

Identity Status in Politically Active Pro and Anti ERA Women

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Interviews of twelve politically active, female proponents and opponents of the Equal Rights Amendment were content analyzed for differences in identity status as indicated by relative adherence to parental attitudes, idealization of parent figures, and absoluteness in thinking. Proponents gave more manifestation of Achievement identity status; opponents gave more manifestation of Foreclosure identity status. Theoretical implications of relating identity status to the Equal Rights Amendment are discussed.

The long standing controversy over ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment poses several theoretical questions. A strictly political analysis might lead one to isolate such demographic variables as age, sex, income, and religion in order to explain differences in ratification preference. However, a review of the literature suggests that a traditional political analysis is insufficient.

The major work done in this field to date (Brady & Tedin, 1976; Tedin, Brady, Burton, Broman & Thompson, 1977; Tedin, 1978) has concentrated primarily upon demographic factors. Although these authors found that demographic factors such as religion did relate to E.R.A. preference, they suggested the need to explore psychological variables. A psychological analysis appears particularly relevant because the controversy over E.R.A. ratification is not primarily between men and women but rather among women. This points to an ideological difference among women regarding the implications of equal rights.

Seeking a theoretical framework which clarifies the significance of this ideological difference, we have employed the methodology of preselecting matched criterion groups for indepth interviews and analyses with politically active pro- and anti-E.R.A. women.

We would like to express appreciation for the editorial assistance of James R. Hudson, Penn State, Capitol Campus. Requests for reprints should be sent to Sandra Prince-Embury, Ph.D., Community Psychology Program, Penn State University, The Capitol Campus, Middletown, PA 17057, U.S.A.

The relevant concept which emerged in these interviews was "identity status" (Marcia, 1966; 1978; Josselson, 1973; Waterman, Note 1). It is our hypothesis that the Equal Rights Amendment represents possible redefinition of the identity of women with respect to significant others and with respect to our society. We further suggest that the conflict among women activists regarding E.R.A. may be viewed as a conflict between women who have arrived at different resolutions of their feminine identity.

For this reason we suggest that the concept of "identity" developed by Erikson (1956) and further elaborated as "identity status" by Marcia (1966) provides a meaningful theoretical framework for comparative analysis of these politically opposed groups. Erikson defined identity as the contact an individual makes with society to be and act in certain ways and not others.

According to Erikson, identity refers to the presence of a clear self definition, particularly regarding personal goals, values, and beliefs. Identity can be further described in terms of both the process by which an individual establishes a sense of self definition and the content of particular identity elements.

Based on Erikson's theoretical writings, Marcia (1966) developed a four-category classification system for the study of identity using the dimensions of "crisis" and "commitment." Crisis refers to a period of struggle or active questioning in arriving at identity decisions, which can be past, present, or absent.

Commitment involves the making of relatively firm choices regarding identity elements and engaging in significant activity directed toward the implementation of that choice. The absence of commitment implies that the individual's ideas are weakly held and that behavior is changeable. Simply stated, commitment means maintaining a given direction in spite of alternatives.

Marcia (1966; 1977) delineated the following four identity status's using the criteria of crisis and commitment in individual life choices.

Achievement: those who have seriously considered ideological alternatives and have made a commitment on their own terms;

Foreclosure: those who have made commitments in the absence of crisis largely holding on to childhood or parentally derived choices;

Moratorium: those in an active period struggling to make commitments;

Diffusion: those who lack commitments and appear unconcerned about it.

Waterman (Note 1) in his rating manual for adults suggests that the

presence of a stable political ideology is evidence of Achievement or Foreclosure identity status, depending upon whether the ideology was adopted from a parental figure or not.

The highly involved and relatively enduring political activity of political activists implies both the presence of an identity base for ideological decisions and the ability to make commitments to those ideological decisions. For this reason this study focuses exclusively on Foreclosure and Achievement statuses, both characterized by the presence of commitment.

Previous case study research applying Marcia's identity statuses to college age women (Josselson, 1973) has shown that while Achievement and Foreclosure women have both arrived at committed identities, there are striking differences between the two groups. These discrepancies include perceived differences between self and parents, relative idealization of parent figure(s), and tolerance of ambivalence.

Josselson (1973) found that while Foreclosures emphasized the closeness of their families of origin and made repeated references to their families, Achievements did not. Among the Foreclosure women there was a need to idealize parents, particularly the father or a male figure by presenting this person as exclusively positive and flawless. Josselson (1973) suggested that Foreclosures, in idealizing their parents were trying to maintain the security of primary narcissism. Josselson suggested further that "individuation is scarcely suggested (in the self-reports of Foreclosures) and the Foreclosures often have difficulty conceptualizing their parents as distinct from themselves... no distance exists between their idealization of one or both parents and their own ego ideal... being a very good girl for very good parents was a source of self esteem" (1973, p. 25).

Achievements, on the other hand, saw clearly the differences between themselves and their parents, having gone through the developmental disillusionment with parental imperfection. The predominant theme for Achievements is their struggle for independence and identity confirmation (Josselson, 1973).

