Women’s rights, women’s virtue: the co-option of feminist antipornography rhetoric by the Christian Right in the United States

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

FREDA ROSE HAYLETT

October 25, 2016
ABSTRACT

By undertaking a case study of three of the most prominent groups on the religious right in the United States – Concerned Women for America (CWA), Focus on the Family (FOF), and Eagle Forum (EF), and an historical comparison with the temperance movement – this study reveals that rather than focusing solely on the sinful, immoral nature of pornography, these groups are broadening their antipornography narrative to also include consideration of the misogynistic themes of pornography, and the harm it causes to women. These Christian Right groups are pursuing a rhetorical approach marked by the co-option, manipulation, and reconceptualisation of the arguments of antiporn feminists. This strategic shift has been facilitated by the lull in antiporn feminist activity following the deep intra-movement rifts of the 1980s between feminists who were opposed to pornography and others who saw it as merely an expression of free speech. On the other end of the political spectrum, within conservative movement politics, an identity shift in the 1990s away from inflammatory, militaristic rhetoric towards a softer, somewhat secularised tone reflected a desire by movement leaders to appeal to adherents outside the movement’s usual constituency, including women for whom feminist ideas have resonated. In order to reconcile this pro-woman construct with the image of the subservient woman central to fundamentalist Christian interpretations of scripture, these groups use antiporn feminist rhetoric in the service of preserving the patriarchal nuclear family. Meaningful parallels can be drawn between the rhetoric of today’s Christian Right in response to pornography and the way in which key figures in the temperance movement dealt with the crisis of male drunkenness in nineteenth-century America, which resulted in a push for the enhancement of women’s rights coalescing with deeply held beliefs about family values. As the temperance precedent makes clear, movements for moral reform are not always ideologically pure, and can involve trade-offs and a negotiation of values to ensure their political survival.
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACLU</td>
<td>American Civil Liberties Union</td>
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<td>CAN</td>
<td>Catholic News Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBE</td>
<td>Christians for Biblical Equality</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFT</td>
<td>Christian Feminism Today</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPC</td>
<td>Crisis pregnancy centres</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPRP</td>
<td>The Center to Protect Patient Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>CWA</td>
<td>Concerned Women for America</td>
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<tr>
<td>EEWC</td>
<td>Evangelical and Ecumenical Women’s Caucus</td>
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<td>EF</td>
<td>Eagle Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>ERA</td>
<td>Equal Rights Amendment</td>
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<tr>
<td>EWC</td>
<td>Evangelical Women’s Caucus</td>
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<tr>
<td>FFL</td>
<td>Feminists for Life</td>
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<td>FMF</td>
<td>Feminist Majority Foundation</td>
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<td>FOF</td>
<td>Focus on the Family</td>
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<tr>
<td>GOP</td>
<td>Grand Old Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>IWF</td>
<td>Independent Women’s Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGBT</td>
<td>Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAACP</td>
<td>National Association for the Advancement of Colored People</td>
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<td>NAWSA</td>
<td>National American Woman Suffrage Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOW</td>
<td>National Organization for Women</td>
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<td>NRA</td>
<td>National Rifle Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>PAC</td>
<td>Political Action Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>RFRA</td>
<td>Religious Freedom Restoration Act</td>
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<td>VAWA</td>
<td>Violence against Women Act</td>
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<tr>
<td>WAP</td>
<td>Women against Pornography</td>
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<td>WAVAW</td>
<td>Women against Violence against Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>WAVPM</td>
<td>Women against Violence in Pornography and Media</td>
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<tr>
<td>WCTU</td>
<td>Woman’s Christian Temperance Union</td>
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<td>WEBA</td>
<td>Women Exploited by Abortion</td>
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INTRODUCTION

“We’ve had very little contact with the Christian Right. They stay away from us,” revealed antiporn feminist Gail Dines during a 2009 roundtable discussion in Leeds on pornography, adding “what they have done, though, is adopt some of our language, and that’s not a terrible thing, because we’ve got them thinking about harm to women” (Dines in Boyle, 2010: 28). Once preoccupied with pornography’s corrosive effects on men and the nuclear family, the Christian Right started to pay closer attention to the way women’s lives are affected by material that tends to represent them as subordinate and hypersexual. Not known for centreing women’s rights in their political discourse, it was a striking development for a movement that has traditionally framed women’s role as that of the ‘helpmate’, a mere appendage to the God-given leadership potential of their husbands (Pearl, 2004).

For definitional purposes, the term ‘Christian Right’ refers to the politicised religious movement that emerged in the United States in the 1940s but became especially influential in the 1970s. The Christian Right is closely aligned with the secular New Right movement which emphasised social conservative policies in addition to earlier American conservatism which had focused more narrowly on classic liberal economic reform. The Christian Right appeared in the larger context of the New Right, but was more specifically oriented toward a religious crusade, and had its roots in religious institutions.

The Christian Right’s adherents span a number of religious denominations, including evangelical Protestants and Catholics, as well as some Jewish and Mormon adherents (Smith, 2008). The movement’s defining characteristic is its obsessive focus on social issues such as pornography, abortion, birth control, stem cell research, prayer in public schools, sex education, homosexuality, and intelligent design. Its leaders tend to be charismatic and deliberately inflammatory, relying on conflict-based rhetoric premised on the idea of a “holy war” in the United States between the forces of good and evil (Hedges, 2006). The movement has an impressive ability to organise and agitate for political change using its vast network of radio and television programs, church groups, published books and magazines. Through this tradition of evangelical populism, churches have been able to capitalise on the therapeutic, individualistic, and anti-establishment desires characteristic of many older generation Americans in order to expand their reach (Kyle, 2006: 225).
The movement’s co-option of feminist rhetoric has been precipitated by two overarching developments: the political and social relevance of fundamentalist Christianity, and the evolving theoretical precepts of the feminist movement in America. For the Christian Right, extraordinarily successful efforts in the 1960s to mobilise constituents around issues such as abortion, gay rights, and anti-feminism in the form of opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment, an amendment which would have guaranteed women equal rights under the law, saw the movement gain political momentum and access to the institutions of power. The movement’s leaders were adept at exploiting disparate identities, whether that involved pitting the virtuous rural American against the degenerate urban American, or the employed against the jobless, at a time when unprecedented social change in the form of the sexual revolution and the civil rights movement were defining the new face of the country (Williams, 2010).

Rather than losing steam, the unyielding persistence of the Christian Right saw it survive the turn of the century, and throughout the early 2000s the movement played an integral role in George W. Bush securing two presidential victories (Layman and Hussey, 2007). This influence has since plateaued and the Christian Right no longer holds the same degree of power to determine presidential election outcomes due to a number of interrelated factors (Merritt, 2012). For example, the size and scope of the fundamentalist Christian constituency has contracted at the same time as there has been a diversification of ethnic and religious demographics in the United States. This shrinking base is partly attributable to the ageing face of the Christian Right. A strict adherence to sexual morality, perceived homophobia, and antiquated views on women have alienated many younger Americans who now identify as less religious and attend church less frequently than did their youthful counterparts in previous generations (Putnam and Campbell, 2010). There is a theory that younger people abandoned the Christian Right at around the same time as the movement’s visibility in the public media increased, signalling a backlash against religious conservatism from the younger generation (Hout and Fischer, 2002). What is more, young people are now coming of age in a country with an increasing partiality to liberalisation, particularly on issues such as same-sex marriage and marijuana,¹ which has, in turn, made religion and religiosity a less salient point of political division.

¹ The United States Supreme Court legalised same-sex marriage in all fifty states as a result of the Obergefell v. Hodges ruling on June 26, 2015. A number of states have, in recent years, also decriminalised or legalised
But aside from the maturing impulses of Americans away from traditionalism when it comes to the relationship between church and state, the Christian Right has also suffered from a rhetorical problem. The charismatic leaders such as Jerry Falwell, James Dobson, and Pat Robertson who so effectively agitated for a cultural backlash in the 1960s and 1970s by framing their argument in terms of a moral crusade, have either died or retreated from the focal point of political activity over the last decade. In their absence the movement has seen the elevation of some younger faces, such as Pastor Rick Warren of Saddleback Church, Joyce Meyer, T.D. Jakes, and Franklin Graham, son of celebrity evangelist Billy Graham. But this new generation of pastors have adopted a distinctly different tone to their forebears. Rather than cling to the messianic, often aggressive rhetoric of the movement’s forefathers, today’s Christian Right leaders have chosen to bring their message in line with the inclusive, rights-oriented themes prevalent in American society at large.

In articulating their disdain for pornography, leaders on the Christian Right are diversifying their arguments, adopting a more compassionate, rights-conscious approach in order to reach new constituents, and embolden existing ones. But they also rely on a familiar repertoire of harsh rhetoric and punitive policy recommendations, reminding observers that pornography remains a moral issue as much as a rights-based one. With the emergence of new technologies such as smart phones, tablets, laptop computers, and the ubiquitousness of the internet, it is now possible for unprecedented numbers of people to consume pornography without the social impediments that once meant only the most determined could gain access. The way in which these tools are facilitating easier access to obscene materials has given greater enthusiasm to the ongoing panic about declining moral standards and sexuality in the United States.

Within this debate, certain figures have dictated the moral boundaries in discussions of sexuality. Becker (1963) describes these figures as “moral entrepreneurs” or “moral crusaders”, whose task it is to spread warnings about sexual immorality by creating “vocabularies of motives” that explain the harms of pornography in ways that will be meaningful to people. The aim is to shame, deviantise, and vilify entire sub-sections of the population, providing vivid illustrations for the clash of different “symbolic-moral universes”

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2 Cynthia Burack (2014) makes this case in her book by highlighting the way in which a new brand of ‘compassionate conservatism’ has had to compete with the exclusionary, marginalising rhetoric once favoured by Christian Right leaders.
(Ben-Yehuda, 1990: 121). For today’s Christian Right, moral symbolism expresses itself as a unique composite of old Victorian sexual mores obsessed with shielding children and preserving female purity within patriarchal terms, and a newer somewhat contradictory discourse on pornography, which constructs women’s sexual defiance a moral imperative, even if it undermines that central notion of male primacy.

As a result, the narrower biblically inerrant discourse premised on divine law, a preoccupation with sin, and hierarchy within the church and the nuclear family has been supplemented by a consideration of rights and equality traditionally associated with progressive-left movements. This new rhetoric has penetrated the movement’s discourse on multiple policy fronts, from abortion to gun control. But the focus of this study will be on the movement’s response to pornography, an issue which reveals a tense interplay between two of the most crucial voices in this debate, the Christian Right and the dwindling antiporn feminist movement.

Underlying this relationship is a political paradox, characterised by the Christian Right’s strategic use of the feminist movement as on the one hand a hostile political enemy, serving the movement’s aim of attracting adherents opposed to women’s liberation. On the other hand, pro-woman arguments against pornography have considerable appeal to some existing and prospective adherents, and cannot be altogether shunned for the sake of maintaining ideological purity.

Aiding the co-option of feminist arguments by the Christian Right has been the relative political invisibility of the feminist case against pornography in the present-day United States. At the same time as the Christian Right was first broadening its scope and influence, antiporn feminists were engaged in a suicidal battle with so-called ‘sex-positive’ feminists.

This conflict, which came to be known in feminist literature as the “feminist sex wars” of the 1980s, eventually saw antiporn feminism vanish almost entirely from the mainstream political conversation about the status of women (Duggan and Hunter, 1995). Accusations of sexual moralising, prudishness, perceptions of hostility towards the queer and transgender community, collusions with conservatives, and classism in the form of middle-class respectability overwhelmed antiporn feminism and saw the position largely abandoned, sparing pornography from meaningful, progressive critique throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.
This fallow period for feminist antiporn activism opened up new opportunities for conservative activists to claim that they best represented women’s interests in the pornography debates. They no longer needed to jostle with the feminist movement for representational claims, because what had prevailed from the ashes of the sex wars was a tacit commitment to silence on the issue. Therefore conservatives were free to occupy this political space unchallenged. Using the women’s rights arguments it had cultivated from being closely involved with feminists on the development of the Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography and the Antipornography Civil Rights Ordinance in the 1980s, the Christian Right pursued a new rhetorical strategy, appropriating the feminist case for eradicating pornography.

In addition to the waning influence of the Christian Right, which forced the movement into secularised territory, and the decline of antiporn feminism in response to intra-movement tensions, other social, economic, and political factors have played a central role in the development of antipornography politics. These include the migration of women from the domestic sphere to the paid workforce (Abraham and Hipple, 2006); the destabilisation of the nuclear family (Bengtson, 2001); the increased marketisation of private and public life including the commodification of the most intimate elements of human interaction (Graham, 2006); and the entrenched polarisation of the political system and its constituents (McCarty, Poole and Rosenthal, 2016).

The Christian Right have had to grapple with the uncomfortable reality that the free market economy on which its political ideology stands also permits the ruthless pursuit of profit at a moral cost, occasioning the explosive availability of pornographic material. The multi-billion dollar a year pornography industry would not be possible without the unrestrained capitalism the Christian Right’s Republican allies’ champion. But in critiquing the merits of unfettered capitalism with respect to pornography, the Christian Right again find themselves relying on arguments developed by those on the progressive-left. To temper the impact of such a betrayal of the Right, the movement more forcefully assigns blame to the feminist movement for the moral decay of society. In both instances, the movement is condemning what it sees as the underlying ethos of both feminism and neoliberalism: self before family and church, profit before virtue, and leadership before obedience (Lienesch, 1993: 72).

The backlash against pornography has not been the first crusade to unite disparate coalitions of women, and where a religious defence of “family values” has coalesced with a push for the
enhancement of women’s rights. Indeed, the women’s temperance movement of the last two decades of the nineteenth century serves as a useful historical parallel to today’s antipornography efforts.

Posing as concerned mothers seeking to protect their sons and husbands from the seductive allure of rum sellers, temperance reformers became prominent public agitators, not only for curbing the drink, but for women’s suffrage (Martin, 2008). The case for suffrage was made on the basis that granting women the vote would allow the fairer sex to bring her womanly virtues to bear on the world, and oversee the moral transformation of America at a time when rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, and racial diversification threatened the stability of the middle-class. Just as today’s social conservative women in the antipornography movement are actively renegotiating a social identity which has been affixed to their role as the subservient sex by experimenting with feminist language, earlier temperance activists redefined traditional social roles by challenging the ‘republican motherhood’ notion that women’s contributions as citizens were best served through the rearing of God-fearing, economically productive sons.

Instead, women released themselves from the confines of domesticity and its limited prospects for power by defending the sanctity of that very role, urging lawmakers to extend to them some of the same rights afforded to their male counterparts if the home was to be spared from the destructive potential of the drink (Epstein, 1981). In both the temperance and antipornography cases, a moral reform agenda has been the platform on which conservative women have sought to assume a greater presence on the political stage. Ostensibly positioning themselves as a softer pro-woman alternative to feminism, all the while legitimising feminist arguments and helping to move feminist consciousness into the political mainstream.

Other underlying assumptions link the philosophical basis of temperance and conservative antipornography reformation. Both movements are premised on the belief that men are aggressive by nature and lack control over their impulses, and that women ought to civilise male lust and temper their propensity to sin. Only through the exercise of self-control and individual morality can upward social mobility be attained. This study draws out these striking resemblances in an effort to place the current right-wing appropriation of antiporn feminist discourse in an historical context to further an understanding of how social
conservative groups interpret, reconstruct, and manipulate feminist theory for their own political ends.

In order to achieve a clearer understanding of the movement’s co-option of feminist rhetoric, this study focuses on two overarching questions. First, what is the nature and extent of the American Christian Right’s co-option of women’s rights discourse in their opposition to pornography? And further, why is the movement adopting this approach?

**Conceptual Framework**

To answer the research questions this study adopts a rich, two-pronged method that uses (1) three case studies of influential groups on the Christian Right to understand the phenomenon of co-option in the movement; and (2) an historical comparison with the temperance movement which provides the background for the modern context. Today’s antipornography movement has been described as a kind of ‘new temperance’ obsessed with once again regulating and repressing deviant behaviour (Wagner, 1997). But temperance envisaged a more complex coalescence of forces that united devoutly religious, conservative women with political radicals seeking profound political and social reforms. In this respect it mirrors many of the characteristics of today’s antipornography movement, offering insights that go towards addressing why today’s Christian Right have adopted feminist arguments. Given the historical relevance, parallels with the temperance movement are weaved into the analysis and discussion of the case studies, placing the modern phenomenon of the Christian Right’s rhetorical co-option into historical perspective.

**Strengths and limitations of the case study**

Attempting to pin down precisely what constitutes a case study is somewhat of a definitional morass. In his work on the principles and practices of case study research, John Gerring (2007) defines a case study as a piece of work that is qualitative in nature and deals with a small, delimited unit observed at a single point in time. Given that this study is attempting to explain the phenomenon of rhetorical co-option on the Christian Right, the unit is the organisations. The organisations under special focus are not perfectly representative of the entire Christian Right, but they wield a vast amount of influence over the policy preferences and rhetorical tone of the broader movement. This is due to their large membership base, a long timeline of activity in politics in the United States, and proficiency in the use of various forms of media to reach adherents.
The advantage of using the case study method to address the nature and extent of the appropriation of pro-woman rhetoric on the Christian Right is that it enables the development of a more in-depth, holistic understanding of the way in which these organisations are reconciling rights-based, pro-woman language on pornography with their more traditional family values platform. The expectation is that the three cases in question – CWA (Concerned Women for America), FOF (Focus on the Family), and EF (Eagle Forum) – will, in the words of Gary Thomas (2011), “illuminate and explicate.” This differs from a more evaluative or experimental research design which are concerned respectively with seeing if something is working or establishing causation.

What the case study method is particularly useful for is getting a rich picture from which analytical insights can be drawn, in other words, understanding the details of what is happening. What in the discourse of Christian Right groups indicates that an assimilation of pro-woman, rights-based rhetoric into antipornography discourse is taking place? Is this part of a broader pattern of rhetorical transformation in the movement? What are the socio-political factors that have accompanied this transformation? And what are its ideological parallels with the coalitions of disparate women’s groups who led the temperance movement? These are all questions which can be addressed by the broad methodological umbrella of a case study.

The three groups whose material on pornography has been examined are Concerned Women for America (CWA), Focus on the Family (FOF), and Eagle Forum (EF). Multiple sources of evidence are drawn to address some complex features of the research, these consist of web-based articles, magazine articles, brochures, fact cards, manuscripts, television appearances, podcasts and other audio material, books published by organisational leaders, and testimonies by organisational spokespeople in congressional hearings, as well as a smaller sample of archival records. These sources include FOF’s bimonthly magazine Thriving Family, EF’s monthly Phyllis Schlafly Report, and CWA’s now out of print Family Voice. No stone was left unturned, as it were, as all available sources of antipornography material published by the groups have been examined.

In terms of a time period from which the material has been drawn, this study looks primarily at a snapshot of the movement through the examination of contemporary material which has been published by the groups in the recent five year period from 2010 to 2015. However, a diachronic approach which explores how the movements’ language and strategies have
evolved through time has also been utilised as a way of highlighting the peculiarities of the movement’s current approach.

However, the case study as a methodological approach is not without its flaws. There is a certain degree of ambiguity in the enterprise of the case study and this has led some researchers to dismiss the case study as a “weak sibling among social science methods” (Yin, 1994) due to the perception of a lack of rigour in case study research. The fact that case studies can take on various permutations and trajectories leaves it vulnerable to accusations of bias, too open to subjective interpretation by the researcher. Because the case study involves focusing on a single unit, the risk of generalisation looms larger here than with other types of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009: 51).

It is hoped that by undertaking multiple case studies the generalising effects of the approach will be minimised. Of course that still leaves a large cross-section of the Christian Right unaccounted for. But as Erickson (1986) points out, the general lies in the particular, and what we learn in a particular case can be transferred to similar situations. It is also important to note that this study deals exclusively with the perspectives of movement leaders, not their adherents, and cannot therefore make any definitive or precise claims about what impression the leaders’ rhetorical co-option is leaving on the movement’s adherents. Such an analysis would require further probing. Fortunately that perspective is not essential to deconstructing the matter at hand – the nature and extent of rhetorical appropriation by select groups on the Christian Right.

There are a number of prominent organisations on the Christian Right which could have been examined for this study. Tony Perkins’ Family Research Council, one of the country’s most politically embedded fundamentalist groups operating out of Washington, D.C., is one example. The American Family Association, Traditional Values Coalition, as well as Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell’s respective empires would have been worthy case studies as well. Therefore the rationale behind selecting CWA, FOF, and EF for analysis must be clarified. Firstly, CWA and FOF in particular have large revenues and far-reaching audiences, which means the strategic approaches they take can be seen as emblematic of the direction of the movement as a whole. CWA boasts around 500,000 members, and FOF’s print and digital magazine Thriving Family reaches some two million subscribers. One of the most recognised Christian radio programs, FOF’s daily broadcast, is carried on two thousand
radio outlets. EF also has a regular presence on the airwaves, with Phyllis Schlafly’s weekly *Eagle Forum Live*, broadcast to one hundred stations across the United States, as well as her ‘daily 3-minute commentaries’ of pugnaciously delivered takedowns of all facets of liberal policy, focusing in particular on feminist activities. As key arbiters of Christian Right policy, any appropriation of feminist language by these groups should be regarded as an accurate representation of the movement’s unfolding paradigm, and not merely a series of irrelevant, outlying examples. Secondly, CWA and EF were both founded on the principles of antifeminism. Their founders, Beverly LaHaye and Phyllis Schlafly respectively, have taken prominent positions in the movement as figureheads of a conservative counterpoint to feminism. These two groups are particularly invested in criticising the goals and achievements of the feminist movement and rely on this strategy to maintain their relationship with conservative political institutions. As such, the integration of pro-woman, equality-oriented arguments into the discourse of these antifeminist groups is a betrayal of the groups’ raison d’etre and an indication of the lengths the movement is willing to go to remain relevant to new generations of conservative women for whom pro-woman language has become little short of a requirement of their advocacy on women’s policy issues.

But there are important differences between the three groups as well. Perhaps the most pronounced difference lies in the disparities in membership numbers, which gives EF significantly less clout in terms of direct grassroots mobilisation. EF’s membership base is much smaller than CWA and FOF, at 80,000. Moreover, CWA and EF position themselves primarily as “women’s organisations”. Their activism is centred on women’s issues and they operate as the political counterpoint to feminist organisations like the National Organisation for Women and Planned Parenthood. On the other hand, FOF were not formed on this premise. They do not tailor their message for a particular audience on the basis of sex, and their executive is made up of a fairly even mix of men and women. EF makes up for their comparatively smaller membership base by exercising influence at the top of the political pyramid. Though arguably less democratic, it does cement their relationships with key Republican Party figures. The enduring grasp the late Phyllis Schlafly held over the fate of conservative political hopefuls was well demonstrated by her official endorsement of Republican presidential nominee Donald J. Trump at a St. Louis, MO rally in March 2016. After her endorsement, Trump called Schlafly “a great lady” who is “very,

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very exceptional.”⁴ At a time when Trump’s social conservative credentials were being probed and measured against that of his main opponent, Senator Ted Cruz, Schlafly’s endorsement helped to reassure evangelical voters that Trump was indeed one of them. Despite these differences in size, membership, scope, presence in different media, number of employees and extent to which the groups are considered mainstream or fringe, it is still possible to observe a widespread emergence of an inclusive rights-based discourse around women.

Similar positions were taken by religiously devout women in relation to the nineteenth-century temperance movement in which men’s propensity for falling victim to the drink, rather than pornography, came to symbolise the innumerable societal ills accompanying an unfolding industrial America, with women and children being most vulnerable to the unpredictable rage of intoxicated men. With this historical parallel in mind, the three case studies of the contemporary Christian Right groups will be held up to historical comparative consideration to further draw out the way in which moral reformists seize and reconceptualise the rhetoric of more politically radical women. In this regard, the temperance example is a comparative phenomenon more generally aligned with other movements as well, but which is useful in terms of examining how the Christian Right’s rhetoric on pornography, including its tendency to appropriate arguments conceived in the feminist tradition, compare with an earlier moral crusade. The intemperance that nineteenth-century crusaders were agitating against is a concept that can be applied to the intemperate imagery of pornography. In this sense pornography represents a twenty-first century version of the kind of vice and immorality that nineteenth-century teetotallers were confronting. Like the Christian Right, the temperance movement also had its origins in religious conservatism, but became increasingly dependent on more radical notions of women’s emancipation that were being developed by suffragettes, making it a particularly useful historical case for comparison (Craig, 1992: 53).

The case studies are built around two salient theoretical concepts drawn from the literature – a theory of appropriation and a theory of frames. Scholars who have examined similar research questions have begun to develop an argument based on versions of these two theories. Of the most relevant research, Schreiber’s (2000; 2002a; 2002b; 2008; 2010) studies on conservative women’s co-option of pro-woman language, Rose’s (2011) analysis of the

pro-life movements’ acquisition of a pro-woman frame, and Saurette and Gordon’s (2015) book on the Christian Right’s reframing of anti-abortion politics as grounded in progressive values all engage extensively with frame theory and the question of rhetorical and strategic co-option in their analyses. This study builds on that continuum of inquiry and is grounded in Lijphart (1971) and Eckstein’s (1975) notion of ‘disciplined configurative case studies’. This refers to research involving the use of established theories to explain a case, rather than the development of new theory. This approach is particularly useful for capturing the major elements of a historical case, such as thematic parallels between the Christian Right’s approach to pornography and the temperance movement, as it involves transforming specific explanations into the concepts of the more general theoretical framework.

Theory and definitions

A radical feminist definition of pornography

This study uses the 1983 definition of pornography defined by antiporn feminists Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon as an interpretive framework. Dworkin and MacKinnon’s definition describes the parameters of what actually constitutes pornography from a feminist perspective, enabling parallels to be drawn between the pro-woman rhetoric of CWA, FOF, EF, and antiporn feminists.

The 1983 Minneapolis Antipornography Ordinance was the first time pornography had been framed as a civil rights issue, rather than a question of obscenity. The fundamental difference being that obscene material is determined by what is likely to offend, appeal to prurient interests, or lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value. MacKinnon and Dworkin’s efforts to redefine and reconceptualise pornography as a civil rights issue meant rejecting obscenity law, which MacKinnon describes as “useless” and which actually protects pornography “while pretending to stop it” (MacKinnon and Dworkin, 1998: 20). In their view obscenity law inappropriately deals with the problem of pornography by sending a message that “sex is dirty, that my body is dirty because it is associated with sex, and that I should be ashamed” (p. 191). A civil rights-based interpretation of pornography lifts the burden of shame from women and instead recognises their right to not be harmed in the making of pornography.

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5 *Miller v. California*, 413 U.S. 15, 24 (1973)
In achieving this, Dworkin and MacKinnon defined pornography as the sexually explicit subordination of women, graphically depicted, whether in pictures or in words, entailing one or more of the following:

(a) women are presented dehumanized as sexual objects, things or commodities; or
(b) women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy pain or humiliation; or
(c) women are presented as sexual objects who experience sexual pleasure in being raped; or
(d) women are presented as sexual objects tied up or cut up or mutilated or bruised or physically hurt; or
(e) women are presented in postures of sexual submission; or
(f) women's body parts— including but not limited to vaginas, breasts, and buttocks—are exhibited, such that women are reduced to those parts; or
(g) women are presented as whores by nature; or
(h) women are presented being penetrated by objects or animals; or
(i) women are presented in scenarios of degradation, injury, abasement, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual (Appendix D, Section 2).

The Indianapolis Ordinance later omitted (i) and (vii) from the definition. The 1985 US Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit case of American Booksellers v. Hudnut, which examined the constitutionality of the Antipornography Civil Rights Ordinance, took issue with the problem of vagueness found in the original ordinance, noting, “that terms such as “degradation,” “abasement,” and “inferior” are subjective terms which are inherently void for vagueness (Sandler, 1984: 912). Although the court made subsequent amendments to the ordinance, this has no bearing on this study. The original definition, however vague, provides a strong indication of the most problematic aspects of pornography from a feminist perspective.
Theory of appropriation

The second interpretive framework on which this study is based is the theory of appropriation. In this case, how language can be co-opted, reinterpreted, and employed for political ends. Tracy Strong (1996), writing on the political misuses of Friedrich Nietzsche’s work, described appropriation as follows: “I have appropriated something when I have made it mine, in a manner that I feel comfortable with, that is in a manner to which the challenges of others will carry little or no significance.” Nietzsche’s writings were used as an anti-Jewish propaganda tool by the Nazis because of his profound opposition to priestly Judaism and the prophetic tradition. However, this is an incomplete picture. While Nietzsche was indeed sceptical of the priestly tradition in Judaism, this criticism was grounded in a visceral opposition to prophetic aspects of Christianity, a strand of the Christian faith he believes emerged from archaic traditions in ancient Judaism (Santaniello, 1994). In fact, Nietzsche was strongly opposed to anti-Semitism and the German nationalism with which it was connected (Yovel, 1994: 223). A series of disappointing experiences were the impetus for Nietzsche’s alienation from German Christian culture, namely his sister’s alliance with members of the Nazi Party through the Wagner circle led by Cosima Wagner, the daughter of Hungarian pianist and composer Franz Liszt. Evidently, Nietzsche’s writings were too tempting for Nazi exegetes to overlook, as they “clearly and knowingly misinterpreted many of Nietzsche’s ideas, especially his hatred of anti-Semitism, in order to benefit their own ideological purposes” (Santaniello, 1994). Of particular relevance to this study is Santaniello’s assertion that the Nazi appropriation of Nietzsche was a “means of silencing him.” Due to Nietzsche’s increasing popularity and relevance, it was a tactic of the Nazis to confuse and discredit Nietzsche’s original work (p. 151).

James Sosnoski (1993) describes appropriation as an ‘arrogation’ and a ‘seizure’ of concepts outside a movement’s governing framework. Underpinning the concept of appropriation is a presumption of theft. Appropriation is an act of taking. The dominant culture adopts something “belonging” to the minority culture. It is important to note that inequitable claims to power underpin this concept of appropriation. The conservative groups in this study occupy the dominant position relative to the feminist authors whose arguments they are co-opting. The hetero-patriarchal, capitalist ideology of the groups’ leaders is the dominant worldview. In Gramscian terms, the groups engage in the production and maintenance of beliefs and values that uphold the apparatus of political and cultural hegemony (Thomas, 2009). Male dominance, the preservation of the nuclear family, and endorsement of the free
market are cultural norms. CWA, FOF and EF are engaged in the practice of preservation rather than subversion. The groups’ governing framework reinforces the dominant worldview and uses language to naturalise the status quo. Conversely, antiporn feminism is counter-hegemonic, challenging and interrogating the dominant ideology sanctioned by the Christian Right. Antiporn feminism is not a disorganised, apolitical resistance, but rather an organised political opposition built on decades of critical theory. As Lather (1984) writes, an organised resistance is crucial to counter-hegemony:

The task of counter-hegemonic groups is the development of counter-institutions, ideologies, and cultures that provide an ethical alternative to the dominant hegemony, a lived experience of how the world can be different (p. 55).

Emerging from the radical feminist perspective within feminism, antiporn feminism relies on a materialist analysis to deconstruct patriarchal systems of power and the way it interacts with white supremacy and capitalism. As Stewart Van Leeuwen et al (1993) assert, radical feminism is ‘the most pointedly and consistently woman-centered’ of all the feminist perspectives (p. 56). Liberal feminism, the most dominant form of feminist action in the United States, regards assimilation with masculine norms as sufficiently progressive, and sex-positive feminism imagines that women can have individual agency under conditions of sex inequality. On the other hand, antiporn feminists maintains a rigid and uncompromising stance advocating for women’s complete emancipation from the sex industry. Because antiporn feminism has taken the form of critiquing many of the structures and practices that are central to Anglo-American, Protestant life, namely compulsory heterosexuality, gender roles, and the nuclear family, it has therefore found itself on the margins of a broader feminist debate about women’s roles in society, and even further isolated from mainstream political debate.

Although the Christian Right has been able to penetrate the ranks of the Republican Party and to drive an agenda which has seen an unprecedented focus on social issues among conservative lawmakers, antiporn feminists have not had the same institutional success. The marginalised position antiporn feminists are in makes them vulnerable to co-option by the politically powerful Christian Right.

In Adaptation and Appropriation (2006) Julie Sanders defines appropriation as ‘a decisive journey’ away from the master frame ‘into a wholly new cultural product and domain’. Intrinsic to appropriation is a wholesale rethinking of the terms of the original work;
developing new meanings and applying them to an existing set of governing principles. Leeds-Hurwitz (1993) echoes this interpretation, asserting that beyond the act of taking, appropriation allows the dominant group to reinvent the meaning of the stolen arguments. In other words, “appropriation refers to the taking […] by one culture for use in another culture, giving it new meaning in the process.”

This process is often inconspicuous or shadowy. Collaboration between adversarial groups can precede an eventual co-option (Fiorenza, 1992), and this is reflected in the sequence of events which have defined the trajectory of antipornography politics. As the following chapters will explore, strategic collaboration took place between antiporn feminists and Christian Right campaigners during the push for antipornography ordinances in the early 1980s. Since then, strategic collaboration between the two movements has not materialised as explicitly on the issue, and the nature of the relationship has transformed into one of subversion and usurpation by the dominant Christian Right over the subordinate feminist position.

Theory of frames

Frame theory is the third interpretive framework for addressing the research question. Leading scholars in frame theory Snow, Burke Rochford, Worden and Benford (1986), Goffman (1974), and Lakoff (2004) explain that a “frame” simply refers to a schemata of interpretation. Frames imbue certain events or issues with political meaning, and help to guide and persuade an audience’s interpretation of the issue. They are often used for political ends, and convey a message about an organisation’s values. Social movement organisations are actively engaged in attempts to control how audiences understand their rhetoric in this process referred to as framing. The result is a package of rhetorical devices favouring certain interpretations of meaning and against others, typically effacing subordinate voices.

Organisational leaders decide which frames to emphasise depending on the political climate at the time. “Movement frames are in dialectic relationship with political opportunity,” explains Rose (2011). Political events and evolving public opinion forces organisations to adapt if they wish to survive. This means organisations will consider the use of certain frames for tactical advantage. For example, Melody Rose’s empirical study on leaders in the Christian Right found that since the 1970s leaders have decided to adopt a pro-woman frame in the antiabortion debate, to supplement their old argument that abortion is primarily harmful to the foetus. Benford and Snow (2000) point out that a process within frame theory referred
to as “frame alignment” can often be deployed by an organisation with the intent of attracting “prospective constituents and actual or prospective resource providers” (p. 624), which was evident in Rose’s case study and has implications for this study as well. Crucially, a shift in framing is not without risk to an organisation and can raise questions from existing constituents about the purity of the movement.

There are indeed advantages to adopting new frames. For a movement like the Christian Right which has been around in its current politicised form since the 1960s, a shift in framing can breathe new life into a waning movement, attracting support from external and internal sources, therefore boosting the revenue of the movements’ most prominent organisations (Zald, 1997). New frames can also renew an organisation’s relevance from the perspective of the media. The Christian Right has a lengthy and entrenched history in the United States. In order to keep up with the demands of a dynamic media environment which is always seeking new and different causes to put a spotlight on, the movement must employ a message that will survive in such a cursory, headline-grabbing atmosphere. In the case of antipornography politics, adopting a pro-woman frame has the added advantage of subverting the strength of feminist organisations competing with conservative organisations for political resources. Such a rhetorical heist undermines feminist claims to speak for women and reframes a rights-based approach to antipornography activism as the equal domain of the religious right and feminism.

The first part of this thesis traces the broad timeline from the inception of the new Christian Right in the 1960s, which was at first deeply invested in militaristic symbolism warning adherents of the battle between the forces of good and evil, to today’s more pluralistic, secularised movement. This has taken place within the broader secularisation of American political discourse, which now characterises religious rhetoric as narrow, outdated, and exclusionary (Bates, 1995).

Despite there being little evidence in the 1960s that the movement was interested in appealing to women constituents, it is possible to pinpoint precise turning points in the movement’s direction, most of which began to take hold in the 1980s in an anxious response to the intensification of pro-woman politics emanating from the second-wave of feminism.

In the second chapter, the focus narrows in on how the Christian Right is both participating in and exploiting the politics of gender consciousness to further its own political ends. Elaborating on Ronnee Schreiber’s (2002a; 2002b; 2008; 2010) body of work which has
explored the battle over representational claims between conservative women’s groups and feminist groups, this chapter deconstructs the notion of “gender consciousness” as it relates to the Christian Right, and whether the politicisation of gender by conservatives is establishing new normative boundaries of gender relations within the movement, but also whether such a politics has been absorbed by the movement because it simply reinforces neoliberalism and its attendant elimination of class-based analyses from contemporary political discourse, and therefore represents no fundamental threat to the orthodoxy of free market capitalism that is central to the Christian Right’s worldview.

The third chapter delves deeper into the issue of appropriation at the heart of this study, and broadly examines other policy areas where the Christian Right has demonstrated its willingness to co-opt the language of rights and equality. These atypical concepts have not only found their way into the movement’s rhetoric on pornography, but also on abortion, contraception, gun control, and military action abroad. On abortion, the demonisation of women which has traditionally featured so strongly in anti-abortion campaigns has been replaced by a softer, gentler, more sympathetic perspective that positions the abortion-minded woman and her foetus as dual victims of an aggressive, profit-driven abortionist; a narrative which capitalises on anti-patriarchal and anti-capitalist sentiment (Rose, 2011). On a range of social issues, the movement is pivoting to a rights-based, science-based, pro-woman frame indicating that their new rhetorical approach to pornography is part of a larger frame transformation.

Covering the way in which the nineteenth-century temperance movement mirrored many features of today’s antiporn movement, the fourth chapter explores this historical perspective as a background to the modern phenomenon of co-option by the Christian Right. As with the parallels on abortion rhetoric, the issue of temperance offers a crucial insight into how strategies from progressive causes can be seized upon by moral reformists, as well as revealing the way a defence of “moral values” and the preservation of the domestic sphere interact with a progressive, women’s rights agenda when both schools of thought have an eye to the same overarching goal. In many respects, temperance reformers were an early incarnation of today’s Christian Right opponents of pornography, in that they made use of conservative ideals about women’s natural affinity for the domestic sphere, pairing this with more radical proposals for how women’s roles might evolve to give them greater political influence. The fate of the movement has enduring implications for today’s activists on both the left and right engaged in antipornography politics.
This discussion then moves into the fifth chapter which explores how the Christian Right are engaged in a contemporary revitalisation of the notion of separate spheres central through the doctrine of true womanhood. This has occasioned a discourse on pornography that problematises the harms done to women in pornography using women’s rights-based arguments, while simultaneously affirming a set of ideals that undermines women’s autonomy. At the heart of this is a tension within conservative ranks about what women’s ideal role should be. Oscillating between the homemaker archetype and the independent woman, leaders in the movement are working through how to frame pornography’s harms to women in a way that caters to the broad spectrum of interpretations about women. From this a rhetorical duology has emerged, where women’s rights and domesticity converge to form a new approach to pornography.

The final chapter consists of two parts: first, a detailed discussion of the case studies, which are organised thematically and are presented with numerous quotes from the groups; and second, in an attempt to provide some context in terms of why the groups have opted for the tactic of appropriation, is a discussion of the attendant socio-political factors which have motivated the groups towards this rhetorical strategy. Where relevant, the temperance parallel is drawn into the discussion to add depth and clarity to the analysis.

Each chapter attempts to make the case that today’s Christian Right are breaking away from a traditional gendered narrative that solely places women within a subservient, domestic frame, to appeal more broadly to constituents persuaded by pro-woman, rights-based arguments. Through the vehicle of pornography, today’s Christian Right are distancing themselves from their political forebears who used strict, biblically-driven rhetoric to naturalise women’s unequal access to power. Instead, they are borrowing from feminist discourse to extend the boundaries of their narrative to include the concepts of equality and rights into their assessment of pornography.
CHAPTER ONE

The new Christian Right, second-wave feminism and the emergence of antipornography politics

The debate between rival perspectives on what role, if any, pornography should play in a civilised society has been well drawn out by theorists in works such as Susan Faludi’s Backlash (1991), Donald Alexander Downs’ The New Politics of Pornography (1989), and more recently Whitney Strub’s Perversion for Profit (2010). The focus tends to be on the broader set of competing claims between free-speech liberals who regard the suppression of pornography as tantamount to censorship, and those opposed to pornography on either moral or civil rights grounds. But fewer inquiries have been made into the rhetorical and strategic characteristics of the two groups principally opposed to pornography: the Christian Right and antiporn feminists.

The relationship between these groups is generally regarded as a classic example of how the radical impulse of women’s liberation can be tempered by aligning itself with proponents of moral reform. In other words, antiporn feminists were gradually made more conservative over the course of their engagement with antipornography politics, a trend reflected more broadly in left-wing movements across the West.6 What has not been explored in any great depth is the appearance of the opposite phenomenon – how the Christian Right has exploited the radical impulse of the feminist position for its own political ends. Through various tactics of co-option and reframing, the tone of the Christian Right on pornography has evolved into a distinctly secularised narrative, appearing as concerned with women’s rights and equality as with the preservation of the nuclear family and the moral compass of America.

This move by the Christian Right towards secularised rhetoric on pornography is not an atomised phenomenon, and exists within a broader historical context that has determined the course of antipornography politics in postwar America. Before delving into the intricacies of the Christian Right’s current framing of pornography, the key social, political and economic tensions and transformations which played a central role in the development of antipornography politics must be explored.

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6 Bill Clinton and Tony Blair were political manifestations of this move on the left to “civilise” capitalism, rather than agitate against it. For a more detailed discussion see: Romano, F 2006, ‘Clinton and Blair: the political economy of the third way,’ Journal of Economic and Social Policy, Vol. 10, No. 2.
Social issues like pornography took on new political significance in postwar America as fiscal and economic differences between the two major political parties diminished. Broad agreement on a set of neoliberal policy imperatives referred to as the “Washington Consensus” have obscured many of the important distinctions between institutionalised parties on Left and Right, and have forced the electorate to shift their focus to more pronounced differences in party positions on morally-charged social issues (Lavelle, 2008).

The parties differing stances on key social issues was crystallised by the period of unprecedented social change in the 1960s. An era that spawned the new Christian Right and the second wave of feminism, and occasioned what Andrew Hartman (2015) refers to as “a war for the soul of America.” Homosexuality, abortion, feminism, art, censorship, and affirmative action came to dominate political discourse, precipitating a period of marked political polarisation which still persists strongly today. Such polarisation is believed to exist between two broad coalescing groups, motivated either by religious orthodoxy or progressivism. The emergence of identity politics has further intensified these tribal conflicts over values, which its critics suggest has little to do with finding a common humanity and more to do with provoking oppositional cultures (Sullivan, 1995; Tomasky, 2013).

Therefore, the culture war of the last fifty years has been between groups largely divided over what Hunter (1991) calls “the impulse toward progressivism” versus the “impulse toward orthodoxy” (p. 43). While Christian groups tend to arrive at their moral conclusions based on biblical principles, the moral basis of progressivism is less straightforward. “Some draw upon scientific evidence about the human condition” states Jensen (1998), an approach which derives from the intellectual tradition of Enlightenment naturalism. Others draw on personal experiences, a kind of subjectivism (Jensen, 1998). Broadly speaking, progressives are united by the understanding that moral precepts evolve and adapt to social change, while orthodox individuals regard moral principles as originating from a divine source and existing in a fixed state.

For leaders on the Christian Right, anxieties about the decline of morality in the United States are expressed through a fixation on the stability of the nuclear family, which is tasked with everything from maintaining normative gender relations to preserving myths about the national identity.

The supposed moral supremacy of the patriarchal nuclear family grew out of colonial structures linked centrally to Britain. Upon settling in the United States, white colonisers
imposed the ideology of the nuclear family on Native American populations, whose varying family structures – often matrilineal – were interpreted by colonisers as a violation of the natural and instinctual roles men and women ought to assume within the family structure (Chambers, 2001).

Although leaders on the Christian Right employ a narrative essentialising the patriarchal, Anglophonic family, early colonisers as well as today’s Christian Right leaders understand that the family is a vulnerable, contested, and constantly evolving structure. Meanings about the family and gender roles are constructed not through a single site but through a range of discursive sites, including biological, scientific, psychological and historical codes of knowledge that attempt to “universalise and dehistoricise the [nuclear] family” (Chambers, 2001: 33). The concept of the ideal family, wherein men and women occupy separate, unequal spheres, has been anchored within the patriotic symbolism of the nation state. The decline of the nation is inextricably tied to the instability of the nuclear family model.

Christian Right leader and FOF founder James Dobson has repeatedly emphasised this view. Responding to the impending legalisation of same-sex marriage in the United States, Dobson (2015) wrote that “the family that has existed since antiquity will likely crumble, presaging the fall of Western civilization itself.” This myth of the naturalness and universality of the patriarchal nuclear family is repeatedly appropriated by the Christian Right in order to construct the inferioritisation of women as fixed and immutable (Chambers, 2001: 34). Feminism has been the great moral challenge over the last century to this orthodoxy on family, exposing the malleability of the nuclear family and the roles within it.

Mixing the politics of family values with metaphors of violence has been Dobson’s preferred approach. Justifying such tactics, Dobson asserted that the heated dispute over values in Western countries was simply a “continuation of the age-old struggle between the principles of righteousness and the kingdom of darkness” (Dobson in Diamond, 1998: 2). He added that opposition to violent pornography among other sins did not merely represent a battle between the Christian Right and their philosophical opponents, but against Satan, “who leads the whole world astray.” Conflating the progressive-left with Satan sought to deepen the movement’s perception that it was locked in a biblical battle between the forces of good and evil.

A key component of this deeply hostile strategy by the Christian Right was to hijack and exploit key national events and use them to demonstrate that the country was in the midst of
the ‘end times’. Dr Dobson, now in his late seventies but still exerting his influence through a
daily broadcast titled *Family Talk*, has stayed true to the movement’s pre-1990s style and is
quick to employ this tactic. For example, following the December 2012 massacre at Sandy
Hook Elementary School in Connecticut where 20-year-old gunman Adam Lanza shot and
killed twenty children and six staff members, Dr Dobson went on the air alleging that Sandy
Hook was the direct result of the breakdown of the American family, and served as a dire
warning that the country would soon be beyond redemption if it did not repent for its sins and
return to biblically sanctioned ways of living. The timing of the broadcast was regarded by
some as highly insensitive and its content misguided and poorly judged, but by connecting
current events with biblical prophecies, the polarising broadcast appealed to the eschatology
ethos of many evangelicals who are waiting patiently for the rapture when Jesus returns for
his believers.

The Christian Right’s longstanding warlike strategy came under review during the period of
self-reflection within the movement in the 1990s, and since then a discernibly kinder, gentler
moral conservatism has replaced the conflict-based tactics of the early years.

**Casting a wider net: pornography and the Christian Right’s mainstream agenda**

In 1993 influential Christian Right leader Ralph Reed Jr. wrote that the movement had failed
to connect its agenda up until that point with average voters. “The pro-family movement still
has little appeal among the 40 million voters who attend church frequently,” Reed asserted,
reasoning that the political rhetoric of the Christian Right had been value-laden but policy-
thin, failing to inspire voters. The movement had limited its effectiveness, Reed argued, by
concentrating “disproportionately on issues such as abortion and homosexuality” (p. 31).
Reed cited surveys which showed that only twelve percent of Americans regarded abortion as
a key motivator in who they decided to vote for.

Pornography had similarly failed to ignite voters’ passions, and was being passed over in
favour of bread-and-butter issues, such as taxation, the rising cost of health care, government
deficit, and stagnating wages. To restore voters’ attention to core social issues such as
abortion, homosexuality, and pornography, the movement would have to tie morality to

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7 *Cleaning house: raising responsible kids – 1* 2012, podcast, Dr James Dobson’s Family Talk, August 13,
responsible-kids-i-295805.html>.

8 *Being a smart stepmom – 3* 2012, podcast, Dr James Dobson’s Family Talk, November 21, retrieved June
economics (Reed, 1993). This new strategy regards pornography as the catalyst to sexual promiscuity, which can be linked to sexually transmitted diseases and must be treated at great expense to the taxpayer in the health care system. Sexual promiscuity is also believed to be the cause of children being born out of wedlock, an increasing phenomenon the Christian Right identify as the root of numerous problems – poverty, violent crime, and drug addiction (Green, Rozell and Wilcox, 2003). Focus on the Family explicitly link premarital sex with an increased likelihood of later marital breakdown, asserting that “[…] divorce is more likely among the sexually active and cohabiters because they have established their life together on relatively unstable sexual relationships.”

Conservative groups routinely cite statistics showing that children raised by their married, biological parents have better educational and health outcomes, thus resulting in fewer costs to the taxpayer and employers who provide health insurance for around half of all insured Americans (Janicki, 2013). Because marriage is regarded as a civilising institution for men, imbuing them with a sense of purpose that can then be channelled into providing for the family, removing the marriage incentive has grave economic repercussions. When men are not working to support a family, their work ethic erodes and productivity is undermined at great cost to company profit margins. Exacerbating the already grave threats sexual promiscuity posed to marriage was the introduction of no-fault divorce, which Phyllis Schlafly insists in her book Feminist Fantasies (2003b) has caused “economic devastation” for women. The logic goes that prior to it being so easy to seek a divorce, men were obliged to provide for their wives, but now that women can exit marriages without enduring fault criteria, the ex-husband leaves with a higher standard of living, while the ex-wife loses considerable economic power, which must be ameliorated elsewhere, chiefly by government.

To social conservatives, all economic problems have a social origin. Therefore, although social issues like pornography may have been greatly eclipsed by economic concerns by the 1990s, threatening the survival of the Christian Right, the movement adapted to this shift by framing pornography differently. Pornography was no longer simply a matter of sexual impropriety, but a violation of women’s rights and a threat to the economic stability of a nation.

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With the increasing casualisation of the workforce and the outsourcing of manufacturing jobs, job insecurity was reaching its highest level in decades (Farber, 2007). Many families had already come to the conclusion that one income was no longer enough to support the family, and more and more women were taking up part-time or full-time work to help pay the mortgage and cope with rising health and education costs. Within this context of increasingly interchangeable and fluid sex roles, campaigns to promote equality between the sexes were more salient than ever. Economic woes caused by the policies of deregulation and privatisation and the second wave of feminism emerged as concurrent and interrelated movements.

Possessing an economic orthodoxy that championed a ‘lean, mean state’, the Christian Right and its New Right allies had good reason to sound the alarm over the corrosive effects of pornography on marriages. Within intact marriages, it is the husband who is expected to support his wife and children with income earned in the workforce. Once a marriage is dissolved, the husband is in some cases supplanted by the state, who must financially support the woman in cases where she cannot participate in the workforce due to caring responsibilities. This vast transition of responsibility from the private to the public sphere represents a threat to a conservative worldview chiefly concerned with maintaining the patriarchal family and diminishing the role of the state in guaranteeing minimum standards of living. It is the family that ought to determine the health, welfare, and education of individuals, not the state.

Eisenstein (1982) identifies the patriarchal loss of authority brought about by the participation of women in the workforce as the main catalyst for the emergence of the Christian Right’s close ally in the New Right:

   In this fundamental sense the sexual politics of the New Right is implicitly antifeminist and racist: it desires to establish the model of the traditional white patriarchal family by dismantling the welfare state and by removing wage-earning married women from the labor force and returning them back to the home (p. 568).

Identified by the Christian Right as one of the key factors in the demise of a marriage, pornography became a focal point for the movement in the decline of the American family, and the economic troubles that followed.
The conservative outfit Morality in Media made this connection clear by drawing attention to a study published in 2014 which concluded that young men are choosing to postpone marriage in favour of “low-cost sexual gratification” found in pornography. The report, published by Germany’s Institute for the Study of Labor and co-authored by a West Chester University of Pennsylvania professor, made the claim that traditionally one of the reasons to enter into a marriage was to gain “sexual gratification.” But as options for sexual gratification outside of marriage have grown, the need for a marriage to serve this function has diminished. The researchers’ analysed 1,512 surveys from the General Social Survey completed by American men aged 18-35 between 2000 and 2004. They looked at whether regular consumption of internet pornography correlated with marriage formation. Despite a problematic method which relied on conflating respondents’ self-reported Internet use with self-reported pornography use, the researchers concluded that easy access to sexual gratification in the form of pornography has eliminated many of the incentives for entering a marriage (Malcolm and Naufal, 2014).

The researchers in the Institute for the Study of Labor study reasoned that the threat pornography posed to marriage had grave implications for the country’s economic future, for marriage is the ideal environment in which to produce “high-quality children” who grow up to become reliable economic contributors (Malcolm and Naufal, 2014: 22). Again, a concerted effort to tether social problems to economic woes helps to convey the message that pornography is more than simply a moral issue for which religiously-inclined Americans should take notice, but also portend a fiscal downturn as the consequences of divorce and fatherless children place further pressure on government revenue. This new messaging has the potential to appeal to a far wider spectrum of Americans previously unmoved by moral arguments.

The merging of social and economic issues in the 1990s precipitated a strong period of political influence for the Christian Right who managed to penetrate the corridors of power in the late 1990s and during the Bush era in the early 2000s. The influence of the Christian Right was felt particularly strongly in the area of welfare reform. Ralph Reed Jr.’s vision in 1993 for a movement that spent as much of its time and resources on policy formulation as it did on values rhetoric was realised through the 1995-1996 welfare reform debates. Christian fundamentalists and right-wing think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation formed effective coalitions, meeting informally to develop common policy positions and to coordinate phone calls, letters, and visits to Congress (Reese, 2008: 175).
These efforts proved astoundingly effective. The opening paragraph of the 1996 welfare reform act, titled The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, proclaimed the promotion of heterosexual, married households to be a major goal of the new law because this kind of family structure was crucial to both a “successful society” and in the “interests of children.” A key component of the law was an annual $100 million ‘illegitimacy bonus’ which rewarded states for reducing their out-of-wedlock births. A further $50 million was reserved annually for abstinence-only and marriage promotion programs in schools. Despite the implementation of such measures reaffirming the Christian Right’s patriarchal family agenda, Congress had not approved all the proposals put forward by the Right. For example, the proposal to deny benefits to unwed teenage mothers and to instead force them to live with their parents was unsuccessful (Reese, 2008: 175). The policy achievements of the Christian Right under the Democratic leadership of Bill Clinton were encouraging to the movement, and their influence only grew following the inauguration of George W. Bush. The ability to transform values-based assessments of social issues into public policy reforms with wide-reaching implications breathed new life into a previously fledgling movement.

Pornography, framed as being directly responsible for the breakdown of marriage and thus a leading cause of economic and societal instability, became a prime candidate for conservative reinvention. As Whitney Strub (2010) notes, the Christian Right’s emerging position on pornography was shaped by three recent developments: public awareness and panic over child pornography, new social science research linking the viewing of pornography with violent behaviour, and the feminist analysis of pornography. “All would be misappropriated in the service of conservative antiporn ideology” proclaims Strub (2010: 194).

Connecting an issue like pornography with broader economic problems also helps the movement to avoid the pitfalls of single issue politics. As Reed (1993) admits, “building a political agenda around a single issue is a risky proposition.” When progress lags on the issue, the viability of the entire movement is threatened. To avoid this fate, Reed stated that the ongoing strategy of the movement would be to “discuss a broader issues agenda in the language of the target audience” (p. 35). A language that ought to embody principles that will respect the rights-based, pluralist, individualist ethos of American society, while also paying homage to Protestant traditions.
Since 1993 when Ralph Reed Jr. first outlined the Christian Right’s new strategy, the impact of pornography on people’s lives has changed dramatically. Once a difficult pastime to conceal, pornography is now ubiquitous, accessible to anyone with an internet connection, and on multiple devices. A 2008 study of 813 university students in the United States found that sixty-seven percent of young men and forty-nine percent of young women agree that viewing pornography is acceptable. Whereas eighty-seven percent of the young men reported using pornography, compared to thirty-one percent of the young women (Carroll et al. 2008). Other studies on young people’s use of pornography in western countries have uncovered similar rates of consumption among men and women (Traeen et al. 2006; Romito & Beltramini, 2011). The rapid increase in the availability and consumption of pornography has resulted in a recentreing of the pornography problem in the discourse of Christian Right groups. The focus on pornography has never completely disappeared, but it has been reenergised in part by the intersecting influences of the internet and increasingly affordable and accessible digital devices.

Despite the fact that today’s Christian Right are aligning themselves with the rhetoric of antiporn feminists, one of the defining characteristics of the movement has been its vehement opposition to feminism. Figurehead of the Christian Right, Paul Weyrich explained that feminism contradicted “the biblically ordained nature of the family, with the father as the head of the household and the mother subject to his ultimate authority” (in Durham, 2000: 36). Deeply worrying for conservatives is the prospect that a reordering of biblically ordained roles for men and women ultimately emasculates men. As feminism succeeds in valorising women’s contributions, masculine attributes come to be regarded as primitive and destructive, and in turn men are encouraged to renounce masculinity and adopt behaviours only deemed appropriate for women. One pastor described this as “the feminization of the American male” and warmed that men were becoming “sissified” and voluntarily abdicating their natural role as leader (Durham, 2000: 36).

The logic goes that when the innate and complementary differences between men and women are distorted by feminism and men are expected to behave ‘like women’, they are deprived of purpose which for some time has been to protect and provide for the economically dependent wife and children. Without purpose, men’s sexual appeal to women is weakened. The inevitable consequence of this is a widespread conversion to lesbianism among women. Robert Knight of the conservative Family Research Council confirmed this fear in a 1995 interview, stating that “lesbianism is the animating principle of feminism. Because feminism,
at its core, is at war with motherhood, femininity, family, and God. And lesbians are at war with all these things” (Durham, 2000: 54).

The core principles underpinning feminist politics in the United States are virtually impossible to reconcile with aspects of the conservative Protestant worldview, particularly the denominations that insist on a more inerrant interpretation of the Bible, such as fundamentalist and evangelical “born-again” Christians. Reproductive freedom, sexual autonomy, and the toppling of the male as the authoritative head of the household and sole income earner are all central to feminist theory and practice but are met with deep unease by traditional family values proponents.

The question then is, how do those on the Christian Right reframe patriarchal values as beneficial to women? And have the inevitable limits of this necessitated a transition toward aping feminist discourse in order to augment the movement’s appeal to women? Making the case that traditional gender roles are a source of happiness and contentedness for women is one way leaders in the movement have tried to sell their ideological vision to women. For example, theology professor Maxine Hancock (1976) reasoned in Love, Honor, and Be Free that the freedom made possible by being a housewife could lead to considerable happiness because it was only in the feminine space of the home that wives had an unparalleled ability to exercise influence, especially with regard to the children. In contrast to the happy housewife is the wife who decides to enter the world of paid work. “There is no solid satisfaction is any career for a woman like myself,” mused author Taylor Caldwell in Family Weekly. “I would rather cook a meal for a man and bring him his slippers […] than have all the citations and awards and honors I have received worldwide” Caldwell adds (in Nigro, 2011: 411). Far from being a source of liberation, many on the Christian Right have traditionally regarded women’s participation in paid work as the catalyst for increasing dissatisfaction among American women and frames their advocacy for the traditional housewife and stay-at-home mother as promising women a more fulfilling life than the drudgery and stress of paid work delivered by the feminist movement. “Maybe the home is a pleasanter and more fulfilling work environment than the office, after all” Phyllis Schlafly (2003a) contends.

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10 Conservatives often cite the National Bureau of Economic Research survey which has shown a measurable decline in women’s happiness since 1970. The feminist movement’s push for women to enter paid work is used to explain this decline, despite the numerous other social and economic transformations since the 1970s, namely economic deregulation, wage stagnation, and markedly increasing health insurance premiums and tuition fees.
The condemnation of the feminist movement has always been central to the reactionary antipornography politics of the Christian Right. CWA’s Rosalie Bush (1997) argues that in granting women opportunities to work outside the home, the women’s movement has produced a generation of women who “resent” their husbands and family (1997: 8). To those on the Christian Right, women’s economic freedom and sexual freedom are commensurate outcomes, and it is only in tethering women to their husband’s for financial security that women’s sexual obedience can be assured.

The supposed interchangeability of the sexes advocated by feminists has resulted in a more relaxed sexual climate where women are no longer expected to preserve their virginity for their husbands, but those on the Christian Right argue that the burden of sexual consequence are still felt most heavily by women. It is women who are primarily left with the responsibility to raise a child in custody arrangements. It is women who must undergo abortion procedures. It is women whose bodies are put through the hormonal experiment of contraceptive pills. CWA’s Janice Shaw Crouse believes feminists have absolved men of their responsibility to women by promoting the benefits of ‘no strings attached’ sex, driving men away from marriage and monogamy, which according to Crouse has been devastating for women who still desire faithful companionship and motherhood.11 One CWA writer chronicles how feminism has led to a shift in cultural norms which has produced an appetite for pornography:

Feminists convinced many women they could have it all – and Super Mom was born. She cleaned, cooked, cuddled babies, coddled her husband – and commuted to the office. The result? Exhausted women who resented their husband and family; unfulfilled women leaving home to “find themselves”; and men who had been stripped of their role as head of the family. No-fault divorce laws made it easy for couples to “start over” – again and again. A “do your own thing” mentality left children low on the list of parental priorities […] And the ongoing battle between the sexes forced all sorts of perversions out of the closet and into the mainstream (Bush, 1997: 8).

The narrative goes that women’s personal and professional pursuits outside the home, which have been largely facilitated by feminism, as well as economic necessity, have left men

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emotionally and physically neglected, causing them to seek gratification elsewhere, in adulterous behaviour and in pornography. Moreover, without adequate supervision of the children due to maternal employment, young boys can easily slip into moral laxity (Marshall, 1991: 56).

The competitive, cutthroat corporate environment suits the male temperament, but it is not in woman’s gentler, more selfless nature to engage in such tactics, and it is bad for her to attempt to mimic her male colleagues. Connaught C. Marshner (1982), who became the highest-level woman in the conservative Heritage Foundation by the 1980s and spent a compelling career in the public sphere, described woman’s nature as “other-oriented”, who are “ordained by their nature to spend themselves in meeting the needs of others” (p. 12). On all policy fronts, essentialist ideas about the “true nature” of women dictate what the Christian Right regard as sensible reform.

The movement has also recast abortion and hormonal contraception as damaging to women’s health in an attempt to frame abortion providers as the real exemplars of patriarchy. For example, CWA declared that “any campaign that pushes abortion promotes the pain abortion inflicts on women.”12 Rather than working within the rhetorical parameters constructed by the feminist movement which sought to connect the constitutionally protected right to abortion with women’s agency, the Christian Right has uncharacteristically pursued a kind of political inversion which sees them questioning the true extent of women’s agency and free will within broader systems of structural oppression. By limiting the accessibility of abortion drugs and procedures, encouraging fathers to take more responsibility for their children, and offering more charitable assistance to young pregnant women, women might be spared the brutality of the abortionist.

The Christian Right may disagree with many of the central policies of mainstream feminist organisations, particularly its support of abortion as underscored by CWA’s assertion that abortion is akin to the promotion of violence against women, but it has taken note of the successes feminism has had in terms of reshaping cultural values and moral attitudes, and adopted the progressive frame of “rights” and “equality” in their pursuit of pornographers.

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In the early days of the new Christian Right there was considerable resistance to this notion that feminist ideals had any place in the movement, and any evidence that women’s liberation was infiltrating the movement was swiftly subverted. When the 1977 International Women’s Year conference in Houston endorsed a feminist platform it provoked the more conservative attendees to mobilise and form New Right women’s groups who could thwart some of the progress being made by the feminist movement (Faludi, 1991).

Susan Faludi notes in Backlash (1991) that the immense success of the feminist movement in the 1970s, particularly with Congress’s tentative approval of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972 and then the US Supreme Court’s legalisation of abortion in 1973, meant it was feminism, rather than communism or racial politics that became the centre of the Christian Right’s fury. Perhaps most worryingly for the Christian Right was the force of the feminist movement in terms of threatening the professional status of religious preachers, who depended on a mostly female flock of worshippers. These women were susceptible to the powerful messaging of the women’s movement to such an extent that the flock was “not only diminishing but becoming increasingly disobedient” (p. 263). In an attempt to sequester the growing acceptance of feminist ideas, evangelical ministers clung to Ephesians 5:22-24: “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church.” The insistence that women submit to their husbands became more critical than ever in the face of widespread female disobedience to traditionally prescribed roles.

Imbued with a renewed sense of cultural and political dominance following Ronald Reagan’s election in 1980, conservatives began actively subverting the feminist position as a means of reasserting cultural dominance. But their newfound political dominance also occasioned a growing confidence among leaders to seize arguments from feminists to use in the service of conservative political ends. Under Reagan, the movement leaders felt a sense of invincibility. Jerry Falwell, the televangelist minister who founded the Moral Majority and galvanised the Christian Right into a political force, described the electoral victory as “the greatest day for the cause of conservatism and morality in my adult life.”13 Leaders on the Christian Right realised that Reagan’s ascent would be politically advantageous for them given his priorities while Governor of California from 1967-1975. As a newly elected Governor in 1967, Reagan

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assured pastors at a prayer breakfast that “trusting in God for guidance will be an integral part of my administration” (in Williams, 2010: 188). Reagan followed this sentiment by endorsing the teaching of creationism in schools, and supporting a return to prayer in public schools. He pushed hard for the passage of an antiabortion constitutional amendment which would have seen a ban on abortions nation-wide had it not been rejected by the Senate (p. 203), and oversaw the establishment of the Meese Commission Report, a comprehensive investigation into the effects of pornography, which came a decade and a half after the Longford Report in Britain. Both investigations borrowed heavily from feminist rhetoric in their final evaluations of the harms of pornography.

The Meese Commission Report, 1986

The Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography, most often referred to as the Meese Commission, was prompted by agitation on the part of the Christian Right for greater control from progressive-left and anticensorship movements over sexual expression and public morality (Strub, 2010). The inquiry included some powerful commissioners, namely chairman Henry Hudson, vice-chairman Tex Lezar, executive director Alan Sears, and Edward J. Garcia, all of which are law-enforcement professionals. The founder of Focus on the Family, Dr. James Dobson, was also among the commissioners.

Deemed objective, the Commission was given half a million dollars to come up with a solution to pornography. Commission critic Pat Califia (1986) described the report, published in July 1986, as a “quick and dirty piece of work” which risks being the “harbinger of a new wave of sexual McCarthyism.” Indeed, the Commission’s definition of pornography was vague and wide-ranging, existing when one’s sexual feelings and desires are aroused. The Commission did, however, emphasise the link between pornography and sexually aggressive attitudes toward women (Day, 1986). It is on this point that the commissioners sought feminist antipornography rhetoric to accentuate their claims. Initially, members of New York Women Against Pornography (WAP), which included Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon, aided Commission staff in locating individuals to testify who had experienced harm from pornography. Despite pulling back from their endorsement of the inquiry, Dworkin and MacKinnon were pleased that the final report of the Commission supported their ordinance which defined pornography as a violation of women’s civil rights. Califia (1986) describes WAP as being “hoodwinked, coopted, and used” by the Commission, who never genuinely intended to reframe pornography as a civil rights violation, but merely to
reaffirm the legally contentious position that pornography is obscenity. This goes to the underlying conservatism of many of the commissioners, whose beliefs about the function of sex means issues of aggression are incidental to the core issue – that is to say, pornography depicts sex as divorced from marriage. Whether or not pornography depicts aggression and subjugation is not particularly relevant, as it nonetheless represents sex as a primal and mechanistic physiological need, akin to scratching an itch. Any material that depersonalises sex, or detaches it from its original biblical purpose, is pornographic.

**Pornography: The Longford Report, 1972**

Well before the establishment of the Meese Commission, the Longford Study Group in Britain endeavoured to define and offer remedies for pornography. The group was set up in 1971 by Francis Pakenham, known as Lord Longford, in order to “capture the definition of pornography for a semi-religious, right-wing position” (Lehman, 2006: 28). Longford summoned the assistance of notable political figures such as Sir Frederick Catherwood, prominent academics, representatives of the Church, the Law, medical experts, as well as distinguished individuals in the Arts, Industry, Social and Youth workers. In all, 53 committee members were summoned for a total of sixteen months, of whom only 47 stayed the course.

The impetus for the inquiry, Longford claims, was the growing public anxiety about the ever-expanding availability of pornography. The commission’s inquiry was significant as it was the first of its kind and garnered considerable interest from the press in Britain. The report was released in 1972, providing, what it termed, “a Christian view” on the harms of pornography. The report offered a rationale as to why the Christian finds pornography fundamentally disagreeable. For one, “the Christian believes that man is not another order of animal, that we are an altogether different […] No one should, therefore, treat another human being like an animal” (p. 138). The report goes on to ask: “Is a pornographic picture of a woman – or man – a picture aimed to arouse sexual passion, likely to produce a feeling of respect for the human dignity of the person in the picture, or is it likely to degrade them?” (p. 139). The belief that people must always appeal to the better angels of our nature was the report’s prevailing narrative. “Civilisation,” the committee argued “is a thin crust,” and sexual depravity had dangerously eroded this crust, releasing the dark amoralities which lurk in every human being, and which require persistent restraint (Sutherland, 1982: 129).
A focus on how pornography sexually objectifies women only features briefly in the report. At times, the report uses strong feminist rights-based language: “The effect of pornography is to turn women […] from human beings into objects of lust. It has a strong dehumanising trend” (p. 141). At other times the report reverts back to its religious roots, critiquing pornography from a marriage-oriented perspective: “a woman does not have to share a husband’s love with three or four others” (p. 140). The ideological tug of war in the Longford Report represents an internal struggle within the Christian conservative movement that still pervades it today. Should pornography be shunned on the basis that it depicts and incites sexual violence, or because it represents unbridled and illicit sexual excitement outside the confines of a marriage? Conservative leaders are constructing pornography as the bridge between illicit sexual behaviour and sexualised violence, and this is where decades of antiporn feminist scholarship come in very handy. Among the recommendations of the Longford Report was the proposal to draft a new obscenity law which would extend more widely than the area of pornography to cover violence and drugs (p. 408). However, the report makes clear that it is enjoined “to see how pornography can be tackled […] in a many that is felt to be compatible with essential liberties” (p. 415). This assurance was dismissed by George Gale (1972) at The Spectator who asserted “what is being proposed is an extension of censorship. Lord Longford and his crew are trying to tell you and me what we may and may not read and publish.” Gale adds that introducing a new test dependent on popular ideas of decency would be a step backwards into the dark and closed societies where censors and moral watchdogs prowl.

The Meese Commission report and the Longford Report represent two early examples of pro-woman, rights-conscious arguments being drawn into an otherwise biblical, morally-driven case against pornography and portend the modern phenomenon of rhetorical co-option on the Christian Right.

**Framing the emerging problem of pornography, 1960s-1980s**

Traditionally the religious right has regarded pornography as solely or primarily a problem of moral recalcitrance. How pornography is defined in this context depends largely on the decade in question. From the 1950s but prior to the advent of the internet, pornographic imagery could be found in magazines, books, in theatres, and later on VHS tapes. What precisely constitutes pornography is contested terrain. The MacKinnon-Dworkin model statute defines pornography as requiring three elements: graphic sexual explicitness, the
subordination of women, and depictions of any one of a long list of sexual acts. Other definitions have attempted to further narrow the definitional criteria. Cass Sunstein’s (1986) seminal piece in a *Duke Law Journal* argues for a simpler definition focused more explicitly on the abuse of women.

However, for those on the Christian Right the definition of pornography can be much more wide reaching. For example, evangelical minister Tim LaHaye (1993) classifies biology textbooks and sex education manuals as pornographic. To support this assertion he states that “sex education is a family matter” and should not be addressed in public schools. Public schools, LaHaye charges, have used sex education to instruct young people on “the art of intercourse,” the result of which has been a “moral holocaust” in the United States (LaHaye in Lienesch, 1993: 83). For those on the Christian Right like LaHaye, mere allusions to sexual activity outside of the wedded bond are enough to warrant the pornographic label. Whereas for antiporn feminists, evidence of abuse is a more reliable benchmark on which the material can be judged.

Despite the lack of universality on the definitional front, antipornography campaigners on the Christian Right have, in recent times, demonstrated their proclivity for supplementing moral arguments with civil rights claims which materialised from the feminist tradition. This is in stark contrast to the early days of the new Christian Right in the 1960s and early 1970s, where there is little evidence that the movement was interested in appealing to women constituents by framing their stance on particular social issues as beneficial to women’s autonomy and to a goal of equitable treatment of the sexes. This is significant as it points to an emerging consensus within the ranks of the Christian Right that moral arguments were no longer sufficiently persuasive on their own, and that a more explicit connection needed to be articulated between the policy proposals of the movement and the advancement of women in all realms of life. This tendency is manifest in a range of policy areas, as demonstrated by a congressional testimony in 1981 by Vincent Rue, founder of *Women Exploited by Abortion* on the devastating psychological harms a pregnancy termination can cause to women. Rue’s testimony proved to be a pivotal turning point in the rhetoric of the movement, which had previously cast women who have abortions as evil, but now sought to acknowledge their victimised status alongside that of the foetus. The softer, pro-woman tone embraced by antiabortion activists after this point proved so successful that it has since been applied to other core issues, including pornography.
By the 1990s, leaders of the Christian Right were boastfully disclosing their tactical shift to more secularised, rights-based rhetoric. Prominent evangelical Jerry Falwell addressed the movement’s evolving strategy with specific reference to pornography:

On most issues, whether pornography or abortion, I try to do more than just quote the Bible. You can’t win a national debate from simply a scriptural perspective. So I try to come at these issues from a secular [angle] (in Tamney, 1992: 130).

In the same vein, a lobbyist for the Moral Majority asserted:

We are not a religious organization, and we have some non-religious people who support us because of our stand for a strong national defense. We don’t try to use scripture or words of Christ to convince people. If we started to use scripture we would bleed ourselves to death. We want to influence government (in Hertzke, 1988: 89).

According to Hunter (1991) the adoption of a more secular tone by religious conservatives amounts to an admission of the superiorly positioned status of liberal discourse:

Every time an evangelical pastor makes an appeal to “medical and psychological proof” to establish that homosexuality is harmful and makes no other appeal; the [evangelical pastor] tacitly submits to the linguistic domination of its more progressive opposition (p. 306).

The broader foundations of this rhetorical shift can be traced to the concurrent emergence of both antiporn feminism and the Christian Right in the same era. By the end of the 1970s, institutionalised opposition to pornography from within the women’s movement had coalesced in the political dominance of the feminist Women Against Pornography (WAP).

This group was led by some of the feminist movement’s most notable figures, including Susan Brownmiller, Gloria Steinem, Adrienne Rich, Andrea Dworkin, and Robin Morgan. “Every feminist in the New York metropolitan area has heard of Women Against Pornography” proclaimed author Paula Webster (1981: 48). In Battling Pornography, Carolyn Bronstein (2011) explains how WAP tried to differentiate itself from the very vocal religious opposition to pornography at the time:

WAP actively sought media attention and tried to communicate a specifically feminist (as opposed to conservative-moralist) objection to pornography, namely that it was a
point on the continuum of male violence and functioned as a key mechanism in the subordination of women (p. 238).

Although it would be a few more years before Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon presented their definition of pornography as a violation of women’s civil rights to the courts in a number of American cities, an emerging milieu saw WAP campaigners already reframing pornography as an affront to women’s rights, as opposed to the obscenity precedent favoured by conservatives which focused more on whether or not the material in question inspired prurient curiosity. Just as WAP was ascending politically and generating debate on pornography and civil rights, the prospects for success in terms of the broader American feminist movement was diminishing as the political climate in the United States drifted rightward (Bronstein, 2011: 238).

Beyond demands for the nation’s economic program to conform to the requirements of a rationalised market society, the rightward shift concentrated heavily on social issues, all of which contradicted the vision for a reconfiguration of sex-specific roles promoted by feminists. In *Rightward Bound*, Schulman and Zelizer (2008) document the American conservative transformation in the 1970s and cite two key issues as catalysts for the mobilisation of conservatives. The first was Congress’ approval of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1972, and the second was the Supreme Court’s *Roe v. Wade* ruling legalising abortion in 1973 (p. 77). Still incensed by decisions made by Congress and the Supreme Court in the 1950s and 1960s on race and religion, religious conservatives “were ripe to be drawn into a social movement against federal ‘intrusions’ into the sensitive and intensely personal arena of relations between the sexes” (p. 79).

Pornography became a central concern for the newly politicised religious right because it represented the decay of modern society by glorifying nonmarital, nonprocreative relations. The subtext being that pornography endorsed homosexual or otherwise transgressive sexual practices. This fear had been articulated a decade earlier in the 1965 documentary film *Perversion for Profit*. In the documentary, television news reporter George Putnam claims that mere exposure to the nude male physique in pornography can “pervert” a normal male, causing him to become homosexual. Putnam alleges that such perversions are henceforth fixed in the viewer’s psyche: “we know that once a person is perverted, it is practically impossible for that person to adjust to normal attitudes in regard to sex.”
It is not just the boys who are enticed by the sight of nude men into homosexuality; girls too are “lured into lesbianism.” Putnam points to a rear shot of a nude woman and makes the logical connection that it “appeals to the sodomist.” A picture of another nude woman on a farm with a goat in the distant background is said to contain “overtones of bestiality.” The power of pornography to entice people toward transgressive sexual practices has underpinned much of the political backlash since the emergence of the new Christian Right. One of the leaders of this reactionary sexual politics of the 1960s, Senator Jesse Helms, made sure his criticisms of pornography and homosexuality were always closely aligned. Rather than a legitimate sexual orientation, Helms regarded homosexuality as little more than a ruse to conceal a true desire for sexual promiscuity and perversion. To Helms, homosexuality itself was pornographic (Dean, 2000: 11).

By 1980 there was a strong public appetite for the condemnation of pornography, but less zest for a mainstream feminist politics. To accommodate this political contradiction, the leaders of WAP shifted their focus from issues like sexism in advertising and violence against women, which earlier feminist groups like Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW) and Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media (WAVPM) had sought to address, to a more narrow analysis of pornography. Dolores Alexander, one of the founders of WAP, explained the narrow focus in a letter to a friend written in August 1979: “[P]ornography is of such interest to men and the male press that it will make it an important issue for us. If we were against say, violence, – by that I mean wife beating, sexual harassment, etc. – we would have a hard time being heard” (in Bronstein, 2011: 204).

The singular focus on pornography allowed WAP to become the most powerful and influential force in the feminist movement against pornography, but it also meant the group failed at times to sensitively address intersecting issues such as race and class. This oversight brought WAP perilously close to affiliating itself with right-wing interests in the 1980s. For example, the group set up an office in a space that New York’s Office of Midtown Enforcement had cleared out by arresting prostituted people. WAP also accepted donations from the Theatre League who had supported stronger police action against those working in the sex trade (Bronstein, 2011: 211). Some regarded these affiliations as proof of WAP’s lack of regard for those dependent on the sex trade for survival, many of whom were women of colour.
At the same time as sex industry-critical feminists were narrowing their political purview, the Christian Right was widening theirs and by the 1980s represented the most influential and significant social movement on the American political scene. With political allies like Jesse Helms and Orrin Hatch in Congress, and an equally amenable Ronald Reagan in the White House, the Christian Right was able to extend its reform agenda beyond social issues to encompass foreign policy matters, advocating American militarism and intervention abroad (Diamond, 1995: 228).

But as the Christian Right ascended politically in the 1980s, broadening their agenda to encompass foreign policy aims as well as traditional social issues, antiporn feminism took a dramatic hit from within that would permanently realign the movement’s alliances and ultimately weaken the feminist case against pornography, setting the stage for an emboldened Christian Right to fill the empty space left by a diminished antiporn feminist movement.

**Splintered sisterhood: the sex wars divide feminism**

Since the 1980s when pornography was catapulted to the forefront of the feminist agenda, the movement has undergone a marked political transformation which has seen it almost entirely abandon its critique of pornography as a source of oppression on the one hand, and liberation on the other. The downfall of antiporn feminism intersects with the rise of the Christian Right and the election of Ronald Reagan. The fear that hard fought for rights in the arena of women’s sexuality would be lost worried some pro-sex feminist activists such as B. Ruby Rich, Pat Califia, Ellen Willis, and Dierdre English\(^{14}\) who cautioned that antipornography arguments were resonating with those on the Right and could be used to further limit women’s sexual autonomy.

In her historical account of the American feminist antipornography movement, Carolyn Bronstein (2011) writes that certain narratives used by antiporn feminists which relied on old tropes of men as insatiable creatures unable to control their lust, and women as more oriented to emotional and nurturing sexual practices, were perceived by some to serve essentialist, right-wing interests more than they had the potential to liberate women (p. 280).

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The broader political context in the 1980s saw women’s reproductive rights under increasing threat from a politicised religious base who understood that limiting women’s sexual life to heterosexual, marital, procreative activity would preserve the patriarchal family model and the strength of its concomitant institutions. This sexual and reproductive agenda had by the 1980s firmly penetrated the institutionalised Republican Party, allowing right-wing politicians to ascend politically in the 1970s and 1980s in a way that would not have been possible on economic policies alone.

Perhaps unanticipated by social conservatives at the time, this economic model would ultimately undermine the patriarchal family model they idealised, as the stagnating wages and increasingly insecure work occasioned by neoliberalism would necessitate a second income-earner in the home. A scenario in which a wife is able to stay home, care for the children and keep a tidy, homely abode for her husband became less economically viable. Nevertheless, the appearance of deep concern for the family, and an emphasis on sexual and reproductive politics gave right-wing politicians a point of ideological convergence with predominantly rural, working class Americans whose economic interests were not necessarily served by fiscal conservatism, but whose concerns about the decline of the traditional American family made them see eye-to-eye with Republican lawmakers.

As Rosalind Pollack Petchesky (1981) writes, it was through sexual and reproductive issues that the Right imposed conservative thinking on many areas of social and economic policymaking, namely the reprivatisation of welfare benefits from a public to an individual responsibility. The meanings resonating from, for example, antiabortion politics have more to do with women’s potential as sexual beings and the ability to control their level of engagement with the workforce than they do with the foetus (p. 210). At the heart of the reactionary politics against abortion was a desire to maintain the supremacy of the patriarchal figure in family, business, and political life.

Recognising the power of the pro-choice movement to fundamentally reshape the family – an institution conservatives regard as the very foundation of society – right-wing politicians set about defeating abortion through the courts and legislatures in an unprecedented attack on the core precepts of the feminist movement. At the same time, the antipornography subset of the feminist movement was articulating its own version of human sexuality that seemed to some progressive observers to mirror the rigid set of sexual practices approved of by the church.
Given the politics of the time, feminists identifying themselves as ‘pro-sex’ had an apposite response:

This situation motivated pro-sex feminists to argue that a feminist campaign against pornography was a risky proposition, being undertaken at a politically inopportune moment. The state had turned sharply away from promoting women’s rights and women’s equality, and it was a dangerous time for women to cede sexual territory (p. 280).

Fearing that an extension of power to regulate sexual expression would inevitably lead to the repression of gay and lesbian material by a government hostile to such communities was enough for many feminists to turn away from antipornography activism. While the conservatives were coalescing, the Left was fragmenting – making the ideological ground easy pickings for conservative ideologues. What ensued was a deep rift within the feminist movement between antipornography activists and an emerging pro-sex countermovement, a debate referred to as the “feminist sex wars” (Duggan and Hunter, 1995).

Tensions came to a head between the two conflicting schools of thought at the 1982 Barnard College Feminist IX Conference “Towards a Politics of Sexuality”. The initial intent of the conference was to have a broad discussion about various aspects of women’s sexuality along the lines of “pleasure and danger” (Sands, 2000). The conference was coordinated by a well-known scholar on gender and sexuality, Carol S. Vance, who invited about one hundred women to work collaboratively with her in deciding how the conference should be organised. Vance was motivated by an unease with the wider feminist conversation about sexuality which had been funneled into the single issue of pornography. She hoped the conference would revive considerations of how women could attain their own pleasure from sex, rather than being persistently framed as passive victims of male sexuality. Vance acknowledged that women had to contend with dangerous barriers to total sexual autonomy, but wanted to imagine “the textures and contours [of sexual practice] that would unfurl and proliferate in a safer space” (in Bronstein, 2011: 298).

In the two years leading up to the conference and for the first time, the Republican Party adopted a formal position of opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment and abortion, pressured by groups like Phyllis Schlafly’s Eagle Forum and Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority. Bronstein writes that these erosions of feminist gains only underscored the poor timing of the
antipornography fight, asserting that it was “too much in concert with a right-wing government that quickly proved itself no friend of feminism” (Bronstein, 2011: 300).

Amid the meteoric rise of the Right in American politics at the time, a more nuanced discussion of women and sexuality seemed pertinent to many in the movement. However, it soon became known that Vance and the organisers had not invited any members of the antiporn feminist community to participate in the planning committee.

Rather than representing all corners of the feminist discussion on sexuality, antipornography activists accused the conference of bias in favour of pro-sex advocates. Once the antipathy many of the conference organisers felt towards antipornography politics became apparent, WAP members and supporters resolved to retaliate by picketing the event and distributing leaflets to the 800 attendees which condemned the conference for recognising organisations that supported and produced pornography and promoted sadomasochistic sexual practices (Off Our Backs, 1982: 5). One of the conference organisers was pro-sex feminist Gayle Rubin (2011), who summarised the conflict over attitudes to sex and pornography within the feminist movement by drawing parallels between the Right and antiporn feminists:

[…] There have been two strains of thought on the subject. One tendency has criticized the restrictions on women’s sexual behaviour and denounced the high costs imposed on women for being sexually active. This tradition of feminist sexual thought has called for a sexual liberation that would work for women as well as men. The second tendency has considered sexual liberalization to be inherently a mere extension of male privilege. This tradition resonates with conservative, anti-sexual discourse (p. 172).

The events at Barnard College on April 24 are widely recognised as the first site of the feminist sex wars, which would continue for the next decade and which would eventually degrade the antipornography position to such an extent that a strong, unified feminist message against pornography became scarcely evident from the 1990s onwards, laying the groundwork for the contemporary Christian Right to effortlessly occupy the vacuum of progressive-left antipornography politics.

Antiporn feminism has not been able to recover from the damaging effects of being associated with the Right. As a result, contemporary Christian Right leaders have little rhetorical and strategic competition from progressive opponents who have assimilated into a
more liberal stance on this issue which valorises free speech concerns above civil rights. A critique of capitalist institutions applied to other forms of exploitative labour is swiftly dismissed by such progressives as inapplicable to pornography. Janice G. Raymond (1995) emphasised the hypocrisy on pornography displayed by some progressive men in *Women as Wombs*:

> Many so-called enlightened men promote reproductive rights for women, especially in areas such as contraception and abortion, whereas there is little male support for antipornography politics. Rather, the liberal establishment tries to malign women as prudes and puritans when they attack the sexual politics of a male-dominant culture. Liberals have also sought to discredit antipornography feminists by allying them with the politics of the right-wing (p. 96).

With few friends within their own political ranks, antiporn feminists have suffered the effects of isolation and marginalisation.

The decline of antiporn feminism was not merely a result of the panic within liberal circles that a right-wing government would happily co-opt antipornography arguments in the service of further eroding women’s rights. Perhaps ironically, given his social reform agenda, the decline of antiporn feminism was also prompted by the consequences of Reagan’s economic program. While free market economist Milton Friedman once assumed that the market “enforced its own morality” the dramatic popularisation and mainstreaming of pornography that has accompanied the marketisation of public life in the last forty years suggests otherwise (in Styhre, 2014: 12). As High (2009) writes “if capitalism sells pornography, discourages thrift, and cashes in on counterculture, it cannot produce ‘virtue’ as well” (p. 480).

In allying government with big business, Reagan liberated corporate producers of pornography from the burdens of regulation and oversight and effectively made his own vision of a smut-free society untenable. Rather than the market, with its own morality, encouraging efficiency, it has seen the fall of virtue. Cultural historian Christopher Lasch (1979) believes sexual decadence is the ultimate expression of bourgeois individualism and its economic vehicle, capitalism. In a culture of constant consumption and immediate gratification, human beings are inevitably reduced to their sexual organs, rendering them anonymous and interchangeable – affirming the capitalist principle that human beings can be reduced to substitutable objects. In Lasch’s view, the development of social life under
capitalism has evolved into a widespread acceptance that all social relations should be subordinate to the market, and thus pleasure becomes life’s only business. However, under capitalism the pursuit of immediate gratification is tolerated no matter how perverse, insane, criminal, or immoral it is (p. 69). Reagan’s personal religious ethos which assumed that people are prone to do evil unless suitably restrained was not applied to the will of the market, which too has no intrinsic ability to self-regulate, and thus pornography was permitted to flourish.

Despite its sometimes paradoxical aims, the Christian Right enjoyed a rapid political ascendency in the 1980s which ingrained in the movement a self-assurance that emboldened movement leaders to reach beyond traditional rhetorical boundaries. Pornography, once a clear-cut moral problem, became a matter of rights to conservative leaders, a perspective which originated in the feminist opposition to pornography. Over the subsequent decades, the Christian Right sought about repackaging their core beliefs, reframing pornography and other areas of social reform as civil rights issues in which the primary recipients of harm and injustice are not women of colour, or incarcerated populations, or same-sex oriented people, but conservative Christians.

**Embracing the secular language of rights**

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the Christian Right had successfully established itself as a solid political force, but in doing so had constructed an image of itself as politically aggressive, pursuing a militant effort to return faith and morality to American homes. This image was aided by leaders in the movement who used militaristic language to describe their efforts. Focus on the Family founder James Dobson was particularly fond of using wartime metaphors:

> Nothing short of a great Civil War of values rages throughout North America. […] Two sides with vastly differing and incompatible worldviews are locked in a bitter conflict that permeates every level of society (Dobson and Bauer, 1992: 19).

To Dobson and his allies, this battle was a war against forces with lethal goals, whether that be ending life through abortion and euthanasia, or legalising drugs. The drawback of using such inflammatory rhetoric is running the risk of alienating potential adherents who might not relate to social issues within strict religious and moral terms, but who respond more favourably to rights-based arguments. In the pornography debate, moral arguments have
dissipated as a new concept of ‘pornography-as-power’, introduced by feminists, have replaced concerns from the 1960s and 1970s that pornography was primarily a threat to America’s moral decency. Linda Williams (1989) explains how the feminist injection of “power” into the debate in the 1980s led to a crucial paradigm shift:

[t]heir alliance [feminists and the Christian Right] has definitively shifted the debate about pornography from a discussion of aesthetics and morals by academic literary critics and intellectuals in consultation with the judiciary, to another, equally unresolved discussion about abusive forms of power and the threatened civil rights of women. (p. 16)

The shift in focus from morality to rights in the pornography debate has occurred within a broader secularisation of American political discourse which characterises religious rhetoric as narrow, outdated, and exclusionary. As Vernon Bates (1995) asserts, “to win in the American political arena one must espouse inclusion” and the problem for the Christian Right is that the strict moral codes it has traditionally relied on “appear to require another language, the language of exclusion” (p. 51). Indeed, the Christian Right’s political platform is one based on ritual exclusion of individuals and groups incompatible with its notion of a Godly nation – namely proponents of the ‘homosexual agenda’ and feminists. Rights have been profoundly important to the development of the United States as a nation, and as such organisations on the Christian Right have molded their activism to a classically American pattern (Hoover and den Dulk, 2004: 10).

To assuage the perception of exclusion and strengthen the movements’ mainstream political appeal, leaders on the Christian Right have reimagined moral issues as chiefly a matter of rights, and as this thesis will uncover, pornography has been a central component of the political experiment to present the family values agenda as a natural ally of the civil rights project.

This strategy has been applied across a range of moral issues. In Aaron Louis Haberman’s (2006) doctoral thesis on civil rights in the Christian Right, he notes a similar trend by tracing the transformation of the movements’ rhetoric on prayer in public schools. To prohibit an individual’s right to engage in religious practices in a public space, including schools, amounted to a violation of that individual’s rights. A denial of this right was further proof that religious expression, specifically Christian religious expression, was under attack by the state.
Leaders on the Christian Right have, since the 1980s “recognized the secularization of the political system and advanced a new set of arguments framed in terms of constitutional and minority or civil rights” (Haberman, 2006: 6). Some on the Right have questioned the wisdom of expanding judicial accommodation of religion. In the cases where Christian Right lawyers have attempted to elevate religious expression to a protected level enjoyed by other forms of speech, critics have responded by asserting that such moves actually degrade religious expression by appealing to the secular to protect the sacred. In framing religious practice as a mere viewpoint, like other forms of speech, “it is dislodged from its lofty dwelling with the divine and placed squarely within the baser realm of politics” where it is subject to legislative wrangling and adjudication by mortal judges (Brown, 2002: 143).

Ironically, in seeking refuge in the free speech clause, Christian Right lawyers are linking religious expression with other types of protected speech, including pornography, thereby using the language of rights to protect conservative religious causes.

The Christian Right’s inversion of rights-based rhetoric has appeared again more recently in debates concerning same-sex marriage in anticipation of the long-awaited decision by the Supreme Court of the United States on June 26, 2015 to recognise a federal constitutional right for same-sex couples to marry. The Christian Right rallied enthusiastically behind the March 2015 passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) passed by Governor Mike Pence in Indiana which gives individuals and businesses the right to the free exercise of religion. The text says that the state cannot “substantially burden a person's exercise of religion” unless it is furthering a “compelling government interest” and acting in the least restrictive way possible. This includes preventing the government from compelling people to do things they object to on religious grounds, such as providing floral arrangements for a same-sex wedding.

There is evidence that Indiana’s RFRA was impelled by a panic over New Mexico’s Elane Photography v. Wilcock decision. In that case, a same-sex couple sued a photography business for refusing to photograph their wedding. New Mexico law bars discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and ultimately ruled in favour of the same-sex couple (Epps, 2015). In addition, same-sex marriage has been legal in Indiana since October 2014, a campaign which has been gaining momentum across numerous states over the last decade, and this bill gave opponents some assurance that equal rights for gay and lesbian individuals was not necessarily inevitable. Within just one week of the bill being signed into law, a small
pizza business in Walkerton, Memories Pizza, became the first business to publicly announce it would refuse to cater same-sex weddings as a result of the law (Wong, 2015).

The opposition to same-sex marriage and RFRA were deeply entangled from the beginning, but by undermining the rights of the LGBT community under the guise of protecting the competing right to religious exercise, the Christian Right could shift the public’s focus from the exclusionary religious realm of moral indignation to the inclusive secular realm of rights.

With similar tact, Christian Right leaders seek to avoid the perception that their opposition to pornography is motivated more by fearful suspicion of female sexuality than the goal of championing the rights of women by reframing their arguments in inclusive, accommodating pro-woman terms. This is an inherently risky direction for the movement to take. Imbibing the secular language of rights and equality into their discourse conflicts with the movement’s enduring defiance against the state’s supposed imposition of a “secular humanist” ideology, characterised by godlessness and moral relativism, through channels such as the courts and public schools (Liebman and Wuthnow, 1983). The construction of the secular humanist bogeyman has been a central element of the Christian Right’s successful efforts to mobilise adherents in a diverse and pluralistic population. Organisations at the forefront of the feminist movement have been diagnosed as key culprits in the secular humanist conspiracy. Right-wing leaders developed “an elaborate theory” writes Sara Diamond (1990), which linked the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the National Organization for Women (NOW), and Hollywood movie producers to the impending downfall of modern civilisation (p. 85).

Pursuing a visceral war against the cultural spectre of secular humanism, in which the feminist movement is identified as a key component, while simultaneously appropriating antiporn feminist arguments for their own political ends reveals the way in which the movement is constantly repositioning its enemies for the sake of political expediency in a dynamic political climate where the politics of inclusion and exclusion appeal to different constituencies at varying points in time.

A cornerstone of this politics of inclusion involves extending an olive branch to groups of women who might have become disenchanted by perceptions that the Christian Right takes an overly judgemental and excessively moralistic stance on pornography. As the next chapter will explore, pressure to adapt to a more inclusive, pro-woman style of politics is not only
driven by the expectations of prospective adherents, but also a burgeoning gender consciousness from women within the movement.
CHAPTER TWO

Feminist consciousness on the Christian Right

Existing literature on gender consciousness and religious women

Not to be overlooked in an analysis of the involuted relationship between the Christian Right and feminism is the extent to which feminist theory has been imbibed by the movement, particularly its women adherents, as part of the larger cultural adoption of certain elements of feminist theory and practice.

Scholars refer to the process of politicising one’s sex as ‘gender consciousness’ and have typically conflated it with feminist activism (Conover, 1988; Gurin, 1985; Hildreth and Dran, 1994; Klein 1984; Rhodebeck, 1996; Tolleson-Rinehart, 1992). Put simply, when one is “gender conscious,” one feels a sense of connectedness with others perceived to be similar, and have a level of concern about the wellbeing of that group. Rather than being applicable only to feminist-identified women, the politicisation of sex crosses ideological boundaries, as demonstrated by the rich history of religious conservative women who have mobilised together in the service of preserving traditional gender roles and ensuring the supremacy of the family in American life.

There is considerable evidence that the influence of feminist ideology has extended as far as the ranks of the Christian Right. Stacey and Gerard’s (1990) study on the influence of the feminist movement on religious conservatives’ draws upon a broad scope of literature, media material, and fieldwork conducted in a small evangelical Christian ministry in California’s Silicon Valley to explore this possibility. The authors acknowledge the view held by many secular feminists that feminism and fundamentalist Christianity represent incompatible world views. In addition, many secular feminists interpret the hierarchal gender ideology of evangelicalism as a reactionary response to the egalitarian model of gender proposed by feminism (p. 99). Today, prominent male theologians are absorbing feminist rhetoric into their teachings in an effort to promote an egalitarian perception of heterosexual marriage. For example, pastors who advocate a marital doctrine of male headship and wifely submission are now amenable to offering female constituents support for creative adaptations of Christian gender ideology towards more egalitarian family reform projects. For more progressive constituents, this flexibility on gender ideology can be sufficiently revisionist to temper residual feminist objections (p. 105-106). Proponents of the revisionist position claim that
encouraging men to prideful domination and women to subordinate passivity is a misunderstanding of biblical teachings. Rather, both men and women ought to be in mutual submission to God (Scanzoni and Hardesty, 1974). Other scholars have examined the reinterpretation of biblical gender ideology towards more egalitarian principles (Gallagher, 2004; Dayton, 1976; Grenz and Kjesbo, 1995; Groothuis, 1997; Storkey, 2001; Tucker and Liefeld, 1987). If feminist ideology has permeated even the biblically inerrant, rigid structures of born-again Christian ranks, it suggests the magnitude of feminist influence upon American culture.

Gender consciousness is instinctively linked with feminism and its attendant arguments about women’s unequal access to power because implicit in the formation of most kinds of collective action is a recognition by the group that they are being oppressed, excluded, and marginalised by forces with greater access to power. This has tended not to be the basis of right-wing Christian women’s activism. In fact, their engagement with the political process has been more concerned with maintaining the unequal distribution of power between men and women that lies at the heart of family values politics. Hogeland’s (1994) analysis of gender consciousness engages with the assumption that it must be accompanied by the politicisation and problematisation of power difference: “Feminism politicizes gender consciousness, inserts it into a systematic analysis of histories and structures of domination and privilege” (p. 19). Reid and Purcell (2004) give a similar appraisal of gender consciousness, arguing that for it to be considered feminist it must recognise “women’s relatively low status and power compared to men” (p. 760) and attribute power differentials to illegitimate sources, such as institutionalised sexism.

These definitions of gender consciousness call attention to the radical feminist understanding of gender as a caste system, or a “cultural category that gives social and cultural meaning to sexed bodies” (Soothill, 2007: 13). This cultural category socialises women from birth to conform to a feminine ideal and submit and surrender to men who are constructed as naturally dominant. The social construction of gender fetishises women’s compliance to prepubescent beauty standards and requires of them a docile and passive acceptance of supposedly innate feminine traits. In The Second Sex, first published in 1949, Simone de Beauvoir famously asserted “one is not born, but rather becomes, woman”, adding “it is civilisation as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine” (p. 293). Kate Millett’s Sexual Politics (1970) was one of the first works to articulate the belief that women’s oppression is buried in the sex/gender
system. Since then, radical feminists have continued to emphasise the material difference between ‘sex’ and ‘gender’, the first as fixed and biological, the second as a patriarchal construct, merely reflecting a formulaic version of femininity and masculinity which exaggerates the biological differences between men and women for the purpose of institutionalising and maintaining male power.

For the Christian Right, gender and sex are interchangeable and synonymous. Women are believed to have certain essential feminine characteristics that are natural and stable. God made women to be nurturing and submissive and this therefore makes them more vulnerable and needy, and men were made to be more emotionally rigid and independent because they were created for positions of leadership (Storkey, 1985: 26). Within this conceptualisation of the sexes, patriarchy is not a perversion of the potentially equitable relationship between men and women, but instead rooted in the natural and biblically sanctioned order of things. Practiced perfectly, patriarchy is believed to civilise men, protect women, foster the rearing of obedient children, and facilitate a thriving free market system. The feminist problematisation of gender essentialism is therefore the true distortion, with everything from the breakdown of the nuclear family to rising income inequality attributed to the feminist refusal to reconcile their feminine essence with their biological sex.