In addition to tolerating ambivalence toward their parents, Achievements seemed better able than Foreclosures to tolerate ambivalence in general. Foreclosures, who were notably lacking in ambivalence toward their parents, tended to categorize most things in extremes of good or bad (Josselson, 1973).

Thus, Josselson's study clearly underlined that Foreclosure women see themselves as similar to their parents, idealize parent figures, and manifest extremes in thinking; while Achievement women view themselves as different from their parents, do not view their parents in an idealized way, and appear to manifest moderation in thinking.

Previous research with adult women suggests that there may be a relationship between identity status and women's attitudes toward sex roles. Waterman (Note 2) has found that Achievements have less traditional attitudes toward women than Foreclosures. He suggests that when there are no substantial differences between the ways in which the person and her same sex parent express sex roles, the person may be considered Foreclosure status. Where there are extensive contrasts with same sex parent, Achievement identity status seems more likely.

Recent work by Waterman (Note 2) examining identity status in adult married women indicated that women attending college were most frequently in the identity Achievement status, and full-time homemakers were least often in that status. Waterman also found that Achievements had less traditional attitudes toward women than Foreclosures.

From these previous findings, we suggest that identity status in politically active women is a useful framework to explore the psychological basis for opposition or support of the Equal Rights Amendment. The Equal Rights Amendment may be seen as a redefinition of the identity of women with respect to significant others and society. Female activists in favor of ERA ratification may be characterized by Achievement identity status as suggested by their less traditional attitudes toward women (Waterman, Note 2). Female activists opposing ERA ratification may be frequently characterized by Foreclosure identity status as suggested by their more traditional attitudes toward women (Waterman, Note 2).

Method

Subjects

Participants were twelve Caucasian women between the ages of 32 and 73 who volunteered to be interviewed by the researchers.

Subjects were recruited through major women's organizations which were actively working either for ERA passage or defeat. These organizations included Stop ERA and Eagle Forum (opposed) and National Organization for Women and ERAmerica (favorable). In selecting pro- and anti-ERA women from these two politically opposed groups, attention was paid to matching pro- and anti-women on demographic variables such as religion, educational level, and socio-economic status.

The average age of respondents was 47. Pro- and anti-ERA groups were similar in age, religious affiliation and marital status; most of the women in both groups either were currently married or widowed. There was no difference in educational level of the two groups. Three "pros" and five "antis" were mothers.

Criteria of Political Activist

From the available pool of volunteers, only those who met one or more of the following criteria were selected for participation: (1) regular participation or election to office in one or more political organization; (2) elected office holder (state or national level) with publicly stated ERA preference; (3) appointed official (by governor, mayor, etc.) with publicly stated ERA preference; (4) coordinator of grass roots feminist/anti-feminist organizations; (5) voluntary or employed lobbyist working for feminist/anti-feminist legislation.

Of the twelve participants finally selected, five of the anti-ERA women belonged to Eagle Forum and/or Stop ERA. The sixth opponent was affiliated with two other political organizations which have contributed time and money towards ERA defeat (Conservative Caucus and Young Americans for Freedom). Two anti-ERA women were also coordinators of grass roots anti-feminist organizations (Pro-Morality Coalition and Parents and Children Together).

Four of the six ERA proponents were members of the National Organization for Women (NOW). One of these four was an elected official (state legislator), and another was a lobbyist for Planned Parenthood. Of the remaining two proponents, one was a gubernatorial appointee (State Commission on the Status of Women) and the other a coordinator of the Women's Center at a large University, as well as a "feminist activist" engaged in various grass roots activities.

Measure: Identity Status Interview

A semi-structured interview based on Marcia's Identity Status Interview (1967) and Waterman's adaptation for adults (1980) was employed to elicit information from the pro- and anti-ERA women concerning their conceptualizations of the Equal Rights Amendment, as well as other areas of importance to them. Questions focused on three of the standard topic areas: politics, sex-role, and religion. The interview was designed to elicit specific information regarding three aspects of identity status: individuation from parents; idealization of parent or parent figures; and, relative modulation in thinking. These three indicators have been considered particularly critical by Josselson (1973) for determining identity status. Interviews were approximately one hour in duration and were taped for later analysis as is standard in identity status research.

Taped interviews were content analyzed independently by two raters to determine the frequency of Achievement and Foreclosure statements for each respondent, as identified by the following three themes: (1) whether or not the subject's views were identified as similar to or different from

those of her parents and significant others; (2) whether or not she tended to idealize one or both parents or parent figures (idealization refers to exclusive attribution of positive qualities to the parents coupled with the conspicuous absence of any mentioned parental flaws); (3) relative tolerance or intolerance of ambivalence as evidenced by the degree to which issues were discussed in an absolute or modulated manner. Although frequency counts and analysis of rater agreement of specific statements are more specific than standard identity status research, the present authors suggest this as a helpful illustration of the manifestation of identity status in specific content areas.