The ongoing nature versus nurture debate underpinning conflicts over the sex and gender question complicates discussions of gender consciousness as a framework for examining the extent to which conservative women actively participate in the development of a gendered collective identity while at the same time reinforcing the supposed naturalness of masculine dominance and feminie subordination. In an attempt to resolve this, Rebecca E. Klatch (2001) developed a definition which distinguishes gender consciousness from the distinctly more politicised feminist consciousness. Klatch contends that there are three stages in the formation of a feminist consciousness: (1) identification of inequality or mistreatment, (2) discovering a language of framing by which to interpret these experiences, and (3) the social construction of a collective identity. The impetus for Klatch’s study was the need for a more thorough examination of the processes that precede the formation of social movement organisations, as well as the “social-psychological and discursive processes involved before a movement is consolidated” (p. 792). Klatch makes the distinction between gender consciousness and feminist consciousness by asserting that gender conscious women believe in gender equality but do not identify with the term feminist. However, this definition does not fully comprehend alternative avenues to gendered collective identity that are not premised
on a belief that women’s subordinate status is necessarily wrong. Reverting back to Hogeland’s (1994) view that gender consciousness develops into feminism when political considerations of power, agency, and oppression are recognised, if a group purports to support equality between the sexes, then one can assume they acknowledge that women are unequal to men, and not because of intrinsic weaknesses on the part of women that belie any efforts to address these inequalities. Therefore, while Klatch’s three stages of feminist consciousness formation are sound indicators of feminist consciousness, they fall short of fully articulating the more complex formation of a gendered collective identity among religious conservative women.

For these women, a sense of fictive kinship with other likeminded women arises out of their mutual experiences embodying certain roles formulated within a patriarchal system; that of the wife, mother, community volunteer, churchgoer. Within these networks, religious conservative women interact with family members and the broader community in a way that is qualitatively different to their male counterparts. Through these recursive social arrangements, they reaffirm gendered relations with the world and necessitate the separate spheres of male and female on which gendered collective identities thrive. West and Zimmerman (1987) call this process “doing gender”. It is fundamental to the maintenance of proper status, and because it is an active process, doing gender can produce constantly changing discourses on gender roles.

This active process is manifest in the pornography debate. The adoption of pro-woman, rights-based rhetoric by the Christian Right signals the establishment of new normative boundaries of gender relations within the movement. While the movement’s antiporn discourse once framed the harmful effects of obscene material primarily in terms of the threat it posed to the dignity of the woman in her role as wife and mother, the arguments now reflect a changing perception of women as more atomised, self-determining individuals with an intrinsic value that is not solely incumbent on her role as wife and mother.

**Gender consciousness and identity politics**

Another perspective sees the identity politics at the heart of gender consciousness as less of a challenge to the status quo, and more an inevitable outgrowth of neoliberalism and its attendant elimination of class-based analyses from contemporary political discourse. Crucially, identifying with other members of one’s own sex and organising collectively around this one unifying feature does not predict or precede a critique of capitalist market
forces; it is essentially apolitical in terms of a class analysis. Therefore, gendered collective identities can thrive within almost any political organisation regardless of its ideological leanings. As Adolph Reed Jr. (2015) articulately states, as capitalist power more aggressively and assertively destroys and marketises every shred of social protection for people of all sexes, races, and sexual identities, capitalism has assumed an unassailable position, and in its place a politics of identity has arisen as the new alternative to class politics, which arranges and organises people based on what we are rather than what we do. Reed proposes that within this moral economy, it might be deemed just that 1% of the population controls 90% of the resources, provided that “roughly 12% of the 1% were black, 12% were Latino, 50% were women, and whatever the appropriate proportions were LGBT people.” It is Reed’s contention that rather than presenting a challenge to neoliberal economic doctrine, identity politics actually justifies it, because in insisting on the political priority of fictive, naturalised group categories within populations “identitarianism meshes well with neoliberal naturalization of the structures that reproduce inequality.”

Wendy Brown’s (1995) powerful critique of liberalism in States of Injury makes this point persuasively:

Drawing upon the historically eclipsed meaning of disrupted and fragmented narratives of ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, region, continent, or nation, identity politics permits a sense of situation-and often a sense of filiation or community—without requiring profound comprehension of the world in which one is situated. Identity politics permits positioning without temporal or spatial mapping, a feature that sharply distinguishes it from (Marxian) class analysis and reveals its proximity to (liberal) interest group politics. In this respect, identity politics, with its fierce assertion and production of subjects, appears less as a radical political response to postmodernity than a symptom of its ruptures and disorienting effects (p. 35).

From the demise of class politics, a politics of identity has emerged which has typified progressive discourse since the 1970s. In A Brief History of Neoliberalism (2005), David Harvey explains that throughout the 1960s the left had tremendous difficulty reconciling organised labour espousing social solidarities with the student movement desirous of individual liberties. These differences generated a wedge between disparate groups on the left and were easily exploited by neoliberal advocates. Rather than enhancing the progressive-left critique of capitalism, a politics of identity concerned chiefly with race, gender, and sexuality
replaced such critique, fostering resentment between these various categories of identity. As a consequence, the symptoms of capitalism – including commodification, alienation, exploitation, and displacement – become depoliticised and normalised. As Herbert Marcuse (1964) asserts, individuals unable to imagine a qualitatively different universe of discourse and action come to identify themselves with the neoliberal existence which is imposed on them and this becomes central to their development and satisfaction. Under such an arrangement, class becomes a vague concept, both invisible and incapable of being articulated. If a worker and his boss are able to enjoy the same television shows or visit the same resort places, or the typist is as attractively dressed as the employer’s daughter, then the institutions which uphold the system can claim society has reached a so-called equalisation of classes (p. 8). With class suppressed as a point of focus, discourses of race, gender, and sexuality take on renewed significance, leaving class politics rarely theorised or developed (Brown, 1995: 61). Identity politics presents little real challenge or resistance to the existence of capitalism. It is therefore flexible and mobile in terms of ideological adjustments and appropriation, and is easily accessible by groups wedded to free market orthodoxy such as those on the Christian Right who want to compete with progressive organisations for representation of women’s interests.

**Gendered differences in policy perspectives on the Christian Right**

Within the identarian framework of gender consciousness, questions still remain about how a gender conscious discourse is formulated and employed by right-wing adherents who have traditionally rejected the politicisation of womanhood by progressive women’s groups, favouring a view that men and women have innately complementary, not competing interests.

One view posits that feminism is an essential predictor of an emerging ‘women’s perspective’ on policy issues (Conover, 1988). But as Cook and Wilcox’s (1991) study, which incorporated the perspectives of fundamentalist Christians reveals, feminist consciousness merely results in explicitly feminist values and policy preferences, and not on the formulation of women’s policy preferences alone (p. 1115). The implication being that women’s organisations on the Right need not subscribe to feminist politics in order to formulate pro-woman policy positions.

In considering what is driving the Christian Right’s pro-woman shift on pornography, it is worth noting research that has engaged with the question of whether devout women on the Right politicise their experiences differently to their male counterparts, and how this
manifests in both conservative women’s stance on key policy issues and on the policy agenda of Christian Right groups seeking to appeal to female constituents. Feminist scholar Sara Ruddick (1980) theorised that all women, conservative or otherwise, share a latent bond through the experience of lived or potential motherhood. The prospect of motherhood gives all women access to a heightened ability to experience empathy and act with humility, allowing women to develop what Ruddick terms a ‘maternal perspective’ in response to their desire to foster the growth and preservation of their children. This allows women to accept human fallibility and prompts the emergence of a more compassionate worldview (p. 355). Criticised for its latent ethnocentrism, Ruddick’s work has been accused of universalising women’s experiences with motherhood, removing them from their racial, economic, and political contexts (Keller, 2010).

While Ruddick’s work concludes that women in a broad sense possess a maternal perspective which lends itself to greater political empathy, Kaufman (2004) has looked more specifically at men and women on the Christian Right in his endeavour to discover whether gendered political differences were pronounced even within a group that is historically represented as culturally homogeneous by its leaders.15 He wondered, given that women tend to be more religiously devout than men, why women are more likely to identify with the Democratic Party. After conducting a study on the growing gender gap in American politics, he discovered that although religious commitment affects partisan political choices to an extent, it does not override the powerful effects of male and female socialisation. Earlier studies have also observed a stronger link between religious devotion and political conservatism among men than women (Layman, 2001; Tolleson-Rinehart & Perkins, 1989). Kaufman suggests this might be because “for women, religious consciousness may compete with gender consciousness, eroding the level of political solidarity among devout women” (p. 494). The competing interests may result in devout women making meaningful connections between their sex and their social position in a way that manifests itself politically, despite subscribing to the same set of biblical principles as their male counterparts.

Kaufman (2004) also looked at whether there was any variance in political attitudes between religiously devout men and women on women’s rights issues (p. 496). It must be noted,

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15 Michael Lienesch’s book Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right (1993) makes the case that the cultural homogeneity of the movement means the political differences between those who write the movement’s most popular books (such as figures like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson) and those who read them are considerably smaller than in other comparable movements.
however, that the study only includes attitudes to abortion and the belief about “the appropriate role of women in society” as indicators of the participants’ stances on women’s rights issues. Attitudes to pornography were not included in the study, but the results still reveal a divergence in gendered perspectives that fall across distinct policy lines. Devout women are more progressive on social issues than devout men. For example, on the question of women’s role in society, participants were asked whether they believed women deserved to have equal roles to men in business, government, and industry, or whether they agreed with the traditional view that a woman best fulfils her responsibilities in the home. Kaufman found a significant difference ($p < .05$) in the attitudes of evangelical Christian men and women when asked about both abortion and women’s role in society (p. 499), revealing that even for the most religiously observant demographic in the United States, a more liberal, gender conscious stance on women’s rights issues prevailed among women.

As feminism entrenches itself further into the political mainstream of the United States, conservative women are not insulated from its influence and this has implications on the Christian Right’s position on pornography. Given that women, conservative or otherwise, are more likely to possess social justice-minded perspectives on political issues, the movement is responding adaptively by embracing the paradigm of women’s rights in a self-preserving move that holds the potential to attract new adherents and reinvigorate existing ones.

**Representing women’s interests**

Conventional wisdom on the subject of gender consciousness within western, liberal social movements posits that political activism on issues directly linked to the social conditions of women is synonymous with feminism. Scholars have consistently conflated the active role of women in the political sphere with the feminist movement (Conover, 1988; Gurin, 1985; Hildreth and Dran, 1994; Klein, 1984; Miller, Hildreth and Simmons, 1988; Rhodebeck, 1996; Tolleson-Rinehart, 1992). This assumption has often failed to recognise the substantive possibilities of a fundamentalist Christian perspective on women’s interests that, while not explicitly feminist or politically progressive, is also not universally antithetical to women’s rights. In other words, there is a third way that is neither explicitly feminist nor outright hostile to women, but maintains a delicate balance of traditional gender politics and a rights-based dimension.

While existing as a broad church with many varying perspectives, feminism is a movement that has been associated with progressive reform agendas and perceived as a threat to social
conservative values centred on the preservation of the patriarchal nuclear family (Calhoun, 2000). This has consigned conservative women who interpret women’s interests through a rights-based framework to the political periphery. Typically, the role conservative women have played in developing women’s policy has been regarded as a sign of their being misled by patriarchal forces in a wave of false consciousness (Schreiber, 2008). Supposedly trotted out as political pawns for their male counterparts, conservative women have fought to present themselves as credible arbiters of women’s interests (p. 39). When conservative women first began successfully mobilising against the feminist movement in the 1970s they were wryly dismissed as “pod feminists”, suggesting they were fake or robotic women, similar to the fake humans or pod people in 1970s science fiction thriller, Invasion of the Body Snatchers (Norton, 2009). For many, the paradox that a group opposed to gender-based identity politics could actively advocate for the interests of women was difficult to comprehend. But excluding them on this basis may be a false distinction, as it fails to account for a genuine sense of a gendered collective identity among women on the Christian Right.

For many women of conservative inclination, to be conscious of the collective responsibilities of one’s sex is to assume it’s more natural association with the politics of social conservatism. Emanating from the cult of domesticity in the nineteenth century, and gaining considerable momentum in the 1950s, women came to be regarded as the “conservative sex.” It was woman’s intimate attachment to the ‘hard realities’ of life, wrote Professor Russell Kirk (1957), that gave her a superior ability to understand the practical worth of the family and community and to reject the supposed characterisation of society by the Left as a ‘machine for living’.

Through her role as overseer of the children and domestic affairs, it was in the woman’s interests to preserve the stability of the home and protect it against the great experiment of communism which would entirely reconfigure the private life that women had been confined to, and had in some cases come to identify affectionately with. As Republican Party political consultant F. Clifton White (1967) declared, “men have sight, women have insight.” For those involved in America’s growing Christian Right movement in the second half of the twentieth century, gender consciousness had entirely different societal implications than those imagined by adherents of the Left. Rather than a disruption of traditional gender roles, it meant the affirmation and valorisation of women’s conventional place in the domestic sphere. Michelle Nickerson (2012) described the conservative movement’s articulation and
eventual politicisation of women as the conservative sex as a ‘new awareness’ that inspired the expansion of gender consciousness on the Right (p. 137).

One of the more comprehensive studies of the position of women in the contemporary Christian Right movement has been undertaken by Ronnee Schreiber (2002a; 2002b; 2008). Schreiber has examined conservative women’s organisations in the United States and their struggle against feminist groups to gain recognition as the group most representative of women. Like any viable social movement organisation, movement organisations on the right have been mindful of speaking to their existing constituents on issues of most importance to them, such as abortion, reassuring them that the movement’s fundamental ‘pro-life’ credentials are secure. However, Schreiber (2008) correctly asserts that for organisations on the Christian Right to remain relevant in a constantly evolving political climate, they must be open to both adapting to changing contours of public opinion, and accepting that potential adherents may have benefited from and support the feminist movement (p. 6).

Schreiber’s work is particularly relevant to this study because it looks at how issues such as violence against women, and women’s health – both significant priorities for the feminist movement – have been adopted by women’s organisations on the right and reframed to retain their social conservative appeal. Schreiber is careful to demonstrate, however, that right-wing women’s organisations have been openly hostile towards feminism and feminist policy prescriptions, noting “since the term feminism itself gets mixed reactions from the public, these organizations invoke the phrase in criticizing public policies and liberal ideologies” (p. 10). Instead, these organisations seek to offer solutions from a conservative women’s perspective, not a feminist perspective, and wholly reject the notion that their discourse is sympathetic to feminism.

Schreiber (2002a; 2002b; 2008) has carefully examined how two conservative women’s organisations in particular have made full use of the notion of gender consciousness to offer alternative policy positions to their feminist counterparts. Concerned Women for America (CWA), and the Independent Women’s Forum (IWF) have reframed key women’s policy debates to make the case that a conservative stance on issues such as reproductive rights can be as coherently tied to women’s interests by the right as it has been by the left. The role of CWA and IWF is “to offer women’s, but not feminist, voices in debates on a range of public policies” (p. 336).
Crucially, Schreiber believes that when right-wing groups like CWA and IWF frame their arguments using language that is inclusive of women, it has the effect of broadening what we understand to constitute a typically conservative issue (2007: 10).

These groups have also been very adept at exploiting the tension surrounding the term ‘feminist’. Data pertaining to the trends in support for the women’s movement reveal that increasing groups of people perceive ‘feminist’ to be an insult (Huddy et al. 2000). The ongoing stigma attached to the term, despite increasing public support for equality between the sexes, invites conservative groups to offer policy prescriptions that are perceived by women to be liberatory, whilst at the same time mocking and dismissing similar solutions put forward under the aegis of feminism.

In Rethinking Feminist Identification, Patricia Misciagno (1997) argues that the depoliticisation of the term ‘feminist’, wherein anyone can adopt the identity regardless of what its speaker and listener choose to make of it, occasioned debate and confusion about what constitutes feminism. Feminist politics has suffered both the expectation that it ought to be a uniform movement, and the reality that it is, of course, as diverse and divergent as any sizeable political movement naturally is. However, the variety and range of explicit and implied issues associated with feminism has made it difficult, Misciagno argues, for many women to politicise their discontent in any kind of meaningful, organised fashion, given that identification with the feminist label is fraught with deep emotional conflict (p. 2). Groups on the Christian Right have seized on this ambivalence, which underscores the potential for antifeminist organisations to successfully make competing propositions for women’s support, discarding previously held assumptions that pro-woman policy positions and feminism are synonymous.

Where there is evidence that feminist arguments are being adopted by conservative women’s organisations, it is not intended to promote a feminist policy prescription, asserts Schreiber (2002). Rather, the intent is to offer a conservative solution imbued with a subtle appeal to women’s rights, and carefully framed in terms that are inclusive of groups central to the politics of family values, such as men and children (p. 337). While feminist organisations make no obvious distinctions between women in terms of what ‘types’ of women are more deserving of sympathy, conservative women’s organisations have been explicit in their push for special recognition of harm with respect to certain categories of women. In 1998 the then-president of CWA, Carmen Pate, made this position clear:
With every issue, we can bring in why it should be of concern to women, and that is what we try to do: why mom should be concerned, why wives should be concerned, why you should be concerned about your daughters. That is the connection that we try to make. How will this impact women long term? (in Schreiber, 2008: 50)

Positioning the wife, mother, and child at the forefront of the movement’s concern is part of a broader conservative strategy to conceptualise problems in terms of how they affect families.

The second-wave of the feminist movement beginning in the 1960s and lasting through the 1980s had gone to great lengths to deconstruct the assumption that a woman was tethered to her husband and children and deserved little right to exercise free will (Abbott and Wallace, 1997). Husbands who battered their wives were protected by a legal system and widespread cultural attitudes which regarded such abuse as a private matter between a man and his subordinate. On abortion, the debate over whether the adult woman or the developing foetus had greater rights under the law persisted. The patriarchal nuclear family was constructed by the feminist movement as an impediment to women’s self-actualisation (Carr and Van Leeuwen, 1996). For conservative women who regarded the family as one of the only safe spaces left in a society ravaged by the immoral impulses of the sexual revolution, the feminist attack on the family was an attack on the only righteous institution left in the United States.

The fear on the Christian Right and conservatism more broadly was that once the protective structure of the family was eroded, the government would be required to step in to provide the resources a working husband ought to. Long-time leader of the Christian Right, Phyllis Schlafly, explains this succinctly: “We used to have a social structure in the United States where husbands and fathers provided the financial support of wife and children.” Schlafly also cites a statistic revealing that almost half of all babies born in the United States in 2011 were born to unwed parents, “it is obvious that when the mother of these children has no husband to support her and her babies, she calls on Big Brother Government.”16 This fundamental disagreement over the importance of the patriarchal nuclear family in maintaining a civilised society has been, in many respects, the key point of divergence between religious conservatives and feminists.

The anthropological concept of ‘fictive kinship’ has some meaningful parallels with gender consciousness. Fictive kinship differs from Claude Lévi-Strauss’s (1969) structural theory of kinship as arising when a woman from one group marries a man from another, forming interdependence between families and lineages in what is termed ‘alliance theory’. In Lévi-Strauss’s notion of kinship, women are offered and exchanged for marriage between tribes as a way of ensuring inter-group alliances and maintaining the political dominance of male tribe members. A better analogy can be found in the work of Melissa Harris-Perry. Harris-Perry’s (2011) book on shame, stereotypes and African American women’s collective identity explores the concept of fictive kinship, which refers to “connections between members of a group who are unrelated by blood or marriage, but who nonetheless share reciprocal social or economic relationships” (p. 102). Fictive kinship, Harris-Perry suggests, underscores a voluntary sense of shared identity. This is not to say that a vastly diverse group such as women will always feel a collective sense of identity based on their sex alone. However, when a woman develops a sense of connectedness with other women who are of no relation to her, and sees the connections between her sex and categorical treatment, she is demonstrating the politics of identity.

While gender consciousness overlaps with the women’s movement at many points, the two are not dependent on the other. Although identification with feminism implies a gender consciousness, the same is not always true of the opposite. In other words, women’s groups can form on the basis of analogous goals but harbour no identification with the feminist cause. This is arguably the case with many groups on the Christian Right, particularly those deemed “women’s groups” such as two groups examined in this study, CWA and EF, who were formed in the 1970s in direct response to the rise of second-wave feminism. They embrace elements that are woman-centred but understand that there is political virtue in maintaining a healthy distance from the feminist movement.

Wilcox (1989) conducted a study on the prevalence of feminist and anti-feminist attitudes amongst evangelicals on a range of women’s issues: the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), abortion, government funding for abortions for the poor, and birth control information in schools. Wilcox found that among fundamentalist evangelicals – that is, evangelicals who

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17 In I Am Woman By God’s Design (1980) Beverly LaHaye states that she founded Concerned Women for America in response to Betty Friedan’s assertion that her views were representative of the majority of American women. Eagle Forum was first named ‘Stop ERA’ until 1975 when it took on the name it still holds today. As later chapters will touch on, Eagle Forum was originally formed with the sole purpose of defeating the Equal Rights Amendment.
have a strict interpretation of the Bible and tend to adhere to conservative policies, were opposed to all of the abovementioned positions with the exception of the ERA (p. 151). However, Wilcox’s study, as with other studies addressing a similar question, does not include a stance on pornography as a variable and thus cannot examine the extent to which those on the Christian Right converge with antiporn feminists on this issue.

**Situating conservative women’s gender consciousness within Christian Right gender ideology**

Where examples of politicised gender consciousness among those on the Christian Right can be observed, scholars have questioned whether this is the result of religious accommodation to a larger culture, or whether feminist sympathies are part of a longstanding tradition within Christian fundamentalism (Ingersoll, 2003: 100). Although the adoption of women’s rights language by the Christian Right on the pornography issue is a relatively recent phenomenon, it has roots that extend back to the first wave of feminism, eventually taking shape in post-war America.

Two proponents of the accommodationist standpoint, Stacey and Gerard (1990) argue that evangelicalism in particular “selectively incorporates and adapts many feminist family reforms.” (p. 111). Adding that there have been extraordinary diffusions of feminist influence on “even this most unlikely of constituents.” The authors confess they were surprised at the level of “feminist consciousness” among many evangelicals, and observed that: “evangelical theology and institutions are serving as remarkably flexible resources for renegotiating gender and family relationships, and not exclusively in reactionary or masculinist directions” (p. 99). The authors concede that evangelicals are the vanguard of the antifeminist backlash, and, therefore, evidence of gender or feminist consciousness among individuals in this movement is a testament to the magnitude of feminist influence upon American culture. Bramadat (2000) wonders if evangelical groups can perhaps function as bridges between evangelicalism, which is traditionally antifeminist, and feminism, which is traditionally antievangelical (p. 39).

Evangelical publications from the 1960s and 1970s contain protofeminist articles written by adherents, revealing the extent to which the rise of evangelical feminism paralleled secular feminism (Stacey & Gerard, 1990: 101). *Daughters of Sarah* was the first evangelical feminist newsletter published from November 1974 to winter 1996, and at its height was
circulated in larger numbers than any other biblical feminist publication to follow.\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Daughters of Sarah} described themselves in their first few issues by stating: “We are Christians; we are also feminists. Some of us say we cannot be both, but Christianity and feminism for us are inseparable.” (Cochran, 2005: 33). \textit{Priscilla Papers}, which began publication in 1987, stated that its objective was to provide “interdisciplinary evangelical scholarship on topics related to a biblical view of gender equality and justice in the home, church, and world.”\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Priscilla Papers} is published by Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE). CBE also began publishing the journal \textit{Mutuality} in the 1990s, which espouses the same view of promoting gender equality within the Church. The key difference between the publications being that \textit{Mutuality} is marketed as the “popular voice”\textsuperscript{20} on these matters. Many of the evangelical feminist publications were taking shape during the battle over the ERA in the 1970s. Although not an evangelical Christian herself, Schlafly’s enormously successful efforts to mobilise conservatives of all stripes in support of the Stop ERA campaign put her at odds with the Evangelical Women’s Caucus (EWC) who endorsed the ERA in 1974 at a conference attended by 360 adherents (Stacey & Gerard, 1990: 101). In addition to thwarting secular feminists on the prospect of an ERA, Schlafly had to contend with dissenting factions from within.

The EWC later became the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women’s Caucus (EEWC) and now call themselves Christian Feminism Today (CFT).\textsuperscript{21} Initially gathering as a cohort of “socially concerned Christians” in Chicago in 1973, and soon growing into an organised caucus of feminist evangelicals who, in addition to supporting the ERA, also encouraged fellow evangelicals to seek inclusive language in Bible translation and Christian publications, campaigned for affirmation of the ordination of women, and criticised discriminatory hiring policies in Christian institutions. Cochran (2005) writes that one of the founding members of CFT, Anne Eggebroten, became a Christian in 1962 and a feminist later on that decade. Eggebroten admits that as a young woman she struggled to integrate marriage and motherhood with her feminist ideals while pursuing a scholarly career at California State

\textsuperscript{18}Within two years of \textit{Daughters of Sarah} first being published, the journal had a mailing list of approximately one thousand. See Quebedeaux, “We’re On Our Way, Lord”, p. 138.


University in San Bernardino. Eggebroten eventually opted to leave her nontenure track position in San Bernardino to focus primarily on motherhood. She remained active within CFT, organised a picketing of the anti-feminist Fascinating Womanhood event advertised by her pastor with signs reading “Jesus Was a Feminist” and “Worship God, Not Your Husband”, and wore a pro-choice button during her pregnancy (p. 36). Cochran’s thesis posits that evangelicalism, like all religion in America, has seen a radical transformation through the second part of the twentieth century from biblical inerrancy to a hermeneutic approach which favours a subjective textual interpretation of the Bible, and hence a weakening of scriptural authority.

As women have gained greater social, legal, and economic rights, they have secured more power to assess Scripture themselves (Harrison, 2007: 1). Scholars have examined how the advent of the women’s movement has paralleled the trend towards hermeneutic interpretations of the Bible (Bineham, 1993; Felix, 1998; Harrison, 2007; Scholer, 1987). Bineham asserts that Christian feminists have utilised interpretive codes which yield feminist readings of biblical texts, adding:

One example of such a code is the location of authority in female experience […] this code counters the dominant code, which locates authority solely in specific scriptural texts, and it has specific implications for biblical interpretation, as it leads to an emphasis on female role models and images within Scripture (p. 30).

A particularly thorny area for egalitarian-minded evangelicals is the issue of biblical submission. James Davison Hunter’s 1987 study on the influence of feminism within the evangelical movement interviewed students in evangelical colleges and seminaries and found that although a majority of the students agreed that a husband should have the final say on family matters, there was also much debate between the students on how to appropriately interpret the concept of submission. Hunter incipiently remarks that many evangelicals express sympathy with the feminist critique of submission: “by thoroughly rejecting any suggestion that submission implies inferiority or that headship implies superiority” (p. 104). He follows by stating that this opinion was reflected in the evangelical students’ response to a question pertaining to a woman’s right to refuse to have children despite her husband’s desire to have children. A majority of the students, especially the younger cohort, agreed that a woman should be able to decide whether or not to have children, rather than submitting to her husband’s wishes (p. 103). Notably, seventy percent of the students disagreed that gentle and
sensitive men are less appealing than men with traditionally male characteristics (p. 94),
suggesting that hegemonic masculinity was not necessarily favoured by the evangelical
students.

In addition to hermeneutical interpretive approaches inspiring new perspectives on the role of
women, Sweet (1997) argues that the evangelical movement has a long tradition of enhancing
women’s role in public life by extending the values of the home into the political sphere.
“Evangelicalism gave women’s lives social and psychological enlargement as well as public
usefulness by stretching the scope of their mission” she writes (p. 57). Nancy F. Cott (1977)
argues that evangelical women derived self-identity, collective consciousness and solidity
from the notion of “true womanhood”, and found that the idealisation of femininity implicit
in true womanhood produced largely positive results for middle-class women, given that
“evangelical activity fostered women’s emergence as social actors” (p. 156). The nineteenth-
century women’s rights activist Lydia Maria Child similarly asserted, “The sects called
evangelical, were the first agitators of the woman question” as they eloquently urged upon
women their prodigious influence, and consequent responsibility, in the great work of
regenerating a world lying in wickedness (Child and Karcher, 1997: 356).

Christian Right women have not, however, responded with equal interest to all the policy
proposals put forth by the feminist movement. There are certain issues on which Christian
Right women are more likely to feel comfortable subscribing to certain tenets of the feminist
movement, such as efforts to see women on par with men in the workplace, and support for
legislation to combat violence against women as it appeals to conservative law and order
themes (Kelly, 1987). Conservatives are also not averse to the notion of a strong woman in
the role of entrepreneur, in accordance with their support for the neoliberal principle of risk-
taking (Sawer, 2006: 114). Where feminist principles encourage less support among
conservatives is in areas requiring wealth redistribution, or perceived ‘positive
discrimination,’ such as paid maternity leave and government funding of child care.

A figurehead of the conservative movement, Sarah Palin, has demonstrated her ease with
adopting the feminist label. Palin embraced the term with alacrity at a May 14th Susan B.
Anthony List gathering in 2010, using her opposition to abortion as a platform to discuss what
she described as an “emerging, conservative, feminist identity” (Gardner, 2010). Palin
appropriated the feminist notion that women can balance motherhood and a career to support
her antiabortion position: “[women] can give their child life, in addition to pursuing career

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and education and avocations. Society wants to tell these young women otherwise. These feminist groups want to tell these women that, ‘No, you're not capable of doing both.’” Daum (2010) points out that Palin’s logic could be perceived as somewhat contorted, but suggests that subscribing to one set of principles outlined by a progressive faction of the women’s rights movement does not necessarily negate one’s identification as a feminist.

An article in the *Christian Post* draws attention to this ‘fresh approach’ to feminism being taken by prominent born-again Christian women. In the article, author Sarah Hamaker (2011) attempts to redefine the term ‘feminist,’ and exalts Christian women who are taking a stand against conventional notions of feminism, quoting from author Betsy Hart:

> The term ‘feminism’ has been hijacked by the secular feminist movement,” says Betsy Hart, […] “Many people – including Christians and a lot of young, secular women – associate traditional feminism with very angry, men-hating, strident, unattractive and unhappy women.

Christians are attempting to reconceptualise feminism, by framing feminists as women who are “conservative and pro-life, who [have] a calling in the workplace” Hamaker writes. Janice Shaw Crouse, director and senior fellow for *The Beverly LaHaye Institute* at CWA also seemed to promote a return to early feminist principles, when claiming that the earliest feminists were, in fact, women of faith. Crouse asserts that religion “demanded that women be treated with the same equalities as men and have the same opportunities” (Hamaker, 2011).

The article goes on to quote Betsy Hart, who makes the observation that secular and religious women found considerable common ground during the campaign for women’s suffrage, but that over the last thirty years Christian women have shied away from feminism due to the movement’s “politicization of women.” Such politicisation, according to Gurin (1985), is an essential component of feminist consciousness. The relationship Christian women have with the term ‘feminism’ is made complicated by the perceived philosophical incongruity of feminism and Christian fundamentalism. Crouse states that when a Christian woman uses the term ‘feminism,’ she is not using it in the political sense that the term has come to mean in contemporary progressive-left formats. Which begs the question then, how does she mean it? Can feminism ever not be political? And if this is the case, is the decision to adopt the term an inherently political choice?
Undermining the extent to which Christian Right rhetoric can realistically intersect with feminist theory on antipornography terrain is the conservative predilection for framing women in terms of their usefulness to men. Schreiber (2008) examined this, and found that Christian Right groups deliberately highlight women’s responsibility to others, namely her husband and children (p. 14). This is a perspective undergirded by Genesis 2:18 and 2:20, in which women are defined as a man’s helper.

Two prominent antifeminists on the Christian Right, Nancy Leigh DeMoss and Mary Kassian (2012), echo this in their eight week study guide “True Woman 101” stating that God created woman as the man’s helper so she could assist him in fulfilling his ultimate purpose. This appraisal of women’s roles conflicts with feminist thinking, which has sought to recenter women within a patriarchal framework from marginalised positions in the family unit and public sphere. Moreover, feminist theory has focused on the creative and intellectual potential that awaits women who break free from what radical feminist Mary Daly (1973) described as “the experience of nothingness” that is being a housewife (p. 23). From outward appearances, the two perspectives seem almost irreconcilable.

But defining women in terms of their relationship to men is not restricted to conservative discourse. It is a perspective deeply entrenched in the cultural milieu of mainstream America. During President Obama’s State of the Union address in February of 2013, he declared: “We know our economy is stronger when our wives, mothers, and daughters can live their lives free from discrimination in the workplace and free from the fear of domestic violence.” Although the themes of President Obama’s were coloured with feminist references to workplace discrimination and domestic violence, the more subtle, instinctive decision to refer to women by their familial role betrayed the dominant message in his statement and drew considerable backlash from feminist critics. A petition was formed by feminist blogger Melissa McEwan and submitted to the White House, stating:

Defining women by their relationships to other people is reductive, misogynist, and alienating to women who do not define ourselves exclusively by our relationships to others. Further, by referring to ‘our’ wives et al, the President appears to be talking to The Men of America about Their Women, rather than talking to men AND women. (Clark-Flory, 2013)

The President’s rhetoric on women is consonant with CWA, FOF, and EF’s framing of women in a relational sense as mothers, wives, and daughters. These groups routinely link
women’s identity to their relationship with men. Denmark and Paludi (2008) note that adolescent youth are more likely to define themselves based on their relation and connection to others. Gender-role socialisation intensifies during this developmental phase, leading girls and women to connect their identity to their relationship with others more strongly than boys and men (p. 259). One way in particular that CWA demonstrates this with respect to pornography is by voicing concerns that pornography leads men to mistreat their wives, whether that means forcing unrealistic and degrading sexual demands on their wives, having affairs, or abandoning their marriages (Schreiber, 2008: 62).

This is not an argument you would expect to see from antiporn feminists, as it elevates the position of married women above other women, accentuating and giving priority to the perceived harms pornography causes in their lives. The gendered subtext being that a woman tethered in a marital bond has greater intrinsic worth than her non-married counterparts. The Christian Right’s worldview sees marriage as a kind of ‘cure’ for the sexual immorality intrinsic to pornography. In Every Man’s Battle (2009), an evangelical manual on “winning the war against sexual temptation,” the authors give countless examples of men steered away from their marriage by sexual sin, but who are finally healed by “releasing” themselves to their wives, forsaking their right to a private sexual realm in the mind, and starving their eyes of all other sexual imagery. The wife plays a crucial role in the sexual redemption of her husband to such an extent that it becomes a marital duty in which her own rights are subsidiary.

Invoking imagery of the mother and wife in political debate has long been an effective rhetorical tool in politics. Lopata (1994) asserts in her book on women’s social roles since the advent of industrialisation that for women, the most culturally significant social roles continue to be that of the wife and mother. Subsequently, society justifies the neglect of work in the public sphere if it interferes with the obligations of wife and mother. Douglas and Michaels (2004) argue that a reinvigorated idealisation of motherhood has emerged in the United States which they attribute in part to the media’s construction of the ‘perfect mother’ whose parenting is intensive, patient, professional, and selfless (p. 5). The symbolic significance of invoking motherhood is crucial to the conservative framing of pornography given that notions of gender and the roles associated with womanhood and manhood are imagined to be predetermined.
Conversely, radical feminists and many antiporn feminists see gender as socially constructed, and the roles men and women adopt as fluid and arbitrary. They contend that sex is immutable, but the roles we assign to them are not. When gender roles are thought of as predetermined, the consequences for women and men who appear to be actively rejecting them is perhaps more significant than it is when these roles are viewed as socially constructed. That is to say, a woman in pornography whose actions go against the biblical teachings of modesty and chastity will not provoke the same reverence and empathy as a woman who is married and made to participate in similar acts by her husband. Antiporn feminists may recognise the parallels between both women in terms of issues of consent and power asymmetry, but markers of identity which are not a necessary precursor for feminist sympathies are nevertheless crucial to the Christian Right’s narrative on sexuality. What a wife and mother does, or is made to endure sexually, elicits a compassionate response, but the actions of a woman whose identity cannot be so manifestly tied to a man, except in acts of sex alone, does not warrant comparable sympathies.

**Gendered collective identity and American individualism at odds**

The possibility of a more “gender conscious”, group-oriented, and inclusive Christian Right fits somewhat awkwardly into the conservative American belief system this study in situated in. Indeed, an expression of a pro-woman position by those on the Christian Right requires some philosophical contortions insofar as it clashes with the movement’s neo-Calvinist doctrine of unabashed individualism. The Calvinist tradition glorifies the individual’s right to uninhibited pursuits of material gain and selfish passion above the social and economic good of the community (Weber, 1958).

It is this tradition that has come to shape American cultural life. The recognition of group disparities and an awareness of the structural forces that impede achievements for some social categories is not a narrative that has assimilated into post-colonial American society in any sort of profound way (Gurin, 1985: 144). However, within this frame, notions of “community” are not entirely dispelled and it is the church that has played a central role in tempering selfish impulses for fear that such an ethos might corrupt or even compromise the existence of the church (Markofski, 2015: 91).

There is still a shared belief in the United States that seeking community or communing in a particular place is meaningful (Putnam, 2000). One need not look further than the significance of the church in the lives of so many Americans to realise that some level of
collective consciousness is seen as worthwhile. In this sense, community is the salve which heals the darker elements of individualism, or what Charles Taylor (1991) saw as the kind of society where individuals end up ‘enclosed in their own hearts’ (p. 9).

Nevertheless, Americans struggle to connect their own experiences with others of a similar status, and believe in a world where individuals largely receive what they deserve (Crosby, 1982; Lerner in Gurin, 1985). This view that individuals receive what they deserve can be traced back to Scripture, specifically Proverbs 12:14, which reads: “From the fruit of their lips people are filled with good things, and the work of their hands brings them reward.”

Applied to pornography, such a perspective would have brutal consequences for the rights of the women in the industry. Any social and economic forces which drove them into the industry would go largely unacknowledged, eclipsed by a stubborn ethic that believes people’s circumstances are of their own making and thus little sympathy is deserved.

But with respect to pornography, groups on the Christian Right are actually suppressing inclinations toward individualism. Applied to the market, economic individualism permits the existence of a thriving, profitable pornography industry, regardless of the social consequences. Aware of this contradiction, the movement prioritises the integrity of the community above the unfettered pursuit of wealth in their antiporn agenda. “The only ‘community standards’ where this stuff might be acceptable is Hell,” declared CWA following the prosecution of two pornographers from West Virginia in 2003 (Strub, 2010). In this view, undisciplined individualism constitutes in itself a certain immorality.

Carl W. Wilson, who describes himself as a Christian sociologist, described the characteristics of a decadent, excessively individualist culture like the United States and how they actively work against the nuclear family:

Men reject spiritual and moral development as leaders of families; men begin to neglect their families in search of material gain; men begin to engage in adulterous relationships or homosexual sex; women begin to devalue the role of motherhood and homemaker; husbands and wives begin to compete with each other and families disintegrate; selfish individualism fragments society into warring factions; and men and women lose faith in God and reject all authority over their lives (in Smith, 2008: 1).

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Allowing the corrosive influence of unbridled individualism to flourish leads to moral anarchy. This perspective has put the Christian Right at odds with more libertarian fiscal conservative members of the Republican Party who regard limited government and economic growth as much more pressing priorities than tackling sexual promiscuity, same-sex marriage or abortion. Indeed, during his time as president, Ronald Reagan ridiculed forms of group consciousness, seeing them as much the enemy as government action. Whether as women, African-Americans, or gay and lesbian groups, Reagan regarded their collective organisation as an impediment to individual enterprise (Leege et al. 2002: 212). Women on the Christian Right, increasingly aware of the benefits of collective identity in forging a case for moral order, pressed on despite wider scepticism of the merits of such strategies in the Republican Party.

By highlighting themes of inequality and power in pornography that have traditionally been argued by feminists, and by promoting collective action as a means of correcting this discontent, women on the Christian Right are tapping into a method of resistance that exposes ideological nuances underpinning the movement’s rhetoric.

Further proof of the malleable nature of the movement’s gender conscious, pro-woman rhetorical strategy can be found in the way movement leaders have extended this frame to a number of issues other than pornography. The discussion in the following chapter focuses on this phenomenon and the way in which the Christian Right are recasting women as victims and positioning themselves as advocates of women’s rights on multiple fronts, from abortion to foreign policy.
CHAPTER THREE

The appropriation of women’s rights language on other conservative policy issues

The Christian Right’s willingness to incorporate pro-woman, rights-conscious rhetoric traverses a range of fields in addition to pornography. The adoption of women’s rights language has become normalised in Christian Right woman-oriented discourse on issues such as abortion, contraception, gun control and foreign policy, pointing to a wide-ranging shift in the movement’s strategy to attract women adherents.

Abortion

The extent to which women’s groups on the Christian Right have reconciled their status as pro-woman groups and their opposition to abortion has received heightened scholarly attention in recent years (Schreiber, 2002a; 2002b; 2008; Rose, 2011; Luker, 1985).

Conservative women’s groups have not eased their objection to abortion, because they do not see their stance as inconsistent with the rights culture of the United States. On the contrary, they see the triumph over abortion through the prism of rights – as fundamental in affirming it. The abortion issue remains a powerful drawcard for conservative women’s groups and is increasingly proving to be legislatively successful with individual states passing laws restricting abortion procedures to early in the gestational life of the foetus, and requiring ‘abortion-minded’ women to undergo a sonogram and have the image displayed and described to them. Instead, these groups have chosen to reframe their opposition to abortion using language evocative of the women’s rights framework adopted on pornography, in an attempt to undermine feminist claims that antiabortionists harbour hostility towards women.

The issue of abortion shares some common characteristics with pornography insofar as both are deemed “women’s issues”. Although the definition of what constitutes a women’s issue is complex, Alison M. Jaggar’s (1983) assertion that it is a practice or institution that affects the livelihoods of women is imprecise but sufficiently expositive. However, crucial differences do exist between abortion and pornography activism. There is an understanding, a consensus of sorts, that the feminist movement is pro-choice on the issue of abortion. Those in the

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23 Perhaps the most prominent example of such a law is Texas Senate Bill 5, passed by the state’s legislature in July 2013. The bill banned abortions later than 20 weeks fertilisation, except in cases where the woman’s life is at risk. As of December 2014 states requiring abortion-minded women to undergo a sonogram and to have the image displayed and described to them are Texas, Wisconsin, Louisiana, Nebraska, and Oklahoma.
feminist movement who publicly adopt an antiabortion position do so at the risk of being dismissed as a dissident feminist. For example, Australian antiporn feminist Melinda Tankard-Reist’s admission that she describes herself as pro-life, since “abortion is often an excuse not to deal with the structural conditions that compel women to have abortions” and constitutes a form of “violence against women” was met with contempt by prominent feminists Leslie Cannold and Eva Cox. Cox saw Tankard-Reist’s redefinition of feminist reproductive politics as a sign of a conservative co-option of the movement (Hills, 2012).

While a pro-life stance does not necessarily negate one’s identification as a feminist, it is not representative of the broader goals of the movement. On the other hand, pornography has been a divisive and contentious issue within the feminist movement with no clear consensus or dominant view having emerged. With a few notable exceptions, the issue has been largely subverted. Indeed, Susan Gubar and Joan Hoff (1989) noted in their book on the dilemma of violent pornography among women that “pornography may be potentially the most divisive and debilitating [problem facing the women’s movement] since the fifty-year debate over protective legislation and the ERA, begun in the 1920s” (p. 10). Feminist opposition to pornography has been labelled by other feminists more sceptical of the harms of pornography as no less of a moral crusade than what is being waged by their conservative counterparts (Bulbeck, 2009; Rubin, 1992; Vance, 1993). The weaker presence of the feminist movement on the issue of pornography, as opposed to abortion, mean the women’s rights frame is ripe for the taking. When opposition is divided, this provides a range of options for appropriation.

When it comes to the abortion debate, conservatives have tactfully co-opted a frame from their feminist counterparts: women’s health care. Conservative groups are competing with feminist groups in an effort to represent women’s health interests, a move that Aberbach and Peele (2011) describe as “a consciously articulated strategy” (p. 138) showing a pattern that is consistent across issues, including pornography. There is a very specific purpose to this, and that is to draw attention to how opposition to abortion ensures the protection of women’s physical and emotional wellbeing, an area of concern traditionally addressed by feminist activists (Schreiber, 2008: 98). CWA characterises women as “abortion’s second victims” (Wadkins, 1999), invoking an injustice frame by identifying a victim. Gamson states that “injustice frames’ are effective rhetorical tools because they amplify an alleged injustice in order to generate support for a group and their proposed remedy (in Benford and Snow, 2000: 615).
Within the Christian Right’s health frame, women’s varied emotional responses to abortion are pathologised and given medical names such as ‘Post-Abortive Syndrome’, positioning women as passive victims within the broader construction of abortion as a war waged by opposing sides. Dubious studies linking abortion with breast cancer are frequently cited, and the increased risk of miscarriage and preterm labour for women who have undergone multiple abortive procedures are heavily emphasised.

Crucial to the legitimacy of the Christian Right’s pro-woman health frame is the insinuation that abortion is a self-indulgent, medically unnecessary procedure that has no physical or psychological health benefits to women. They refer to these as ‘elective abortions’ and point to data revealing that the most commonly reported reason women cite for having an abortion is to postpone or stop childbearing, primarily for socioeconomic reasons (Klusendorf, 2009). Couched in language sympathetic to women, some pro-life activists have used this data to argue that women ought to receive more financial and emotional support from the community in order to reduce abortion rates. But rather than the government providing the support, it should come from the church and the boyfriends or husbands of abortion-minded women.

There is some disagreement within the movement over whether women should be permitted to access an abortion if they have been a victim of rape or incest, with opponents claiming that aborting a foetus conceived in rape merely punishes the victim for the perpetrator’s crime, and that abortion does not “undo the rape” (Harrison, 2013). However, abortion for the purpose of saving the pregnant woman’s life is generally regarded as morally permissible by antiabortionists. In other words, the threshold determining a medically necessary abortion is not reached until the woman is at risk of death, anything less and the woman is implored to show the foetus mercy, and warned of the potentially negative health consequences of failing to do so. Aberbach and Peele (2011) note that the decision made by various conservative groups to frame abortion as a threat to women’s health neither overrides nor overshadows their concerns about foetal rights, “nor are these narratives antithetical to its religious mission” but rather “they co-exist with and expand the boundaries of conservative arguments.


25 Donna Harrison, M.D. is a member of the American Association of Pro Life Obstetricians and Gynecologists and takes the stance that seeking an abortion in the aftermath of a sexual assault does not “undo the rape”, but rather deepens the psychological trauma of the assault.
about abortion and thus help CWA fill an important gap in conservative movement politics” (p. 138). Therefore, appropriating the language of women’s health allows groups on the Christian Right to appeal to greater numbers of potential adherents.

Much of the Christian Right’s antipathy to abortion stems from its belief in the intrinsic maternity of all women, and that motherhood is the single most important identity claim women can make. Kintz (1994) argues that fundamentalism insists on the sacredness of motherhood, because “fundamentalism needs children to provide a gender for identity-less women who, for complicated and often astute reasons, have a deep fear that without an identifiable and sacred notion of gender, they will be judged against men and found lacking” (p. 55).

The unease with abortion is tied to a wider panic in social conservatism about the dismantling and outsourcing of mothering. Abortion relieves the woman of her duties as a mother, just as public institutions ensuring every child receives certain medical, dental, and psychological care are handing these responsibilities to the state, and not to the family. Groups on the Christian Right are beginning to express concern and sympathy for women in the abortion debate, as they regard an abortion-minded woman as the would-be mother who is presumed to share a reciprocal bond with her unborn child. Abortion also violates the essentialised belief that a woman never exalts herself, she responds to the needs of others, given that the essence of femininity is the impulse to respond. As conservative political activist Connie Marshner (1990) stated “[women’s] bodies respond to the first hint of pregnancy; our emotions and minds continue to respond” (p. 158). Given that abortion involves a woman’s assertion of independence from the responsibilities of child-rearing, it represents a subversion to the authority of God. To those on the Christian Right, abortion does not only victimise the foetus whose life has been envisioned by God and then denied to them, but also ends the process whereby a woman’s most sacred identity is being formed. Christian Right opposition to pornography is similarly tied up in anxiety about the severing of motherhood from women’s essential identity. Sexual impurity is implicated in the epidemic of single motherhood, seen as a culprit in the increasing existence of fatherless homes wherein men have become alienated from their God-given role due in part by the distractions of external temptations.

Valuable to this study because it unearths the recent inclination within Christian Right organisations to manipulate pro-woman arguments to suit conservative ends, Melody Rose’s
(2011) examination of the co-option of a pro-woman frame by those on the Christian Right uses the methods of frame analysis and descriptive analysis to examine the most cited writings of American antiabortion groups from 1973 through 2007. Her research uncovers the recent and widespread appropriation of women’s rights language by these groups. In the earlier years antiabortion groups were framing abortion primarily as a tension between foetus and mother. Movement leaders would construct foetuses as victims, and women who had sought an abortion as perpetrators of an immoral act (p. 6). In the later years and to the present day, a new framing technique emerged, where women are constructed as having the “right to know” the deleterious effects of abortion to them (p. 7). Rose argues that using the language of rights to recast women who have accessed abortion as victims, rather than perpetrators, was a shrewd move allowing the movement to open its doors to women who have experienced abortion. Indeed this framing technique is a favourite of antipornography conservatives. Christian Right leader Phyllis Schlafly’s 1987 book Pornography’s Victims put a spotlight on the individual women affected by pornography whose cries had been silenced, centreing the perspectives of women, and marginalising some of the traditional concerns of the Right, such as the health of the family and the Church.

Pro-life activists have also artfully used the issue of sex-selective abortion to present themselves as advocates for women’s rights while chipping away at abortion rights. Lynne Marie Kohm (1997) referred to the issue as the ‘boomerang effect of a woman’s right to choose’ underlining the paradox of the mainstream feminist position on abortion which views choice as an absolute, even in cases where a certain choice is motivated by a preference for a male child. The Prenatal Nondiscrimination Act (2013) was the pro-life movement’s first legislative attempt at using sex-selection to plant into law the notion of the foetus as human (Hvistendahl, 2011: 242).

The conservative focus on sex-selective abortion belies the data on its actual prevalence, which indicates that the procedure is a minimal problem in the United States. When it occurs it tends to be confined to Korean, Chinese, and Indian populations with a cultural preference for males. Nevertheless, the issue puts feminist reproductive rights activists on the defensive, characterising them as cruelly unaffected by a misogynistic practice. In a podcast titled ‘Women’s Rights: Protecting life at every stage’ on Dr James Dobson’s Family Talk podcast, CWA’s president Penny Young Nance referred to sex-selective abortion to make the case that abortion hurts women. “How does someone who calls themselves a feminist oppose sex-selection abortion ban?” asks the interviewer, to which Nance gives a telling reply, “It’s
almost a religion for them. It’s not really about protecting women. It’s about this right. That is this penultimate right that trumps everything else. [...] They won’t admit that their philosophy is damaging to women, because to them it’s a religion. This is what they believe.”

Through the emphasis on sex-selective abortion, and framing women as the true victims of abortion and pornography, conservatives are building a narrative that traverses multiple issues and makes the case that they are in fact the true advocates of women’s rights.

The Christian Right organisation Women Exploited by Abortion (WEBA), founded in 1982 and made up of women who regret having undergone an abortion procedure, has capitalised on the widespread concern for women’s well-being that was generated by the feminist movement and is now being seized upon by the Christian Right (Berlet and Lyons, 2000: 232). In a meeting of WEBA members in Washington, D.C. in 1985 abortion was described as the “ultimate exploitation of a woman and her dead child” and “a violent betrayal of everything [a woman] is.” Language that has many parallels with Christian Right claims that pornography represents the ritualistic degradation and exploitation of women, and is little more than sexualised violence. The WEBA members claimed that they had felt betrayed by the feminist movement which had refused to see them as genuine victims of abortion because it undermined their principled support for a woman’s right to choose.

The similarly named Women Victimized by Abortion and Women Exploited also emphasise the harm abortion does to women. These groups co-opt the feminist narrative of the subordinate woman and the oppressive man by characterising abortionists and the boyfriends or husbands of post-abortive women as abusive, uncaring or neglectful men. Pro-life groups aping feminist arguments are contesting the scope of feminism as it influences younger women (Oaks, 2009). Reframing anti-abortion politics as the more purely woman-centred and historically accurate feminist position means anti-abortion groups can claim to truly represent women’s interests.

Best exemplifying this position is the anti-abortion feminist outfit Feminists for Life (FFL). FFL draw on the work of first-wave feminists such as Susan B. Anthony, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who were among many early feminists who opposed abortion on the grounds that it was both morally troubling and would give women

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fewer excuses to refuse sex from men. In the introduction to FFL’s published book Pro-Life Feminism (1985), Paulette Joyer writes of her regret that the mainstream feminist movement and the pro-life movement are perceived as in opposition to each other. “The pro-life tenet is that each and every human being, pre-born or born, deserves the opportunity to develop into the best she or he is capable of” writes Joyer, linking this with the feminist precept that “each and every human being, woman or man, […] be respected, however minimal or great their development may be” (p. 1). Moreover, pro-choice feminism is believed to deepen societal contempt for motherhood, limiting the collective respect society has for mothers and children. Pregnancy comes to be seen as more an obstacle to success and happiness than a welcome and integral part of a woman’s life, which has the ripple effect of workplaces and universities stubbornly resisting adequate accommodation to the needs of pregnant women and mothers. Because feminism was built on the tenets of nonviolence, non-discrimination, and justice for all, abortion is regarded as hostile to such principles. It bears repeating that the framing of abortion as pernicious to women’s rights in the Right to Life movement is a framing technique that is being employed within the antipornography wing of the Christian Right movement. Just as activists reason that abortion is not harmless or liberating to women, pornography similarly promises only to exploit and violate young women, and inspires men to enact the degrading behaviour on women as well.

The formation of pro-life crisis pregnancy centres (CPC), which have expanded rapidly since the 1980s, gave the movement a fighting chance against the largest abortion provider in the United States, Planned Parenthood. Activists allege that Planned Parenthood encourages women to have an abortion, thereby limiting their choices. Through counselling, discipleship, adoption referrals, and the provision of nappies and infant formula, activists can argue that CPCs broaden women’s choices in the cases where a pregnant woman desires to go through with the pregnancy, but lacks the resources to do so. There are about 2,500 CPCs in the United States, compared with 1,800 abortion clinics (Belluck, 2013). They often present themselves using vague, inconspicuous language that can make it difficult to discern between a CPC and an impartial women’s health clinic. Nevertheless, activists insist that they are merely offering pregnant girls and women resources and advice that they would not be able to get elsewhere.

FOF’s ‘Option Ultrasound’ initiative employs the rhetoric of choice while advocating a controversial procedure that encourages abortion-minded women to first see their embryo or foetus on a sonogram before making the final decision on whether or not to undergo an
abortion. For a decade, the group has equipped CPCs with ultrasound machines, contending that once a woman sees her embryo of foetus she will be less likely to go through with the abortion. Writing on the problems with the pro-life/pro-choice dichotomy, Tanya Saroj Bakhru (2010) highlights that the Christian Right’s choice rhetoric fails to acknowledge that decisions about reproduction exist within a complex web of factors in which power and privilege play significant roles (p. 26). The conflict over which side genuinely exemplifies choice speaks to the success of feminist campaigners in terms of defining the meaningful categories in the debate. By co-opting the feminist language of choice, the Christian Right are effectively conceding that they have failed to sufficiently persuade constituents using their traditional arguments about the sanctity of human life. But as cognitive linguist George Lakoff (2004) makes clear “when you are arguing against the other side: do not use their language” (p. 3). Doing so simply reinforces the opposing side.

In Brian E. Fisher’s (2014) book which makes the impassioned case that abortion is in fact the ultimate exploitation of women, Fisher does what Lakoff cautions against, and employs quotes by radical feminists Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon to legitimise his antiabortion arguments. Fisher’s book approaches the issue of abortion from the perspective of women’s rights and is emblematic of the trend toward using feminist rhetoric to bolster conservative political ends. He is the co-founder and president of the antiabortion group Online for Life who claims to be “revolutionizing” antiabortion activism by pushing for ‘abortion-determined’ women to undergo ultrasounds. Quoting MacKinnon from her 1987 essay ‘Privacy vs. Equality,’ Fisher argues that abortion “does not liberate women; it frees male sexual aggression. The availability of abortion removes the one remaining legitimized reason that women have had for refusing sex besides the headache” (p. 65). MacKinnon’s argument was a striking departure from the conventional feminist position on abortion, concentrating on male aggression rather than women’s reproductive choice. Fisher points to other feminists who agree with his position, such as New Zealand feminist writer and founding member of FFL Daphne Clair de Jong who believes that “if women must submit to abortion to preserve their lifestyle or career, their economic or social status, they are pandering to a system devised and run by men for male convenience” (p. 65). These quotes, taken out of their broader feminist context, serve to reinforce Fisher’s stance that various

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interventions ought to be made to prevent abortions from occurring. It is the failure of men to hold up their end of the bargain that is most central to Fisher’s thesis, and in doing so he employs a kind of pseudo-feminist tactic that relocates the blame and burden ordinarily imposed on abortion-minded women onto the men who had an equal part in conceiving the foetus but who carry just a fraction of the societal responsibility:

If we are concerned about women’s equality and rights, we should not only be concerned about women being properly informed about abortion, we should also be concerned about their ability to make an abortion decision independent of male coercion (p. 69-70).

We do not have “true gender equality” Fisher argues, until women can make abortion decisions without male interference. An audacious reconceptualisation of the feminist pro-choice position which proclaims “no uterus, no opinion.” But Fisher stands by the claim, alleging that a majority of abortion-minded women report feeling pressured to abort by the father of the baby, or by their own father. “Pressure to abort can escalate to violence” which is reflected in figures which show that the leading killer of pregnant women is homicide (p. 70). It is the woman’s natural desire to nurture and protect her child, asserts Fisher, but this intrinsic urge is repeatedly violated and undermined through coercive intimidation from powerful male figures in her life. The recent publication date of Fisher’s book reflects the culmination of years of quasi-feminist Christian Right political posturing on this issue, wherein the movement has been increasingly engaged in efforts to reclaim ownership of “women’s rights” from feminist groups.

Attempts in early 2015 to pass the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act in Arizona, which would prohibit an abortion from being performed if the probable “post-fertilisation age” of the unborn child is twenty weeks or greater highlighted the great lengths conservative activists are going to compare abortion with other human rights travesties typically condemned by the Left. The bill’s sponsor, Representative Trent Franks has described abortion as worse than slavery for African Americans. “Far more of the African American community is being devastated by the policies of today than were being devastated by the policies of slavery,” exclaimed Franks to liberal blogger Mike Stark in 2010 (Madden, 2010). Although not reflected in the data on abortion statistics by the The Centers for Disease Control, Franks justified his remarks by claiming that “half of all black children are aborted.” Franks’ co-option of anti-slavery rhetoric is tactically equivalent to the Christian Right’s
appropriation of pro-woman, anti-abuse rhetoric on pornography. Indicative of the level of pressure to appeal to a wider spectrum of constituents, the Republican Party has endured dissent from within its own ranks in response to the ambitious bill. Republican women have specifically balked over a provision in the bill which would require victims of rape to report their attack to police in order to be eligible for an abortion after twenty weeks. Republican women expressed concern that the legislation’s “restrictive language” would once again spoil the party’s chances of broadening its appeal to women and younger voters (O’Keefe, 2015). Trent Franks’ female colleagues are concerned that his bill would deepen the already salient narrative that the GOP is waging a ‘war on women’. The war on women is a political expression frequently employed by Democratic congresswomen and feminist activists to describe the Republican Party’s restrictive policies on matters concerning women in the United States, particularly on reproductive rights issues.

The legalisation of abortion in the decision of Roe v. Wade occurred at a time of intense political transformation for the GOP. The party was embracing a more explicitly social conservative agenda following the ascendance of so-called ‘Rockefeller Republicans’ in the 1960s, the more moderate wing of the Republican Party who subscribed to the politics of social liberalism. Since the Roe decision, the party’s relationship with women voters has been largely defined by their position on reproductive issues. A series of recent political decisions made by the party have intensified the perception that Republicans are seeking to restrict women’s rights. These include such efforts in multiple states to pass personhood amendments, along with the implementation in 2012 of a law requiring women in Texas seeking an abortion to first undergo a sonogram at least twenty-four hours before the procedure from the doctor who will perform the abortion (National Public Radio, 2013). The backlash from women within the party, and Trent Franks’ clever recasting of abortion as a genocidal tool of black oppression, speaks to the degree of cultural cognisance within the party, as lawmakers confront the challenges of reconciling restrictive policies on abortion with a female electorate wary of politicians’ attempting to deprive them of hard-won rights. In counterbalancing the damage, Franks’ is reacting to the rights-based rhetoric of pro-choice groups by employing his own civil rights case. Just as conservatives have done in the pornography debate, Franks’ and his supporters are using the tools of their opponents to win the war.
**Gun control**

In recent times a key ally of the Christian Right, the gun lobby, have also recognised the importance of emphasising the role of women in the movement. Traditionally the gun lobby have framed gun ownership as an expression of a healthy, robust form of masculinity. Gun manufacturers have exploited the notion that men are the dominant, combative, protecting sex to advertise the “awesome power beyond belief” of firearms, and have occasionally relied on hypersexualised female models to promote the product (Cukier and Sidel, 2006: 130). Cukier and Sidel (2006) assert that the goal herein is to “invoke [a] rugged individualism overlain with American nationalism” (p. 130). Realising the political and monetary benefits of appealing to women, a large portion of the industry has set its sights in recent years on increasing the number of women purchasing firearms and enrolling in the National Rifle Association (NRA). The group launched a campaign targeted at women called ‘Armed and Fabulous’ which Revives latent stereotypes about women as vulnerable and defenceless to make the case for fewer restrictions on firearms. The group employs empowering language to appeal to women who can “refuse to be a victim” by arming themselves.28 The Armed and Fabulous webpage features a video of a rape survivor named Amanda recalling her ordeal and stating her belief that had she been allowed to carry a firearm for protection while on campus, she would have been able to fight off her attacker.

The NRA’s campaign urging women to arm themselves in the hope they will be better equipped to resist their aggressor has some parallels with feminist efforts to train women in the art of self-defence. The feminist rationale for teaching self-defence training to women has been careful to situate the training within the context of rape culture, with a holistic focus on the many facets involved in defending bodily autonomy. As Susan Schorn (2014) who has taught empowerment self-defence for decades states, it should address the “physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social/cultural components of self-defense.” Feminist programs designed to teach women to defend themselves against random or repeated acts of physical violence are meant to equalise the power imbalance between men and women. However, critics argue that it simply validates the use of violence – a male concept – and takes the onus off men to change violent behaviours (Ziegler, 2008: 106).

In January 2013 Gayle Trotter, a senior fellow of the conservative women’s group the Independent Women’s Forum (IWF) and Wayne LaPierre, the CEO of the NRA appeared together on Capitol Hill to urge the Senate Judiciary Committee to further liberalise gun laws. During Trotter’s speech, several references to women’s empowerment and the notion of ‘choice’ were made. According to Trotter “guns reverse the balance of power” in violent confrontations, and neutralise the natural disadvantage women have due to their typically smaller stature. Guns will also apparently help women “protect loved ones”, a task suitable for them as the nurturing overseers of family matters. Trotter goes on to assert that curbing access to guns would create an “undue burden” for women who would “choose” to defend themselves from violence.\(^29\) The appropriation of the feminist language of choice is an attempt by IWF and the NRA to frame gun restrictions as antithetical to women’s autonomy, just as feminists claim that restrictions to abortion access constrain a woman’s right to choose whether or not to continue her pregnancy. There are empirical flaws in Trotter’s argument. The emphasis in her statement on ‘stranger danger’ belies the fact that most violence against women is committed in the home, and as a study by the Violence Policy Center demonstrates, for every woman who kills a partner with a gun in self-defence, 83 women are critically or fatally injured by an intimate partner.\(^30\) Putting aside the factual inaccuracies, Trotter’s argument is important because it represents a growing ‘feministing’ of conservative debates.

**Foreign policy**

Although sitting outside the domestic social issues which usually occupy the Christian Right’s attention, foreign policy has been an area of considerable interest to social conservative leaders in recent decades. Lee Marsden (2008) notes that since the early years of the Bush administration the military have become increasingly influenced by conservative evangelical Christianity. Buoyed by the Bush presidency, born again Christians actively evangelise within the Pentagon and occupy senior positions. During his commencement address at West Point, Secretary of the Army Pete Green portrayed the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq as ‘a clash between American and radical Islamic approaches to religious liberty’ (Banerjee, 2008). According to Marsden, this spiritual battle narrative has led to a United

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States military made up disproportionately of evangelicals many of whom see themselves as being members of a Christian army.

Frequently cited as a compelling justification for the removal of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Saddam Hussein in Iraq has been the liberation of women in those countries. For George W. Bush and his religious allies, this rhetoric limited women’s freedom to western practices, and situated liberation within a colonial discourse (Ferguson and Marso, 2007: 222). The image of the fully veiled Muslim woman emerged as a powerful symbolic justification for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, despite the devastation and loss that such military action would visit upon those women. As Hirschkind and Mahmood (2002) assert: “the twin figures of the Islamic fundamentalist and his female victim helped consolidate and popularize the view that such hardship and sacrifice were for Afghanistan’s own good.” The subordinated Muslim woman became a central figure on which American military action was rationalised and marketed to the American people. A fixation on the myopic goal of lifting the burqa and consequently freeing Afghan women exemplified the superficial short-termism of the broader United States military campaign.

Prominent American feminists were often complicit in this narrative, colluding with imperialist efforts by the United States State Department to end “gender apartheid” in Afghanistan. The most prominent example can be found in the Feminist Majority Foundation’s (FMF) controversial support of the Bush administration’s rhetoric on subjugated women in Afghanistan. The feminist group’s president, Eleanor Smeal, urged President Bush in 2002 to expand security forces or risk witnessing the region “descend into chaos”, adding that full equality for women “is an essential part of the war on terrorism.” Smeal also spoke gleefully about the inclusion of women in every level of the Air Force and Navy, stating optimistically that women’s participation made Afghanistan “a different kind of war” (in Ferguson and Marso, 2007: 134). Ann Russo’s (2006) piece on the intersections of feminism and imperialism in the United States is scathing in its critique of Smeal’s brand of militarised feminism. Russo asserts that FMF’s support of military action as a means of establishing equality between the sexes simply reified the West’s terms of gender equality and its own superiority, seriously implicating the FMF campaign in the rhetoric legitimising the expansion of the United States empire (p. 576).

When feminists in the West fail to acknowledge that an exclusively sex-based interpretation of oppression is inadequate, and that in fact incorporating considerations of how white
supremacy, capitalism and imperialism interlace is crucial to overcoming the oppression of women across borders, they unwittingly become appealing targets of appropriation for pro-war conservatives seeking to justify an offensive in the Middle East using whatever persuasive material is on offer. Indeed, CWA relies heavily on feminist rhetoric to reinforce their campaign against Islamic ideology, which they call “the real war on women”, in contrast to the American feminist movement’s framing of the erosion of reproductive freedoms as a war on women (Nance, 2015). Nevertheless, when mainstream feminist groups such as the FMF begin to endorse the rationale and practices underlying the world’s most powerful military waging war in the Middle East, they cannot avoid entering a tacit rhetorical coalition with those in the Republican Party and on the Christian Right who see a holy war in the futile pursuit of dismantling terrorist ideology.

Contraception

A further colonisation of feminist rhetoric by the Christian Right has centred in recent years on the contentious issue of contraception, especially emergency contraception, commonly referred to as ‘Plan B’ or ‘the morning-after pill’. In April 2013 a federal judge ruled in Tummino v. Hamburg that all females, regardless of age, should have direct access to emergency contraception without a prescription. While laden with a number of moral ramifications, from the facilitation of casual sex to the abortifacient effect of such a drug, the response instead from women’s groups on the Right was to frame the debate using language that conveyed an ethos of care for women, by highlighting the potentially negative health implications emergency contraception might have on their bodies.

Using science and concern for women’s health, conservative women’s groups emphasised the ineffectiveness of the drug for women who weigh over 79 kilograms, and stressed that a drug forty times as powerful as the combined oral contraceptive pill – which requires a prescription from a doctor – should not be accessible over-the-counter. CWA warned that simplified access to the drug would mean it winds up in the hands of “predators who exploit young girls”, in sum, “a pimp, predator, and pedophile’s dream – unlimited access to Plan B.”31 Rather than expanding women’s freedom and choice, as advocates of the drug argued, conservative women’s groups constructed an alternative feminist narrative that framed

emergency contraception as a tool of oppression, causing potentially harmful effects on the bodies of girls and erasing some of the evidence of abuse when it has occurred.

Wynn and Trussell (2006) argue that in American politics women’s bodies are frequently used as ‘sites of control’ where the politics of sexuality, public health, and medical constructions of biological processes intersect. They argue that while the Christian Right has chosen to couch their arguments concerning emergency contraception in terms that revolve around biomedical definitions of reproductive processes, as well as concern for women’s health, these science-based arguments “deviously [mask] an underlying moral stance” chiefly concerned with policing women’s bodies and zygotic bodies (p. 314).

The recent conservative co-option of feminist arguments on the issue of emergency contraception runs parallel with an emerging feminist critique of hormonal contraception that challenges the long-running and prevailing feminist orthodoxy which has regarded the invention of the contraceptive pill as a defining moment in the evolution of women’s rights. Feminists such as Holly Grigg-Spall, author of *Sweetening the Pill* (2013) argue that the contraceptive pill has been able to escape fair critique from the feminist movement, and because of this, the side effects of hormonal contraception produced by pharmaceutical companies are not being adequately scrutinised. “We’ve come to see the pill as synonymous with women’s liberation” claims Grigg-Spall, “but it’s actually very much a part of the capitalist patriarchal social structure, and an extension of the misogyny that’s been present in the medical industry for a long time.”32 In many respects Grigg-Spall’s argument is indistinguishable from the Christian Right’s emerging pro-woman perspective on contraception, despite Grigg-Spall’s stance being grounded in a feminist analysis.

In other feminist quarters a critical analysis of the abortion drug RU-486 has emerged, with the publication of a book by radical feminists Renate Klein, Janice G. Raymond and Lynette Dumble (2013) which argues that the drug ‘privatises and de-medicalises’ the abortion process, and poses risks to the woman’s body that have been largely overlooked by feminist proponents of the drug. This feminist critique shares with the conservative opposition to the contraceptive pill a distrust of mainstream science and the medical establishment.

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Within feminism there is a history of epistemological debates surrounding established scientific canons, with a number of key feminist researchers questioning scientific inquiry in the male-centred sciences with respect to women, and also focusing on the need to emancipate women from the kinds of scientific practices which continue to oppress them (Kitzinger, 1990; Lerner, 1976; Reinharz, 1984; Star, 1979). One of the key challenges for feminist scholars has been interrupting the ongoing use of the universal ‘man’ who represents the object of study in most scientific inquiry in both the hard and soft sciences.

Feminist scholars have attempted to introduce a new politics of ‘woman’ that examines areas such as kinship, psychology, work, and politics from a female perspective (Ross, 1996: 70). In achieving this, they have had to counter the othering of women in the sciences, and reconceptualise the notion of the male as the default sex, or the “template for normative humanity” (Bolich, 2007: 183) through which all scientific analysis should be principally concerned.

New feminist approaches sought to make women the foremost object of study, women’s personal experiences the source of data, and the body rather than the mind the subject of analysis (Ross, 1976). The feminist critique of hormonal contraception draws on this woman-centred epistemological approach and has appealed to conservative opponents who are demonstrating an increasing willingness to frame their arguments in the language of science and women’s rights, as long as the argument aligns with their pre-existing ideological position. Similarly, with respect to pornography, new approaches to scientific inquiry which decentre the traditionally masculinist characteristics of scientific culture are underpinning both feminist and Christian Right antipornography discourses.

Rather than examining the harms of pornography from a masculinist perspective concerned with preserving the patriarchal family by, say, examining the relationship between pornography and marital breakdown, new feminist methods reproduced by those on the Christian Right instead aim to demonstrate substantial proof of the various harms done to women in pornography through the use of empirical data to lend scientific weight to their claims.

The examples above demonstrate how the Christian Right and other elements of the Right have developed their own strain of pro-woman politics that repositions notions of equality, subjugation, dominance, and choice to fit conservative policy prescriptions. These interest groups have not had to decelerate or cease campaigning on these core issues, which are as
vociferous today as at any other point in the last fifty years. To the contrary, the groups are moving towards broadening the legitimacy and mainstream acceptance of a right-wing social agenda by adopting themes from their ideological opposites in order to appeal to those in the political centre.

In addition to parallels with other areas of conservative activism, the current landscape of conservative and feminist positions on pornography has historical parallels with an earlier moral crusade which united feminists and the religiously devout: the movement against the drink.
CHAPTER FOUR

Strategic and rhetorical parallels: antipornography campaign and the temperance movement

As with the rhetorical parallels on abortion, contraception, gun control, and foreign policy, the temperance movement offers a crucial insight into how rhetoric and strategies from progressive causes can be seized upon by moral reformists on a range of policy fronts. The temperance movement began in the early nineteenth century in response to concerns about the harmful effects of alcohol on individuals, families, and the broader community (Gusfield, 1986). The movement was significant and worth noting in this study for five key reasons. Firstly, temperance was led primarily by women and formed a foundation upon which future movements for moral reform could transpire. Secondly, temperance saw the convergence of first-wave feminists and Christian conservative activists whose ideological underpinnings differed, but whose goals were analogous, in similar fashion to the modern-day antipornography movement. Thirdly, alcoholism was framed in distinctly sexed terms, as a vehicle for vice that hypersexualised the women who consumed it, and caused men to act more impetuously on their sexual impulses. Fourthly, there was a strong status element to the activities of temperance campaigners, constituting a power play by “old middle class” powers in the face of urbanisation, immigration, and industrial capitalism that has parallels with contemporary perceptions of antipornography campaigners as predominantly white, middle class, well-educated women desperately clinging on to heteronormative traditions. Lastly, and highly pertinent to this study, the temperance movement saw the Christian Right adopting many ideas promoted by feminist activists within the movement, including recognition of the vulnerable position women were put in, in terms of their safety, when men drink to excess.

The fate of the temperance movement has enduring implications for today’s activists on both the Left and Right engaged in antipornography politics and is a legacy worth appreciating. Temperance offers deeper insights into the way a defence of “moral values” and the preservation of the domestic sphere interact with a progressive, women’s rights agenda when both schools of thought have an eye to the same overarching goal.

Other writers have drawn their own comparisons between early temperance reform efforts and today’s antipornography movement. The two campaigns were both mutually imbued by
their adherents’ sense of status discontent, and a perceived threat to the dominance and prestige of the lifestyle to which they were committed, posits Zurcher et al. (1971, 1976). During the temperance era, this status politics was expressed primarily through pitting rural Americans against those in urban centres. Rural America represented the self-control and industriousness revered by temperance reformers, whereas the cities inspired people to succumb to their baser instincts and valorised such behaviour. It is not Zurcher et al.’s contention that modern-day antipornography politics is a simple replication of the earlier temperance movement. Rather, antiporn campaigners have engaged in a form of status politics that, rather than focusing on rural versus urban demographics as temperance crusaders did, is very much preoccupied with the struggle between traditionalism and the deviance at the heart of modern life.

Another perspective, offered by Wagner (1997) argues that antipornography politics constitutes a kind of “new temperance” obsessed with once again regulating and repressing apparently deviant personal behaviour. The neo-Puritan ideology of modern day social conservatives has a heritage that has been remarkably consistent, Wagner contends. Whether applied to pornography, alcohol or drugs, what is common to all of these campaigns is the enforcement of religious-cultural condemnation and coercion. It is a politics of intolerance.

In a persuasive essay on nineteenth-century sexual thought, leading historians on women’s history Dubois and Gordon (1983) question whether the profound disappointment of what has passed for “sexual liberation” has caused some feminists to replicate the sexual politics of earlier temperance activists, which focused too exclusively on the dangerous aspects of sexuality and risks mirroring the narrow, one-dimensional concept of sex advocated by conservatives. Tilly and Gurin (1990) also found the temperance analogy useful, arguing that like temperance’s attempt to remove liquor but leave unchanged property and marriage laws, pornography legislation attempts to remove a manifestation, but not the underlying cause, of women’s pain (p. 524).

The activities of temperance activists were, for much of the twentieth century, ignored by feminist scholars. Their dismissal of temperance women as significant contributors to women’s emancipation was supplanted by a focus on women’s involvement in antislavery reform, which was framed as the predominant source of women’s activism throughout the nineteenth century (Martin, 2008). This is despite the mounting evidence that the temperance movement played a significant role in the unfolding struggle for suffrage and women’s rights.
Martin (2008) posits that feminist scholars overlooked the significance of the connection between temperance and women’s rights due, in part, to many of the most radical elements of the temperance movement exiting in the early 1850s before easing off in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In addition, the ideological allegiances of many temperance women were an uncomfortable reality for feminist historians, who preferred to find their intellectual and moral forebear among the ranks of abolitionists, rather than prohibitionists (p. 6).

Whether the political roots of temperance reform lie in conservatism or a more radical prospect have been disputed in two rivalling historical accounts of the movement. For Norman H. Clark (1976), prohibition was conservative from start to finish. It disrupted social problems with alarm, and always held at its centre the survival of the nuclear family, making it an inherently conservative cause. But for Jack S. Blocker (1976), a glimmer of hope in the 1880s that prohibition might lend itself to addressing more radical social problems which beleaguered the lower classes were short-lived but nevertheless significant, with considerable evidence that its adherents were sensitised to a wide range of social transformation objectives, some of which social conservatives found most objectionable (Blodgett, 1977).

Disputes over the political essence of antipornography politics have similarly characterised much of the debate in the last thirty years. Many on the Left have struggled to reconcile a feminist politics which seeks to challenge existing models of sexual expression with the assumption underpinning much of the Left’s approach to sexuality – that all forms of sexual expression are healthy and that to question this assumption is bigoted and harmful.

The guiding ethos of the temperance movement is not confined to the nineteenth-century call for stricter laws on alcohol. Rather, temperance can be viewed as a broader code of conduct that regulates human behaviour and prevents it from going into a world of ‘sin’, and is therefore a useful point of comparison for this study. A notion as applicable to pornography as it was to alcohol as it deals with man’s need to constantly suppress a temptation to fall into sin. Temperance merely means “avoiding ruin,” and is believed by Christians to be a core virtue, preventing people from acting on ‘dangerous’ urges. For example, the Catholic News Agency’s (CNA) explanation of this virtue reads: “Temperance enables us to keep from doing what is wrong, even when we have strong feelings for it. In other words, temperance is what keeps us from sinning, even when we want to.”

intemperance one must be constantly wary of. That is because drunkenness, CNA charges, takes “our beautiful nature, a masterpiece of creation” and contorts it into “something ugly.” Inebriation is seen as a direct form of self-debasement.

Using similar prose, CNA cautions against succumbing to lust, adding that “pornography, or any visual sexual objectification of a person is [a] widespread form of lust.” Drunkenness and the use of pornography are, according to this doctrine, both sinful because they are selfish and pleasure-seeking. In Lyman Beecher’s (1833) six sermons on intemperance, often believed to be the precipitating event leading to the establishment of the American Temperance Society, he refers to alcohol as the “the sin of our land.” Berkeley Fletcher (2008) elaborates on Beecher’s point, stating: “it [alcohol] encroached upon the lives of individual citizens and turned them into loathsome, irrational, and poverty-stricken drunks, alcohol threatened to stunt the political, economic, social, and moral progress of the nation, defeating all utopian possibilities” (p. 8).

Temperance was a perfectionist reform, driven by a belief that the material world is perfectible. This idea was especially advocated by the utopian Christian Shaker movement, who believed shunning tawdry or frivolous excesses constituted a profound act of worship, and lists Temperance and frugality as cardinal virtues of its ‘Society’ (Evans, 1867: 44). With God’s grace, people could speed the coming of the millennium by improving their society on earth (Blocker, 1988: 22). Temperance emanated from religious trends, and linked individual perfectibility to greater societal improvements. The perfectionism and benevolence at the heart of temperance was indebted to the legacy of John Wesley and the subsequent spread of Methodism in the United States (Yrigoyen and Daugherty, 1996). While some strains of Christianity had emphasised spiritual health over the preservation of the body, Wesley believed the body was a gift from God and must be cared for. Therefore the toll intoxicating beverages took on the body was stressed repeatedly in The Methodist temperance magazine (1872) who suggested nothing short of total abstinence for those hoping to recover their organs and circulatory system from the ravages of alcohol. Optimistically convinced of the ability of each individual to achieve salvation, Methodism differed greatly from the Calvinist tradition which believed in the innate depravity of human beings (Opp, 2005: 20). The perfectionist impulse underlying temperance enabled the strong involvement by women in the movement. Regarded as the more virtuous sex, women seemed like the natural stewards of a message encouraging people to appeal to their higher self.
The temperance movement allowed for the reconfiguration of traditional gender roles in political activism. The movement began as a male-led idea transfixed by the concept of the ‘self-made man’, but later transformed into a movement dominated by women, a process which radically shifted the political influence of women in the United States (Berkeley Fletcher, 2008; Epstein, 1981). The legacy of the temperance movement in normalising women’s involvement in prominent political campaigns not only set the stage for later developments in women’s political activity, but it gave birth to a particular style of women’s political engagement that has many parallels with conservative women’s activism on pornography today. In both cases, the themes of family and nationalism are the prisms through which much of the political rhetoric is filtered.

But before the significance of temperance activism on women’s status in the United States could be realised, middle-class ideologues were expressing concern in the mid-to-late 1840s about women’s true intentions and motives in supporting temperance reform. What had begun as a respectable, middle-class cause honouring the separate male and female spheres now threatened to encourage women to move beyond the domestic sphere to militate for their rights (Martin, 2008: 142-143). Soon, women temperance activists began calling for protection for married women’s earnings against the profligacy of drunken husbands, as well as engaging in other forms of political advocacy on the issue of prohibition seen to be overstepping the boundaries of appropriate conduct for women. One Virginian resident complained in 1853 that temperance reform had prompted women’s rights societies “to invest the frail and modest part of the race with the political power of men” (in Martin, 2008: 143). It was thought that the radical instincts of a few women’s rights activists had co-opted the entire movement. The “sisterhood” of temperance reform with the abolition of slavery and women’s rights caused a decline in women’s participation in temperance in the mid-nineteenth century because of perceptions that the movement was heading in an all too radical direction. It was not until the rise of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in the 1870s that women re-engaged in organised political action against the drink, by which time the women’s rights movement had shifted attitudes – and laws – to such an extent that a more politicised temperance was better tolerated.

Before women started forming their own temperance organisations, their presence in the movement was approved of by male leaders who saw temperance work as a natural extension of women’s nurturing instincts with respect to home life. Sons carefully reared by godly women were falling victim to the scourge of liquor. The recourse proposed involved devout
women dispersing into institutions rife with fallen men so they could evangelise to the nation’s broken sons. Prisons, police stations and railroad terminals were regularly visited, as were vulnerable populations such as sailors, soldiers, and lumbermen (Grenz and Kjesbo, 1995: 50). Given that temperance aligned itself with religious principles, it possessed benevolence sufficient to warrant women’s involvement (Lasser et al, 2010). Its values of morality, virtue and self-sacrifice were neatly aligned with those characteristics believed to be inherently female, while the masculine traits of greed, selfishness and ambition were counterintuitive to abstention from alcohol consumption.

Men were imagined to be inherently virile and intractable by nature, and women’s crucial function, therefore, was in tempering these masculine traits. One can see the parallels between this narrative on alcohol and the way pornography is imagined by its opponents. Duggan and Hunter (1995) highlighted this in their assessment of an antipornography hearing that was held in Suffolk, New York in 1984 in which the Dworkin-MacKinnon antipornography ordinance was being proposed. They assert that the hearing included hordes of men lined up to discuss the way in which pornography had ‘made them’ brutalise their wives and commit acts of sexual assault on their daughters (p. 70). The extent to which pornography played a genuine role in these acts of violence is not the question – indeed it may have helped revive such impulses in the men – but rather, the authors point to the particular similarities between the remedy put forth by the antipornography campaigners and those who participated in the earlier temperance movement:

The remedy for these problems was not more aggressive prosecution of rape and sexual assault. Their remedy was antipornography law. They confessed their acts of violence, but did not hold themselves accountable. Instead, they displaced responsibility for their acts onto pornography in exactly the way that is so familiar to people who have looked closely at the temperance campaign (Duggan and Hunter, 1995: 70)

If temperance and antipornography movement activists share the assumption that men are indeed intractable and aggressive by nature – easily tempted by objects of sin – then the abolition remedy makes good sense. It is not enough to tighten laws around the punishment of bad behaviour if the objects of intemperance are still so pervasively present in society.

Greek and Thompson (1992) elaborate on the assumption of innate male aggressiveness, and offer a sound explanation on the origins of the Christian Right opposition to pornography and
other forms of intemperance. They suggest that St. Augustine’s commentary on the actual character of God’s punishment of Adam’s sin reveals a very gender-specific assessment. On the subject of lust, the authors posit that St. Augustine believed “only men appear to suffer this affliction,” while women are merely the objects of lust, victims of men’s wayward inclination towards sin. As men’s use of alcohol underscored women’s vulnerability in the nineteenth century, so pornography is seen as underlying female weakness today. The catalyst changed, but the narrative is remarkably consistent. In both cases, the inner-worldly sinfulness of man consists in the fact that “he is unable to wilfully control his own sexuality” and hence “males are potential victims of whatever might arouse their sexual desires” (Greek and Thompson, 1992: 604).

However, masculinity was not wholly shunned into disrepute, it had a crucial function, and temperance activists were concerned that drunkenness would undermine this function. Masculinity was believed to be linked to independence and femininity to dependence. Therefore, the threat alcohol posed was that it could render a man dependent on the substance – an emasculating prospect. Berkeley Fletcher adds: “[…] a man’s bibulous demise occur[red] through his dependency and failure to provide – his being made feminine” (Berkeley Fletcher, 2008: 14). The framing of alcohol as a feminising agent by temperance reformers was an attempt to undermine the belief held by working class men that drinking was an integral part of their identity. To these men, the unruly, boisterous effects of liquor were seen as congruent with the rugged anti-establishment ethos of working class culture:

On the railroads and in other workplaces drinking figured as part of a “rough” style of masculinity that emphasized “manly” confrontations with the rigors and dangers of the job, defiance of management, and consumption of alcohol (Taillon, 2002: 320).

From its earliest inception, temperance had no interest in valorising the culture of the working class and its attendant drunkenness, and thus set about conflating alcohol with an emasculated state. As Taillon (2002) notes, this strategy was not received particularly well by many working men, who regarded the rhetoric of temperance as indistinguishable from middle class “bourgeois” expectations of strict bodily control, and an unrealistic strive toward financial betterment.

Within the rigid gender politics of nineteenth-century America, the prospect that adhering to temperance principles would somehow bring these men closer to the virtues of women was perhaps the most unnerving threat to their masculinity. In a sense, pornography has been
traditionally caught up in a similar wave of angst concerning the preservation of hegemonic masculinity. Many saw manhood as being corrupted and weakened by feminising forces in the permissive, peace-loving 1960s, and worse by the advent of the second-wave of feminism in the following two decades. Rather than pinpointing changes to the global economy and the industrial manufacturing sector as the catalysts for men’s declining ability to independently provide for their families, many men blamed second-wave feminists for taking away their social and economic status (Lee, 2014). In response to this sense of emasculation, masculinity has undergone a cultural resurgence. The excess, impulsivity, recklessness and lasciviousness so integral to the hegemonic masculine identity have come to represent a pre-feminist form of masculinity that must be recovered in the service of maintaining male status and dignity.

Pornography figures centrally in the recovery and maintenance of hegemonic masculinity because it is seen as a vehicle for male dominance. Pornography tends to portray men in stereotypically dominant heterosexual roles, while simultaneously objectifying and subjugating women and non-dominant forms of masculinity (Johansson and Hammaren in Kahn, 2009). Therefore, the decline of pornography and of manhood are inextricably linked. As the drink came to symbolise a vestige of a threatened working class culture in the nineteenth century, pornography and the pornification of western culture is a reassertion of male dominance – a form of sexual antagonism, which is occurring within the broader context of a reconfiguration of gender roles.

**The problem of female drunkards**

Temperance conceptualised drunkenness and its sinful consequences to be an almost exclusively male problem. The harm caused by alcoholism was attributed to men, which confused the narrative whenever women were seen to be participating in the act of drinking.

The concept of a drunkard woman became almost entirely absent from the American imagination. Any woman seen in a drunken state publicly was immediately shunned as a moral degenerate, and invariably presumed to be working class (Crowley, 1994: 117). Crowley argues that this idea of alcoholism as an exclusively male problem engendered sexed implications for women who participated in the consumption of alcohol: “the alcoholic female was oversexed (a slut)” (p. 118). In an Australian example from 1841, which paralleled the views held by many American temperance reformers that alcohol hypersexualised women, Governor Gipps of New South Wales sounds the alarm:
[...] that woman should renounce the tenderness of her nature, belie the softness of her sex, stoop from her high station [...] that she should herself be the victim of intemperance; that woman should herself be guilty of the bestiality of drunkenness; but this indeed could hardly be, for ere it can arrive, the creature is unsexed, the soft and endearing name of woman shall no longer be applied to her; call her fiend-fury-Hecate or invent some new term of insult in the language; to designate a thing so fallen, and so vile. There is nothing in the whole catalogue of crime, so thoroughly revolting as drunkenness in a woman; there is no object of disgust or horror that offends the sight of God or man, so entirely loathsome as a drunken woman.

(Windschuttle in Leigh, 1995: 1)

Intemperance and sexual immorality were seen as confederate problems. The Reverend Stephen Badger explained: “If one dies, the other will restore it to life. They must both stand or fall together” (Martin, 2008: 26). The belief that male lust was inevitable ensured that women’s transgressions amounted to a far more serious matter than men’s. Because men’s propensity for sexual sin was conceived as natural, women who engaged in lewd behaviour were perceived as much more cunning and deliberate in their actions, having stepped outside of their natural environment. From both ends of the social spectrum, commentators laid the blame for men’s transgressions at the feet of the women who seduced them (p. 29).

Due to the conflation of alcohol with lewd behaviour, many temperance adherents were also actively involved in efforts to stigmatise sex for nonprocreative purposes. Gusfield’s (1986) seminal work on the temperance movement as a symbolic crusade brings this to light. He notes that the movements against alcohol enlisted many who were also partisans of the movements for sexual purity and against prostitution (p. 197). The concern regarding the relationship between alcoholism and sexual misconduct was not without reason. As Brosnki (2011) reveals, many saloon owners would rent rooms to prostitutes or keep brothels above their businesses. Organised prostitution was commonly a family business, with married couples running brothels. Historian Beryl Satter notes that even women considered progressive “agreed with more conservative women activists that male lust damaged society, and that female virtue would improve it” (Satter, 1999: 112). The more conservative adherents of the social purity crusade campaigned to censor the press, raise the age of consent, and close brothels. Those with more progressive leanings in the movement encouraged sex education as a means of improving the public understanding of sexuality. Better pay for women was also promoted, in turn attacking the economic necessity which
drove many women to prostitution. Although converging on a single issue, ideologically diverse adherents pursued an assortment of strategies to curtail the drink.

But rather than reducing female drunkenness, a backlash against the taboo of drinking generated by temperance reformers has actually seen a significant increase in women’s drinking habits since prohibition (Gusfield, 1986). Analogously, antipornography activism oversaw an exacerbation of the very behaviour it intended to extirpate. Ariel Levy (2005) asserts that although the second-wave of feminism intended to transform cultural mores dictating that women’s sexuality must function on men’s terms, the movement actually witnessed the advent of even more exploitative attitudes towards women’s bodies. This outcome was crafted by pornographers who successfully co-opted feminist language and reconceptualised sexual performances for men as a source of women’s liberation. Terms like ‘empowerment’ and ‘liberation’ were initially used by feminists in the context of casting off the limitations imposed upon women, but these terms were appropriated by pornographers like Playboy’s Hugh Hefner and used to substitute one previously strictly defined role for women with another – the “lusty, busty exhibitionist” (p. 200). Andrea Dworkin (1978) attributes this unintended outcome to the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s. Dworkin argues that women were attracted to the myths of sexual radicalism for its promises of reduced gender polarity: “a dream of being less female in a world less male; an eroticization of sibling equality, not the traditional male dominance.” However, while the movement claimed dichotomous notions of gender would erode under a single standard of sexual-liberation practice, sexuality was still defined in classically male terms. Male dominance persisted under the guise of liberation, and women continued to be objectified and turned into commodities for pornography amidst the triumph of neoliberalism in the 1980s. Dworkin (1978) contends, “Its purpose—its turned out—was to free men to use women without bourgeois constraints, and in that it was successful” (p. 91). In both instances, it seems, the temperance and antipornography movements’ achieved limited long-term success, instead seeing their aims subverted by the strength of capitalism.

Preserving middle-class respectability

In addition to regulating lustful excess spurred by alcohol, temperance was a vehicle for the management of urban social problems and the valorisation of the middle class. The prosperity promised by a capitalist market economy and favoured by temperance reformers had also led to the rapid industrialisation of urban spaces; the death of small communities through the
collapse of small, family-run enterprises; and a subsequent increase in prostitution, drunkenness, and mass immigration and migration which had manifested in the emergence of poverty-stricken enclaves throughout America’s urban centres. This new urban reality frightened people who were accustomed to small-town, agricultural ways of life, and as Gusfield (1986) writes:

It threatened the social position of those who strongly identified their social status with dominance in the small-town image of the community. Religion bolstered this uneasiness and directed attention toward the ill-effects of industrialism in a context which stressed both moral and economic betterment. The maintenance of the old norms of Temperance, as ideal or reality, was one way to insure their continued prestige (p. 80).

Intemperance itself became the symbolic impediment to middle class status. A 1889 Union Signal article exemplifies the belief at the time that the middle class typified moral perfectionism and ought to be emulated: “the class least touched by the evil thus far is that which here, as elsewhere in the land, forms its bone and sinew – the self-respecting and self-supporting class whose chief pleasures in life center in and about the home” (p. 3).

Despite a proud identification with middle-class values, temperance reformers were also aware that the middle-class was plagued by inner-conflict over the implications of an increasingly unrestrained capitalist economy, which on the one hand embodied the entrepreneurial spirit which drives ordinary men to work hard and succeed, and on the other hand inspires a narrow pursuit of profit, requiring the abandonment of familial responsibilities. It was in the rum selling profession that the unease felt by temperance reformers concerning the contradictions of capitalism and temperance were perhaps best encapsulated. Temperance reformers scolded rum sellers for engaging in a profession whose sole purpose was to make money without a care for the betterment of mankind, exposing the nuances of middle-class culture and its relationship to the market revolution (Berkley Fletcher, 2008: 11).

Today, those on the Christian Right are embroiled in a similar tension, on the one hand favouring laissez-faire capitalism, and on the other detesting the pornography-saturated culture it produces. Speaking on the supposed complementarity of Christianity and the Bible, Jerry Falwell (1981) has stated “The free enterprise system is clearly outlined in the Book of Proverbs in the Bible. […] Ownership of property is Biblical. Competition in business is
Biblical. Ambitious and successful business management is clearly outlined as part of God’s Plan for His people” (p. 13).

This belief that capitalism is religiously ordained has been the cornerstone of Christian Right orthodoxy (Himmelstein, 1983: 23). And yet the pursuit of profit clearly has its limits where moral suasion is concerned. An inclination to support righteous causes before profitability is evident in the antipornography discourse of many Christian Right groups. For example, in 2011 FOF praised Texas billionaire and Christian Robert Rowling for his decisions to withdraw pornographic films from his chain of hotels, “his decisions was made on moral, not financial grounds” the group claims.34 Despite assured hits to its bottom line, CWA has pleaded with Target stores to end their sales of “Fifty Shades of Grey” themed sex toy items, citing ‘social responsibility’ as the central consideration.35 In an excerpt from her book, The Supremacists, Christian Right legend Phyllis Schlafly (2004b) lambasts the Supreme Court for “guarantee[ing] the profits of pornographers” through a series of decisions which have upheld the First Amendment rights of pornographers to continue production of their material (p. 83). In each example, leaders at the forefront of the contemporary Christian Right movement, as with the temperance reformers of old, reveal their discomfort with the prospect of living under an economic system which thrives at the expense of their most sacred moral values.

Temperance reformers were quite happy to champion the cause of the middle-class, as are Christian Right opponents of pornography today, who use the symbolic power of the white, suburban, heteronormative, patriarchal family to promote the image of a romanticised, simpler era, before feminism, gay rights, and racial desegregation complicated the destiny of the middle-class. Remaining loyal to their economic philosophy, the Christian Right do not attribute the disappearing middle-class to the forces of the market, such as free trade agreements, automation, the outsourcing of jobs, and the redistribution of wealth from the middle-class to the billionaire class. Instead, it is a deviation from narrowly prescribed family models, toward out-of-wedlock births, premarital sex, homosexual relationships, and a decline in Church attendance and adherence that is chiefly responsible for the erosion of the

middle-class. Poverty is imagined as a self-inflicted wound, more the result of an individual’s poor moral judgement than larger structural factors.

Feminist antipornography campaigners have had a more complicated relationship with the middle-class identity, as left-wing opponents have sought to frame a belonging to the middle-class as a point of weakness which undermines feminist claims to speak for poor and exploited women in the pornography industry. Sexual liberationists accused antiporn feminists of appropriating middle-class respectability politics through their valorisation of a new sexual politesse. To sexual liberationists, the moralisation of pornography was about more than just pornography, it was about asserting the nobility of self-control, a virtue reserved for the respectable classes.

In *Bound and Gagged* (1996) Laura Kipnis traces the connection between antipornography politics and middle-class respectability:

> Pornography […] dedicates itself to offending all the bodily and sexual proprieties intrinsic to upholding class distinctions: good manners, privacy, the absence of vulgarity, the suppression of bodily instincts into polite behaviour (p. 174).

In addition, pornography’s consistent downward focus sees it veering far from the cultural past times of the elite classes, such as the opera, the symphony, and gallery art – “it is the lowest of the cultural low” asserts Kipnis, serving only to appeal to humanity’s baser instincts.

The associations with middle-class respectability might prove politically useful for those on the Christian Right, where an ethos of aspirational capitalism, a striving toward the “American dream”, underpins the philosophy of its adherents. But for antiporn feminists who emanate from a broader left-wing tradition which has its roots in identification with a disenfranchised class of women, the conflation of antipornography politics with middle-class respectability threatens to further erode the public image of the antipornography position within left-wing circles, a fate it has already suffered considerably in recent decades. The appropriation of antiporn feminist arguments by the Christian Right only deepens this perception of an intrinsic alliance between these two schools of thought.
Parallels in conflict and strategies of appropriation: temperance, woman’s suffrage, and pornography

In addition to both temperance and the antipornography movement inciting groups of ideologically adversarial adherents to organise around a single issue of human weakness, the nineteenth-century battle against intoxicating beverages and the present-day backlash against pornography have both seen the conservative wing of the movement appropriating the tactics and language of feminism.

This phenomenon was exemplified by WCTU, the first major organisation formed to combat alcohol’s effects on families. WCTU was formed in 1874 in Cleveland, Ohio, but had gained international influence by the 1880s. At the risk of unsettling relations between men and women, WCTU framed temperance as a means of protecting women in the home against the threat of violence posed by an alcohol-fuelled husband. This represented a marked shift away from the movement’s earlier rhetoric, which had focused on the moral, religious motive for temperance, and was reflective of the earlier movement’s more mixed gender composition (Banaszak, 2006: 5). As Martin (2008) notes, temperance women appeared to be contending for organisational influence, power, and pride of place, rather than solely for the cause of total abstinence (p. 144). These changes contributed to the impression that women’s support of liquor reform masked a campaign for women’s rights and a greater role in public life.

By 1874 the temperance movement was dominated by women, and with this came a new discourse focusing on the power of alcohol to enflame the male temper. Frances Willard, the second and most enduringly influential president of WCTU revealed that her parents had a steel engraving hanging on their dining room wall depicting the contrast between a happy home which embraces temperance, and has a woman at the centre, against a “dismal, squalid house with a drunken man staggering in, bottle in hand” at the centre (Willard, 1889: 331).

The newspaper Lily, founded in 1851, conflated temperance and the women’s movement on the basis that men commit violence against women. Lily fostered the idea that prohibition was a basic component of women’s rights. The newspaper cited intemperance as a “great foe to women’s peace and happiness,” adding that no wife should endure a husband’s “blows and curses, and submit to his brutish passions and lusts” (Bloomer in Alonso, 1993: 48). In this view, alcohol rouses a man’s violent temper, much like pornography is thought to stimulate a

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man’s latent desire to sexually dominate. In addition to a focus on men’s violence against women, temperance reformers spoke of the need to extend feminine influence beyond its traditional boundaries. Frances Willard described the mission of the ideal woman as “to make the whole world homelike” (Willard in LeGates, 2001: 218). Mary Livermore, another temperance leader, called on reformers to create a “republic of women” who would “train women for the next great step in the evolution of humanity, when women shall sit side by side in government, and the nations shall learn war no more” (p. 218). These statements reflect a desire to transform women’s social and political standing beyond prohibition.

At the turn of the century, WCTU had some 176,000 members, whereas the suffrage organisation, National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), had just 13,000 members (Mezvinsky, 1959: 68). The roots of WCTU’s success began to culminate just over two decades earlier from the fervent but brief period of activity against the drink between 1873 and 1875, referred to as the Woman’s Crusade. Through the direct action tactics of the Woman’s Crusade, temperance women used the very few means of political action at their disposal against saloons and liquor sellers, these included prayer vigils, petition campaigns, demonstrations, and hymn-singing. Formed following the crusades, WCTU was able to capitalise on the charisma of the crusades and appropriate many of its more confrontational tactics for its own political ends.

WCTU benefited from having a democratic national organisation that the more loosely organised crusaders did not, but it was able to broaden its appeal further by making the connection between temperance and larger social issues impacting women’s lives, which the crusaders had begun to articulate. As Epstein (1981) notes, “within the WCTU, the values and attitudes that had informed female evangelism and the Woman’s Crusade were carried forward, sharpened, and made the basis for social and political action” (p. 115). Frances Willard was central to this new mission. Being careful not to make overt feminist references, Willard nevertheless benefited from inheriting the protofeminist elements of the earlier crusaders, and initiated a conversation within the group about women’s equality inside and outside the home (p. 116).

Willard had to tread carefully, as many within the movement remained sceptical of women’s rights. Progressive activist Richard T. Ely, for instance, advocated for labour reforms and supported labour unions, believing alcohol to be a significant part of the problem of inequality between the sexes. He did not, however, regard women’s exit from the home into
the political sphere as the remedy for such an injustice. Rather, Ely saw women walking away from the home as a further erosion of the family, on par with alcohol. Both fed inequality (Noel, 2013: 86). Willard’s strategy of appropriating feminist reform tactics while avoiding explicit identification with the more radical elements of early feminism defined much of Willard’s tenure as WCTU president. Like today’s Christian Right, WCTU’s political action had to be rooted in a Protestant framework. To the extent that WCTU’s political action intertwined with feminist politics, it was practiced as a conservative alternative to feminism, rather than an incarnation of it.

As with the tension shared between feminist and social conservative activists over pornography in recent decades, the relationship between members of suffrage organisations and temperance activists was not uncomplicated. Suffragettes often looked down on the Crusaders whose activists they felt degraded women and whose movement caused men to equate suffrage with temperance (McLeod, 1986: 160). The perception that temperance and suffrage were intertwined had serious political consequences and for this reason was exploited by the liquor industry who poured vast resources into the antisuffrage campaign, convincing the overwhelmingly male liquor consumers that granting women the vote would eventually lead to a prohibition on the sale of alcoholic beverages. Indeed, this was precisely the temperance activists’ plan. Referring to the influence of the liquor industry in Oregon’s 1906 suffrage election, Carrie Chapman Catt asserted that “had there been no prohibition movement in the United States, the women would have been enfranchised two generations before they were.” For women’s rights advocate Abigail Scott Duniway, the threat temperance posed to woman’s suffrage was so severe that she opposed any cooperation between the two movements (Bradley, 2005: 151). The intrinsic conservatism at the heart of temperance risked tainting the more radical impulse implicit in woman’s suffrage, a tension mirrored in contemporary liberal criticism of the supposed anti-sex sentiments underlying feminist opposition to pornography, which are judged as being indistinguishable from the religious right’s discomfort with transgressive sex (Duggan and Hunter, 1995). The mésalliance, so to speak, between Christian Right and antiporn feminist campaigners resembles what one officer of NAWSA described as an “involuntary entanglement” between suffragettes and temperance reformers (Benjamin, 2014: 205). In both cases, the public has been led to believe the movements are practically identical, creating the perception that a radical, progressive agenda is being subverted and weakened by its conservative counterpart. But it is worth considering that the opposite is just as valid a prospect – that the campaign to
curtail pornography exposes the Christian Right to penetration by more radical antiporn ideas instituted by the feminist movement.

Temperance reformers pivoted back and forth between competing demands on women’s roles, which on the one hand made demands for domesticity, and on the other sought a place in the public realm where they could assert themselves as politicised women. While this was path breaking at the time, this merging of a domestic ideology premised on an idealised feminine identity, and a feminist ideology which acknowledged the evolving status of women in society has been replicated by today’s Christian Right opponents of pornography. The next chapter examines the re-emergence of the notion of the ‘true woman’ alongside the rise of the new Christian Right and how the frame of the docile, subordinate woman alchemised into a discourse of rights.
CHAPTER FIVE

Competing narratives: True womanhood and empowered womanhood coalesce on pornography

Featuring prominently in the Christian Right’s discourse on pornography is a perennially salient set of values premised on an idealisation of femininity which took shape in the nineteenth century. This set of beliefs has been referred to as the doctrine of ‘true womanhood’. Susan M. Cruea explains (2005) that true womanhood set forth a highly restrictive and narrow set of standards for the ideal woman. Importantly, the true woman should portray an image of delicateness and weakness. She should allow herself to be subservient to men, and solely devote herself to duties of the home. In the early twentieth century, sexuality emerged as a powerful cultural symbol of true womanhood, and with it a dualistic interpretation of female sexuality. “Women were either pure or promiscuous” and sexuality either “private and marital or public and prostituted” writes Sanday (2007). This rigid framing of sexuality conferred on certain women loyal to the domestic sphere a degree of moral superiority, but for women engaged in prostitution and pornography, the cult of true womanhood was a cruel ideology, equating them with the lustfulness of men and scapegoating them as the root of America’s moral decline.

This chapter will explore the conservative reemphasis on the doctrine of true womanhood that accompanied both the rise of the new Christian Right and the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. The contemporary revitalisation of the notion of separate spheres has occasioned a discourse on pornography that problematises the harms done to women in pornography using feminist, rights-based arguments, while simultaneously affirming a set of ideals that seeks to undermine women’s emancipation from the domestic sphere.

True womanhood re-emerges

In 1963, the same year that Betty Friedan published The Feminine Mystique, Helen Berry Andelin released Fascinating Womanhood as a text to accompany a series of classes she was teaching with the adult education department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.37 The premise of Fascinating Womanhood was that women could get more fulfilment in a heterosexual marriage by accepting a subservient position to their husband, rather than

competing for equality. More than 400,000 women paid to access Andelin’s teachings, many of whom were economically dependent on their husbands and who subscribed to a conservative ideology (Wood, 2011: 91). Based on the strict set of moral values central to the nineteenth-century cult of true womanhood, the Fascinating Womanhood movement formed during a transformational period in the 1960s and 1970s when movements for gender equality were emerging as politically eminent forces.

Fascinating Womanhood represented a social conservative backlash to the feminist movement, encouraging women to regard the home as their rightful place and their husband as their moral leader.38 Far from adopting the language of feminism, Andelin believed in a “benevolent form of male dominance” in which husbands reward their wife’s unremunerated housekeeping and childcare with financial security and relational stability (Freeman, 1979).

In her assessment of women’s proper place, Helen Andelin encouraged her female readers to acquire a man’s love and affection by yielding to him and focusing an inordinate amount of time on maintaining his interest, a task best achieved by possessing stereotypically ‘feminine’ characteristics, which for Andelin meant mimicking the personality traits of a child (Coltrane, 2000: 30). The extent to which she believed women ought to exercise these qualities was laid out in her book:

> We would do well to copy the manner in which children express emotions, especially the emotions of anger, hurt, disappointment, sympathy, tenderness and joy. I believe that by doing so, women can solve some of their most difficult marital problems. Truly fascinating women always remain somewhat little girls, regardless of their age [...] Every woman can become childlike, for we all have this trait somewhere in our nature. It is part of being a woman. Remember that it was not long ago you were a little girl when these traits were natural to you [...] If you are to be loved and treated like a woman, you must make him feel like a man (Andelin, 1963: 17, 35, 263, 297).

The book goes on to endorse tactics such as voice modulation for women, which involves avoiding loud or firm tones, as they are strictly masculine; limiting long strides or a “heavy gait” as these are typical in men; and acquiring “an attitude of frail dependence upon men to take care of you.” Women are also encouraged to express anger in the way a child might, by stomping her foot, lifting her chin high and making childlike threats (Andelin in Weiss, 1995: 38 A modern Christian adaptation of Andelin’s ideas surfaced in Laura Doyle’s *The Surrendered Wife* (2001) which counsels women to abandon the quest for equality in order to have a happy marriage.
Cultivating a “girlish trust” in their husbands, and never appearing to “know more than he does” were cited as other effective ways for women to achieve marital bliss (Andelin in Coontz, 2011: 15).

Contrast this with literature being published at the time by second wave feminists, which encouraged women to be louder, more assertive, and to occupy traditionally male spaces (Bird, 1969; Firestone, 1970; Greer, 1970) and the chasm between the two conflicting ideologies could not be clearer. What is more, feminist literature during this period was often explicit in its intent to reconceptualise women as bearers of sexual energy. Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* proposed that women reject the feminine socialisation which equated women with erotic passivity, and dared them to assume a more assertive sexual role. In *Fascinating Womanhood*, there is barely a mention of sexual intimacy. It is there in the background – implied – but a call to sexual submission is not spelled out. This is not entirely surprising given that the nineteenth-century notion of true womanhood defined women as passionless (Patton, 2000: 67). This shy approach was largely abandoned a decade later in Marabel Morgan’s (1973) *The Total Woman* which used the tenets of true womanhood to instruct wives on the specificities of feminine sexual subordination within marriage. In *Right-Wing Women* (1978), Dworkin reveals how Morgan, an evangelical Christian, manages to co-opt both Christian teachings and pornographic imagery in her book:

Morgan’s achievement in *The Total Woman* was to isolate the basic sexual scenarios of male dominance and female submission and to formulate a simple set of lessons, a pedagogy, that teaches women how to act out those scenarios within the context of a Christian value system: in other words, how to cater to male pornographic fantasies in the name of Jesus Christ (p. 25).

The eroticisation of subordination popularised and normalised by Morgan and Andelin in their contemporary reimagining of true womanhood created the problematic perception that the Christian Right endorsed, or at least was neutral about, the underlying power asymmetry in male and female sexual relationships. The Christian Right’s adoption of broad principles of equality, autonomy, and empowerment in their critique of pornography seems at first glance incommensurate with the resurrection of true womanhood.

But in fact true womanhood offers today’s leaders on the Christian Right a narrative on sex and sexuality that appeals to moral imperatives and male headship, and also a way of protecting female vulnerability that conveys an ethos of care for women’s sexual autonomy.
“True womanhood was the only power that stood between man’s destructive sexual impulse and the order of the home” writes Nancy F. Cott (1993). For the women who convincingly embodied the cardinal virtues of true womanhood — piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity — there was a fragile form of power within their grasp. In practice, this power meant virtuous women became the moral guardians of society. Within the unstable, rapidly industrialising economy, Americans took comfort in clinging to the highly valued ideals of domesticity and respectability these women embodied. This perception of women’s moral superiority imbued them with a restricted form of power. This was useful to Willard and other temperance reformers who could make the case that women, representing the good conscience of Victorian society, had a special duty to protect their country, and therefore required the vote (Epstein, 1981: 4).

The notion of women as “the fairer sex” has been remarkably enduring, and allows leaders on the Christian Right to frame women as more vulnerable than men, and thus more susceptible to various forms of abuse. It is a clever inversion of feminist pro-woman rhetoric, which has tended to avoid claims about women possessing some kind of morally superior essence, fearing that this kind of language too closely resembles the kind of biological determinism that has been used to marginalise women. Dorothy Wickenden’s (1986) assertion that feminism is too narrowly committed to an androgynous equality that denies women’s sexual difference proved a scathing critique of this widely-held feminist belief. However, there are notable exceptions within feminism that valorise women’s difference and praise the Victorian ideal of separate cultural spheres (Chodorow, 1978; Gilligan, 1982; Ruddick, 1989, Tannen, 1990). These writers propose theories of sexual difference that at certain points closely resemble the doctrine of true womanhood — notably that women are more relational and nurturing than men.

These are theories that have made their way into feminist antipornography discourse. As the antiporn feminist critic Alice Echols (1983) points out, antiporn feminism relies on the assumption that male and female sexuality are polar opposites: “male sexuality is driven, irresponsible, genitally oriented, and potentially lethal. Female sexuality is muted, diffuse, and interpersonally oriented.” Sentiments that frequently appear in material produced by CWA, FOF, and EF.
True womanhood and the elusive female body

The key principles of true womanhood can be found in the way in which leaders on the Christian Right have developed discourses on the female body, having implications in terms of how key figures in the movement approach the issue of women and pornography. The female body is presented as a site of tension and paradox by the Christian Right. On the one hand a woman’s body is extolled for its lifebearing potential, and yet the sexual experiences which make this destiny possible are treated as a shameful secret. Sorin (2015) explains how the nineteenth-century cult of true womanhood wrestled obsessively with this paradox: “while religious sermons and female magazines glorified woman’s natural superiority […] medical research made public the mysterious insides of the “Angel in the House”’ whose womb and ovaries were framed as capricious, complex organs (p. 130). Women had to view their bodies in binary terms, as pure yet fertile, inferior yet influential, and above all as intrinsically unspiritual. The prevailing and paradoxical view in nineteenth-century America that women assert power through submission is still very much alive in the publications of contemporary Christian Right groups. For example, FOF argue that pornography weakens women’s power in the marital relationship because in situations where a husband is using sexually explicit material, it undermines the wife’s ability to “influence” her husband’s actions by cooperating with his sexual expectations.39 In both cases, women’s source of power is in her ability to quietly persuade the male figures in her life.

One of the most challenging aspects of pornography for those on the Christian Right is how thoroughly it brings explicit depictions of the female body into public view. Female modesty is a highly virtuous quality, and defiance of it is nothing short of a sin. In the nineteenth century this meant that even female ballet dancers, whose bodies were on public display, were widely considered disreputable (Hanna, 2008). Since this period in history, sex has been annexed to the private sphere. But pornography violates this assumption by shifting the sacrosanct female body into the secular, visible realm where it can be known and possessed by anyone (Nead, 2002). Linda Williams (1989) calls this “the frenzy of the visible” wherein female pleasure as depicted in hard core film becomes a publicly staged “involuntary confession”, as distinct from a secretive pursuit stalked by feelings of shame. According to Williams, pornography functions as a way of circumventing the self-conscious control and

surveillance normally exercised by the properly socialised woman over her appearance (p. 50). In this sense it is the ultimate defiance of true womanhood and its modern-day adaptations. Antiporn feminists have likewise expressed discomfort with the visibility of the female body in a pornographic context. They locate power in male consumers, who are the “bearer[s] of a gaze that humiliates” (Moreland, 2015). The way antiporn feminists had begun in the ‘70s and ‘80s to incorporate some essentialist notions of ‘natural’ female desire as romantic and passive meant the masculinised depictions of women’s bodies in pornography as sexually assertive and adventurous were an affront to their beliefs about the intrinsic superiority of women’s intimate lives (Gelder, 2004: 138). This is where the philosophical intersection between nineteenth-century purity mores, the Christian Right’s beliefs about delicate femininity, and essentialist elements of antiporn feminism are most pronounced. At this intersection, antiporn discourse can move fluidly between the feminist position and the Christian Right.

Antiporn feminists established theories on the harms of pornography by developing their own perspective on the female body that sought to dismantle long-held beliefs about women’s bodies as possessions indistinct from any other commodity. Unlike adherents of true woman ideology or today’s Christian Right, antiporn feminists have attempted to deconstruct the various ways in which the female body has been defined and addressed as a naturally deviant body, “a source of moral and physical contamination” as Rich (1976) puts it, as well as the belief that men have proprietorship over women’s bodies (Thompson, 2001). But this did not prevent some antiporn feminists from adopting their own binary tropes which portrayed men as inherently threatening and aggressive and women as sexually passive. This revived the female body as a site of public debate – a space onto which collective anxieties about the family, the church, and the state could be engraved. Leaders on the Christian Right have been able to identify these areas of rhetorical convergence where antiporn feminists have used dichotomous and essentialising language to describe the threat pornography poses to women.

The enduring narrative of separate spheres

The cult of true womanhood rose to prominence in a period of material uncertainty, “where fortunes rose and fell with frightening rapidity” writes Welter (1966: 152). The rapidly evolving social, political, and economic conditions of the United States between 1820 and 1860 imbued women with the moral and political responsibility to remain a hostage in their own home for the good of the country. The re-emergence of the true woman doctrine under
the auspices of the new Christian Right came at a similarly pivotal time where unfolding struggles for women’s rights, black civil rights, and gay rights were competing with advocates of traditional values for cultural and political eminence.

Because true womanhood was associated with civilisation and progress, any challenges to the precepts of the ideology could be interpreted as a reversion to savagery (Clinton, 1994: 51). True women anchored the country with a sense of stability. Attempts to rewrite the meaning of the true woman were seen as threats to a vacillating national identity. The disjuncture between the image of true womanhood and the reality of increasing numbers of women leaving the domestic sphere to take up wage-earning work propelled the domestic myth further. Moreover, the dreary nature of women’s paid work, repetitive, menial, and providing little opportunity to procure a living wage, reinforced the importance of true womanhood ideology and the institution of marriage (Frager and Patrias, 2005: 150). Some scholars have traced how the rise in the production and visibility of pornography has coincided with the emergence of women from the domestic sphere, as a kind of backlash against women’s newfound independence. Susan Faludi (1991) highlights this in her aptly titled book *Backlash*, pointing to the sharp increase in rape, and in pornography depicting extreme violence against women following the rise of the women’s movement in the 1960s (p. 16).

Rather than an ideology that transcended class divides, true womanhood was situated within a privileged and exclusive sector of society (Lindley, 1996). The ideology was only accessible to a select group of women: white, Protestant, upper-middle class women who lived in the Northeast of the United States. For many women it was economically unfeasible to remain in the domestic sphere, they simply had to seek wage-earning work in order to sustain their family. The steadily emerging conflict over whether women should remain in the home and endure the misfortune of being tucked away from participation in public matters, or whether women should enter public life and risk abandoning some responsibilities in the home, was a dilemma only contemplated by white, middle class women. There are many similarities in the perception of true womanhood as being an exclusively middle-class pastime, and accusations levelled at antiporn feminists for being excessively concerned with preserving the respectability of relatively well-to-do, intellectual women who did not need to turn to the sex trade to survive economically (Goode and Ben-Yehuda, 2009). The critique being that while antiporn feminists engage in a discourse that underscores injustices being practiced against poor women, often women of colour, the key figures in the movement tend to be white, well-educated, and economically secure. The intense focus on pornography above and beyond
what are arguably more pressing issues is seen as a mark of the privileged lives antiporn feminists must possess, “a spewing of venom that only white middle-class women can afford” (Tong, 1984: 156). The perception of the movement as ‘elitist’, rather than grassroots, gives it a similar class profile to the Christian Right, whose appeal in suburban, middle-class areas where incomes are relatively high has been strong (Cobb, 2003). Prostitution advocates argue that this class position insulates both movements from the gritty realities of being poor and working class in America, and how this existence pushes some women into survival sex (van der Meulen et al. 2013). From this position of relative class comfort and stability, antiporn narratives can transition across ideological divides.

The postbellum period from the 1860s saw a shift from the ‘true woman’ to the ‘new woman’ as employers began to welcome women’s low cost labour in roles such as sales clerks, teachers, secretaries, nurses, and factory workers (Woloch, 2002). As a result, ideas about women’s essential domesticity and their subordination to men began to fade and were replaced by new notions of the modern woman, who was permitted to be economically independent of her husband (Gallagher, 2003: 37). What followed for Protestants was a split between the fundamentalist and modernist factions of the faith. Fundamentalists stayed true to the doctrine of biblical inerrancy despite the rapid cultural change occurring around them and as a result became increasingly isolated and socially irrelevant (Gallagher, 2003: 37). Using more critical methods of biblical interpretation, modernists attempted to revalorise Protestantism, adapting it to the changing contours of twentieth century America. We see these two diverging elements coalescing on the Christian Right’s response to pornography today. Where on the one hand a traditionalist, biblical, true woman discourse frames pornography as an affront to patriarchal marriage and the delicate nature of a woman, and on the other hand a modern, secular, rights-based discourse frames pornography as a threat to women’s equal status and bodily autonomy.

Despite accommodations to a modernising image of women, traditionalists have repeatedly attempted to recover the idealism of the domesticated wife by entrenching the separate spheres of male and female life. The recession of the 1970s which saw the breadwinning husband and homemaking wife ideal, now severely threatened by stagnating wages and the increasing need for two-income families, once again came to represent the stability of a nation (Edwards, 2001). It was during this decade that the groups at the centre of this study – CWA, FOF, and EF – were all founded. A growing sense of cultural and economic loss incited the Christian Right to mobilise on a platform of family values. However, the cultural
conditions had changed significantly since the middle of the nineteenth century, and a need to integrate the spheres of domesticity with women’s increasingly dominant presence in the workforce presented new and unfamiliar challenges to a movement whose gaze was fixed on the rear-view mirror.

One of the ways the movement attempted to merge these two spheres was with the adaptation of ‘Republican Motherhood’ precepts. Republican Motherhood served an important political purpose by attempting to integrate domesticity and proto-feminist campaigning “by defining women’s domestic behavior as having a direct political function in the new republic.” (Rotman, 2009: 15). Not to be confused with the Republican Party, Republican Motherhood encouraged young women to uphold the ideals of republicanism and emerged before the American Revolution, eventually dying down in the early twentieth century. It was a way for conservatives to reconcile a domestic ideology with an unfolding collective gendered ideology by combining the private, domestic spheres of true womanhood with the public, political spheres of the feminist movement; functioning as a kind of temporal overlap.

The dual identity offered by Republican Motherhood belied the rigid expectations of true womanhood, where venturing into the public sphere was perceived as an ungodly transgression. Therefore, women finessing a transition into public life had to navigate a series of gendered expectations which prevented them from abandoning their feminine principles on the masculinised public stage, despite femininity being seen as antithetical to power. Today, prominent women on the Christian Right wrestle with competing expectations about their ideal identity. EF’s Phyllis Schlafly and CWA’s Beverly LaHaye have been a constant presence in the public arena for decades, pleading with women to put husband and children before their own creative pursuits. Any sacrifices this has necessitated in their personal lives is kept quiet. They reconcile this public, assertive image with the demure, feminine image by insisting that their activism is “selfless and ordained by God” (Diamond, 1990). This justification embeds itself in antiporn discourse by prefacing more radical, feminist-inspired arguments with a nod to the Bible.

Republican Motherhood addressed a tension in middle class women’s lives; the blurring of spherical boundaries in the day-to-day lived experiences of these women had resulted in a “kaleidoscopic spectrum of understandings, interpretations, and implementations of gendered roles and relations” (Rotman, 2009: 16). For example, during the Revolutionary War in the eighteenth century, women had “boycotted imported goods, increased their workloads by
supplying replacements for the boycotted goods, fed and clothed armies, ran farms and businesses while their husbands and fathers were away, and engaged in other efforts outside of the women’s previous domestic scope” (Rotman 2009: 17). Republican Motherhood presented itself as a mechanism for women to assimilate into ‘the new world’, by altering “the female domain in which most women had always lived their lives; it justified an extension of women’s absorption and participation in civic culture” (Kerber, 1976: 204).

Yet the manner in which women could engage in civic culture tended to be through their role as wife and mother. For prominent women on the Christian Right today, this expectation has evolved to the point where they may not have to engage directly through their role as wife and mother, but through a more theoretical, abstract identity in which being a wife and mother are of central, but not absolute, importance. For example, Phyllis Schlafly’s marriage and children have been occasional themes in her writing, but have been more background noise than the only means through which she could assert herself in right-wing political spaces. This tension between domesticity and personal fulfilment, between the private and public realms of a woman’s life, play out in conservative antiporn material. The domestic frame is romanticised as a place to safely retreat from a depraved world. Women’s professional endeavours are less valorised by movement leaders, and are treated with a realistic pragmatism. Although the Christian Right links women’s participation in the male world of work with a whole host of social ills, it is too common a scenario to merit deep criticism. In borrowing from feminist rhetoric, the leaders concede that the boundaries separating women’s and men’s spheres are becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish.

Phyllis Schlafly’s adaptation of true womanhood

Throughout the latter part of the twentieth century, one of the greatest champions of nineteenth-century domestic ideology has been the politically astute conservative activist, Phyllis Schlafly. Schlafly’s belief in the centrality of the nuclear family in American society has seen her engage most critically with the women’s movement. She regards feminism as responsible for the decline in women’s self-reported happiness, as it created the conditions for women to leave the home to take up paid work, but still left women shouldering the bulk of the caring responsibilities (Schlafly, 2003). Schlafly’s campaign against the women’s movement gained prominence in the 1970s and still persists today through her stewardship of the conservative interest group, Eagle Forum. Concentrating on “the right to be treated as a woman,” Schlafly’s activism has relied on tropes of the ideal woman, who is all at once
moral, virtuous and self-sacrificing, embodying distinctly different values and qualities to the greedy, selfish ambitiousness of men.

Schlafly’s successful efforts to mobilise conservative forces against the ERA during the 1970s has been credited with making the Christian Right synonymous with the Republican Party, by thrusting social issues into the political arena. Before Schlafly entered the ERA fight and enlisted her broad network of supporters to crusade against it, the Republican Party had consistently endorsed the amendment at every political convention since 1940 (Lelyveld, 1976). Indeed, it had been the party to first add support for the amendment to its political platform in 1940, in the hope that doing so would persuade some women voters to desert popular president Franklin D. Roosevelt in favour of their nominee. The Democratic Party, held back by labour unions whose male-dominated constituencies feared the ERA would undermine their power, took another four years to endorse the amendment (Lowenthal, 2008: 187).

It was Ronald Reagan’s successful bid for the Republican presidential nomination in 1976, due in part to Schlafly’s efforts to portray the ERA as a symbol of feminism that saw the Republican Party and the Christian fundamentalist faction of the conservative movement coalesce around efforts to dismantle pro-ERA advancements. An aggressive modern reassertion of the principles of true womanhood accompanied Schlafly’s campaign against the ERA. The amendment was constructed as “unwomanly”, an affront to the God-given differences between men and women. But Schlafly went further than merely constructing a soft, maternalist vision of the ideal woman as unfit for traditionally male pursuits, she also exploited a key point of contention among supporters of the amendment – whether women required protection or deserved equal treatment. If women were to be treated as no different from their male counterparts, would they actually emerge from the arrangement worse off?

Echoing the rights-based retorts of conservative antipornography campaigners today, Schlafly used the persuasive language of rights to frighten women into believing the ERA would not enhance their social, political and economic position, but erode it. Housewives whose husbands had been legally required to financially support their family would be made equally responsible for financially supporting their progeny, Schlafly warned. “Wives have traditionally had in this country a great variety of extensive rights based on their marital status” she wrote in 1979, but the amendment risked taking these protections away. Further, the ERA would wipe out many labour laws which protected women by acknowledging their
distinct and unique needs, such as exemptions from overnight shifts or arduous labour (Schlafly, 1973). In employing a rights-based criticism of the ERA, Schlafly co-opted the tactics of her feminist opponents in the service of defeating the amendment, and won.

**Women’s rights and true womanhood unite on pornography**

Emboldened by the success of the Stop ERA campaign, Schlafly’s activism expanded to include a raft of measures instrumental to the family values agenda. Merging the incongruent discourses of domesticity and women’s rights, Schlafly has been a central figure in the Christian Right’s construction of pornography as an existential threat to both the good moral values vital to the preservation of the family, and also to the welfare of women.

In one of her best known books, *The Power of the Positive Woman* (1977), Schlafly demonstrates her willingness to reach beyond the morality-focused master frame of the Christian Right, by adopting feminist language in her critique of pornography:

“[P]ornography can be best defined as the degradation of woman. It exploits women individually and as a group in the most offensive, degrading, and cruel way. In the modern jargon, pornography is the most “sexist” activity of all.” (p. 158)

The rights of women to not be victims of sexual exploitation, and the context in which the term ‘sexist’ is used, are analogous to sentiments put forth by feminist antipornography activists. In Schlafly’s view, women liberationists are as much a catalyst of the problem as any pornographer. This view came through in *The Power of the Positive Woman*, where she asserts “they [feminists] profess outrage at a role-concept fostered by school textbooks that include pictures of women in the home as wives and mothers, but they raise no protest about the role-concept fostered by obscene pictures of women as playthings for male lust and sadism in obscene and “bondage” books, magazines, and movies” (p. 2). But mirroring her feminist foes, Schlafly (1987) is alarmed by the notion that pornography is a root cause of sexual violence. “Those who become addicted [to pornography] crave more bizarre and more perverted pornography, and become more callous toward their victims” she alleges.

Schlafly’s position on pornography, fusing together rights-based language and feminine idealisation, has historical roots in the rhetoric of nineteenth-century temperance activists. Writing for the *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*, Andrew Koppelman (2008) makes a case for this parallel. In the eyes of Schlafly “pornography functions as a modern day saloon” he writes. Like alcohol was to temperance crusaders, pornography functions as
an institution that socialises men into a world that is destructively indifferent or even hostile to the well-being of their wives and children (p. 119). Like WCTU president Frances Willard, whose activism was underpinned by an unquestioned dedication to biological determinism, Phyllis Schlafly was driven by a belief that ‘maternal thinking’ – as congenital to women as her physiology – can inspire a model for political decision making (Marilley, 1993: 141).

Willard and Schlafly have both emphasised women’s physical weakness. For Willard, the question of how women’s physical capacities would limit them, particularly when it came to military combat, was inconsequential, as she believed that women’s greater role in public life would have a pacifying effect on America’s war ambitions. This romanticised view of women’s influence did not come true, and Willard’s biological determinism would later be adopted by Phyllis Schlafly and those on the Christian Right, and used for conservative political ends on a range of key issues, including pornography. Willard’s hope that women’s unique resources might be used to both preserve the family and improve women’s standing in society ultimately became ideological fodder for Schlafly, who assimilated the physical weakness argument into her conservative platform as a means of slowing political progress for women.

Still active and driving the social conservative agenda today, Schlafly and her political allies have mastered a dual narrative combining women’s rights and domestic ideology, in which the idealised, subordinated form of femininity central to true woman philosophy is fiercely defended against dissenting voices, namely feminists, who critique this version of womanhood as a product of dyadic relations of dominance and subordination. What has emerged is a new gender politics that emphasises the right to be treated as a woman, and laments the supposedly oppressive assumptions at the heart of equality feminism. “What about the rights of the woman who doesn’t want to compete on an equal basis with men?” Schlafly asked (in Williams, 2010: 110).

For many leaders on the Christian Right, the notion that a rights-based analysis of gender relations must be synonymous with feminism is being challenged. And as an analysis and discussion of contemporary Christian Right material on pornography will reveal in the next two chapters, the issue of pornography has been fertile ground for this new gender politics to play out.
CHAPTER SIX
Case studies

Concerned Women for America, Focus on the Family, Eagle Forum and the temperance movement

To establish a clear understanding of the nature, extent, and drive behind the Christian Right’s appropriation of women’s rights arguments on pornography, it is crucial to move beyond a purely historical appraisal of the movement’s approach to questions of women’s proper place and how society ought to respond to the decoupling of sex and marriage, and instead shift towards a current snapshot of the movement’s framing of pornography.

Therefore, the remainder of this study will analyse the antipornography material of CWA, FOF, and EF – three groups founded within a few years of each other at a time when the movement was at its most militaristic, drawing in parallels with the temperance movement where appropriate. At the beginning of the rise of the new Christian Right in the 1970s, any notion that the movement could eventually acquiesce to feminist theory would have been unthinkable. But in the decades since, the movement has shifted and adapted strategically, as changing political cycles and public sentiment have thrown up new challenges. The evolving nature of women’s role in society has been a particularly complex adjustment for Christian Right leaders, who have had to reconceptualise their approach to everything from pornography, to abortion and childcare, as women have gradually assumed greater space in the public sphere. CWA, FOF, and EF have all engaged in their own way with this political reality. Their position on pornography is one vehicle through which new normative boundaries of gender relations within the movement are being formed.

A profile of Concerned Women for America (CWA)

Beverly LaHaye was 49-years-old, living in San Diego and married to fundamentalist Baptist minister and Moral Majority co-founder Tim LaHaye in 1978 when an evening news interview appeared on her living room television, sparking outrage and ultimately forming the creation of CWA (LaHaye, 1984). LaHaye’s anger was provoked by feminist activist Betty Friedan who was being interviewed by veteran journalist Barbara Walters. During the exchange, Betty Friedan claimed to “represent the views of a great many women in America” (Faludi, 1991: 279). Upon hearing this, LaHaye recalls jumping off her couch and yelling
“Betty Friedan doesn’t speak for me, and I bet she doesn’t speak for the majority of women in this country” (p. 279). Believing feminism had destroyed a woman’s conventionally understood ‘place’ in the world, LaHaye (1987) argued that removing a woman’s high value toward family, marriage and children would weaken her feeling of confidence, “because that is the way women operate” (p. 5). It was LaHaye’s view that feminists were destroying the notion of family in America and that an organised Christian conservative movement of women needed to be formed to counteract the impact of the feminist movement.

It was then that Beverly LaHaye decided something had to be done to prevent feminists from destroying the family and the nation. With that, LaHaye called a meeting in San Diego. Uncertain if anyone would show up, 1200 women eventually filled the hall. This impressive show persuaded LaHaye to conclude that “the majority of women out there don’t agree with Betty Friedan and the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment]” (in Gardiner, 1998). Today, the group boasts a membership of 500,000 individuals40 and an annual budget of around $8 million (Schreiber, 2008: 133). The group’s sources of funding come primarily from its membership dues, book royalties, and grants from non-profit organisations. The Bill and Berniece Grewcock Foundation, which provides grants to Christian organisations, gives regularly to CWA. The Center to Protect Patient Rights (CPPR), a secretive and deeply political non-profit, with proven ties to the billionaire Koch brothers whose political activities have funnelled hundreds of millions of dollars into conservative, libertarian, and free-market individuals and organisations, including CWA (Novak, 2012). Grants from such a group could be deemed questionable given that many of CWA’s projects operate under a 501(c)(3) tax status. Groups with this status are defined as “social welfare” organisations, and are not supposed to be primarily political.41 In fact these types of tax-exempt organisations are forbidden from engaging in most political and legislative activities. It was Senator Lyndon B. Johnson who introduced this ban on political involvement by 501(c)(3) organisations.

Johnson, a Democrat and pioneer of modern liberalism, was targeting the new measure at right-wing, tax-exempt organisations supporting Dudley T. Dougherty (Segers, 2008). Dougherty was a conservative Texas Democrat challenging Johnson’s renomination and re-

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40 As reported by CWA. Anyone who has ever donated even as little as one dollar is considered a member henceforth: SourceWatch 2014, Concerned Women for America, viewed February 2014, <http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Concerned_Women_for_America>.

election to the Senate in 1954. The move was underpinned by Johnson’s efforts to end McCarthyism and disunity within Democratic Party ranks (p. 196). Because CWA’s political activities are limited by its tax status, the group also operates part of its activities under a 501(c)(4) status, which allows the group to engage in campaigning in favour or opposition to a particular bill or ballot measure. There is little doubt that CWA is an inherently political organisation. The group runs a Political Action Committee (PAC) whose total expenditure during the 2008 election cycle reached $323,185. During the 2012 election cycle CWA’s PAC made donations to a number of specific candidates, such as Congressman Robert B. Aderholt from Alabama, Senator Deb Fischer from Nebraska, Richard Mourdock from Indiana, and Governor Mitt Romney, all Republican candidates.42

The group’s campaigning style has been referred to as “kitchen table activism” (Fetner, 2008; Gardiner, 2006) lifted from the group’s fundamental assumption that its women adherents are nestled contently in a domestic sphere. In the early years of the Reagan administration, the group sent pamphlets to its members titled “How to Lobby From Your Kitchen Table,” characteristic of the veneer of a soft, unobtrusive, ladylike style of activism; putting the group in stark contrast to the militant, aggressive tactics of traditionally masculine campaigns, such as the labour movement.

In truth, CWA’s tenacious methods of campaigning are far from unassuming. One such campaign method demonstrates their truly persuasive style, referred to as “Project 535,” denoting the 435 Representatives and 100 Senators in Congress. Project 535 was launched in 1984 as a volunteer lobbyist program. Each year CWA conducts training seminars in Washington, D.C. for Project 535 volunteers, where they receive a manual filled with tips on how to lobby effectively, and advice from seasoned lobbyists.43 Gardiner (2006) writes that when the Project 535 is activated in response to, say, abortion legislation, its political effect can be menacing:

The program instructs all CWA members to drop an avalanche of letters and phone calls to legislators and public officials at both their Capitol Hill and home offices. The

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effects of such efficient organizing can be devastating as thousands of letters and phone calls bombard Capitol Hill in a matter of days.

It is impossible to fully appreciate CWA’s role in a broader political context without understanding its position as the right-wing foil to feminism. The group’s campaigns certainly go beyond qualms about the influence of feminism, but CWA’s antipathy to the women’s movement is its founding principle, and continues to guide its agenda, at least in theory.

In practice, however, the group’s relationship with feminist politics is not as clear-cut as it might wish to portray. In fact the group both relies on its overt hatred of the feminist movement for maintaining and attracting adherents and also simultaneously depends on rights-based, feminist arguments to enhance and strengthen its antipornography stance to these same adherents. But because the group depends on condemning feminism for its political survival, it has no choice but to pursue this contradictory approach.

As Gardiner (2006) accurately notes, CWA’s existence would be inconceivable had the women’s movement not developed such political salience. The resurgence of a second wave of feminism in the United States in the 1970s drove the impetus on the Christian Right for the formation of organisations devoted to anti-feminism. Cultural ambivalence concerning women’s involvement in political activism across the ideological spectrum means women’s entry point into public life has often been through campaigns deemed gender-appropriate, and within the conservative movement, women activists have delicately formulated campaigns that do not seek to confront patriarchal norms. Rather, CWA’s aims and objectives strengthen the patriarchal narrative that women’s capacities are best exercised in the service of husband, home, and the children.

CWA cites six “core issues” on which it focuses its efforts. The group explains its reasoning behind the core issues principle by claiming that a culture war has engulfed American society, making claims on every area of life, and thus “we must set priorities thoughtfully to determine how best to fulfil our calling.”

44 Since the time of writing CWA’s core issues have been slightly altered. It now lists pornography under ‘sexual exploitation’ and has also included ‘support for Israel’ as a seventh core issue: Concerned Women for America 2014, Our Issues, Washington, DC, viewed June 2014, <http://www.cwfa.org/about/issues/>.
Pornography is one of CWA’s six core issues and has been a focal point of the group’s activism since 1979. These six issues are what LaHaye believes are at the “front lines [of the] spiritual battle”, or the culture wars, in the United States (Morkert, 2008: 154). The group describes each issue as, at its root, a battle over worldviews.\(^{45}\)

**Table 1: Concerned Women for America**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition of Family</th>
<th>Sanctity of Life</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Religious Liberty</th>
<th>National Sovereignty</th>
<th>Pornography</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opposition to same-sex marriage and other rights for LGBTI individuals.</td>
<td>Opposition to all stages of legal abortion.</td>
<td>Abstinence-only sex education.</td>
<td>Opposition to perceived IRS bias against religious nonprofits.</td>
<td>Opposition to women in front-line combat positions and openly gay soldiers in the military.</td>
<td>Opposition to all forms of pornography, obscenity, prostitution and sex slavery.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion of heterosexual marriages and nuclear families.</td>
<td>Promotion of legislative initiatives designed to reduce abortion rates, e.g. pre-abortion ultrasounds.</td>
<td>Advocates home-schooling children.</td>
<td>Promotion of prayer in public schools.</td>
<td>Opposition to United Nations having any authority over the United States.</td>
<td>Promotion of enforced obscenity laws to regulate or prohibit pornography.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism of feminists trying to ‘redefine’ traditional family roles.</td>
<td>Opposition to most forms of birth control, HPV vaccine ‘Gardasil’, and stem cell research.</td>
<td>Promotes teaching creationism in public schools, critical of the teaching of evolution in biology.</td>
<td>Opposition to political leaders deemed ‘biblically hostile.’</td>
<td>Promotion of fiscally conservative policies and small government.</td>
<td>Support for political candidates and Supreme Court nominees who want to regulate pornography.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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A profile of Focus on the Family (FOF)

Beginning with a fifteen minute radio broadcast in 1977, FOF founder, Dr. James Dobson, cemented his role as an influential figure in America’s new wave of politicised religious fervour. Dr. Dobson’s reputation as an outspoken, uncompromising evangelist with a doctrinaire approach to the Bible has shepherded FOF to public prominence over the last forty years.

In 2011 an estimated 238 million people across 124 countries listened to one of FOF’s radio broadcasts. In addition, over thirteen million people emailed, wrote to, or phoned the organisation, and licensed counsellors working for the organisation gave advice to 75,000 individuals. Today the organisation is based in Colorado Springs, following a move by Dr. Dobson and his followers in 1991 who were persuaded by the promise of low taxes and cheap land. The racial homogeneity of the region’s nearly all-white population was an additional draw. Prior to the move, Dobson had run FOF out of Pomona, California as he had become increasingly bothered by the racial diversity in the city. His complaint being that non-whites brought with them “cultural ideas and religious ideas foreign to the traditional American view of life” (Blumenthal, 2009: 48).

The group’s headquarters house a welcome centre which has been attended by more than three million guests since its opening in 1994. The centre reflects the somewhat paranoid mistrust FOF has of the outside world, which it routinely refers to as “the culture”. Security cameras are strategically placed throughout the centre, and heavily armed security guards in bulletproof vests lurk in various locations, fearing unruly intruders from the secular world (p. Blumenthal, 2009: 51).

The relationship between Dr. Dobson and the Republican Party has been instrumental in determining the dynamic between the Christian Right and formal political institutions. Having campaigned at a grassroots level for family values issues to become a key national priority since the 1980s, the presidency of George W. Bush enabled a much closer alliance to form between Dobson and the White House. This was exemplified in 2002 when Dobson established a secretive committee of political and evangelical leaders in Washington, D.C., called the Arlington Group. The Arlington Group was set up by close associates Paul

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Weyrich and Don Wildmon, head of the American Family Association, and chaired by Dobson. It had been 21 years since a secretive and politically motivated evangelical group had last operated inside the Washington Beltway (Ryan and Switzer, 2009: 60). From the vantage point at the heart of America’s political power, Dobson and the Arlington Group were able to strategise and prepare for the 2004 presidential election, where issues like same-sex marriage and abortion would become key wedge issues, angrily dividing the populace and contributing to the increasing polarity among voters of similar economic fortune.

By driving a wedge between working people on these issues, Dobson and his allies were able to elevate previously insignificant social issues to the forefront of the mainstream political debate. Because abortion appealed to latent sexism, and gay rights to widespread homophobia, this narrative found its apotheosis in Republican politics.

During this time Dobson had a direct line to the White House. A Republican kingmaker, he had the ability to make or break rising conservative hopefuls through his multiple channels of influence reaching over 200 million people worldwide, and he often exercised this power. This was not without scrutiny, and in response to concerns about FOF’s political activities, the group expanded in 2004 by creating a political wing of the organisation, Focus on the Family Action, now called CitizenLink.

The 501(c)(4) tax designation of CitizenLink allowed the organisation to pursue more explicitly political activities (Scheitle, 2010: 84). Between 2002 and 2012 CitizenLink spent a total of $2,912,080 on ballot measures in a number of states, with their largest contributions directed at opposing same-sex marriage legislation. As FOF’s explicitly political arm, CitizenLink calls on adherents to ‘take action’ on a number of fronts. On the subject of pornography they have recoiled against Planned Parenthood for normalising and celebrating ‘deviant sexual behaviour’ by for example suggesting that bondage and sadomasochism can be mutually consensual if undertaken in a trusting relationship. CitizenLink urged adherents to contact their local representative and demand that Congress defund Planned Parenthood, an aim long-pursued by other social conservative groups and politicians in the United States.

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A pivotal milestone in Dobson’s career came when he was granted access to notorious serial killer Ted Bundy right before his execution on January 24, 1989. The material gleaned from the interview still informs the basis of much of FOF’s antipornography material today. Despite Bundy’s record, which included the rape and murder of at least thirty young women, he had undergone a spiritual transformation that impressed Dobson. Bundy laid out a riveting tale for Dobson of a boy living in a solid Christian home who was swept into the dark world of pornography after rummaging through garbage cans in the alleyways of his neighbourhood. Soon the devil took hold, and Bundy required increasingly violent pornography to feel aroused. When the pornography did not suffice, he moved on to real-life victims. It was a neatly packaged causal example of how pornography directly leads to violence.

That Bundy’s tale ended in a spiritual awakening and a repentance of past sins gave it the biblical edge Dobson’s followers craved. The interview was quickly turned into a VHS tape titled ‘Life on the Edge: Preparing for the Challenges of Adulthood’ which depicts Dobson in a room full of adolescents warning them that pornography exists to destroy their future marriages.49 Like the group’s other core issues, Dobson sees pornography as a form of spiritual warfare, designed by Satan to lead the world astray. “The heated dispute over values in Western nations is simply a continuation of the age-old struggle between principles of righteousness and the kingdom of darkness” Dobson wrote in a 1995 guest editorial for Christianity Today. Pornography is not a symptom of patriarchy to Dobson, but of a fallen world disobedient to Christ.

Under Dobson’s leadership, FOF was not known for compromise, coalition building, or careful rhetoric (Diamond, 1998: 2). Rather, Dobson was known to use militant, inflammatory rhetoric to get his point across. In a piece for the influential Policy Review magazine, published by the conservative think tank, the Heritage Foundation, Thomas Atwood (1990) scolded fundamentalists like Dobson for engaging in “spiritual warfare” with Americans. “[They] often came across as authoritarian, intolerant, and boastful, even to natural constituents” Atwood said of evangelical leaders. He urged them to “start building alliances” particularly with “political moderates sympathetic toward one or more of the Christian Right’s agenda.” Fast forward twenty years, and it seems Atwood’s plea has been

answered in the form of the toned-down, pro-woman, rights-based rhetoric evident in the group’s current antipornography discourse.

Dobson eventually stepped down as Chairman of FOF in 2009, having already handed over the presidency and CEO position to evangelist Jim Daly in 2005. Daly’s appointment in 2005 signified a shift in FOF’s mission towards a modernised, tempered version of its former self. Dobson had represented a greyed, antiquated version of the Christian Right which needed to broaden its appeal by resisting the ‘anti-everything image’ long conveyed by the movement (Hendershot, 2011: 209). There has been some speculation that Dobson was pushed out of FOF towards the end of his tenure because his style conflicted with FOF’s new direction, which was markedly less divisive. Writing for the right-wing website World Net Daily in 2010, Ken Hutcherson, a friend of Dobson’s, claimed that the current emphasis at FOF is to be “loved and understood” by the secular world. Hutcherson added that he is thoroughly unsatisfied with the ‘progressive’ new leadership at FOF, and hopes the group will return to Dobson’s more militant style of leadership.

Essential to the reimagined image of FOF under Daly is the willingness to adopt more mainstream positions on key issues. In 2010 Daly went so far as to extend his praise to President Obama as a positive example for African American fathers, applauded the president’s attention to the issue of human trafficking, and expressed a willingness to work with Democrats (Hendershot, 2011). Considering the intense unpopularity of President Obama among registered Republicans, Daly’s goodwill had its attendant risks.⁵⁰ Even in areas traditionally met with scorn by conservatives, such as government provision of social services, Daly has led a shift in rhetoric, choosing to adopt a more amenable stance as opposed to the reactive, attack dog tactics favoured by Dr. Dobson.

Under Daly’s leadership, FOF appears to be emulating the softer tactics of another evangelical group, the Christian Coalition of America. Unlike the Christian Coalition, who had built an inclusive, ecumenical organisation by tempering their language, Dobson’s former FOF was ideologically inflexible, seizing on politically divisive issues such as reproductive choice and gay rights to build its base of constituents. This is not to say that FOF has since converted into a progressive organisation, and indeed the political activities of

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⁵⁰ US-based polling company Gallup has described President Obama’s sharply divided approval rating among Democrats and Republicans as “historically polarising”. As of February 2015, just 9 percent of Republicans approved of the job the president was doing, compared to 79 percent of Democrats. See: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/181490/obama-approval-ratings-historically-polarized.aspx>
CitizenLink reveal an ongoing commitment to maintaining the ‘super sin’ status of same-sex marriage and abortion, at least covertly. However, the shift in tone reveals an inclination on the part of organisational actors to moderate what long seemed to be an uncompromising stance.

In a 2012 interview with Huffington Post, Daly claimed that the once vitriolic stance it took against abortion and same-sex marriage was a distraction, stating that “it’s fair to say we have concentrated on some things that have distracted from the main thing, which is the Gospel of Christ.” But rather than dismiss Dr. Dobson’s harsh tactics, Daly rationalises them by pointing to generational differences: “I think if I was born in the 30s with that Judeo-Christian culture and went through the 50s and 60s and saw what I perceived to be a dismantling of these things, I think I would have reacted the same way.” Daly adds “it would lead you to a venomous mentality. And I understand it. I don’t judge it” (Kaleem, 2012).

Indicative of the political consequences of acquiescing to a more centrist platform, as FOF has softened its hard line on controversial social issues, it has seen its donations gradually fall as well. Before Dr. Dobson left the group it hit a staff peak of 1,400 employees in 2002. In the last few years the group has had to let go almost 500 workers as donors have deserted the organisation. According to Charity Navigator, FOF’s primary revenue has fallen steadily from a 2009 figure of $124,223,898 to a 2012 figure of $81,972,759.51 This has happened under Jim Daly’s watch and could signify a backlash within the constituency to Daly’s more moderate vision, occurring at the same time as the American electorate is historically polarised and primed for battle.

Writing for the Huffington Post, Jaweed Kaleem (2012) posited that the tempered rhetoric is actually part of a long-term plan to broaden and diversify the group, eventually leading to an increase in donations. To maintain political relevance, FOF must be attuned to the growing support for same-sex marriage, particularly among young people. Daly’s willingness to work with political foes for a common cause was exemplified by his joining together with evangelical leaders in mid-2012 to urge Congress to pass immigration reform. Speaking on the action, David Fleming, senior pastor at Houston Baptist church described the moral urgency of immigration reform: “The people most affected by this current policy are not anonymous to us. We know their names and their faces […] we recognize their inherent value

and their great potential” (Foley, 2012). Among the principles for reform advocated by the leaders was a path to legal status and/or citizenship to those who qualify. Despite being a group historically seen as a politically obdurate handmaiden for the most dogmatic elements of the Republican Party, it has departed from its own playbook on multiple occasions in recent years.

In line with its new approach to immigration reform, and its easing off on the “super sin” rhetoric of homosexuality, pornography is another area where FOF is embracing a more inclusive approach and emphasising its commonalities with traditional opponents. Through an adoptive process that borrows from antiporn feminist discourse, the group is substituting its rigid, outdated position developed under its former leadership which focused more singularly on the sinful nature of pornography, to a position that more fully considers the threats to women’s rights and equality in the proliferation of pornographic material.

**Table 2: Focus on the Family**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Right to Life</th>
<th>Abstinence</th>
<th>Adoption</th>
<th>LGBT issues</th>
<th>Marriage</th>
<th>Pornography</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opposition to medical or surgical abortion from ‘the single cell stage of development’</td>
<td>Belief in abstaining from sex until marriage</td>
<td>Advocate preference in adoption placements be given to married, mother-father households.</td>
<td>Belief that sexual behaviour is moral only within the institution of heterosexual, monogamous marriage</td>
<td>Belief in the creation of two distinct sexes with complementary qualities</td>
<td>Belief that pornography is ‘highly addictive and destructive material that harms individuals, families and society’</td>
<td>Advocacy for home-schooling to enhance opportunities for intensive biblical lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for federal and state legislation placing limits and restrictions on abortion</td>
<td>Claims pre-marital sex causes a myriad of emotional and physical illnesses</td>
<td>Support for laws that prevent adoption by cohabiting couples, including homosexual couples</td>
<td>Belief that same-sex attracted persons ‘can and do change their sexual identity’</td>
<td>Support for the Marriage Protection Amendment which defines marriage as between one man and one woman</td>
<td>Support for individualised efforts by parents to prevent their children from accessing pornography</td>
<td>Advocacy for the teaching of Bible studies in public schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition to Intrauterine Devices (IUDs) and other ‘abortifacient’ methods of birth control</td>
<td>Opposition to sex education which provides information beyond abstinence-only.</td>
<td>Advocacy for adoption as an alternative to abortion</td>
<td>Support for reparative therapy for same-sex attracted persons.</td>
<td>Support for abolishing taxes that burden families such as the ‘marriage penalty’</td>
<td>Support for legislative and enforcement actions to protect individuals and society from pornography</td>
<td>Scrutiny of education reforms requiring an increase in taxation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A profile of Eagle Forum (EF)

Long before EF was founded in 1975, its creator, Phyllis Schlafly, had been ascending in prominence, securing her place as a key spokesperson for a powerful conservative movement. Schlafly’s life has been both an embodiment of true woman principles, and at the same time, a glaring indictment of its ethos.

In 1949, when Schlafly was twenty-five, she married wealthy corporate attorney John Fred Schlafly, fifteen years her senior (Kolbert, 2005). At age twenty-six she had her first of six children, an achievement routinely emphasised by her conservative allies. Despite the challenges of balancing motherhood and work outside the home, a combination Schlafly writes profusely and suspiciously about in the monthly *Phyllis Schlafly Report*, Schlafly embraced the challenge. In 1952 she ran for Congress in Illinois, campaigning on an anti-communist platform which warned of the spectre of communism, which at the time was ideologically advancing in democratic countries. According to Schlafly’s biographer, her campaign was motivated by the belief that communism was the “most important problem facing America” as it represented an ungodly, collectivist ideology at odds with all that America stood for (Critchlow, 2005: 73). Despite losing her Congressional bid to Democrat Charles Melvin Price, Schlafly remained a prominent figure within the political Right, travelling the state giving speeches on behalf of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and conducting research for Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy as he ruthlessly pursued communists (p. 71). Schlafly has downplayed her early political ambitions, dismissing them as mere “hobbies” and maintaining that she was a “full time homemaker for 25 years.”

In many ways Schlafly’s life has resembled that of the ideal feminist archetype. By all accounts Schlafly was an outstanding student, earning a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Political Science and graduating with honours, among them a Phi Beta Kappa key, from Washington University, St. Louis after achieving mostly “A’s” throughout her degree. Critchlow (2005) writes that after finishing her degree in three years she applied, and was accepted to, Harvard University where she received a Master of Arts in Government from Radcliffe College in 1945. Many years later, in 1978, Schlafly went on to earn a J.D. from Washington University Law School in St. Louis.

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Within her family Schlafly witnessed her mother enter the labour market in order to keep the family afloat after her father entered long-term unemployment during the Depression (Ehrenreich, 1983: 152). Schlafly was exposed to factors which would transform many young women into ardent feminists. Cummings (2009) believes Schlafly’s resistance to the women’s movement stems from her bonds to Catholicism which engendered a deep suspicion of “radical” feminist causes, namely the pro-choice movement (p. 193).

Schlafly’s assumption that a career in public office was possible for a wife and mother is a belief long championed by the feminist cause. Fellow conservative Margaret Thatcher, who served eleven years as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom throughout the 1980s, had a career which embodied the principles of feminism, but she refused to give the movement credit for her success, defiantly stating: “I owe nothing to women’s lib” (Thatcher in Holehouse, 2013). New World City (2011) describes Thatcher in a biography of her life as a ‘nascent feminist’ in her early years in political life, “Although she would deny it vehemently” (p. 2). Harding (1991) argues that it is politically important to reserve the label of feminist for women who work to improve women’s lives (p. 279), which would exclude women such as Phyllis Schlafly, Margaret Thatcher, Marabel Morgan, and Helen Andelin whose politics is rooted in preserving male dominance in social, political, economic, and legal institutions. As Harding asserts, “biology is not enough to make Marabel Morgan or Margaret Thatcher feminists” and not enough to inspire such tendencies in Schlafly either.

A critical breakthrough in Schlafly’s public profile came about in 1964 when she wrote her first book, A Choice, Not an Echo, on a standard typewriter from her home in Alton, Illinois. This early work differed quite considerably in subject matter from the issues which would eventually shape her activism. A Choice, Not an Echo detailed Schlafly’s view that the liberal “Rockefeller Republican” wing of the Republican Party had manipulated the Republican Party’s choice of nominees in several elections to nominate individuals like Wendell Willkie and Dwight Eisenhower. Schlafly urged conservatives to rally against the liberal wing and offer a true conservative for the nomination, which at the time was Arizona senator Barry Goldwater.

A Choice, Not an Echo went on to sell three million copies and is credited by some with helping Goldwater win the Republican nomination that same year (Critchlow, 2005: 109). Schlafly’s position in conservative politics as a vehicle for the restoration of the right of the
Republican Party was cemented by the success of the campaign book, and would serve as a
launching pad for her years of political activism ahead.

In the years that followed the publication of *A Choice, Not an Echo*, Schlafly served as
president of the National Federation of Republican Women where she continued to develop a
reputation as a formidable political organiser, bringing to the movement grassroots organising
skills that had too often eluded the corporate leaders allied with the Republican Party.

The true strength of Schlafly’s organising skills were fully realised in the decade that
followed. In 1972 she declared a war on the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), and henceforth
abandoned a broader debate on socialism in favour of a single-issue mission: defeating the
ERA. In a DVD titled “Doing the Impossible: Defeating the ERA” obtained from the group’s
Education Centre in St. Louis, Missouri, Schlafly details how the once immensely popular
amendment was brought to its knees by the formation of Schlafly’s remarkably successful
STOP ERA campaign, which mobilised thousands of women from a broad range of churches.

The group first mobilised when Schlafly invited 100 of her newsletter subscribers to meet her
in St. Louis in 1972. After a lengthy discussion, the large group rode a bus down to the St.
Louis riverfront and there Schlafly instructed the new movement to become strong
conservative leaders in their communities. Evangelical women took up the cause from the
Church of Christ, Southern Baptist, and fundamentalist independent churches. But Mormons,
Orthodox Jews, and Roman Catholic women were mobilised too. Carolyn Gallagher (2004)
states that the indelible presence of Phyllis Schlafly at the forefront of the anti-ERA
campaign is an interesting case study in and of itself, given that Schlafly was a Catholic
operating in a movement which has long been unified in its opposition to Catholicism.
Schlafly softens the potential repercussions of this by strongly promoting conservative social
causes within a nondenominational organisation, having the ironic effect of attracting
Protestant and anti-Catholic adherents, securing its place in the Religious Right (p. 45).

In describing the difficulties Schlafly initially had in convincing Americans to oppose to
the ERA, she asserts that “we didn’t have any friendly radio and TV talk show hosts. Everyone
was hostile. There was no Rush Limbaugh talking about the feminazis. There was no Fox
News to give balanced news and let the audience decide […] from the get-go we had to fight
the semantics and the momentum.”

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53 *Doing the Impossible: Defeating the ERA* 2007, DVD, Eagle Forum education center, St. Louis, Missouri.
battleground dealt directly with the perceived privileges of being regarded as the more vulnerable sex. Whether women would be drafted into military combat and whether women would lose certain legal rights, such as the right of a wife to be supported by her husband, were of principal concern.

The most public advocates of the ERA were Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan, two women who embodied the coryphaeus of feminism and the ideological opposites of Schlafly’s followers. At Illinois State University in 1973, Schlafly and Friedan had their first public debate. During the exchange Friedan famously lost her temper with Schlafly, accusing her of betraying her own sex and asserting that she would like to burn Schlafly at the stake (Critchlow, 2005). Harlan Ellison, another ERA supporter, said on television that “if Phyllis Schlafly walked into the headlights of my car, I would knock her into the next time zone” (in Mooney, 2012: 137). Angry outbursts like these played perfectly into the hands of the anti-ERA campaign, reifying the Right’s notion that feminism is chiefly an expression of latent anger and embitterment.

Stop ERA was a unique campaign in many respects, not least because it marked the first time in the twentieth century that women across the faith spectrum were being introduced to the larger conservative movement by social issues, rather than anticommunism (Critchlow, 2005: 220). This new focus on social issues would go on to define mainstream Republican politics for the next forty years, and indeed still dominates the debates within the movement today, exemplified by the intense focus on where candidates stand on issues such as same-sex marriage, immigration reform, and reproductive choice in the 2015-2016 presidential election cycle.

The Stop ERA campaign later evolved into what is today known as Eagle Forum. The group now boasts 80,000 members and describes itself as “the most effective national organization of […] men and women who share conservative and pro-family values.”

Much like CWA, EF produces briefing books and summations of issues for regular release to constituents. Schlafly also produces a weekly column of some 700 words in which she draws attention to a particular issue. As of December 2013, EF’s ‘spotlight topic’ was Common Core, the name given to a decision by the Obama administration to impose a set of national standards on public schools. Other topics regularly covered deal with the demise of the

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nuclear family, the over assertion of power by the Obama administration, and the supposed
tendency for the Obama administration to capitulate to feminist demands.

EF differs from CWA and FOF on a number of fronts. It is smaller, both in the number of
members and the size of its staff. It is of course led by Schlafly, who is much older than
CWA’s president Penny Young Nance and FOF’s president Jim Daly. This has a bearing on
the tactics and rhetoric used by the group, which true to its conservative roots does not
concern itself as much with staying abreast of the rapidly evolving opinions of the American
public. Indeed Schlafly’s recently published writing relies heavily on outmoded stereotypes,
such as her claim in an April 15, 2014 piece for the *Christian Post* that women prefer clean
working environments equipped with air conditioning and thus refuse to do the dirtier work
which pays more, befalling a wage gap between the sexes.55

Schlafly’s work on pornography has spanned many decades and has at certain junctures
brought both her rhetoric and campaigning in line with antiporn feminists. I spent a week at
EF’s Education Centre in St. Louis, Missouri in February 2014 and had the opportunity to
meet with Schlafly to discuss her current position on pornography, as well as her thoughts on
where conservatives and feminists agree on pornography, and why some of her political allies
have borrowed from feminist discourse.

It is important to note that the features of Schlafly’s antipornography activism are unique to
the social and political context of the 1960s and 1970s, and have not evolved in style or
substance in any significant way. As Daniel K. Williams writes in the book *God’s Own
Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (2010), the Christian Right’s moral panic
concerning the proliferation of pornographic material arose in response to a number of
cultural trends emerging in the United States. The divorce rate between 1965 and 1975
doubled, the out-of-wedlock birth rate increased by fifty percent, marriage and birth rates
decreased, and abortion rates increased. Moreover, the X-rated film *Deep Throat* (1972)
became a blockbuster hit, and signs of an incipient push for further recognition of women’s
rights were stirring with the mobilisation of the women’s liberation movement.

The Christian Right needed a villain, and hence, the burgeoning spectre of feminism provided
an ideal impetus. Feminism threatened to undermine family hierarchy by encouraging women

55 Schlafly, P 2014, *Facts and fallacies about paycheck fairness*, April 15, Christian Post, viewed June 2014,
to question their role within the family and whether it was, indeed, inevitable. Schlafly reacted sharply to the prospects of a feminist awakening, using her striking intellect and confident public persona to arrest the winds of change.

**Table 3: Eagle Forum**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constitution</th>
<th>Health/Life issues</th>
<th>Courts</th>
<th>Immigration</th>
<th>Family, Fathers, Feminism</th>
<th>Jobs, economy</th>
<th>Globalism vs. Sovereignty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supports the right of Americans to own firearms</td>
<td>Opposition to the Patient Protection and Affordable Car Act</td>
<td>Opposition to ‘tyrannical’ judges seeking to take over powers of the other branches of government</td>
<td>Advocates significantly reducing America’s refugee intake</td>
<td>Supportive of women’s role as ‘fulltime homemakers’</td>
<td>Advocates significantly cutting the size and scope of government</td>
<td>Supports a more isolationist, protectionist America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment</td>
<td>Opposed to legalised abortion and abortifacient contraception</td>
<td>Opposition to judicial activism</td>
<td>Supports Donald J. Trump’s proposition of a temporary ban on all Muslims entering the United States</td>
<td>Argues that the Family Court system unfairly discriminates against fathers’ rights</td>
<td>Opposed to investing money in the ‘green economy’</td>
<td>Critical of free trade agreements the United States has entered into</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to attempts by progressives to change aspects of the Constitution</td>
<td>Anti-vaccination, particularly with respect to the cervical cancer and Hepatitis B vaccines</td>
<td>Upholding the Founding Fathers vision of a restrained judiciary</td>
<td>Supports putting the promise to build a wall between Mexico and the United States in the official Republican Party platform</td>
<td>Argues that the assertion that American women earn 77 cents for every dollar men make is a ‘feminist fallacy’ based on flawed logic</td>
<td>Blames high government spending and free trade for high unemployment</td>
<td>Believes global warming is a lie invented by political elites to reduce Americans standard of living</td>
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Analysis and discussion

Feminist terminology for antifeminist ends

A number of years after Schlafly founded EF, and the ERA she strongly opposed had been defeated, she wrote a book detailing the testimonies from the Attorney General’s Commission on Pornography and titled it *Pornography’s Victims* (1987). In the introduction, Schlafly highlights how the strong arm of the law comes down on material depicting abuse against ‘blacks, or Jews, or Native Americans, or children’, she then asks:

> Why, then, are these acts not likewise against the law when the group targeted for rape, assault, battering, degradation, humiliation, or other abuse is women? Can these things be socially acceptable just because women are the victims? (p. 10)

In her earlier work *The Power of the Positive Woman* (1977) Schlafly again reverted to feminist terminology to emphasise her point, describing pornography “as the most sexist activity of all” (p. 158). The explicit use of feminist terms to describe pornography is perhaps indicative of the period of soul-searching the Republican Party was undergoing with respect to women’s rights in the 1970s. Catherine Rymph (2006) notes that the influence of feminism was felt widely during this decade, leading even Republican women to engage with a wide range of feminist causes (p. 234). Republican women were particularly open to their party pragmatically incorporating women’s rights principles analogous to economic liberalism into their platform, such as facilitating women’s access to paid work. Schlafly knew her audience was receptive to the framing of pornography as sexist at the time.

However, after Ronald Reagan rose to political prominence in the late 1970s following his governorship of California, the Republican Party embraced an explicitly conservative position on social issues. The party shifted from an almost exclusive focus on economic and foreign policy for much of the twentieth century, to an agenda which prioritised social issues. An October 1980 issue of *Conservative Digest* captures the period of transition the movement was in at the time:

> The New Right shares the same basic beliefs of other conservatives in economic and foreign policy matters, but we feel that conservatives cannot become the dominant political force in America until we stress the issues of concern to ethnic and blue-collar Americans, born-again Christians, pro-life Catholics and Jews. Some of these
issues are busing, abortion, pornography, education, traditional Biblical moral values and quotas (p. 11).

Social scientists tend to rely on two interrelated theories to explain the New Right’s emphasis on social issues. The first holds that right-wing movements must tether the social classes together by combining economic conservatism, which appeals to the higher strata, with social conservatism, which appeals to the lower strata (Lipset and Raab, 1978). The other theory posits that as the United States evolves away from an industrial economy to a knowledge economy where an increasing number of jobs require a university education, the social classes reverse their political positions on social issues. In other words, as the upper-middle class becomes more educated, it assumes a more open-minded, permissive stance on issues such as gay rights, abortion, and liberalising drug laws. In contrast, lower-middle and working class Americans, reacting to the perceived elitism of educated, successful liberals – the ‘oppositional intelligentsia’ – are receptive to conservative political figures who argue that the intelligentsia are out of touch with the values of ordinary Americans (Frank, 2004).

This changing dynamic made feminism less palatable to many working class Americans, as it too came to be associated with an intelligentsia. “[…] the environmental and feminist movements – were dominated by members of the professional middle class and by college students, most of whom were preparing for professional occupations” asserts Brint (1984: 31). As a result, feminism became an effective wedge issue throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and religious right-wing leaders like Schlafly became much more explicit in their hatred of feminism at the same time as they were aping the language of antiporn feminism. Schlafly’s more recent 2003 book Feminist Fantasies, a thorough rebuke of what Schlafly believes has been the damaging effect feminism has had on the institution of marriage, masculinity, the workplace, and child-rearing, is evidence of the intensification of Schlafly’s antifeminism.

The Republican Party’s abrupt withdrawal of support for the ERA in 1980, an amendment the party had endorsed since the 1940s – likely on the grounds that the ERA could dismantle protective labour legislation – signified the reorientation of the party around new principles of social conservatism (Rymph, 2006: 81). These changes were also reactionary, and “reflected the immediate historical moment” (Himmelstein, 1983: 28). With the Supreme Court ruling in favour of a woman’s right to access abortion in 1973; an increase in affirmative action programs; and the evolution of the women’s movement from its formation
in Christian ethics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, into a manifestly radical movement by the 1970s, determined the emphasis on social conservatism in that decade.

Although never explicitly endorsing the feminist position, EF kept borrowing from feminist rhetoric throughout the rise of the New Right and Christian Right in the 1970s and ‘80s. This was exemplified during one of EF’s conferences held on September 27, 1986 in St. Louis, Missouri. The speakers, Andrea Vangor and Leanne Metzger, point to a problematic stereotype in pornography while underlining the logic of antiporn feminism:

Rape is portrayed in pornography as if it’s the woman’s fault […] these people [women] are not quite human, they’re not like you, they don’t have feelings, and besides, they ask for it. They want it. They deserve it. That is the message of pornography – the feminists are quite right, they are quite right about that.

This characterisation echoes section (c) of the antiporn feminist definition of pornography outlined in the 1983 ordinance, that pornography presents women as sexual objects who experience sexual pleasure in being raped. The admission that ‘feminists are quite right’ about the relationship between pornography and rape reveals an understanding on the part of EF that antiporn feminists have established a theory of pornography with precepts that resonate with the Christian Right.

This perspective was again underscored during a conference held by EF in St. Louis on domestic violence where conservative activist Barbara Hattemer argued that pornography “encourages male aggression by showing women giving in to force and enjoying it […] thus perpetuating the myth that women want to be abused and raped.”56 In a similar criticism of the normalisation of sexual violence in pornography, FOF authors Gene McConnell and Keith Campbell argue that the material ‘eroticizes rape and makes it arousing’ by showing women being ‘raped, fighting and kicking at first, and then starting to like it.’57 CWA believes the themes of violence and coercion in pornography will unquestionably lead viewers to commit acts of sexual violence because “they are more likely to rape”.58 EF echoes this line of argument in a 2012 article citing Thomas Schiro and Ted Bundy as

extreme cases of pornography-fuelled violence. Schiro obsessively took pornography with him to the scenes of all his crimes, including the final one that included the necrophilic rape and murder of 28-year-old Laura Luebbehusen. Bundy murdered at least 30 women and girls in seven states in the United States between 1974 and 1978 and during an interview with FOF founder Dr. James Dobson, Bundy described how pornography had aroused in him feelings and ideas that became impossible to contain and were eventually acted out on. In the article, EF use Schiro and Bundy as examples of how men with a predisposition to sexual aggression may feel compelled to act on these impulses as a result of using violent pornography. For sexually aggressive men “pornography likely results in fantasies that they are only too likely to act out” and this is a risk we should not be willing to take.

The feminist case against pornography has tried to draw out the connections between pornography and rape. During the pornography civil rights hearings in Minneapolis, Dr. Pauline Bart testified that pornography fuels male sexual violence. Bart had spent a decade studying rape and rape avoidance and had spoken to forty-three women who had been victimised. It was Bart’s contention that the “ideology of pornography” says that women enjoy forced sex and enjoy forced pain. Men are not born believing that women enjoy rape, she said, but pornography educates them (MacKinnon and Dworkin, 1998: 73). The Christian Right groups’ adoption of the rape frame is a shift away from the child-focused, obscenity-oriented critiques typically associated with the Christian Right’s position on sexual politics.

Whitney Strub (2010) argues in her book Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right that the Christian Right’s increasing focus on adult pornography into the twenty-first century, where they had previously favoured an imperilled children frame, was indicative of their greater political assertiveness during the George W. Bush years (p. 286). The movement had a new and dynamic strength, allowing leaders to more effectively tackle difficult policy areas. By the 2000s the new Christian Right had been building political capital for more than two decades, and broadening their discourse to incorporate women’s right language, demonstrating a show of strength from a movement willing to venture into hostile political terrain.

In addition to pointing out how pornography normalises rape, the groups habitually borrow from feminist rhetoric to describe the way in which pornography transforms women into

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objects. Dworkin and MacKinnon outlined this problem in the ordinance in section (a),
defining pornography as material which presents women as dehumanised sexual objects,
things or commodities. Glenn Stanton of FOF makes this case in a 2004 article for the group,
stressing that pornography “dehumanizes sexuality and depersonalizes people by turning the
viewer into a taker and the one viewed into an object.” The danger, Stanton argues, is that we
start to see others in our lives the same way we see the object in the pornographic material,
“as a nobody, a thing that exists for our pleasure.”60 In a 2010 CWA podcast on children’s
exposure to pornography, Janice Shaw Crouse underlines the objectifying effect of
pornography, and also decries the representation of women in pornography as unequal to
men:

In pornography women are objects, they are not people with feelings, they are not
people who are due respect, they are not people who are equal to men, instead they’re
objects to be abused, they’re objects to be used.61

The reference to equality indicates that Crouse regards the perception that CWA supports
equality between the sexes as politically important. Given that the Christian Right strongly
abides by an Order of Creation narrative – teaching adherents that male headship and female
submission honours the Lord – the adoption of a feminist equality frame shows the group’s
willingness to extend the margins of their discourse beyond traditionally delineated
boundaries.

The groups’ entwine the notion that pornography both objectifies and degrades women.
Degradation is a concept that has resonance with proponents of sexual purity as it evokes
notions of the spoiled woman. In other words, that nonmarital sex diminishes the quality or
value of a woman.

CWA’s Janice Shaw Crouse describes pornography as laden with ‘hard-core degradation’
depicting ‘horrific objectification of girls and women.’62 Here, the reference to degradation
reassures adherents that sexual purity is still at the essence of the group’s antipornography

60 Stanton, G 2004, How we dishonor God in our sex lives, Focus on the Family, Colorado Springs, viewed
dishonor-god-in-our-sex-lives>.
61 Concerned Women for America 2010, One third of children view online porn by age 10, Washington, DC,
62 Crouse, J 2010, Pornography is addictive, pervasive and harmful, Concerned Women for America,
Washington, DC, viewed February 2014, <http://www.cwfa.org/pornography-is-addictive-pervasive-and-
harmful/>.
agenda. Frequent references to the way pornography degrades women undermines a potentially more radical interpretation of the groups’ position.

EF also demonstrated this amalgamation of feminist and conservative language during a 1983 conference in Cincinnati. One of the founders of Morality in Media spoke, stating that “pornography cruelly strips woman bare of every vestige of her dignity, leaving her lying discarded as a useless object. Woman is used and abused in ways I cannot even mention here.” The speaker clarifies, claiming that by degradation he means “woman is no longer a person, but an animal.”

FOF uses essentialising language to stress the point that pornography objectifies women. In a 2009 piece, Paul Coughlin writes that biologically speaking, men are ‘the more visually inclined gender’ who are easily seduced into delusional beliefs by sexual imagery. This delusion leads men to believe ‘the object can be possessed’.

Women become a commodity, a point Jim Daly reiterates in a 2014 piece on sex trafficking and the Super Bowl. The objectification point here is clear, but the rhetoric is attenuated by a nod to the traditional framework of sexual purity and biological determinism.

Degradation was an important and emotive political symbol for temperance activists, precipitating the rise of early feminism and shaping how subsequent movements framed threats to women. One of the most visible and outspoken supporters of temperance, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, used the symbolic power of the degraded woman to agitate for enhancing women’s legal and political rights. While other temperance reformers saw alcohol as the primary source of women’s oppression, Cady Stanton drew the connection between women’s economic dependence on drunkard husbands and their meagre economic autonomy, which as Davis (2008) writes, was “the deeper cause of women’s degradation” (p. 90). Only through the right to vote could women bring about legislation to restrict the sale of liquor, thereby bringing the soft womanly virtues that held the home together into the public sphere. This early infusion of a moral plea with women’s rights language is a rhetorical feature that has been taken up by CWA, FOF, and EF.


CWA leaders Brenda Zurita and Janice Shaw Crouse (2012) also engage with unambiguously feminist terms, whether claiming that “misogyny” (the hatred of women) is commonplace in pornography,66 or that “sexism” was behind an article written for Playboy.com in which conservative women deemed attractive were chosen for what the author offensively termed “hate rape.”67

The dehumanisation of women is a theme repeated in CWA’s material on pornography, lifted from a civil rights narrative which challenges social exclusion based on unfair distributions of power. However, before the reader can be convinced that CWA has fully adopted the feminist tool book, the authors warn:

> We must also consider the moral and ethical dimensions — what are the ramifications of treating a woman as an object and violating the God-given purpose of sexual relations between a husband and wife? The harms to specific individuals are multiplied by the offense against natural law, morality, and Biblical mandates for human interaction.

Here we see a convergence of the feminist notion of objectification with the biblical belief that sex must be confined to the parameters of a marriage. The actual physical, psychological and social harms of pornography are intensified, or “multiplied” as the authors say, by a specific set of moral teachings within Christian fundamentalism. Women’s rights language has been appropriated in the service of the patriarchal family – warning adherents that marriage is at stake as a consequence of pornography.

**Making sense of innate male aggression**

The assumption that men have a natural predisposition to violence is a view shared by those on the Christian Right and antiporn feminists alike, enabling the groups to mimic feminist discourse on pornography without getting too far out of their rhetorical comfort zone. A prominent theme in the groups’ antipornography material is that of inevitable male anger, most threatening when it materialises during sex. This theme has resonance across the spectrum, for moral reformists and antiporn feminists alike.

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This theme was at the heart of the push by temperance activists to frame female contraceptives as tools which entice uncontrollable male lust. In 1873 Frances Willard and Elizabeth Blackwell led a purity crusade that made the suppression of birth control information a major plank in their agenda (Rothman, 1978: 82). They supported legislation defining contraceptive information as “obscene material”, and by the 1920s the distribution of such information was illegal in almost all jurisdictions in the United States. Willard and Blackwell’s objection to the distribution of contraceptive information they deemed ‘obscene’ was based on the presupposition that “the male was a savage beast who would subvert and corrupt women in order to satisfy his animal impulses” (p. 82).

It was believed that widely available contraception would allow men to indulge all his lusts while free of the responsibilities of child-rearing. In other words, contraception would turn women into ‘a slave to her husband’s desires’ (p. 82). There are parallels here with MacKinnon’s 1987 interpretation of legalised abortion, which she argued “does not liberate women” but instead “frees male sexual aggression.” Dworkin (1983) saw the willingness of left-wing men to enthusiastically support legalised abortion as a sign of trouble: “It was the brake that pregnancy put on fucking that made abortion a high-priority political issue for men in the 1960s” (p. 94). Both positions assume either innate or deeply socially conditioned male sexual aggression, and anything granting men greater access to a woman’s body will abet harmful treatment of her.

Ellen Willis, one of the leaders of the ‘pro-sex’ feminist movement, compared the rise of antiporn feminism in the 1980s with the temperance movement, and asserted that feminist critiques of pornography ‘reinforced right-wing propaganda’. In a related context, Willis (1983) explained that the antiporn feminist assumption of innate male aggression undermined feminist theory and practice more broadly:

Whatever its intent, the effect of feminists’ emphasis on controlling male sexuality – particularly when that emphasis is combined with a neo-Victorian view of women’s nature and the conviction that securing women’s safety from male aggression should be the chief priority of the women’s movement – is to undercut feminist opposition to the right. It provides powerful reinforcement for conservative efforts to manipulate women’s fear of untrammelled male sexuality, intimidating women into stifling their own impulses toward freedom so as to cling to what little protection the traditional roles still offer (p. 30).
While both antiporn feminists and the Christian Right assume innate male aggression, the right essentialises the response, and calls on women to submit to male power. The feminist response is one of resistance – to unwanted sexual advances from men, and in the form of political lesbianism, to men entirely.

FOF’s Dr Juli Slattery takes the typically essentialist position and invokes God to naturalise male sexual impulsivity, reminding women that their role is in managing this inevitability: “While acknowledging that sex is a huge force in your husband’s life, don’t neglect the fact that God created that force for your use as well.”68 Male sexuality is ultimately the responsibility of women. Just as women entice and lead men to sin, women abate sin tendency by moderating their own behaviour. The burden is always hers. Dr Slattery makes this viewpoint clear, stating how, “just as twisted women are able to pull men into sin, virtuous women can use the influence of sex to call men to morality, love, and godliness.”69 Finally, in a shrewd reframing of submission as power, Dr Slattery tells women that pornography cannot replace them as their husband’s ‘teammate’ and ‘confidante’ because “This is your place; this is your power; this is your gift.”70

In another FOF article from 2008, the author reasons that marriage has numerous social benefits, one being that it inspires women to socialise men into channelling their sexual aggression in socially productive ways.71 The assumption is that male sexual aggression is inevitable, but can be assuaged by a civilising force like marriage. Andrea Dworkin argued that the Christian Right offers women a sense of structure and safety within predetermined roles. “The Right promises to put enforceable restraints on male aggression, thus simplifying survival for women.” So long as a woman devotes herself to wifely duties, she will be rewarded with her husband’s protection and economic support (in Berlet and Lyons, 2000: 232).

In a further endorsement of the notion of innate male aggression, a 2006 issue of EF’s *The Phyllis Schlafly Report* derided feminist groups who were pushing for further inclusion of women in the American military. In Schlafly’s view, such a development would ‘feminise’ the military and effectively emasculate the male soldiers whose dominator, risk-taking, aggressor instincts would be softened by the passivity and timidity of their female counterparts (Schlafly, 2006). Despite asserting the inevitability of male aggression and calling on women to redirect their husband’s energy into something beneficial, the groups present a contradictory set of claims when specifically addressing pornography.

While sexual aggression is something women are called to tolerate and placate within a marriage, it is entirely unacceptable when played out in a pornographic context. This is where the groups reach for feminist arguments. Arguing that pornography is incompatible with family values, EF published an article in 2012 stating that because men are “prone to sexual aggression” they are at great risk of acting out on the acts they witness in pornography. Framing male aggression as good and inevitable in certain contexts, but dangerous and uncontainable in others, is a contradiction reflective of the broader set of conflicting narratives in right-wing antipornography discourse. The co-existence of a hierarchical Order of Creation narrative alongside an egalitarian, rights-based, pro-woman narrative reveals the extent to which the groups are attempting to reconcile the widely held belief, including among evangelicals, that certain behavioural characteristics such as aggression are hard-wired in men, with increasing public intolerance for violence against women.

The same assumption that it is a woman’s duty to moderate the wayward behaviour of men underpinned nineteenth-century writing on marriage in the temperance period. Following the Civil War, wives had a new and urgent responsibility to civilise their husbands by curbing their ‘animal’ instincts (Rothman, 1978: 22). One female writer insisted in 1886 that “few women understand at the outset that in marrying, they have simply captured a wild animal […] the taming of which is to be the life work of the woman who has taken him in charge” (Haller and Haller, 1977). More than just taming her husband, women were tasked with taming society, and feminising an entire culture through the power of purification and unselfish devotion that only woman possessed.

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The porn addicted husband, like the drunkard husband, represents an inversion of the role of
the middle class male, that of protector of the home. Pornography and alcohol, as with other
forms of vice, arouse in men a latent aggression that puts wives and girlfriends at most
immediate threat. One infraction easily leads to another. Liberal defenders of pornography do
not make the same instinctive connection that antiporn feminists and the Christian Right do
between sexualised violence in pornography and women’s increased risk of abuse in the
home.

This position is tested most forcefully on the issue of sadomasochism in pornography, a
practice specifically intended to transgress the boundaries between sex and violence. Despite
being predicated on the eroticisation of power asymmetry and bodily injury, liberal advocates
of sadomasochism insist that it is consensual, and that violence can only be present where
consent does not exist (Truscott, 1991). Pat Califia (1994), who has long defended
sadomasochistic practices in pornography, disagrees with the assumption that violence is an
inherently male phenomenon, stating in Public Sex that “Dworkin and many other members
of the antipornography movement define […] maleness as violence.”

Indeed, Dworkin stated during a speech at San Francisco’s Galileo High School in 1978 that
“sex and murder are fused in male consciousness” and asserted that for men, the destruction
of women’s bodies is intrinsic to their arousal. Califia accuses Dworkin of exaggerating the
threat to women, “I resent attempts like this to distort my perceptions of reality and make me
unduly afraid.” Califia admits to not knowing why men become rapists, but whatever the
reason, pornography is ruled out by Califia as a realistic cause (p. 111).

Antiporn feminists and the Christian Right both make the essentialising assumption that
women have nothing to do with violence, that they have no access to violent practice, “actual
physical brutality, or discursive violence directed towards others” (Lentz, 1993). Violence is
specifically the domain of the masculine. In the antiporn feminist attempts to capture the
ways in which systems interlock to make sexual violence far more complex in its effects on
women’s lives (Berlin Ray, 1996), they have formulated a narrative based on intrinsic female
goodness and innate male badness that can be easily misappropriated by the Christian Right.

A female essence

In their discourse on pornography, the groups construct a notion of female ‘essence’. Women
are believed to be more emotional and relational than men, who are supposed to be primarily
logical and visual. FOF’s Dr Slattery explains men’s use of pornography with this essentialist dualism:

A woman’s sexual desire is far more connected to emotions than her husband’s sex drive is. A man can experience sexual arousal apart from any emotional attachment. He can look at a naked woman and feel intense physical desire for her, while at the same time he may be completely devoted to and in love with his wife.73

When a woman is the one using pornography, FOF stresses that she is going against nature, because ‘she is being the initiator, she is the one seeking it out’. Men’s use of pornography is justified or excused by the naturalisation of male sexual aggression, but for women there is no such relief.

The debate on women possessing a ‘female essence’ is located in the way social science developed to examine whether males and females have essential sets of attributes linked to their sex at birth, or whether these attributes develop in response to a social construction of gender. Mead’s 1928 study on coming of age in Samoa was the first study to examine the theory of gender as socially constructed from a cross-cultural perspective. Although Mead’s study used questionable methods and was subsequently challenged (Freeman, 1992), it nevertheless represented a paradigm shift away from assumptions about essential and immutable differences between men and women.

The distinctly separate roles set out for men and women fostered a sexual antagonism that preceded the subsequent first and second waves of feminism. As Epstein (1981) asserts, everything WCTU did was informed by a commitment to what were perceived as in the interests of women and by an antagonism to what was seen as a masculine culture (p. 125). This attitude even manifested in WCTU’s efforts on prostitution. Despite the extreme taboo of prostitution at the time, WCTU pushed for laws to prosecute men who profited from prostitution, while maintaining an attitude of sympathy for prostituted women themselves, as long as they regarded the institution as evil (p. 126). The women of Iowa WCTU secured a law requiring that “men who frequent the haunts kept by degraded women shall be punished as felons” (in Epstein, 1981: 126). This position has notable parallels with the Nordic model.

on prostitution first established in Sweden in 1999 and later adopted by Norway and Iceland, with versions also being implemented in France and Canada. The Nordic model criminalises the purchase of sex, but legalises the selling of sex. The law is premised on a commitment to women’s rights rather than moral anxiety (Förbud mot köp av sexuell tjänst: en utvärdering 1999-2008). The belief that men’s proclivity for sexual aggression precludes the possibility of a mutually safe and consensual sex contract is evident in both the conservative and antiporn feminist interpretations of prostitution.

However, there is an important distinction between the views of the Christian Right and antiporn feminists on this question of male and female essence. Antiporn feminists reject any conflation of gender with sex. Sex is defined as the “anatomical and physiological differences of males and females” and gender as the “psychological, social, and political significance these differences come to have in society” (DiQuinzio, 1993: 2). The groups in this study tend to treat sex and gender as one and the same. God made man masculine and woman feminine for complementary purposes. Despite antiporn feminist resistance to essentialist claims on gender, there is a strong emphasis on the conditioned differences between men and women in antiporn feminist literature and this is a perspective which resonates with religious conservatives and opens up opportunities for appropriation.

The groups frame women as collective victims of men’s use of pornography. Gamson (1992) describes this discursive process as ‘injustice framing’, which allows those on the Christian Right and antiporn feminists to see the issue of pornography in terms of right and wrong and identify more keenly with the perceived victims of such an injustice. The emphasis by both sides on the differences, innate or conditioned, between men and women are distinct from the liberal feminist concept of human nature, which posits that “male and female natures are identical […] there is no such thing as male and female nature: there is only human nature and that has no sex” (Jaggar, 1983: 37). It is for this reason that liberal feminists present no fundamental challenge to the sex trade, seeing the exchange of money for sex as merely a contractual agreement between two rational humans, rather than a representation of the few options available to women in a system where men and women have unequal access to material power.

The groups’ belief in a female essence comes through strongly in their antiporn material:

Between bad ideas of gender neutrality and even worse ideas about the innocence of pornography, we reach the world […] where men act like stereotypical women, and retreat from a real marriage into a fantasy life via pornography […] and where women conversely act like stereotypical men, taking the lead in leaving their marriages and firing angry charges on the way, out of frustration and withheld sex.75

Therefore pornography is problematic because it teaches men to use their natural qualities as initiators destructively, as FOF senior analyst Daniel Weiss explains; “Pornography teaches that the only value women have is how submissive they are to the sexual perversions of violent men.” He then adds that through pornography: “Men are taught to control, harm, and degrade women.”76 EF’s Tottie Ellis argues that pornography’s callousness towards women has connections with domestic violence, 77 a view CWA echoes. Citing a study on the social costs of pornography, CWA claim male domestic violence offenders who utilise the sex industry have been found to use more controlling behaviours, and engage in more sexual abuse, stalking, and marital rape against their partners than males who do not use the sex industry. 78 The connection between pornography and domestic violence is one that antiporn feminism has long espoused.79 In the case of alcohol, temperance activists presented evidence linking wife beating and neglect with excessive consumption of intoxicating beverages (Epstein, 1981: 114). In both cases, alcohol and pornography are the symbols of a strain of masculine hostility to women and the family.

79 In Dworkin and MacKinnon’s (1997) In Harm’s Way the work of domestic violence expert Dr Richard Gelles is cited. Gelles argues that there is a correlation between pornography, abusive sexual demands made on women in the home, and domestic violence against women and children (p. 222).
A new focus on the links between domestic violence and pornography

The issue of domestic violence has traditionally been met with ambivalent vacillation by groups on the Right. Christian Right leaders have grappled with how to respond to the issue of violence against women since it came to political prominence during the debates over the ERA between 1972 and the amendment’s eventual demise in 1982. The conventional position for social conservatives has been to disregard feminist interpretations of the causes of domestic violence, which attribute men’s violence against women to patriarchal cultural norms which eroticise and institutionalise male dominance. In step with the antifeminist leanings of the Christian Right, CWA, EF and FOF’s lobbying affiliate CitizenLink, all oppose the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). CWA bases this position on its fiscal conservatism, taking issue with large federal programs which foster wasteful spending and encroach on people’s civil liberties. EF takes the same stance, asserting that VAWA is a tool of “radical feminists” who have “devised a scheme to cash in on a flow of taxpayers’ money.”80 This highlights the tension felt by the Christian Right in terms of reconciling the competing realms of fiscal and social conservatism, and the opportunistic manner in which the groups magnify one or the other depending on the issue at hand.

Despite their opposition to VAWA, the groups’ material on pornography give the impression that violence against women is now a chief concern for the movement. CWA’s Penny Young Nance highlights this, stating: “Yes, it is definitely a worthy goal for VAWA to seek to reduce domestic violence against women.” However, the cost of the measure pacifies any urge to see this through: “VAWA doesn’t seem to have made enough of a difference to justify the cost to taxpayers” Nance claims.81 Although the scepticism concerning VAWA seems to undermine CWA’s concern for victimised women, CWA does not trivialise the problem of domestic violence, instead it connects the very real and widespread instances of domestic violence to one of its cultural enemies – the breakdown of the family. CWA is fixated on specific findings within domestic violence data to enhance its pro nuclear family values, asserting that: “everybody should also know that the majority of “domestic violence” incidences are committed by the boyfriends of mothers, not husbands and biological fathers”

adding, “the breakdown of marriage and family has been a major factor in increasing violence and abuse against women and children.”

This is where CWA and antiporn feminists diverge on the issue of men’s violence against women. While CWA argue that marriage offers women safety and protection from violence: “A married father-mother home is the safest and most nurturing place for the nation’s women and children,” feminists contend that it can be one of the most dangerous situations for a woman to be in. For example, writing in Ms Magazine, Barbara Findlen (1995) describes marriage as “a place of oppression, danger, and drudgery for women.” EF takes a much harder line and sees virtually no merit in the premise of VAWA, which they regard as discriminatory in its framing of men as aggressors and women as victims. In a strange misreading of the feminist position, EF characterises VAWA supporters as endorsing “innate gender difference […] men are naturally batterers and women are naturally victims.”

This assertion also conveniently overlooks the biblical teaching on innate male headship and female submission.

Despite the groups’ anxiety about VAWA, on the issue of domestic violence more broadly, CWA and FOF in particular have adopted a gender conscious view of domestic violence that incorporates feminist arguments into its platform. CWA author Rebekah Tooley exemplifies CWA’s confident adoption of a feminist domestic violence frame:

Okay, seriously now, how violent is pornography? And while we’re at it, what’s so bad about pornography? If we are talking about a woman’s worth […] what does pornography communicate about the worth of women? How about a man punching or choking a woman while having sex with her? Does that honor and protect her? No, it perpetuates violence against women.

Here the more explicitly feminist domestic violence frame is placated by a reference to honour and protection, in keeping with the group’s sexual purity instinct. In the New Testament, honour is strongly associated with self-respect. Luke 14:7-8 states that honour

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cannot be sought or taken, but earned through godly character. The loss of honour signals the onset of shame. In her account of biblical shame, Johanna Stiebert (2002) writes that scripture teaches that honour and shame are elucidated by a set of related means values, one of them being purity. Therefore, a person who is pure rather than polluted should know how to maintain honour and avoid shame. Purity thereby functions as a means value because it “facilitates the realization of the core values of honor and shame” (Plevnik in Stiebert, p. 35).

CWA, FOF, and EF use references to honour as a means of reminding adherents that pornography pollutes the pure. It is of course women and not men who are made impure by sex. The innate lasciviousness of men means they cannot reasonably be held accountable for sex they initiate or engage in, therefore it is women who must control when sex takes place, and who must bear full responsibility.

Just as CWA soften their language on objectification by adding that pornography “degrades” women, the group also employs this rhetorical strategy in their material on pornography and violence. CWA’s Angie Vineyard wrote in a 2003 article that pornography is “degrading and detrimental to women’ and ‘encourage[s] violence to women.”85 In a similar piece published in 2010, Rebekah Tooley argues that pornography is not art, but a sin that degrades, exploits, and abuses women to “sate a man’s depravity.”86

FOF sees pornography as a central to the normalisation of violence against women, acting as a guidebook to its viewers: “Some people become so desensitized and addicted [to pornography] that they must act out their twisted fantasies on others.”87 Antiporn feminist scholar Sheila Jeffreys has observed the conservative shift in rhetoric on violence against women and the sex trade, asserting:

Christian organisations that have, for their own reasons, objected to prostitution in the past have in the last ten years or so absolutely adopted the feminist perspective and they talk about prostitution as violence against women (Jeffreys in O’Brien et al, 2013: 44).

Indeed domestic violence is a relatively new issue for the Christian Right. Deliberately ignored in the past because activists worried that emphasising the prevalence of domestic violence might undermine the institution of marriage and allow government to meddle in “internal family business” (Strub, 2010: 278), it is now a key focus of CWA and FOF in particular.

EF has not been as willing to incorporate feminist arguments into its discourse on domestic violence. A 1984 Eagle Council conference titled ‘The Problem of Domestic Violence’ provides some insight into EF’s resistance to the domestic violence frame. EF’s Tottie Ellis explains:

> While this interest [in domestic violence] may sound wonderful, it also creates many problems. The problems involved are not just the tragedy of the victims […] but the fact that the feminist movement and left-wing groups have claimed domestic violence as its own.88

Ellis’s frustration with feminists claiming domestic violence as *their* issue highlights the competitive political landscape social movement organisations face when competing for political legitimacy on women’s issues. Ellis is concerned that feminists have seized upon the genuine issue of domestic violence as a means of securing federal funding for shelters. Ellis objects to such shelters on the basis that they temporarily house women, not men, in sum: “These shelters push the feminist agenda […] to teach women that they don’t need husbands.”89 The concern that domestic violence shelters are in fact surreptitious indoctrination camps run by feminists is supplemented by the claim that feminists “never address the connection of pornography and domestic violence.” Mischaracterising the women’s movement as a homogeneous group that collectively fails to make associations between pornography and violence is a deliberately misleading tactic by the group. EF’s leaders are aware of the work antiporn feminists have done toward framing pornography as a form of violence against women. This is evident in the same Eagle Council conference, in which Indianapolis city council member Beulah Coughenour discusses her alliance with antiporn feminists in efforts to introduce an antipornography ordinance in her city. Coughenour campaigned against the ERA during the 1970s and describes working with

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feminists to frame pornography as a civil rights issue as ‘a real mental adjustment.’\footnote{Ibid -- \textit{The Problem of Domestic Violence -- Part 1} 1984, CD-ROM, Eagle Forum education center, St. Louis.} It is worth noting that Coughenour opposed laws against banning rape in marriage on the basis that she is “very protective of the family”, but took a less doctrinaire approach to pornography, believing some harm to women can be linked to men’s use of the material (in Downs, 1989: 110). But of course being transparent about the areas where EF and antiporn feminists agree on the relationship between pornography and domestic violence would undermine the group’s governing framework which explicitly rejects feminist ideology.

It is how CWA chooses to further articulate and support this traditional view that illustrates its crossover with antiporn feminist discourse. One of the framing mechanisms CWA uses to demonstrate the threat pornography poses to marriages is to emphasise the risk of abuse towards the wife, reverting to the aforementioned domestic violence frame. This technique is by no means unheard of within the Christian antiporn movement. As far back as 1958 Ralph A. Cannon wrote in \textit{Christianity Today} that pornography “de-personalized” women and represented them as “pliant machines which men utilize for brutish pleasure” (in Mielke, 1995: 56). These are sentiments echoed by antiporn feminist activist Gail Dines, who has explained in a podcast titled ‘increasingly violent porn hijacking our sexuality’ that pornography depicts “brutal body punishing sex designed to debase and degrade and humiliate [women]”. The themes of debasement and degradation are not too far removed from Christian notions of impurity and sins committed against one’s own body, and therefore resonate with the groups’ perspective on pornography.

\textbf{Recasting hegemonic masculinity and subordinate femininity}

The groups display a contradictory set of arguments on the subject of hegemonic masculinity in the context of pornography. While each group uses theological rhetoric to naturalise sex hierarchy, there are numerous examples where this position becomes fractured by the adoption of a critique of masculinity more typical of antiporn feminist discourse.

Hegemonic masculinity is a concept that arose out of R.W. Connell’s (2005) gender order theory, which theorises that there are multiple masculinities occupying various positions in a given pattern of gender relations. Hegemonic masculinity simply refers to the most dominant, culturally exalted form of masculinity. It is a contestable position, continually challenged and reconstructed based on cultural norms (Carrigan et al. 1985: 63-100).
The clearest expressions of hegemonic masculinity are manifest in sexual harassment, rape, incest, wife beating, and violent pornography (Kaufman, 1987). This is because a central feature of hegemonic masculinity is the need to aggressively prove heterosexuality, which reveals itself in antagonism towards women and anyone deemed effeminate. For this reason, homosexual men and academically inclined men represent subordinated masculinities because of their associations with femininity. Marginalised groups such as men of colour and low socioeconomic status men represent nonhegemonic masculine identities that can exist in tension with, and appropriate aspects of, hegemonic masculinity. Despite such efforts, these marginalised identities can never penetrate dominant masculinity. Men of colour are marginalised by a discourse which centres the Western white male subject, and poor men have failed to adequately embody the ‘Provider’ role demanded by hegemonic masculinity, thus feminising them. Hegemonic masculinity is not normal in a statistical sense, very few men might actually enact it, but it is normative (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005: 832).

The valorisation of hegemonic masculinity represents the general thrust of Christian Right discourse. Male dominance is a central pillar of the romanticised nuclear family. In fact a key argument of FOF president Jim Daly’s (2016) recently published book Marriage Done Right is that marriages are failing in the United States because men have allowed themselves to become feminised. It is only in reclaiming lost vestiges of their former, more masculine selves that their relationships will be restored. However, in the groups’ discourse on pornography, key facets of hegemonic masculinity that are usually insisted upon come under critique. For example, in a September 2004 radio show for CWA, psychotherapist Rory C. Reid postulates that men are socialised to accept pornography’s precepts due to cultural inculcation. Reid argues that pornography is predominantly a male problem because it is a “function of emotional avoidance,” which is more likely to affect men because they are “socially conditioned” to be emotionally disconnected, a fact that Reid assures listeners does not mean that men are “not capable of becoming more emotionally aware and emotionally connected.” 91 The subject of masculinity is also addressed by CWA leaders Crouse and Zurita in a piece on the objectification of women in pornography. Citing antiporn feminist Gail Dines, they assert that: “pornography

socializes boys to help shape the ways that they develop their masculine identity”\(^{92}\) Evoking (i) of the antipornography ordinance, CWA warns that pornography strips the humanity from women to such a degree that “all women become objects” who are simply there to appease the sexual appetite of a man “in ways that shore up their masculinity.”\(^{93}\) FOF also worries about the influence of pornography in terms of shaping male identity: “[pornography creates] the need to validate masculinity through beautiful women […] the great majority of men who never come close to sex with their dream woman are left feeling cheated or unmanly”\(^{94}\) [emphasis added]. Elsewhere, FOF argues that pornography makes men feel they need “sexually submissive women” to affirm their masculine identity.\(^{95}\) FOF’s Dr. Juli Slattery affirms the view that masculinity is socially conditioned in men. Writing to women whose husbands have lost interest in sex, she assures them that he has been “programmed to believe that masculinity equals sexual conquest and that real men can perform in bed.”\(^{96}\)

By challenging the Christian Right masterframe that seeks to explain and justify masculinity, CWA and FOF subtly embrace the social constructionist view of antiporn feminists, or the idea that the meaning of the body is changeable, and not fixed by a biologically predetermined set of differences between men and women (Willis, 1983).

While CWA and FOF’s rhetoric on pornography and masculinity suggests some openness to the antiporn feminist argument that gender is a fluid, unstable state, elsewhere the groups explicitly reject such a claim. Although CWA’s Crouse co-opts Dines’ argument regarding the socialisation of boys with respect to pornography, she is much more averse to the idea when confronted with it directly, as she makes clear in a 2007 piece “The irony of socially constructing gender” in which the United Nations International Women’s Day erasure of
gender differences is described as “nonsense” and “lunacy.” The more explicitly anti-feminist EF is unambiguously opposed to any critique of masculinity:

[…] the feminist movement was never about equality. It was always about interchangeability, and when the facts of human nature are too overwhelming to make men and women interchangeable, feminists are determined to get rid of anything that is truly masculine.

When pornography is not the focal point, FOF endorse unequal relations between the sexes through a narrative that legitimises hegemonic masculinity and subordinate feminity. For example, FOF has an extensive archive of podcasts devoted to the principles of wifely submission in marriage with titles such as “What Does it Mean to be A Submissive Wife?” “Submission: Finding Strength in God’s Design” and “Submission When Your Husband Isn’t Nice” which teaches women to be “intentionally kind” to their husbands “even when he doesn’t deserve it” because God has called her to that role. CWA is less keen to discuss biblical submission, with few contemporary references to it. When biblical submission in marriage is raised by the group, it is framed in reference to equality and the supposed “equal submission” of men and women to the Lord. Characterised by a need to appeal to culturally accepted notions of gender equality, CWA’s reconceptualisation of biblical submission as equally onerous on husbands as it is on wives underscores the wide-reaching influence of feminist principles.

Temperance movement literature similarly attempted to draw power from subordination through the idealisation of domesticity. Epstein (1981) writes that marriage manuals tried to demonstrate that “domesticity augmented women’s power” (p. 84). It was argued that, although work in the home seemed trivial, women’s domestic work in fact held families

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together and was therefore the basis of a strong society. This subtle but invincible female power was believed to be preserved by women’s seclusion – it was women’s perceived powerlessness that made their moral and spiritual superiority unshakeable.

Pornography weakens women’s power in relation to men because it is through the strategic use of male sexual urges that women exercise power. FOF’s Dr. Juli Slattery makes this clear in her summation of marital intimacy: “While acknowledging that sex is a huge force in your husband’s life, don’t neglect the fact that God created that force for your use as well” [emphasis added][103] the emphasis being on utility, not equivalency. Pornography distorts this delicate relationship by occupying the marital space as the ever compliant sexual participant, denying women the ‘power’ to both enflame and lull male urges at convenient times. To those on the Christian Right, women do have opportunities for exercising power – by guilefully influencing the behaviours of their more powerful husbands. In this sense, the groups reconceptualise subordinate femininity in their antiporn discourse as a source of power, by framing men as easily manipulated and controlled by women who can use their feminine sexual appeal to their advantage. This view is a distorted take on the feminist concept of power. Indeed, the assumption that women significantly control sex has been challenged by antiporn feminist Catharine MacKinnon (1989). MacKinnon argues that women feel compelled to preserve the dualism of male dominance and female subordination because men enforce it through the distant or imminent threat of forced sex (p. 184-5). The groups accept MacKinnon’s take on male dominance within the context of pornography, believing women to be at significant threat of male violence, but within the context of marriage women’s powerlessness is transformed. Again, the nuclear family unit is framed as the one institution in which women can possess some form of power.

**Pornography and familial women: wives, mothers, daughters**

The tension between motherhood and the women’s movement has been thoroughly documented (Alpert, 1974; Daly, 1978; Dinnerstein, 1976; Griffin, 1977; Rich, 1976). Once Betty Friedan (1963) described the plight of white, middle-class women who wanted to leave the domestic sphere and take up professional vocations alongside men as “the problem that has no name,” motherhood moved into contested terrain.

The early stages of the women’s liberation movement defined motherhood and child-bearing as the locus of women’s oppression, and antimaternalism came to define feminism, subsequently alienating many American women who preferred to emphasise the positive aspects of motherhood. In contrast, CWA, FOF, and EF have consistently placed motherhood at the centre of their discourse on pornography as an identity worthy of special privileges, and eliciting exceptional sympathy. This also gives the groups greater leverage to make representational claims about American women, most of whom will be mothers by the time they reach their forties (Pew Research, 2010).

Out of the discourse of nineteenth-century true womanhood, motherhood was conceptualised as a sacred calling “in which the ‘true woman,’ the white woman, emerged as desexualized, indifferent to intellectual life, imbued with Christian piety […] and devoted to home and church” (Mankiller et al, 1998: 380). The belief was that once a woman moved into motherhood her identity became desexed against the hypersexualised version of femininity represented by pornography. What remains of the mother’s sexuality is condensed into one very deliberate function and must be delimited by procreative functions and duties to the family.

The groups endorse this opinion, reminding readers on several occasions that pornography is especially degrading to mothers. FOF warns that the depictions of ‘kinky sex’ in pornography incite men to demand similar from their wives.104 CWA worries that the introduction of pornography into the family home inevitably divides “mothers from children” and “husbands from wives.” CWA upholds this viewpoint by borrowing from feminist rhetoric, stating “there is no equality in pornography; one party dominates, subjugates, degrades, demeans or humiliates another.”105 This typifies the tendency, particularly by CWA, to articulate their argument using the frame of motherhood, but supplementing this with language that appeals to modern women’s openness to equality-based rhetoric. In evoking both promaternal and women’s rights language, CWA in effect caters to both the fear that feminism seeks to undermine the nuclear family, and at the same time accepts that feminism has changed perceptions of women’s appropriate role in society.

The groups rely on mother-centred antiporn rhetoric because the mother of patriarchal Christian mythology is the antithesis of all things pornographic. Her sexuality simply does not exist beyond her reproductive potential (Walker, 2003). The idealisation of the asexual Virgin Mary counters the threat of the aggressive sexuality embodied in Eve, as Walker notes “Christianity balances its […] contempt and idealisation in the figures of Mary and Eve” (p. 136). Positioning mothers as asexual paragons of virtue epitomises the image of the holy mother and child, impregnated without sexual contact, nurturing untouched by the passion of female desire (Macdonald, 1995).

Feminist Adrienne Rich (1967) asserts that patriarchal systems of power require that the mother be divested of sexuality: “women are permitted to be sexual only at a certain time of life” (p. 183) – before she is made unsexual by her children. The more male dominance came to characterise western culture, the greater the disassociation between sexuality and maternalism was embedded in cultural representations of womanhood (Rossi, 1973). In stripping women of maternal associations, they become pornified by the absence of procreative-centred sexual behaviour. The groups use this binary by relying on maternal evocations in discussions of pornography to uphold the crucial moral line between nonprocreative sin and procreative virtue.

The centreing of mothers and wives in the groups’ discourse on pornography also serves to define women in terms of their relationship to others. This was exemplified during a 2013 radio broadcast hosted by CWA’s Martha Kleder. The broadcast discussed an initiative called ‘She’s Somebody’s Daughter,’ which aims to humanise pornography victims by encouraging its users to imagine that the women in pornography are related to them. The project’s manager, Tammy Stauffer, warns listeners: “if you don’t want your daughter, your sister, your mother, your cousin, your son, being treated this way or being sexually abused on camera, why would we accept it for anybody’s daughter, or anybody’s son.”

This rhetorical strategy is based on a belief that women are more ‘relational’ than men, a claim often repeated by FOF to explain a woman’s interconnectedness with her children and dependency on her husband, who is imagined to perform a more autonomous and self-directed role within the family unit.

This is a clear point of divergence with contemporary feminist theory which has gone to great lengths to establish an understanding of women as independently significant. This struggle has been manifestly captured in the campaign for reproductive rights which has sought to separate the woman from foetus. Rothman (1978) notes that from the debate over abortion rights emerged a doctrine of woman as person which implicitly suggested that maternal roles might not be consistent with women’s needs, effectively positioning woman and child in conflict with one another (p. 246). Commenting on the trilogy of mothers, children, and parenting, theological expert Bonnie Miller-McLemore (2011) problematises a tendency in feminist and religious writing to sharply separate the subject of children and the subject of women, believing their plight to be “intricately connected” but warns “neither subject should be reduced to its relationship to the other” (p. 19). In Of Woman Born, Adrienne Rich (1976) explains that the Western institution of motherhood demands that women see themselves in relation to others rather than the creation of the self (p. 42). CWA, FOF, and EF use pornography as a rhetorical vehicle to reify feminine selflessness and affirm maternal interconnectedness.

The unwillingness of the Christian Right to see women as full and separate subjects apart from their familial connections limits their ability to engage with the feminist antipornography arguments centred on the liberatory potential to self-define the boundaries of sexual practice. It is through the site of the mother that the groups make judgements about the moral wellbeing of society. This was demonstrated in an FOF radio broadcast from March 2013 in which the co-host John Fuller asks true womanhood advocate Nancy Leigh DeMoss why many women struggle to switch from being a professional to being a mother, to which DeMoss responds: “Our feminist culture does not value children, and I’m talking about Christian feminists here […] taking care of children isn’t really that important […] but God has placed a nurturing heart in a woman.” In their view, women are abdicating their maternal responsibilities by “imbibing the culture of feminism”¹⁰⁷ which exalts career aspirations. Because of women’s traditionally held role as nurturer of children, feminist efforts to push women into the masculine public sphere imperil the nation’s children, resulting in greater levels of pornography use.

**Childhood innocence**

Fear centreing on the destructive potential of pornography on the impressionable mind of the child underpins a significant degree of the groups’ antipornography material. As Schreiber (2008) well notes, children are a population who tend to elicit more sympathy than women do in Christian Right discourse.

CWA make it clear that children should be viewed as extremely vulnerable in the context of exposure to pornography: “the real tragedy is that young children are watching this porn and will grow up thinking sex as depicted in pornography is how it should be”\(^{108}\) [emphasis mine] and “[…] most importantly, adult pornography harms children”\(^{109}\) [emphasis mine]. It is made clear that the childhood years are a time of innocence, before the true depravity of a fallen world is realised – “a time when you're establishing in [children] and around them a healthy, God-governed life” as FOF’s Vicki Courtney contends. This stance is premised on a belief in the separateness of childhood and in the pure innocence of children, a school of thought that grew out of the nineteenth century when the domesticisation of the family transformed the role of children in society.

The separateness of childhood has its origins in nineteenth-century Victorian ideology which played a dominant role in temperance discourse and shaped the modern-day understanding of children and sexuality. Weeks (1981) notes that as the image of the home became more sentimentalised there was an intensification of emotional investment in children and a fear of sexual corruption.

Temperance literature reveals a strong preference for framing the evils of alcohol in terms of its deleterious effects on children and helpless mothers. One temperance almanac (Dewey, 1843) described the conditions a mother lived in at the hands of her drunkard husband: “poor mother and her babes are cowering over a few decaying embers, blue and shivering with the cold […] the mother weeps as she hugs still firmer in her embrace the little one which is striving to draw nourishment from her bosom.” It was believed that lessons of temperance “taught by the tender eloquence of maternal lips” might save children. Women, particularly mothers, were best equipped to correct the devastation of male vice on the unblemished child.

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However, as Weeks adds, the middle-class family was a peculiar combination, for it both “stressed the innocence of childhood, its asexuality, and its potentiality for sexual corruption” (p. 51).

FOF demonstrates this paradox in their talking points on pornography, asserting that “children who are exposed to pornography tend to exhibit sexually deviant attitudes and behavior, including sexual violence and crime.”\(^{110}\) While children are on the one hand moral innocents, the ever-present potential for sexual transgressions is repeatedly stated.

Kinsey’s model of sex education is particularly detested by the groups, which CWA resentfully describes as encouraging children to “explore their natural sexual desires.”\(^{111}\) The dualistic positioning of children as innocents or devils is a construction that has extensive roots even in Western liberal traditions.

It is possible that the groups are not elevating children to a position of greater concern than women because a child’s innocence and goodness exceeds that of women, but rather because children have such a tendency for defiance and rebellion “associated with the powers of evil” (Mercer, 2005: 145). The groups emphasise the extreme vulnerability of children, who they believe lack the capacity to defend themselves from powerful impositions such as pornography, but rather paradoxically, a child’s wilful sinfulness means they struggle to make good moral decisions.

Although CWA acknowledge the depravity pornography evokes in all its users, they pay particular attention to how it shapes the minds of children. After alleging that one-third of children view pornography before the age of 10, Crouse states during a radio broadcast that children are ‘more likely to rape’ and ‘more likely to view violence as part of the sex act.’\(^{112}\)

The role of the market in reconceptualising the child as consumer and exploiting the moral ambivalence of children also shapes the Christian Right’s narrative on children and pornography. In the consumer context, children are used as scapegoats for broader social ills. They are pathologised and held responsible when they succumb to the pressures of


consumerism, “their ways of participating in consumerist society […] are deemed responsible for society’s problems.” (Mercer, 2005: 74). In other words, one can assess the health of a society based on the pastimes of its children.

The groups are devoted to the notion that children require undivided maternal attention in order to evade predatory men. CWA warns mothers that dressing their children ‘provocatively’ might invite attention from users of child pornography and prematurely shorten this period of innocence: “by allowing our children to dress and act provocatively, are we not sending a message to someone with a proclivity toward sexual deviancy with a minor? In their minds it is okay to have sex with children, and when children are dressed like seductive adults, it can encourage their behavior rather than clearly delineate the line between normalcy and deviancy.”

Fictional work at the height of the temperance movement placed a similar burden on children whose mothers had exited the home for whatever reason, taking with them their ever-watchful eye over the wellbeing of their progeny. In these situations, children’s dependency and vulnerability became a form of power, wherein they could redeem their drunken father from his life of vice, but not before the predatory father had violated the sexual innocence of his daughters (Sanchez-Eppler, 2005). In both scenarios, a mother’s abandonment of her children ends in the most abhorrent of circumstances.

This view is in line with the belief held by the groups that male sexual aggression is virtually impossible to control and therefore anything that might provoke it should be eliminated. On October 24, 2012, CWA and She’s Somebody’s Daughter hosted a ‘Parents Awareness Night’ in Oklahoma City designed to warn parents about the myriad of ways they might be contributing to their child’s pornography exposure. FOF echoes this idea, warning parents that the “monster in their modem” is hurting their children, and proposes that removing the high-speed internet connection from the home might be one reasonable solution.

EF’s Schlafly sees pornography as part of a wider conspiracy by the left to inculcate children with the values of a fallen world, amongst “abortion, sodomy, [and] same-sex marriage license[s]” Paying particular attention to sex education in public schools, the group implies that the government is engaged in a conspiracy to pollute the minds of young children with

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various perversions, including at age sixteen “teaching […] common sexual behaviors including use of pornography.”

However, in a measured convergence of women’s rights and children’s rights, the groups sometimes intersect these narratives, co-opting feminist arguments to strengthen their point:

When the sexualization of girls begins from the time they are born, how will they ever grow up to be strong, capable women who value their femininity and their abilities without relying solely on their sex appeal? In contemporary religious discourse, children are constructed as extremely vulnerable, lacking the capacity to defend themselves from powerful impositions such as pornography. Perhaps most troublingly, their “wilful sinfulness” means they struggle to make good moral decisions (Mercer, 2005: 46).

FOF underscores this point in a 2004 article on restoring teenagers after pornography use, stating that “even when a teenager has a faith-based life in Christ, he or she will still be faced with quite a bit of sexual temptation.” The groups seem aware that young minds are sex-curious, but as Strub (2010) notes, the tendency of the Christian Right is to see aberrant sexual behaviour as a direct result of pornography, rather than a human inevitability.

CWA draws on feminist activist Gail Dines’ work to enhance their argument about sex-curious young people. “Gail Dines tells of talking to her son when he became a teenager” writes Crouse and Zurita “her remarks are a good warning to all young men and women […] her talk is a good model for parents.” Dines’ talk to her son involved cautioning him

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against “hand[ing] over” his “valuable and precious” sexuality, a narrative that appears to resonate with Christian beliefs about the sacrificial nature of sexual intimacy.

The groups’ centreing of the child is ultimately a political manoeuvre. Highlighting the harm pornography does to women alone does not have the same persuasive potential because adult women are imagined to have sexual agency in all or most cases, while children’s minds are unequivocally clean, pure, asexual in contrast. Cottle et al’s (1989) study on the attitudes to pornography of eighty-five individuals in the United States provides evidence for this view. The researchers found that of the respondents described as ‘Liberal’ (as opposed to religious conservative and antiporn feminist), the only type of pornography they objected to was material involving children, and they disagreed that pornography harms women (p. 319).

Unlike children, “adults are assumed to have the maturity to make responsible decisions for themselves” (p. 318) and implicit in this is the assumption that men and women’s experiences in pornography are largely alike and not distinguishable by sex.

Unlike liberals and the Christian Right, antiporn feminists reject the centreing of the child in antipornography discourse and have problematised the assumption that adult women always have sexual agency. As MacKinnon (1989) argues “interpreting female sexuality as an expression of women’s agency and autonomy, as if sexism did not exist, is always denigrating and bizarre and reductive, as it would be to interpret Black culture as if racism did not exist” (p. 153).

While women’s sexual agency under patriarchy is an ongoing subject of debate in feminist politics, the innocence of children goes largely unquestioned. This sentiment echoes the beliefs of humanist philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau who considered children to be naturally saintly, virtuous, and unspoilt, and distinctly different from adults in their limited experiences of life (Rousseau, 1992 [1762]). Any capacity for sexual agency in childhood is roundly condemned, as Kampmark (2012) asserts, the presumption of childhood innocence is predicated on a construction of children as lacking the capacity for “self-awareness, cognition or manipulation” (p. 7).

Antiporn feminism agrees with this characterisation of childhood vulnerability, but extends the same sympathy to adult women as well. Dines, Jensen and Russo (1998) accused liberal

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pornographers of ‘neutralising’ the power asymmetry between adults and children (p. 17) arguing that the defenders of pornography similarly overlook the power imbalances between men and women.

The political consequences for antiporn feminists who centre the child in debates on pornography are greater than they are for the right-wing groups in this study. As Abigail Bray (2011) asserts, the regulation of feminist critiques of child pornography is the direct result of a hegemonic paradigm which serves to paint antiporn feminists as hysterical or moralising. Carol Smart (1989) takes this viewpoint, arguing that the antiporn model of Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon has led to a “shared platform with the moral right and the slippage into law and order rhetoric” (p. 116). The conflation of feminist critiques of pornography with moral outrage has a stifling effect on left-wing critiques of pornography because discussing child exploitation through a left-wing, rights-based frame becomes susceptible to derailing tactics from critics who immediately dismiss their concerns as a precursor to moralism and censorship.

Indeed, many civil libertarians take the position that strong legal remedies to address child pornography are a precursor to future regulation of sexual expression between ‘consenting adults’. A 1978 discussion among Michel Foucault, Guy Hocquenghem, and Jean Danet published as Sexual Morality and the Law (1988) reveals Foucault’s belief that sexual moralising about children will mean sexuality becomes a “roaming danger, a sort of omnipresent phantom, a phantom that will be played out between men and women, children and adults […] Sexuality will become a threat to all social relations” (p. 281). In his view, seeking to prevent child exploitation amounts to an unnecessary sentimentalisation of children, and will inevitably encroach on adult expression.

In Gayle Rubin’s (1984 [1999]) essay on sexuality and the law she describes the urge to protect children as ‘erotic hysteria’ and ‘erotic terror’ resulting in misdirected and ill-conceived laws (p. 146). Bray (2011) notes the gendered subtext in the claims of ‘hysteria’ by antiporn feminists, a term that has long been used to pathologise women who are child sexual abuse survivors.

The successful effort by liberals of conflating feminist concern about child sexual abuse with sexual moralising and sentimentalisation has tainted the child-focused elements of feminist antiporn discourse. It is this conflation in particular that invites critics to draw parallels between contemporary antiporn feminism and nineteenth-century social purity politics.
Two American historians, Ellen Dubois and Linda Gordon (1983) endorse this view:

Today, there seems to be a revival of social purity politics within feminism, and it is a concern about this tendency that motivates us in recalling its history. Like its nineteenth century predecessor, the contemporary feminist attack on pornography and sexual ‘perversion’ shades at the edges into a right-wing and antifeminist version of social purity, the moral majority and pro-family movements of the new right.

As Dubois and Gordon allude to, the common thread between moralist and antiporn feminist fears about pornography is the view that exposure to obscene material is dangerous primarily because it can excite the inevitably aggressive tendencies of the male sex drive.

Bearing striking resemblance to Christian Right and feminist antiporn campaigners, advocates of temperance and certain elements of the woman’s suffrage movement were in agreement that women were the more virtuous sex. Just as antiporn feminists have had to endure decades of critique from sex-positive feminists, the suffragettes who equated women with moral rectitude, good housekeeping and sobriety, and men with drunkenness and corruption, were met with disapproval from sexual radicals, who were often younger women with a much more extreme agenda to shift the status of women in late nineteenth and early twentieth century America. The essence of the sex radicals’ concern was that “they [suffragettes] supported the repressive codes of Victorian morality rather than demanding full sexual and emotional freedom for women” (Joannou and Purvis, 1998: 108). Indeed, as sex-positive feminists have attempted to link antiporn feminism with the Christian Right in an effort to undermine and discredit their claims about the harmful nature of pornography, anti-suffrage activists tried to link women’s enfranchisement with temperance by claiming they wanted to close bars and dancing clubs (Banaszak, 1996). But as historian Lesley Hall (1998) notes, the conflation of some suffragettes with social purity, and not sexual reform, is much too simplistic an interpretation. These were not ‘embattled camps’ she argues, but two elements within a wide spectrum of opposition to conventional wisdom about women’s roles. The same could be said of the conservative and feminist wings of the antiporn movement today, who are both attempting to reimagine women’s roles through different – but occasionally converging – ideological frames.

121 Short stories published by the National Society for Women’s Suffrage conveyed a pro-temperance message, for a more detailed discussion see: Joannou, M & Purvis, J (eds) 1998, The women’s suffrage movement: new feminist perspectives, Manchester University Press, Manchester.
Antifeminist platform enhancing opportunities for co-option

In order to position themselves as the true arbiters of women’s rights, CWA, FOF and EF use arguments that attempt to cast doubt over the way in which the feminist movement has improved women’s lives. They frame feminism as a movement which has failed to deliver on its central theme of lifting women’s status in society. As CWA alleges:

Since 1987, in spite of the feminist movement that was supposed to keep women from being mere sex objects, women have increasingly been depicted in degrading and debased ways. Now, with the demand for younger and younger images, the harm has spread to children.\textsuperscript{122}

According to the groups’ leaders, the feminist movement originally had a worthwhile position on pornography, but somewhere along the way bowed to cultural pressures to succumb to sin. “[…] the feminist movement [has] turn[ed] its entire position on pornography on its ear from initially opposing it, to now saying its empowering”\textsuperscript{123} argues Laurie Higgins, Director of School Advocacy for the Illinois Family Institute during a CWA podcast.

Andrea Vangor’s statement at the Pornography Caucus held by EF in 1985 reiterates this deliberate obfuscation:

One of the problems I have with the feminist viewpoint on pornography is, they believe in this myth of the ‘good pornography’ – erotica. If the woman is smiling, and especially if she’s on the top of the couple, it’s OK […] I don’t care if the woman’s on the top or the bottom, women end up on the bottom in a society where sexual behaviour is made into public entertainment.\textsuperscript{124}

Vangor’s statement – that pornography leaves women ‘on the bottom’, demonstrates how the leaders employ women’s rights language while simultaneously delegitimising feminism. It is an endorsement of the message, but not the messenger.

CWA’s Crouse used a similar tone in her review of the effects of the contraceptive pill on American women: “While feminism delivered many benefits for women, the “free-sex”

\textsuperscript{124} Pornography caucus – part 1 1985, CD-ROM, Eagle Forum education center, St Louis.
movement [attributed to] the contraceptive pill, has advanced neither the fairer sex nor its well-being.” Crouse adds that the sexual revolution “chiefly benefited men, not women” an argument that antiporn feminists such as Sheila Jeffreys (1990) in her book Anticlimax: A Feminist Perspective on the Sexual Revolution have long made.

A Phyllis Schlafly Report article echoes the belief that the supposedly feminist-endorsed sexual revolution has been anything but liberatory for women, but instead “deprived women of the societal support they need to refuse to engage in casual sex.” Rather than using faith-based language to criticise feminism, the groups have seized the rhetorical tools of their foe and are using it against them.

Hostility towards feminism has been noted by scholars as a salient frame within the Christian Right (Gerhards & Rucht 1992; Johnston 1991; Meyer 1995; Voss 1996). The groups perceive feminism as being responsible for the denigration of motherhood in the United States and they tie this concern back to the increasing ‘pornification’ of society. They romanticise a time in the mid-twentieth century when motherhood alone, without the added burden of paid work, was regarded as adequately fulfilling, before the push for middle class women’s participation in the workforce started to receive wide support.

In recent times EF has used pro-feminist Facebook executive Sheryl Sandberg as the scapegoat for their anger, accusing Sandberg of peddling an ideology which sees small children as demeaning to educated women. Again, feminism is perceived as the culprit separating women from their maternal role, effectively transforming them into men whose unbridled sexual appetite can only be tempered by the desexualised maternal woman. CWA connect the supposed feminist acceptance of pornography with declining levels of societal compassion in this piece on whether CWA or Gloria Steinem truly represents women:

Conservative women — moms and wives, sisters and daughters — are standing up because they’ve had enough. They’ve had enough of the “feminists” telling them pornography is empowering. They realize the consequences that have come with


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abortion-on-demand and a complete lack of care and compassion for both the woman and her unborn baby.\textsuperscript{128}

Reflecting the individualising tendencies of the groups and the valorisation of motherhood, CWA wrote an article comparing a number of conservative women leaders with prominent feminist activists on the basis of their success as mothers and wives. In the piece they claim that Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and Germaine Greer all had unstable marriages, and because of choosing career over family, failed as mothers: “her three children had to undergo therapy” CWA’s Crouse writes of Friedan. These feminist figures are juxtaposed against CWA’s founder Beverly LaHaye, and EF’s founder Phyllis Schlafly. LaHaye and Schlafly’s long marriages and large families are lauded as the ultimate accomplishments a woman can make, and feminism is scolded for having “lost its way,” and for excluding the personal dimension from the belief that women should be able to have it all.\textsuperscript{129} This sort of antifeminist rhetoric is very typical of CWA’s efforts to discredit the competing movement.

In discussions unrelated to pornography, CWA criticises feminists for attempting to characterise women as “victims,”\textsuperscript{130} but when pornography becomes the focal point, the group repeatedly highlight its victimising effects of the material, whether they be the women in pornography\textsuperscript{131} or women in society as a whole.\textsuperscript{132} The group even recognises an annual ‘Victims of Pornography Month’ in May, established by CWA’s close allies Citizens for Community Values who insist that pornography renders a woman “the victim of a man who sees her as a mere sex object.”\textsuperscript{133} The dual strategy of delegitimising feminism as a political force and simultaneously co-opting feminist argument works to politically marginalise the movement. Misciagno (1997) notes that a delegitimised movement is far less likely to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{129}Crouse, JS 2013, Feminist leaders compared to religious right leaders, Concerned Women for America, Washington, DC, viewed June 2014, <http://www.cwfa.org/crouse-feminist-leaders-compared-to-religious-right-leaders/>.
\item \textsuperscript{130}Rendall, S 2013, Countervailing the dangerous feminist agenda, Concerned Women for America, Washington, DC, viewed June 2014, <http://www.cwfa.org/countervailing-the-dangerous-feminist-agenda/>.
\item \textsuperscript{131}Crouse, JS & Zurita, B 2012, WRAP week – 10 harms of pornography, harms #5 and #6, Concerned Women for America, Washington, DC, viewed November 2013, <http://www.cwfa.org/images/content/CWA-WW_PornHarms_5-6.pdf>.
\item \textsuperscript{133}Victims of Pornography 2003, Victims of Pornography, Cincinnati, Ohio, viewed June 2014, <http://www.victimsofpornography.org/>.
\end{itemize}
generate mobilised support and thus the tactic is one employed with mundane regularity (p. 64).

In efforts to remain politically relevant in a culture where young women are responsive to rights-based, pro-equality sentiments, the groups employ this language while simultaneously assigning blame to feminists for the hypersexualisation of women in the United States. Snow and Benford (1988) refer to this process as ‘diagnostic framing’, one element of which involves identifying a problem and then assigning blame or causality to a specific agent (p. 200). The attribution of blame is a powerful motivating factor in political mobilisation as it allows the formation of binary categories: the oppressor and the oppressed, the victimiser and the victim. As bell hooks (2013) notes, a politics of blame in which binaries emerge resonates with the dominator thinking that is so prevalent in the west (p. 30).

**Co-option or cooperation? Adopting antiporn feminist strategy**

During a 2013 podcast featuring FOF founder Dr. Dobson, Phyllis Schlafly and conservative author Suzanne Venker, Venker warns that “feminism has infiltrated the conservative movement just as much as it has the liberal one.”\(^{134}\) It is the politics of sexuality that is the clearest expression of this feminist infiltration. But rather than exhibiting an exclusively hostile position against feminism as the previous section explored, the groups also engage in a tacitly collaborative exercise of validating feminist theory in discussions of pornography, occasionally even reaching out to key antiporn feminists for material that can add theoretical weight to their argument.

The groups engage in this exercise with differing enthusiasm. The staunchly antifeminist EF is the least fond of this collaboration. Their audio material from the mid-1980s reveals a keener embrace of feminist theory and strategy during an historical height of antiporn activity around the time of the antipornography civil rights ordinance, but they have since shied away from associating with groups on the Left.

At a 1985 EF conference on family violence and pornography one of the speakers, a woman named Bueller Coughenour, discusses her involvement with antiporn feminists on the Indianapolis civil rights ordinance.\(^{135}\) Coughenour’s tone is ostensibly cautious as she

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\(^{135}\) _Family Violence, Pornography and what to do about it – part 1_ 1985, CD-ROM, Eagle Forum education center, St. Louis.
recounts her cooperation with feminist adversaries on the ordinance. She states that the ordinance is “couched in the language of the feminists” and admits that is “a little hard for some of us to swallow”. Coughenour contends, however, that pornography is a point where “some of the feminists have joined the battle” with the Christian Right.

The possibility of a tacit coalition with feminists on pornography is brought up on more than one occasion. During a Pornography Caucus held that same year in Washington, D.C., Andrea Vangor tells the audience that defeating pornography will require deflecting attention away from their organisational affiliation and towards the issue at hand: “we want to raise the issue in the media […] that [porn] is the problem, not us.” Redirecting attention from the group to the issue is a strategy advocated by Christian Right leader Ralph Reed. Reed sought a guerrilla warfare approach that comprised of an “air war” – a vast network of politicised Christian radio programs, and a “ground war” – mobilising adherents in thousands of evangelical churches across America. “To paint [one’s] face and travel at night” was the aim (Saberi, 1993: 782).

Drawing too much attention to oneself runs the risk of generating media accusations of so-called “astro turf” political organising, which refers to campaigns organised by wealthy and influential corporate elites. Vangor was effectively acknowledging that the groups’ far-right credentials pose a problem in terms of gaining the political credibility necessary to bring antiporn critique from the margin to the centre. She makes this position clear by urging adherents that as Christian activists they need to take off their ‘red coat’ which she believes make them a target of media outlets that quickly dismiss their concerns on the ground of supposed fanaticism.

Vangor further states that the group “needs to build broad-based coalitions on this single issue” reassuring activists that it will “work to our advantage”. But as the group makes clear during another conference in 1989 on tactics to build the movement, a coalition should be an anonymous operation. Press releases should not reveal which groups are participating at the risk of distracting observers and inviting scrutiny rather than mobilisation. With all the risk associated with building coalitions across ideological boundaries, it is not immediately clear why EF seemed eager to engage in cross-movement collaboration. The incentive, they claim, is the fear of what antipornography politics might become without a moral perspective:

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It seems to me to be a more appropriate tactic to get involved and try to steer these things in the right direction than to take a step back and watch them do something that we may not agree with [...] in the name of the issues we support.¹³⁷

Appropriating the language and strategic framework of antiporn feminism is central to this agenda. Vangor explicitly states that the feminist civil rights framework does not rest easy with her philosophically, but “as a construct” to help raise awareness about the harm of pornography “it is a beauty” she states “and it works.”¹³⁸ Schlafly demonstrated an openness to the feminist civil rights position in Pornography’s Victims (1987) asserting that “the civil liberties of the abusers [in pornography] are ranked higher than the civil rights of the abused” (p. 11).

What is clear is that the groups do not have a precise and concrete approach to dealing with feminism as theory and practice. By way of example, a 2010 article by CWA’s Janne Myrdal makes the claim that the word ‘feminism’ has been “hijacked and used for decades solely for not-so-feminist issues with great hostility towards faith.”¹³⁹ Differentiating between ‘leftist feminism’ and ‘conservative feminism’, Myrdal attempts to reframe feminism using the conservative principles of individualism, merit, and morality. This is one of a number of examples of the groups attempting to reappropriate the ‘feminist’ term.

Temperance reformers similarly found cooperating with suffragettes to be beneficial to their cause. When suffragettes started appropriating more traditional conceptualisations of women’s roles in their demand for voting rights, a coalition between temperance reformers and suffragettes flourished (Cornfield and McCammon, 2010: 80). Particularly during periods where the goals of WCTU were threatened, ties between temperance activists and suffragettes emerged, as Frances Willard came to realise that women having the vote was essential to combat the evils of alcohol (McCammon and Campbell, 2002). As leaders on the Christian Right have become more comfortable using the arguments of antiporn feminists, both movements have shown some willingness to engage in collaborative action.

¹³⁷ Tactics to build our movement: how to build winning coalitions 1989, CD-ROM, Eagle Forum education center, St. Louis.
Publicly embracing feminism

When it suits the groups, they assume a more conciliatory posture towards the feminist movement. Of the three groups in this study, FOF demonstrates the most open and willing embrace of feminism in its material. An April 2008 article on FOF’s website titled “The One Thing Christians and Feminists Agree On” details how opposition to pornography in the 1980s provided an unlikely link between two groups that had typically had little else in common. The author revives the idea of a coalition, asserting that, “Maybe 30 years later, though we still can’t agree on much else, Christians and feminists could agree on the danger of pornography and fight it.”140 In another article written by FOF president Jim Daly on casual sex, the feminist label is adopted by Catholic Association Senior Fellow, Ashley McGuire by way of reconceptualising casual sex as hostile to women’s liberation. McGuire states “I consider myself a feminist, and there is nothing that is more antithetical to feminist progress than the hookup culture. Because what it does is it puts women in a position where they feel the expectation to behave in ways they’re totally uncomfortable with.”141

Rather than feminist politics representing the worldly, secular, antimaternal image it does in other examples from the groups, feminism is represented as complementary to biblical versions of womanhood. Even the sacred institution of marriage is not exempt from a feminist revision. A March 2010 article by FOF’s Glenn Stanton goes to great lengths to explain how marriage is in fact a feminist institution.142 Invoking the vision of higher female morality lauded by WCTU’s Frances Willard, Stanton cites George Gilder, arguing that “the crucial process of civilization is the subordination of male sexual impulses and biology to the long-term horizons of female sexuality.” Willard’s call to temperance followers to “make the whole world homelike” – in other words, more persuaded by feminine influence, is Stanton’s core message.

The group also endorses collaboration with antiporn feminists in legal battles. In a 2010 article published by FOF’s political arm, CitizenLink, exploring the links between pornography and prostitution, Lisa Thompson from the Salvation Army discloses her support


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for feminist Donna M. Hughes’ view that the legal system should punish the buyers and not the sellers of sex. Also known as the Nordic model on prostitution. “I totally support and endorse it” Thompson says of the model, adding that she worked with Donna Hughes in 2005 to address the demand side in the reauthorisation of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Donna Hughes has been a key figure in terms of linking the contemporary social conservative and antiporn feminist movements together.

In a piece published by the Washington Post in 2004, Donna Hughes and fellow feminist academic Phyllis Chesler confront the reality of collaborating with the Christian Right:

In the past, when faced with choosing allies, feminists made compromises. To gain the support of the liberal left, feminists acquiesced in the exploitation of women in the pornography trade -- in the name of free speech. The issue of abortion has prevented most feminists from considering working with conservative or faith-based groups. Feminists are right to support reproductive rights and sexual autonomy for women, but they should stop demonizing the conservative and faith-based groups that could be better allies on some issues than the liberal left has been.

Hughes and Chesler add that feminists have been unnecessarily hostile to religious groups, viewing them “as a dangerous form of patriarchy”. Hughes and Chesler believe this view is too simplistic and reflects an antiquated view of Judeo-Christian faiths. Forty years ago religious groups were undoubtedly antagonistic towards feminism, but today they offer “a system of law and ethics that benefits women”, evident in the leading position faith-based groups have taken in the global fight against sex trafficking. “Human rights work is not the province of any one ideology” Hughes and Chesler allege, and in fact assuming that the Left has possession of human rights has led to fractured relationships between progressive-left adherents whenever the question of men’s right to purchase sex is raised.

The human rights organisation Amnesty International found itself in the cross hairs of this debate in early 2014 after a proposal advocating the full decriminalisation of prostitution drafted by the organisation was leaked. Radical feminists and prostitution survivor advocacy groups reacted angrily to the proposal. Believing that Amnesty International’s

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commitment to human rights made them natural allies, abolitionist groups felt betrayed, accusing the organisation of taking a position “that contradicts their own mission as a charity concerned with human rights.” The unreliability of the progressive-left and much of feminism on the pornography and prostitution issues have driven Hughes and Chesler to demarcate new boundaries for antiporn activism that is inclusive of those on the Right:

Saving lives and defending freedom are more important than loyalty to an outdated and too-limited feminist sisterhood. Surely after 40 years feminists are mature enough to form coalitions with those with whom they agree on some issues and disagree on others.

According to this view, a tacit coalition with the Christian Right is not so much a threat from a movement dedicated to preserving the patriarchal family model, but a sign of the ‘maturity’ of contemporary antiporn feminists. It is an improbable development given that antiporn feminist politics is rooted in a materialist analysis of pornography. Concerned with the structural factors that lead women to become involved in pornography, antiporn feminists have examined the way systems of power such as patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism intersect to subordinate women, particularly women who occupy multiple oppressed castes, a theory referred to as ‘intersectionality’.

The willingness on the part of antiporn feminists like Hughes and Chesler to discount the material consequences of the Christian Right’s position on pornography – a hybrid of rights and morality – is perhaps evident of the confrontation antiporn feminism is having with an identitarian, poststructuralist form of feminism.

Identity politics urges mobilisation around a single axis and positions that identity in relation to issues deemed of most importance to those claiming the identity. It has emanated from a postmodern, poststructuralist perspective that prioritises the self-defined ‘identity’ of a person above the material realities determining their position in society. In praising conservatives for engaging with feminist politics and displaying a willingness to work with those on the Right, antiporn feminists balance unsteadily between a critical theory emphasising materialist aspects and an uncritical liberal practice allowing two ideologically hostile parties to merge together based on identification with a single issue. CWA and FOF in particular have

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formulated a politics of identity based on the supposedly universalising power of sex, and in lending legitimacy to this formation have appropriated the woman-identified discourse of antiporn feminists.

FOF does more than simply appropriate feminist discourse, but actually reaches out to antiporn feminists for comment. In a 2008 piece on the link between pornography and sex trafficking, FOF’s Stephen Adams includes excerpts from a conversation the group had with feminist psychologist Dr. Melissa Farley where she states, among other things, that “pornography is men’s rehearsal for prostitution.” The same article quotes antiporn feminist Gail Dines on the prevalence of pseudo child pornography as a gateway to child pornography and paedophilia, as well as feminist Dr. Donna M. Hughes. Seemingly attempting to bolster the credibility of the argument, Adams adds that “this is not just the view of the religious right. Increasingly, feminists are coming around to this perspective, too.” Here the philosophical differences between the two movements are proof of the widespread acceptance of pornography’s relationship to sex trafficking. What is more, the feminist perspective is regarded as morally sound to the extent that Farley, Hughes, and Dines can be called upon to help make the conservative case for women’s rights.

Obviously wary of being seen to cooperate with the Christian Right, Gail Dines addressed suggestions of a feminist collusion with conservatives in a 2011 piece in *The Guardian* newspaper. Dines insists that any claims that feminists who oppose the ‘pornification of society’ are stirring up a moral panic confuses a politically progressive movement with right-wing attempts to police sexual behaviour. The harm done to women in pornography is not a moral issue, Dines contends, but a political one. In her view, antiporn feminists are suffering from guilt by association, as outward observers incorrectly conflate the political objectives of feminists and the religious right. The right’s seizure of pro-woman concepts does not do much to dissuade this theory, but neither does Dines’ collaboration with conservative politicians or Hughes and Chesler’s plea with antiporn feminists to give the Right a second glance.

It could be the case that FOF’s less forcefully antifeminist stance can be attributed to the fact that unlike CWA and EF, FOF is not a women’s organisation. Women’s groups and ministries within the Christian Right are expected to actively promote a perspective on

gender relations that echoes true womanhood ideals. This is central to their political survival as many of their key competitors endorse feminist theory and practice. Although FOF has a predominantly male leadership, it is not regarded as a men’s group and not tasked with catering to ‘men’s issues’ due to the invisibility of maleness within a culture that sees maleness as normative and femaleness as the other. This invisibility gives FOF greater leverage to explore a wider array of perspectives without being as vulnerable to accusations of surrendering to feminism.

The political limits placed on conservative women’s organisations by virtue of their status as representatives of women were felt by the campaigners during the temperance movement. Well before the formation of WCTU in 1874, women’s involvement in the temperance movement was strongly criticised for blurring the lines between the feminised private sphere and the masculinised public sphere. Although it would be decades before the WCTU formed and moral suasion would be abandoned for more concerted political work, male political leaders were wary of the threat of female influence.

According to the temperance newspaper the Lily, minister Henry Mandeville of Albany explained “when a woman goes out of her sphere, when she goes miles attended or unattended […] I say she unsexes herself, is a hybrid, and I for one wish to do nothing in approbation of it” (in McMillen, 2008). The purposeful exclusion of women from male-organised temperance conventions throughout the 1850s galvanised women, culminating in the formation of WCTU. However, trepidation about the extent of women’s influence underscored the origins of WCTU, and the organisation’s first president epitomised this apprehension. In 1874 under the founding leadership of Annie Turner Wittenmyer, the WCTU advocated moral suasion to reform problem drinkers, deliberately evading participation in political work. It was Wittenmyer’s contention that women’s suffrage would “strike a fatal blow at the home” and therefore could not be endorsed (in Berkeley Fletcher, 2008: 103). But once Willard took over the presidency five years later the organisation “almost immediately and forcefully began to delve into political work” (p. 104) causing a tension between women’s rights and the virtues of true womanhood. This tension created an impasse that saw the undoing of the dominance of true womanhood ideology by the 1880s (Lippy and Williams, 2010: 515). This tension was perhaps best encapsulated in the ‘Home Protection’ principle coined by Willard in a 1876 speech to the Women’s Congress in Philadelphia.
Temperance reformers tried diligently both to combat intemperance and insulate free market ideology from scrutiny (Martin, 2008: 124). In this sense the parallel with today’s conservative antiporn reformers is clear. The profitability of the pornography industry is emphasised as proof of moral decay, but the driving force of the industry – the capitalist imperative of infinite growth – is not fundamentally questioned. The evil is in the commodity, not the impulse to commodify.

The rallying cry of Home Protection allowed WCTU to use temperance as a vehicle to agitate for expanding women’s rights. Under the banner of home protection activists could frame women’s intent to win the vote as necessary in the fight against alcohol. Without women’s honourable influence in the political sphere, the scourge of alcohol would persist. Only when women won the vote would the country be returned from the dens of sin. Willard’s 1876 speech blended feminist ideology and domestic ideology together, asserting “God has indicated woman, who is the born conservator of the home, to be the Nemesis of the home’s arch enemy, King Alcohol” (Martin, 2008: 223).

Here we see the ideological basis of contemporary conservative women’s organisations engaged in the struggle against pornography. Rather than entirely usurping the male domain of the public sphere, sacrificing the feminine virtues of meekness and passivity, Christian women with a heart for political change tread carefully between the two spheres, appropriating women’s rights language where deemed advantageous, but always returning to a narrative of morality and sin. As women’s groups, CWA and EF invoke the virtues of true womanhood through their promotion of purity, piety, and submissiveness, but they are inheritors of WCTU’s reconceptualisation of the limits of women’s influence.

Indeed the legacy of the temperance movement in terms of constructing women as uniquely suited to solving social problems has paved the way for groups like CWA and EF to loosen traditional norms barring women’s political participation. As Blee (1998) notes, CWA and EF have been able to adeptly use the success of early feminism in normalising women’s public activism to, ironically, mobilise antifeminist women. Moreover, as the women’s movement transformed matters of sexuality from an intensely private subject to the centre of public discussion, CWA, FOF, and EF were able to use sexuality as a cornerstone of their ‘pro-family’ agenda (p.173).

The task of enforcing sexual morality is unique for women’s groups within the movement. As women’s organisations, CWA and EF are expected to balance their oftentimes competing
narratives of antifeminism and opposition to pornography to an extent that is not required of the male-led FOF. Being seen to sympathise too overtly with the feminist perspective carries greater political consequences for CWA and EF whose formation depended almost entirely on an opposition to feminism.

As a matter of principle both CWA and EF routinely employ antifeminist arguments on a wide array of issues to an extent far exceeding FOF. However, on the specific issue of pornography CWA is less forcefully antifeminist than EF. CWA is not averse to adopting rights-based, feminist arguments in their criticism of pornography. In a 2011 article on modern-day slavery, Crouse asserts that pornography fuels prostitution, which she describes as a ‘swirling vortex’ of ‘violence, slavery, and misogyny.’ As the abovementioned material indicates, EF did demonstrate openness to antiporn feminist arguments in the 1980s and was willing to cooperate with feminists to formulate an effective legal case against pornography, but has since abandoned this strategy, retreating from its implicit endorsement of feminist arguments to a more stubborn social conservative position which primarily views pornography as an issue of concern to parents of young, exploitable children. Schlafly’s fading political influence and the relative success of other conservative women’s groups such as CWA and the IWF in eclipsing EF over the last decade have also contributed to the shift in rhetoric. Rather than catering to a more diverse pool of adherents, EF’s audience are on the ideological margins. CWA has adapted to the demands of secularisation more effectively than EF, thus securing its political survival.

Common ground on law and order

Antiporn feminists might have a traditional home on the political Left, but their willingness to propose punitive, law and order solutions have made some of their arguments particularly appealing to the groups in this study who are happy to endorse legal remedies which punish producers and consumers of obscene material.

The United States is a unique case study when it comes to advocacy for victims of crime – “it defies left-right categorization,” according to Valdivia (2003) because it has traditionally involved the confluence of politically disparate groups. Therefore, a better frame through

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which to examine positions on pornography and the justice system is class. In *Sex Panic and the Punitive State*, Lancaster (2011) argues that liberal, middle-class women have been receptive to the crime-control approach because they have not had to live in the poor neighbourhoods which bear the brunt of increased policing and incarceration. Distance from the effects of excessive policing has resulted in some feminists being eager to pursue antiporn laws that contribute to an atmosphere of punitiveness, putting them in near propinquity to their antiporn counterparts on the Right who have traditionally favoured prosecutorial vindictiveness (p. 210).

One prominent left-wing antiporn feminist who has visibly moved towards the law and order orientation is Gail Dines, whose work the groups’ cite on numerous occasions. Following the announcement by the British Prime Minister David Cameron in 2013 that internet service providers would be encouraged to bar their customers from accessing pornographic material, Dines came out in agreement. Appearing on a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation radio program in July 2013, Dines described the filter as “taking the onus off parents who have had to basically look over their kids’ shoulders.” Later that year Dines appeared alongside Conservative MP Joy Smith and evangelical Julia Beazley at an event on the harms of pornography in Ottawa, Canada and expressed her support for Canada adopting a similar opt-out model. Indeed on a range of issues from antiporn and antiprostitution laws, to raising the age of consent, feminists have been drawn into alliances with archconservatives (Lancaster, 2011: 210).

Elsewhere in the conservative movement, Christian Right activists are using Dines’ work to redefine their relationship to feminism. In a 2010 issue of *The Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, Denny Burk refers to Dines’ book *Pornland* (2010) and states, “on every other issue, Gail Dines and I would probably be on opposite sides, but not on this one.” Burk methodically dissects Dines’ argument, agreeing that pornography portrays the degradation of the body and is not an expression of sexual freedom. But Burk diverges with Dines on her argument that patriarchy is synonymous with abuse. “Biblical patriarchy is not abusive but strives toward the protection of women and children”, proclaims Burk. Male headship is ultimately selfless, he continues, symbolising a chivalrous, protective instinct that all men

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ought to possess. Only when male headship is disregarded do men dishonour women on a wide scale. In other words, Dines is right that pornography corrupts men and alters their behavior towards women, but patriarchy holds the ultimate solution to this predicament and should not be condemned. This is strikingly similar to the position taken by the groups in this study, whose endorsement of the feminist position extends only so far.

The law and order frame provided another opportunity for CWA to co-opt antiporn feminist arguments in the wake of rape allegations at Steubenville High School in Ohio. In a rare public showing of consensus, CWA joined forces with UltraViolet, a pro-choice group devoted to combating sexism and advancing women’s rights, to address the case. In her statement on the alliance, CWA president Penny Young Nance appealed to both a pro-woman and law and order angle, citing the tragedy of society’s sexualisation of girls and the seriousness of rape, and pledging to address it through the power of the punitive state. The co-founder of UltraViolet, feminist Shaunna Thomas confessed that an alliance with those on the Right was an unlikely one, asserting that “there are few things that Ultraviolet and Concerned Woman for America agree on, but when it comes to rape case in Steubenville we are united. Every last person involved in the cover-up of this crime must be prosecuted.”

Feminist analyses of pornography are often so multi-layered that fitting it within a legally constituted statute has proved difficult, argues Carol Smart (1989: 116). Preferring to view issues like pornography in terms of absolute truths, conservatives have had an easier time applying law and order solutions to complicated social problems. Smart warns that this could be a suicide ritual for the feminist position against pornography, which risks becoming a “latterday moral crusade” prepared to concede more power to an anti-feminist legal system in order to achieve limited legislative regulation over some forms of pornography (p. 116).

Feminists have experienced a similar dilemma when confronted with the question of how to punish perpetrators of rape. Criminalising marital rape was celebrated as a victory for feminism, but with it came tougher penalties, which played into the conservative thirst for a more prosecutorial climate. Conservatives have driven the framing of pornography as a legal conundrum, and despite disparate sources of objection to pornography, feminists have followed, narrowing their focus onto a legal framework. In the foreword to Phyllis Schlafly’s

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book *Pornography’s Victims* (1987), CWA founder Beverly LaHaye borrows from feminist rhetoric on the harm pornography does to women, but ultimately arrives at a law and order remedy:

The defenders of pornographers’ “rights” are, knowingly or unknowingly, creating an environment that legitimizes the further spread of abuse of women and children. By ridiculing and opposing all attempts to prosecute and track down those depicting even illegal activities, they are obstructing justice and promoting the violation of our civil rights.

Feminists have defended the legal ground shared with conservatives by assuring critics that obscenity laws are a moral idea championed by the Christian Right, while the civil rights platform has its origins in left-wing campaigns against racial segregation and oppression.

The temperance and social purity movements of the late nineteenth century reveal parallels to today’s antipornography efforts in terms of both collaboration and tension between conservative Protestant women and early feminists in the area of sexual misconduct and the law. Early feminists used the language of the time to denounce unbridled male sexuality and “sexual excess”, promoting in its place “continence” and bodily integrity to protect women and children (Jeffreys, 1985: 27).

Stemming from deep anxiety about growing industrialisation, increasing immigration, sprawling cities and the decline of rural America, the social purity movement attracted both conservative and progressive adherents. It was believed that such rapid change had led to the commercialisation of contraception and more men using prostitutes to satisfy sexual needs outside their marriage. Sexuality itself needed to be restricted. For early feminists this fit a perception that male sexuality needed to be placated. Emanating from this belief was a deep ambivalence about the role birth control played in facilitating male sexual dominance, leaving women with no excuse to avoid his advances. The suffragette Lucy Re-Bartlett (1912) demonstrates this position:

> Those artificial means which in the educated classes are so largely resorted to in order to prevent results leave the animality resulting from the undue use of the sexual act the same as in the populace, adding to it a new element of degradation through the violation of physical nature which in the populace rarely, and in the animal never appears (p. 59).
Birth control merely meant women had to submit to more sexual intercourse. It did not restructure the societal relations which render women the subordinated sex. The conservative position, more concerned with protecting a nationalist agenda of restoring America to its once proud tradition of religion, home and empire nevertheless found temporary friends in early feminists who supported their legislative aim of criminalising contraception and abortion.

The conservative panic with regard to abortion stemmed in part from a constellation of fears that with the growing number of migrants settling in the United States, racial imbalances would arise if middle class white women chose to forego motherhood (Freedman, 2006: 181). The collaborative effort between conservatives and feminists was exceedingly successful. Until the 1860s, abortion and contraception had gone largely unchallenged in the United States, but the social purity movement accelerated the criminalisation of abortion throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which held firm until the Roe decision in 1973.

Like the anti-feminist and conservative campaigners today whose language can be difficult to distinguish from one another, social purity reformers were united by rhetoric that could seem prudish and pious to contemporary observers. For example, the problem of ‘sexual vice’ was well documented by the Suffragette newspaper, and it was widely understood that men’s ‘moral degeneracy’ had brought venereal diseases into the home (Jeffreys, 1985: 47).

Indeed, the paradox underpinning today’s antiporn discourse on the Christian Right which regards the use of pro-woman, equality rhetoric as necessary in the service of maintaining unequal gender relations was first trialed by social purity reformers. August Forel (1922) captured this contradiction perfectly in his work The Sexual Question in which he advocated for equal rights between men and women for the preservation of intrinsically unequal separate spheres. Forel believed women should be given equal rights so that they might “react freely according to their feminine genius” (p. 504). In other words, women ought to be free, but within the constraints of femininity.

CWA takes the firm position that upholding women’s rights and enforcing law and order are one and the same. “If we do not enforce obscenity laws stringently, the ripple effect on the
rest of the culture will lead to a tidal wave of degradation and destruction.”[150] But they distinguish themselves from their feminist rivals on the Left by going one step further, “The legality of pornography is but the first consideration in regulation, a deeper consideration is the moral basis for legal regulation.”[151] In their view, without authoritative bases for distinguishing between right and wrong, judges cannot be expected to make the sound moral judgments that will protect women.

FOF’s position is almost identical. “Strong laws can successfully curb the spread of pornography and reduce the harm associated with it,” they contend[152] These measures are what is required to preserve “God’s design for sexuality”, but also to protect women from the attitude that they are merely “possessions and playthings”[153] for men, reminiscent of the language used in section (a) of the 1983 Minneapolis antiporn ordinance feminist definition of pornography.[154]

EF’s language on pornography is strongly orientated towards law and order, partly owing to Phyllis Schlafly’s background as a constitutional lawyer. For Schlafly, “The evil fruits of the Supreme Court’s endorsement of pornography as a First Amendment right are everywhere apparent, and the pro-pornography bias of the federal courts continues to this day” wrote Schlafly (2004b). EF in its contemporary form focuses much more than CWA and FOF do on pornography’s harmful effects on children, tending to avoid language that could be perceived as sympathetic towards feminism. This is a shift from its antiporn discourse in the 1980s, which wove in far more references to male sexual aggression and female victimhood.[155] Today the group prefers to convey their argument in more affectless terms about using

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[154] The feminist definition of pornography, including material where “women are presented dehumanized as sexual objects, things or commodities”  
prosecutorial power to recapture the country’s moral foundation, rather than about protecting women from harm.

When the issue at hand is not pornography, feminist action on the legal front is triviliased and even ridiculed by some leaders in the groups. For example, Phyllis Schlafly alleged that the attempt by women’s groups to bring legal action against men who sexually harass women in the workplace was driven by little more than feminist paranoia that men are conspiring to victimise women. In the same vein, Schlafly strongly opposes the battered woman syndrome defense, which she believes is used to free guilty women from being convicted of a violent crime. Once an acknowledged ally of many EF members during the antipornography civil rights ordinances, Schlafly also takes aim at feminist lawyer Catharine MacKinnon for her work on the *Meritor Savings Bank v. Vinson* case which recognised certain forms of sexual harassment as a violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 Title VII. MacKinnon’s views regarding consent have made many conservatives balk, and Schlafly was no exception. In a 2006 interview for *The Guardian* with Stuart Jeffries, MacKinnon reaffirmed her position that in rape cases, consent is irrelevant. “My view is that when there is force or substantially coercive circumstances between the parties, individual consent is beside the point” MacKinnon is quoted as saying, adding “if someone is forced into sex that ought to be enough.” The Christian Right worldview which views women as both the regulators and tempters of male sexuality, and at the same time as sexually passive and undesiring, does not centre issues of consent in its discourse on sexuality and marriage.

The implicit feminist aim in all of these legal challenges, Schlafly claims, is not equality, but instead to usurp male dominance with its polar opposite – domination by women. “The feminist goal is not fair treatment for women” asserts Schlafly, but “the redistribution of power” from one sex to the other. CWA’s Janice Shaw Crouse also criticises a worldview which she believes frames social relations only in terms of the oppressor and the oppressed.

Legal action taken by feminists in the area of sexual harassment amounts to a hostility toward masculinity, adds Crouse, and has created “an uncertain environment, if not a hostile one, where men have to watch their every word and action lest it be misunderstood or

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misinterpreted.” To conservative leaders like Schlafly and Crouse, sexual harassment laws are an obfuscation, drawing attention away from the true problem of marital infidelity and sexual impropriety. Therefore sexual harassment is less a question of “economically enforced sexual exploitation” as Catharine MacKinnon (1979) terms it, and more a case of private immorality threatening public morality.

At first glance, Schlafly and Crouse’s opposition to sexual harassment law while simultaneously advocating stricter laws against pornography might seem contradictory. Indeed Schlafly’s assertion regarding sexual harassment that it should not be the job of government to “catch some man who’s a slob” could just as logically apply to a man caught procuring pornography as it could a man harassing a female co-worker (Schlafly in Saguy, 2003: 119).

However, the key difference between the conservative objections on the one hand to sexual harassment law and their support of antipornography law on the other, is the fact that the construction of sexual harassment law was a direct response to issues which arose when middle-class women’s participation in the workforce increased dramatically. The Christian Right is uncomfortable with women’s workforce participation, particularly when the woman is employed on a full-time basis, necessitating childcare for her children and undermining her husband’s role as the family breadwinner. This position was well captured by Schlafly in a November 6, 2014 radio show, where she declared that women have realised that “having it all” is a myth, adding that “raising children while pursuing a successful, high-powered career at the same time just doesn’t work for most moms.”

The valorisation of the stay-at-home mother is a prevailing theme in the groups’ discourse. Stay-at-home mothers are encouraged to think of themselves as undertaking work that is equally, if not more difficult and important than mothers who work outside the home.


make this clear, FOF appropriates J. Howard Miller’s 1943 wartime propaganda poster of Rosie the Riveter which has been used by feminists as a symbol of women’s empowerment (Kimble and Olson, 2006). The group edited an image of a baby into the arms of Rosie the Riveter in a 2012 article about the value of stay-at-home mothers; adopting the cultural icon of a strong, powerful, independent woman in the service of upholding the male breadwinner family model. Therefore, sexual harassment law is perceived as a superfluous remedy to address a problem that need not exist had women remained in their rightful place in the home. Sexual harassment law will only lead to the further marginalisation of men in the workplace, worsening the perversion of natural roles defined by the order of creation.

Antipornography law poses no such threat. Rather than reordering male and female roles, antipornography law affirms the marriage relationship by insulating it from external temptation. It must be noted that President Reagan’s Meese Commission, although couched in the language of women’s rights and social science, was primarily concerned with maintaining the marital relationship and reaffirming the inseparability of sex and procreation.

Indeed, the Meese Commission serves as one of the most salient representations of the intersection of pro-law and order feminist and Christian Right narratives, eventuating in a new discourse in which the women’s movement was exploited and co-opted to serve President Reagan’s pro-law and order agenda. It was the cementing of a new paradigm in the approach the Christian Right took to pornography. They would continue with the law and order ethos and of heavy surveillance of cultural deviance, but would use the work of feminists to help broaden the scope of obscenity prosecutions (Jackson and Scott, 1996: 346).

Whether it is in their articulation of pornography as an affront to women’s rights, their problematisation of male sexual aggression, a new consideration of pornography’s role in men’s violence against women, or critiquing the way in which pornography encourages hypermasculinity, the groups are seizing arguments which originated in antiporn feminism and undermining notions of male primacy which are the cornerstone of the family values agenda. But elsewhere in their antiporn material, a more traditional set of values sentimentalising married women and children and proposing punitive law and order measures resuscitate the traditional far-right case for coming down hard against pornographers. By pursuing this rhetorical strategy, the groups unite the romantic portrait of the domestic ‘true

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woman’ with her radical counterpart, for whom feminist arguments are most persuasive. It is a stark parallel with the political trajectory of the temperance movement under Willard’s stewardship, which pioneered the version of conservative feminism now being taken up by the Christian Right.

**Socio-political influences: why the Christian Right are co-opting feminist arguments**

To provide some context in terms of why it is that CWA, FOF, and EF have opted for the tactic of appropriation, it is worth examining the attendant socio-political factors in the United States which have motivated the groups towards this rhetorical strategy. This section delves into some of the key factors at play, these include: the way paralleling fundamentalist tendencies have allowed the Christian Right and antiporn feminists to both construct a notion of pornographers as unequivocally bad; how women’s changing relationship to the public sphere created a political imperative for the Christian Right who had to adapt or perish; the role political polarisation has played in motivating the Christian Right towards tactics that appear conciliatory and bipartisan; and the way sheer political opportunism has compelled the Christian Right to temper some of their hyper-religious rhetoric in favour of a pro-woman stance that appeals to the moderate, pluralist, and secular rungs of American democracy.

**Pornography, fundamentalism, and the single-issue coalition**

A unifying feature of both antiporn feminism and the Christian Right is a degree of fundamentalism that underpins both positions. Scholars are divided on the precise boundaries of fundamentalism, but there is a general consensus that it emanates from anti-modernism, “a reaction against developments in science, in society, but even more rigorously in theology and religious leadership” in the words of Heinz Streib (2007: 151). A penchant of fundamentalism is the belief in the struggle between good and evil. “Fundamentalists define themselves in large part by what they are against” asserts Richard T. Antoun (2001: 56) in his book on fundamentalist traditions. The groups in this study employ the rhetoric of good and evil in their discourse on pornography as they do on all social issues where an oppositional stance has been developed.
Feminist antiporn politics is also premised on a strong oppositional posture of rejecting the hegemonic heteropatriarchal sex practices glorified in pornography. But because they have not been able to precisely articulate what more equal sexual relations would look like, accusations of ‘sex-negativity’ have been waged at antiporn feminists. A failure to balance such an oppositional model with a vision for more egalitarian sexual relationships between men and women may stem from an understanding that capitalism inevitably co-opts and contorts women’s attempts to pursue their own fulfillment in sexual relationships. Indeed contemporary pornography arose out of the sexual liberation movement of the 1960s in which women were led to believe their sexual preferences and behaviour would carry no more shame or judgment than those of their male counterparts, particularly with the threat of pregnancy diminished by the contraceptive pill. Experienced businessmen like Hugh Hefner and Larry Flynt exploited the emancipation of sex from the private to the public sphere, and built profitable magazine empires on the commodification of women’s bodies.

With this recent history in mind, antiporn feminists remain hesitant to explore the liberatory possibilities of heterosexual relationships, instead maintaining a position of oppositional resistance that is unsuited to the realities of postmodernity. Through the interpretive framework of postmodernism, a broader perspective on gender, sexuality and the formation of identity can be realised (Pitchford, 1997). Remaining trapped in an older oppositional model of politics and representation sees antiporn feminists converge with the Christian Right in terms of framing pornography in absolutist terms, arguing, in essence, that all pornography is bad. Possessing no redeeming features, pornography is framed by both sides as intrinsically harmful, consisting of images and film of women “to be acted upon” as MacKinnon puts it (1987: 130).

The position that all pornography constructed on the premise of dominance and subordination is a violation of women’s civil rights reflects a strong tone of moral absolutism. Constructionist approaches to pornography which explore the possibility that women can be sexual agents who self-define their desires and limitations are dismissed by antiporn feminists as merely an extension of patriarchal logic. The remarkable rhetorical consistency within antiporn feminism over the last forty years speaks to the rigid self-assurance of the movement.163

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163 Although recent antipornography publications, the most notable being Gail Dines’ Pornland (2010) have explored new aspects of the debate (the rise of online pornography), the framing of the problem and the
The common fundamentalism underpinning both positions occasioned strategic alliances and blatant co-options of feminist arguments throughout the 1980s, but the political landscape has changed since then. The George W. Bush era allowed the Christian Right to affix itself to the political establishment through the Republican Party. Movements focused on material conditions of power such as antiporn feminism found themselves with diminished cultural resonance due to a political climate that was less responsive to class-based, materialist analyses of power (Haverty-Stacke, 2009). The 1990s saw a shift “from the class-based concerns of the Old Left to the more personal, self-oriented politics of the late twentieth century” (p. 227). A cultural politics of recreation, personal freedom, and individual rights had taken over from a critique of capitalism within the left.

The emerging neoliberal paradigm had substituted such analyses with individualist therapies such as the positive thinking movement and the notion that one's contentedness is determined by how they choose to think about their circumstances, and not by the material reality of those circumstances. These coexistent factors gave the Christian Right unprecedented influence over the outcome of elections and the public discourse on social issues. This position of advantage allowed the movement’s leaders to borrow from feminist rhetoric, exploiting the movement to modernise and sexualise its image.

While the Christian Right had the political connections necessary to guide and shape public policy, it needed to attune itself to a new social and economic dynamic which had changed women’s relationship to the state. High female workforce participation; widespread use of birth control; high rates of cohabitation; an increasing divorce rate and declining marriage and fertility rates became new realities. By imbibing the language of women’s rights and forging opportunistic alliances with feminist figures, the Christian Right ensures its compatibility with a culture constantly reevaluating the role of women.

It is a movement adept at forging these kinds of alliances around single-issues. On abortion, the Christian Right has been able to capitalise on widespread feelings of insecurity and personal loss to make connections with feminists who are critical of abortion. The non-profit group Feminists for Life represents the most organised feminist objection to abortion, critiquing the issue from a human rights perspective. In their view, abortion is “a reflection

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proposed avenues of redress are consistent with the arguments Andrea Dworkin made in 1981 in Pornography: Men Possessing Women.
that our society has failed to meet the needs of women.”\textsuperscript{164} The new framing of abortion as harmful to women’s mental and physical health is also indicative of the alliances that have been forged between antiabortionists on the Christian Right healthcare providers. The Ohio-based Association of Pro-life Physicians, directed by Christian physician Dr. Patrick Johnson, provides contact information on a vast network of antiabortion doctors within each state in the union on its website.\textsuperscript{165} Other medical groups like the American Association of Pro-life Obstetricians and Gynecologists and the Christian Medical Association offer similar referrals to healthcare professionals with strict opposition to abortion.

On the issue of sex trafficking, which the Christian Right regards as inextricably linked with pornography, single-issue alliances have been formed as well. In a January 8, 2014 radio program on human trafficking, FOF president Jim Daly admits that he worked with Democrats and a “homosexual activist group” to ensure that House Bill 14-1273 was passed in Colorado, which made trafficking of a minor a sex offence.\textsuperscript{166} The bill also states that a minor cannot consent to being prostituted, and defendants can no longer argue that they do not know the age of the minor they are accused of trafficking. The issue has facilitated a strategic relationship between feminist abolitionists and the Christian Right in the pursuit of tougher prosecution of sex traffickers. From this alliance the Christian Right have emerged wielding the universally appealing language of human rights, permitting them to make significant inroads on sex trafficking legislation on an international level (Kamrani and Gentile, 2013). Morality discourse does not have the same power as liberal rights to influence the legal framework on trafficking internationally, particularly outside of a North American context where evangelical policing of sexual behavior and biblical binaries denoting what is irrefutably ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are constrained by cultural relativism.

Temperance reformers found their own version of a single-issue coalition in the slogan of Home Protection. Nineteenth-century feminist groups organised around the central goal of women’s equality, whereas evangelical women and temperance reformers took as their central goal the moral reformation of American society (Epstein, 1981: 4). The two


movements converged on the principles of the Home Protection ballot, urging that women, as the morally superior sex, had a special duty to protect their country and therefore required the vote. In other words, female suffrage would enable women to rescue America from its moral demise. However, where the interests of women and the defense of family and moral values diverged, the temperance movement chose the latter, dividing the early progressive feminist and temperance movements.

Just as Home Protection served as a single unifying point on which conservatives and radicals could converge in the nineteenth century, the antipornography movement has allowed these two groups to meet again. In both the temperance and antipornography movements, political issues outside of the single-issue coalition have caused rifts between adherents. Conservative temperance activists found themselves at odds with the anti-slavery abolitionists in the ranks of the American Temperance Union, and disputes over whether activists ought to campaign for moderation in liquor consumption or total abstinence caused some division as well (Johnson, 2010: 85). Differing views on women’s sexuality also divided temperance leaders. While WCTU leaders Wittenmyer and Willard conceived of women’s sexuality as distinct from men’s – tamer and less receptive to temptation – feminist activist and temperance supporter Elizabeth Cady Stanton took a different view. “A healthy woman has as much passion as a man” argued Stanton, whose belief it was that women should not be liberated from men’s sexuality, but instead allowed their own (in Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 2001: 126).

Similar disputes over sexual agency plague the antipornography movement, with the defining point of convergence being the Christian belief that women control the sexual impulses of a man by manipulating his sexual energy. Antiporn feminists do not possess the same confidence that women have any such power under patriarchy, and maintain that men routinely violate women’s sexual boundaries. Other rifts on issues such as abortion, birth control, child care, and marriage have further sullied relations.

Beneath the partisan, antagonistic veneer of Christian Right family values politics is a far more complicated set of beliefs regarding faith and public policy that are being constantly redefined and renegotiated by movement leaders. Before his fall from grace, influential pastor Ted Haggard argued that “evangelical does not mean any particular political ideology” (Stafford, 2005: 42). Richard Cizik (2000) of the National Association of Evangelicals argued that the nature of evangelical political involvement is changing. “Evangelical coalition-
building is breaking new ground on a variety of issues” alleged Cizik (p. 82). Fears of guilt by association no longer dissuade those on the Christian Right from finding common ground with erstwhile opponents to seek a larger end.

**Political polarisation and antiporn rhetoric**

The willingness by some Christian Right leaders to adopt feminist arguments is occurring against a backdrop of extreme political polarity in the United States. The Pew Research Center’s 2014 study of some ten thousand adults in the United States found that self-identified Republicans and Democrats are further apart ideologically than at any other point in history. The study’s findings point to a stiffening in people’s ideological attachments, resulting in an unprecedented level of philosophical homogeneity within the major parties. The typical Republican is now more conservative than ninety four per cent of Democrats, compared with seventy per cent twenty years ago. And the typical Democrat is similarly more liberal than ninety two per cent of Republicans, up from sixty four per cent. Moreover, the most ideological Americans are the most energised and likeliest to participate in primary elections.

These animosities extend beyond the political sphere. Partisan Americans have self-segregating preferences which motivate them to live around people with similar viewpoints. Geography is a strong polarising factor, as is the liberal desire to live in a small home within walking distance to schools, compared with the conservative preference for a large home requiring a car that can transport them to a school miles away. “The tendency for liberals and conservatives to self-segregate most likely reinforces the ideological and partisan divide” writes Nate Cohn (2014) for the *New York Times*, the effect is that “voters silo themselves into echo chambers where dissenting opinions are rare.”

Within this climate of uncompromising partisan loyalty, the Christian Right, occupying an ideological position on the margins of conservative politics, have exploited one of the few areas of common ground they have with the progressive-left. Using their more substantial resources, the Christian Right have been able to seize ownership of a feminist narrative by merging the liberated woman with the true woman.

Essential to the success of this adaptive process is another key source of ongoing tension and polarity: the feminist movement itself. In the absence of a broader feminist consensus that pornography is fundamentally harmful to women, the antiporn feminist movement, with little
political leverage, is left vulnerable to external political forces determined to co-opt marginalised feminist perspectives.

In a climate of widely acknowledged ideological polarity, coming across as a unifying force attracts praise and widens a group’s appeal. Writing for FOF, Ed Chinn criticises Christians who engage in hostile political exchanges with their opponents. “Politics has never been about truth or righteousness” proposes Chinn, “it is about compromise and consensus.” In place of the reactionary style of some Christian leaders, Chinn suggests followers of Christ employ a strategy of “serious and long-term craftsmanship” that unites old political foes in a “majestic mission of reconciliation.” As a movement known for its sententious moralising and stubborn devotion to traditional values, the Christian Right is not typically seen as a bastion of compromise.

In a chapter on the Christian Right and civic virtue, long-time scholar of religion and politics, Clyde Wilcox (2010) explains that those on the Christian Right are far less likely than other Republican donors to agree that compromise is an essential part of politics (p. 193). However, Wilcox concedes that the uncompromising characterisation of the Christian Right is often overstated, “Christian Right activists are willing to be persuaded in at least some political conversations and to engage in compromise that does not involve core principles.” This is playing out on the antipornography front. The Christian Right and antiporn feminists agree on the core principle that pornography is harmful. The rhetorical tactics employed to support this position are subordinate to this governing principle.

At the same time as the American people are shifting further apart ideologically, the major political parties are drifting closer together. While the division of Americans with common economic interests has become increasingly pronounced, an uncritical acceptance of fiscally conservative ideology has permeated throughout the United States with the convergence of the major parties, particularly on matters of taxation. Levin and Shapiro (2001) refer to this as the ‘fiscalization’ of the policy debate. Prior to the 1980s, Republicans and Democrats were less focused on conflicts over the budget. Muted against the backdrop of the Cold War, the budget did not start becoming a central political concern until the Reagan era, when an economic slowdown served as the impetus for a return to Gilded Age era fiscal policies, slashing the top income tax rate from 70 per cent to 28 per cent. As a point of contrast, the

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top income tax rate was 94 per cent in 1944 under Franklin D. Roosevelt, ushering in decades of post-World War II social equality and middle-class prosperity. Since the 1980s the doctrine of trickle-down economics has come to be regarded as untouchably sound, and certain cardinal virtues go unquestioned, such as the assumption that inequality is inevitable; enormous defence budgets are necessary; and the private sector is the best source of ingenuity and productivity.

In her book *The Twilight of Equality?* Duggan (2003) dissects the political landscape that developed in the 1990s whereby the progressive-left started to reproduce itself as divided into economic vs. cultural issues. The illusion that categories of social life can be practically abstracted from one another gave rise to single-issue, identity-based political movements, and the possibility of ideologically nonsensical coalitions between antiporn feminists and the Christian Right.

The big difference, Duggan argues, between leaders in neoliberal organisations like CWA, FOF, an EF and key antiporn feminist theorists, can be observed in the culture of redistribution. The conservative groups in this study co-opt feminist rhetoric, but they do so within a broader framework of upward wealth redistribution; whereas antiporn feminists, in line with the Left, support the goal of downward redistribution. Business and financial interests sully the potential for the groups to make serious inroads in terms of a women’s rights-centred strategy to defeat pornography. Without embracing the larger project of downward redistribution, Duggan contends that organisations settle for “stripped-down equality, paradoxically imagined as compatible with persistent overall inequality” (p. XX).

Duggan is referring here to progressive-left organisations, but the same analysis can be applied to the groups in this study. Without lining up their rhetorical strategies with a policy agenda that supports equality across the board, the appropriation of women’s rights language by these groups has few opportunities to translate into meaningful antipornography reform. The tactic of selectively appropriating aspects of feminist discourse is superficial, incapable of inspiring the kind of activism required because it constantly contradicts itself. At nearly every turn the radical language is placated by discursive reassurances that the philosophical core of the groups are still intact.

Another monumental change in recent decades has been the corporatisation of political parties, which has undermined the cause of social justice movements such as antiporn feminism that are grounded in a structural analysis of power. Since the 1980s a new
liberalism has emerged, described as a ‘third way’. Set against the old liberalism advocating progressive taxation, a substantial welfare state, and the universality of civil rights, new liberalism retained support for progressive responses to so-called ‘social issues’, but weakened its resolve against neoclassical efforts to frame happiness, liberty, and the free market as interrelated. That is, liberty cannot exist without private ownership (Duggan, 2003). As a result, new liberals began to see government as less of a vehicle for ensuring fair and equitable treatment, and more as a burden, an impediment to individual brilliance that had to be diminished. This had the effect of legitimising the individualist economic worldview possessed by those on the Christian Right.

Within previously progressive-left circles it became accepted that good governance ought to be judged using business principles. That is to say, the state should mimic the corporation. “The era of big government is over” announced newly re-elected Democratic president Bill Clinton during his inaugural address in 1996, demonstrating the extent to which conservatives had successfully framed government provision as fundamentally wrong. This is a far cry from the position progressives took during the early twentieth century, during the Progressive Era, and later the New Deal under President Franklin D. Roosevelt. During this period there was considerable support for the idea that the power of the state ought to be expanded to regulate economic relations, such as the hours and conditions of labour (Duggan, 2003: 7). The policies of the New Deal, including the establishment of social security, minimum wage laws, abolishing child labour, redistributive taxation, and public works programs initiated decades of unprecedented American prosperity. State regulation of the markets came to be regarded as common sense; necessary for upholding the principles of a liberal democracy, and the ‘vital centre’ between democracy and totalitarianism, as Schlesinger (1998) posited.

In the 1950s and 1960s, in an effort to reprivatise public assets, conservatives mobilised to reframe the state as an intrusive, stifling force, except in matters of sexual politics, where it was entirely reasonable for the government to have a say in the personal affairs of Americans. The push rightwards in American politics came with the assimilation of neoconservatives into the base of the Republican Party. Previously identified liberals, that is, those who supported the Democratic Party and labour unions, but who possessed strong anti-Stalinist views, abandoned the Left and turned on many of the precepts of the New Left, such as the feminist and gay liberation movements. These neoconservatives migrated from the left during the New Deal era to the ranks of the Republican Party by the 1960s, accusing the progressive-left
of social engineering a class of unproductive and elitist public sector workers (Horwitz, 2013: 1940).

Neoconservatives have been able to successfully portray the progressive-left as an elite class fundamentally out of touch with ordinary working class Americans. This has led to the formation of coalitions between neoconservatives and the Christian Right, whose opposition to the secular humanism of the ‘elite left’ makes the two groups natural allies. The problem for the progressive-left has been that the association of their politics with the intellectual elite has become somewhat of a self-fulfilling prophecy. The Democratic Party has shied away from New Deal era economic reforms concerned with the nationalisation of industry and the expansion of labour unions, in favour of so called ‘social issues’ and reforms that appeal to those suspicious of government intrusion into the private sphere, such as a woman’s right to terminate a pregnancy, and the rights of gay and lesbian couples to wed (Duggan 2003). Both appealing prospects in a libertarian mindset concerned with minimising the role of the state. With the neoconservative-infused Republican Party jolting the right-of-centre party further to the right, and the Democratic Party diminishing its once robust economic agenda in favour of social issues, the differences between the parties have become more a matter of where one stands on, say, the issue of abortion than on redistributive taxation. As the fictional character Josh Lyman quipped on The West Wing “now what we’ve got is two corporate parties - one pro-life, one pro-choice.”

To make matters worse for those on the progressive-left, the influence of labour unions and fraternal organisations which once linked blue collar workers to the political establishment has declined at the same time as conservative political organisations have ascended. Making up much of this landscape are so-called “astroturf” organisations that purport to be broad-based but are in fact run by industry organisations and have few actual members (Soss et al. 2001: 12). As the Democratic Party have echoed the Republican Party’s belief in the self-regulating power of the market economy and shifted their focus to social issues, the opportunities for single-issue coalitions and the co-option of rhetoric have become more tenable.

Because both the Christian Right and antiporn feminists emerged out of the sexual liberation movement of the 1960s at a time when economic issues were playing second fiddle to concerns about the moral degradation of American society, class-based analyses of

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168 What kind of day has it been 2000, DVD, The West Wing Season 1, Episode 22, Warner Bros. Television.
pornography failed to resonate with a public unconvinced that the United States was divided along class-based lines after a period of significant middle class prosperity. The public was less concerned with the pivotal role poverty played in the production of pornography, and more concerned with the consequences of sexual promiscuity on malleable young minds. Temperance activists faced a similar predicament. “Instead of indicting the whole economic system” writes Blocker et al. (2003) of the temperance reformers, they “stressed the moral aspects of overindulgence.” The individual was responsible for his poverty by spending his money on drink (p. 259).

In What’s the Matter with Kansas?, Thomas Frank (2004) details how the geographical, racial, and religious divisions among Americans have been able to cement themselves so convincingly, largely because the Democratic Party has softened its position against supply-side economics. Meanwhile Republicans have been engaged in a fierce program of ideological transformation, legitimised by an intelligentsia consisting of multiple structures, such as media organisations like Fox News, The Spectator, and the editorial page of the Wall Street Journal, as well as theory emanating from the Chicago school of economics (Krugman, 2007). The Democratic Party has forgotten blue-collar voters, Frank argues, and concentrated instead on recruiting affluent, white-collar professionals who are liberal on social issues but are more or less indifferent to issues affecting working people, such as organised labour and privatisation.

The result, political writer E.J Dionne (2004) points out, is that both the Republicans and the Democrats became “vehicles for upper-middle class interests” (p. 12). As the differences between the two major political parties dissipate before the American people, old rivalries become less significant. In a peculiar paradox, groups like CWA, FOF, and EF can exploit growing polarity within their constituency to enflame antifeminist sentiments, while taking advantage of a broader political meeting of the minds that obscures the traditional boundaries of political action, allowing old foes to meet on common ground.

**Political opportunism and rhetorical co-option**

Fundamentalist groups operating within a secular, pluralistic society must be mindful of the socio-political landscape on which it stands. Hopson and Smith (1999) reason that “the rhetorical strategy of the leaders of the [Christian Right] has been to wed a selected set of biblical imperatives with their particular vision of the public good in such a manner that their message may be embraced by an ostensibly democratic pluralist society” (p. 6). The call to
abstain from sex until marriage and to restrict sexual practice to procreative behaviour is biblical in origin, but it has an alienating effect on the broader community, particularly towards women whose sexual impropriety is regarded as especially unacceptable. Although Americans tend to hold conservative views with regard to sexual morality, particularly when it comes to what information children are given about sex, studies show a general resistance to abstinence-only education and an openness in terms of providing children information on contraceptive methods.\(^{169}\)

It is through pro-woman rhetoric that groups on the Christian Right are managing their relationship with the moderate political centre. There are numerous examples of this that extend well beyond the activities of CWA, FOF, and EF. For example, back in 2008 an evangelical organisation based in Washington, Sojourners-Call to Renewal, recognised that the movement’s reputation for being opposed to abortion and same-sex marriage was hurting its image. Worrying to evangelical leaders was the fact that the movement was becoming increasingly removed from the politics of young Americans and threatening the future strength of evangelicalism. The organisation’s CEO, Jim Wallis, organised meetings in Columbus, Ohio attended by 10,000 evangelicals, with a focus on the movement’s origins in woman’s suffrage and the abolition of slavery. Reverend Rich Nathan, senior pastor at the Vineyard Church of Columbus asserted that many feel that the evangelical label “has been taken captive by a very narrow political program” concerned primarily with the right-to-life issue (Carr Smyth, 2008). Although taking a more inclusive, rights-based, women-oriented approach may well be a strategic façade, the consequence is still pluralist and secularist in outcome (Moen, 1992: 1367). As Bates (1995) incisively asserts “exclusive language is used to motivate movement members” whereas “inclusive language is used to lessen the fears of outsiders” (p. 47). In order to expand their constituency, the Christian Right is engaging in the politics of inclusivity.

Post-traditionalist movements like the Christian Right have no real means of dismantling the structure of modern, secular societies and are therefore required to accommodate and adapt to ensure their political survival (Wilson, 1982). CWA and FOF have responded to this inevitability, and given that their opposition to pornography has some allies in the feminist

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\(^{169}\) For example, a 2006 study on published in the *Archives of Paediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, a publication of the American Medical Association, concluded that adults, regardless of their political position, favour a more balanced approach to sex education that encompasses information on contraception and abortion.
movement, have exploited this uncomfortable liaison. EF has not adapted so seamlessly, clinging to a more antiquated, narrow view of pornography as an affront to scripture.

The evidence is overwhelming that, through the vehicle of pornography, the Christian Right are pivoting towards the mainstream, or what Moen (1997) describes as “the societal consensus.” But the risk is that feminist concepts are being appropriated by the movement in the service of patriarchy, to eventually close off those same opportunities.
CONCLUSION

This thesis set out to explore to what extent, how, and why the Christian Right in the United States have appropriated pro-woman, rights-based, equality-conscious arguments into their opposition to pornography, and specifically, how the movement has borrowed from antiporn feminist literature in the service of conservative ends. For a movement defined by its vehement opposition to feminism, it is an ideological aberration that carries as many political risks as it does rewards.

The chapters gradually pick apart this question, first by delving into the dawn of the new Christian Right, wherein key figures set a distinct tone for the movement, drawing an ominous picture of a country gripped by the forces of evil.

To survive spiritually, Americans would have to return to patriarchal family values and aggressively resist the incipient threats of feminism, gay rights, and black liberation. Because pornography depicted nonprocreative sex and normalised transgressive sexual practices, it was implicated in the breakdown of the American family. Feminists who were problematising patriarchal institutions such as the family and church were blamed for contributing to a morally depraved culture in which sexual excess was becoming the norm. These were early iterations of what came to be known as a “culture war”, in which pornography formed part of a broader anxiety about women agitating for independence from male control.

As the women’s movement intensified in the 1970s and ‘80s, so did the rhetoric of the Christian Right, giving rise to figureheads like Phyllis Schlafly who led the successful campaign to dismantle the Equal Rights Amendment, striking at the heart of the feminist movement’s goal of overcoming Freud’s famous assertion that biology is destiny. Reviving nineteenth-century gender politics which sentimentalised women and consigned them to the home, Schlafly and the Christian Right convinced women that the ERA would not take into consideration their unique vulnerabilities, and perhaps counterintuitively, would end up doing them more harm. After the amendment failed the ratification benchmark in 1982, the role of women on the Christian Right became far more crystallised.

Far from being voiceless figures, certain women in the movement were instead given a platform where they could function as effective foils against feminism. However,
constraining expectations on conservative women’s organisations when it came to their engagement with women’s policy produced unique challenges. They were required to appear both sympathetic to women adherents who have become accustomed to antiporn arguments expressed through a rights-conscious frame, and conciliatory to forces within the movement determined to preserve the tenets of male headship.

Through their involvement in the Meese Commission Report and antiporn civil rights ordinances in the 1980s, prominent figures in the movement were exposed to antiporn arguments developed from the civil rights perspective. The legally contentious position that pornography is strictly an obscenity was on unsteady ground, and feminist postulating about pornography being an affront to women’s rights presented the Christian Right with new opportunities to advance a conservative agenda couched in the progressive language of rights and equality.

This rights-conscious frame stood in confrontation with the movement’s traditional position on pornography which saw America’s obsession with obscene material as a sin of moral recalcitrance with horrific cultural implications. Antithetical to the feminist civil rights position, this traditional view placed particular onus on wives, whose duty it was to ensure their husbands were sexually satisfied and would therefore not need to seek outside pleasures from pornography. Reflecting an Order of Creation mindset, the traditional line centred the needs of the male head of the household at the expense of the woman.

As the Christian Right sought to reconcile such contradictory positions, the feminist movement was in its own state of crisis in the 1980s over debates about pornography and prostitution. Clashing ideological viewpoints about the extent to which women can exercise sexual agency under patriarchy, and whether pornography should be considered a form of “speech” worthy of protection, led to bitter and still unresolved divides between activists. Antiporn feminists were left enfeebled by these disagreements, which came to a head at the 1982 Barnard Conference on sexuality in which organisers excluded antiporn feminists from the organising committee, prompting protests by the New York-based Women Against Pornography. For antiporn feminists, being associated with the moralists of the right-wing proved difficult to overcome. In contrast, liberal pro-sex feminists were given the upper hand due to the shift during this era away from a more class-oriented, state-managed economy to a hyper individualised and financialised economy which commodified their vision for freer sexual expression. Antiporn feminists retreated from view and a decade of vacuity followed,
in which the absence of an organised feminist challenge to pornography created a vacuum that could be filled by the Christian Right.

By the 1990s a shift in rhetoric among Christian Right leaders seemed to acknowledge that hard line loyalty to biblical inerrancy had its political limits. While they had up until that point been value-laden, they had been policy-thin, and there was a need to tie moral issues to secular concerns like the economy. This strategy framed pornography as a central culprit in the breakdown of marriages, which can render women dependent on the state, rather than their husbands, causing great expense to the taxpayer. The feminist analysis of pornography also became very useful to the movement at this time, as it presented another angle of attack that could be misappropriated in the service of conservative political ends.

The Christian Right’s appropriation of women’s rights language is in part a reaction to the resonance of pro-woman rhetoric to many women in the movement, and also an acknowledgment of the extent to which feminist principles have transcended political, as well as religious/secular divides. CWA, FOF and EF’s use of feminist rhetoric signals an obvious, if tepid, alignment with a more gender conscious politics that politicises women’s experiences. The groups’ consideration of power, agency and oppression in their antiporn discourse meets certain criteria for feminist consciousness, but the reality is a more complex identification with both traditional and radical perspectives on women’s roles. The effect is a mosaic of perspectives that look like an attempt to reconcile biblical mores with modern expectations, and which can all be traced back to two inharmonious schools of thought: the true woman and the liberated woman.

Indeed, it is not only on the pornography front that pro-woman rhetoric is being assimilated into the discourse of the Christian Right. Retreating from a morality frame, antiabortion acitivists in the movement are attempting to connect with women using feminist language that constructs abortion-minded women as helpless victims of violent male abortionists, an aping of the feminist dominance-subordination dyad. Old tactics that demonised abortion-minded women and privileged the zygotic bodies of their potential offspring have been replaced by gentler, more compassionate campaigns designed to reinvent the image of a movement which had become associated with extreme violence and coercion. And on guns, leaders on the right are urging women to join the macho firearm culture by assuring them that being armed will be a power equaliser, shielding them from male sexual violence. In each case, the Christian Right in alliance with other right-wing elements have developed their own
strain of pro-woman politics that repositions notions of equality, subjugation, dominance, and choice to fit conservative policy prescriptions.

Through the Christian Right’s inversion of women’s rights arguments on pornography, they have gone about presenting the family values agenda as a natural ally of the ongoing civil rights project. The same was true of the nineteenth-century temperance movement, who under the stewardship of protofeminist Frances Willard managed to merge the interests of teetotallers and suffragettes under the banner of home protection. This allowed temperance reformers to frame women’s intent to win the vote as necessary in the fight against alcohol. Today’s Christian Right, brimming with their own home protection agenda, are proposing that a version of women’s equality tinged with conservative overtones is necessary to unmoor the grip pornography has on the culture. Both movements use the progressive expansion of women’s rights in the service of a prohibitive, repressive, censorial end.

As the temperance precedent makes clear, movements for moral reform are not always ideologically pure, and can involve trade-offs and a negotiation of values to ensure the movement’s political survival. Instead of seeing today’s antipornography movement strictly as a kind of “new temperance” obsessed with once again regulating and repressing deviant behaviour, scholars must account for a more complex set of circumstances that acknowledges the way in which the Christian Right have confronted the political reality of women’s increased visibility and negotiated their values to adapt to a rights-conscious culture that is less tolerant of blatant misogyny than it was when the movement first emerged. In doing so they have reconceptualised women as more than a biblical abstraction, but rather capable of some degree of agency and deserving of equal rights.

By appropriating feminist terms, the groups in this study enflame tensions with political rivals in the women’s movement, and provoke definitional questions about who gets to represent women’s rights. Their new focus on the links between pornography and domestic violence, for example, suggest that past concerns that discussing the prevalence of domestic violence might undermine the institution of marriage are being overshadowed by the need to challenge perceptions that the Christian Right is a movement concerned primarily with maintaining male power at the expense of women. Indeed, the movement supports the patriarchal nuclear family, but it is attempting to frame the maintenance of heteropatriarchal structures as beneficial to women. Through the vehicle of pornography, the groups are taking established concepts from feminist discourse and contesting their meaning. Their critique of
hegemonic masculinity is a core example of this – problematising the way pornography encourages men to see women as inferior, while simultaneously endorsing a view that naturalises men’s superiority over women.

Essentialising assumptions about women’s intrinsic virtuousness and men’s unrestrainable virility in the groups’ antiporn material are part of a long tradition in women’s movements of using women’s supposed moral superiority as a powerful political symbol. Temperance reformers thrived on this narrative, and antiporn feminists have used these assumptions to their advantage. The belief that violence is an inherently male phenomenon, fused in male consciousness, has allied antiporn feminists and members of the Christian Right for decades. The right’s appropriation of feminist discourse has occurred against the backdrop of this ideological alignment, in which maleness is constructed as unaccountable and animalistic.

But far from adopting an indiscriminate appropriation of women’s rights language, the groups allay their pro-woman arguments by regularly pivoting back to a conventional antiporn narrative that sentimentalises mothers and children, obsesses over transgressive sexual practices, and accuses feminism of helping create the social conditions under which pornography could thrive. They oscillate perplexingly between an accusatory posture toward feminism, and a more open stance willing to work with certain antiporn feminists. In this strategy they seem to be navigating the precarious terrain between dogmatism and pragmatism.

This tactic is emblematic of Ellen Flournoy’s (2013) notion of “pick and choose conservatism”. A contradictory approach that allows the Christian Right to seize aspects of feminist discourse they like, while aspects they do not like are held up for vicious critique. It is in many respects a coping mechanism. During the lifetime of the Christian Right, increasing numbers of women have migrated from the domestic sphere to the public sphere. To remain of the view that women ought to cede all responsibility to their husband and carry on quietly with the unremunerated work of caring for children is in the present-day American context a proposition that does not resonate with great numbers of women, even those who lean conservative. The groups are cognisant of this, and are therefore reconciling their domestic ideology with a conservative version of feminist ideology by locating women’s empowerment in the heteropatriarchal institution of the nuclear family. Repeatedly, the groups use the notion of the family as a safe space in which women can retreat from the violent misogyny of pornography. Contrary to temperance reformers who identified the home as a
site of hostility in which drunkard husbands would take out their grievances on their wives and children, today’s Christian Right largely absolve husbands of blame by locating the problem in the external institutions of government, media, and left-wing political movements who they accuse of hypersexualising women as part of a plot to undermine the strength of the family.

That women are on the one hand deserving of equal rights, and on the other must remain deferential to their husbands and tethered to their caring responsibilities is a manifestation of the competing narratives within today’s Christian Right. Praise for nineteenth-century ‘true woman’ ideals have been revitalised by conservative leaders like Schlafly and LaHaye who assure their women adherents that piety and purity confer on women special powers of sexual persuasion. The female body in pornography is therefore not only contaminated, but represents a complete relinquishment of power to the unbridled sexual appetite of men. It is by strategically withholding affection and manipulating their husband’s weaknesses that women bridge the power imbalance in their relationships with men. To progressive feminists this might seem like little more than the product of dyadic relations of dominance and subordination between the sexes. But through an emphasises on the right to be treated as a woman – in the idealised feminine sense of the word – the Christian Right converge the two poles of the true woman and the liberated woman.

For both the Christian Right and antiporn feminists, there is a thrust of fundamentalism that underpins their positions, simplifying the Christian Right’s co-option of ideas. Both movements frame pornography in absolutist terms as an outright evil with no redeeming qualities. The more liberal notion that a woman can exercise sexual agency in pornography is dismissed by antiporn feminists as an extension of patriarchal logic. The Minneapolis antiporn ordinance cemented this in a legal framework, emphasising that pornography can only be degrading, and if it is not, it falls outside the definition of pornography. This moral absolutism appeals to the Christian Right whose strong oppositional posture has always been a central feature of their political efforts.

Broader social, economic and political factors also go toward explaining the decline of antiporn feminism and its attendant consequences in terms of rhetorical appropriation. With the rise of neoliberalism since the 1980s and a declining focus on class politics, a self-oriented politics took over large elements of the left, including the feminist movement. This has had two significant consequences in the antiporn context. It has diminished the influence
of antiporn feminists whose analysis centres on the structural influences that coerce women into pornography, instead elevating an individualist interpretation that imagines women can defy structural impediments to power and have a liberating experience in the sex industry. The depoliticisation of class has also increased the political leverage enjoyed by the Christian Right, whose movement is premised on exploiting a sort of essentialist tribalism that pits disparate groups against each other based primarily on identification with certain social groups. A weaker antiporn feminist movement and a politically dominant Christian Right permits conservative leaders to seize concepts and arguments developed by their subordinate foe, reinventing the meaning of the original work in the process. Taking discourse that was intended for a radical end and putting it to use for the preservation of the nuclear family.

What is more, the co-option of feminist discourse poses a threat to the feminist position against pornography. The continued use of pro-woman, rights-based arguments by Christian Right leaders means the movement is now occupying ideological terrain well outside the realm of morality and sin, to the extent that their adoption of pro-woman arguments, coupled with biblical gendered language, constitutes a new rhetorical tradition that amounts to a paradigm shift. The effect is that, in the context of pornography, the civil rights frame starts to become instinctively associated with the politics of the Christian Right. This undermines the progressive case against pornography by conflating the family values agenda of the religious right with the more radical, counterhegemonic project of antiporn feminists.

A weakened antiporn feminist position means that pornographers and the content they produce escape a meaningful critique grounded in a structural or institutional analysis of the harms of pornography. The Christian Right might borrow feminist terms, but they fail to connect these concepts with a critique of broader structures of male dominance, because to do so would contradict their foundational belief in an order of creation and male primacy. Without a prominent structural interrogation of pornography, the liberal, anti-censorship angle moves into the centre of feminist discourse, shifting the frame from ‘structures of dominance’ to an individualised focus on a kind of ‘sexual agency’ which defies structural barriers.

It is not a coincidence that the Christian Right has sought to formulate their own conservative version of feminism at the same time as the feminist movement has undergone its own process of depoliticisation. As feminism has mutated from a politics grounded in a left-wing
materialist analysis of power, to a set of ideals based increasingly on the framework of identity politics, it opens itself up to a hijacking of sorts by right-wing dissidents.

By seizing arguments developed in the feminist tradition, an emerging consensus that moral arguments are no longer sufficiently persuasive reveals itself on the Christian Right. It is in some respects an implicit admission of the success feminist activists have had in defining and determining the meaningful categories in the pornography debate. It also underscores the superiorly positioned status of liberal, secular discourse in the United States. In adopting the progressive frame of rights and equality, the Christian Right concedes that approaching the issue from a purely scriptural perspective undermines their ability to influence policy and attract new adherents for whom feminist arguments might have some resonance.

The perception that antiporn feminism has been hoodwinked and manipulated by moralists on the Right has inflicted devastating damage to the feminist critique of pornography. But a political inversion, in which the Christian Right are succumbing to the influence of feminist ideas, is apparent in their approach to pornography. The widespread use of feminist arguments by groups on the Christian Right challenges the dominant paradigm of the movement’s family values agenda; premised on the maintenance of heteropatriarchal gender norms which insist on women’s subordination to male primacy. Pornography has become an exception to this rule. For the women effected by it, Christian Right leaders are re-evaluating their instinctive response and initiating a conversation about women’s equality. Whether or not this transcends rhetoric and leads to policy outcomes more sympathetic to women remains to be seen.
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