Results

Because of the highly selective nature of our sample, we were unable to make the assumption of normal distribution as assumed in parametric statistical analysis. For this reason nonparametric median tests were employed to compare the frequencies with which "pro" and "anti" women made Achievement or Foreclosure statements. As illustrated in Table 1, pro-ERA women made more comments indicating individuation from parents than did anti-ERA women ($p < .01$). "Anti's", on the other hand, made more comments characteristic of Foreclosures than did pro-ERA women, specifically, similarity of attitudes to those of parents ($p < .01$) and idealization of parents ($p < .01$). Inter-rater reliabilities for these dimensions are illustrated in Table 2.

Individuation from Parents and Significant Others

As indicated in Table 1, anti-ERA women made significantly more comments concerning how their views were similar to the views of their parents, and significantly less comments concerning how their views were different from their parents than did pro-ERA women. When asked how their parents felt about their political activity and political views, anti-ERA women unanimously reported that their parents were both proud of their activity and agreed with their political views. One "anti" woman offered that her parents "would not expect her to do anything else."

Pro-ERA women unanimously reported that their views differed somewhat from those of their parents, specifically mentioning the following:

"I have quite a few ideas which differ from the traditions with which my parents were raised."

"I'm much more liberal than anyone in my family... at times I think my parents are horrified."

Table 1
 Median Frequencies of Foreclosure (F) and Achievement (A) Oriented Statements
 Volunteered by Politically Active Pro and Anti ERA Women and Chi Square of Differences Between Groups

	Pro ERA (6)	Anti ERA (6)	Chi Square
Relatedness of attitudes to those of parents and significant others (individuation)			
(F) Same as	1.0	3.0	6.00*
(A) Different from	2.5	1.0	6.00*
Perception of parents			
(F) Idealized	.25	3.20	6.00*
(A) Imperfect	1.0	.25	2.4
Tolerance of ambivalence in attitudes			
(F) Absolute	.5	1.0	.53
(A) Modulated	2.0	1.5	1.5

* $p < .01$

Table 2
 Coefficients of Inter-Rater Agreement on Six Dimensions
 Differentiating Foreclosure and Achievement Identity Status

	Relatedness of Attitudes to Those of Parents and Significant Others		Idealization Versus Acknowledgement of Imperfection in Parents		Relative Absoluteness Versus Modulation of Attitudes	
	Same	Different	Ideal	Imperfect	Absolute	Modulation
Foreclosure Status	.36	X	.74**	X	.97**	X
Achievement Status	X	.79**	X	.25	X	.61*

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

"My parents are proud of me as a person, though they don't support my political stand."

"I sound my father out to find out what the other side is thinking and he does the same thing."

Two married pro-ERA women spoke of ongoing conflict which they recognized as such in their relationships with their husbands. The first woman reported how she had changed in dealing with the conflict:

"We were married nine years ago, there was money in the budget for my husband's membership to ACLU, but I never said anything about my League of Women Voters membership. I totally allowed myself to be subsumed by the relationship and my spouse... Now my husband doesn't think we need ERA. I tell him he's wrong and go about my business."

The second "pro" woman handled her conflict quite differently but acknowledged its existence quite openly:

"I lead a schizophrenic lifestyle... I lead my private life under one set of standards and my public life under another. In my relationship with my husband there are areas that my husband doesn't approve of, dislikes, or is threatened by such as some programs of the ERA... this we don't discuss."

"Anti" women on the other hand, minimized differences between themselves and their spouses, stating that if there were any they were not important.

"...that's what I fear [immediately corrected to feel] is so important. [Then changed the subject to focus on parenting and other people]... I'm not trying to say that everything in my household was perfect, but...the interesting thing is that with our backgrounds totally different, we (my husband and I) *think exactly alike*, someday I intend to write a book about this... but its really amazing how we *think exactly alike* about raising children and the free enterprise system."

Another anti-ERA woman, in commenting on the fact that her sister supported ERA ratification, minimized the importance of their difference of opinion by likening it to "going to the store and one of us buying a green skirt and the other buying a blue one."

Idealization of Parent or Father Figure

Anti-ERA women made significantly more comments which idealized a parent or parent figure, although the groups did not differ in number of mentioned imperfections. Pro-ERA women were notably lacking in idealization of parents, although several expressed appreciation for qualities held by one or both parents. One woman commented on her mother's political involvement, another on her mother's out-spoken nature. On the other hand, all anti-ERA women gave some indication of idealizing their fathers or father figures.

Two "anti" women eulogized their fathers:

"I would pick up from my father and feel as strongly as he did, he was very human, I'd like to think that I was like him... I've been very inspired by him... He was the kind of man who would help others, everyone loved him..."

"Father always sublimated his desires for the family. I made that my goal because I admired him so much... He was a tremendous person, just a regular fellow... He touched everyone's life so much, his friends and enemies, I don't think he had an enemy."

Other "anti" women made comments suggesting idealization of husband as a substitute for father. In discussing parenting, one woman stated:

"If the children disagreed with me on a moral grounds, I would refer them to my father [deceased], I mean my husband..."

A second:

"My first husband often said he married me then brought me up how he wanted me to be."

A third:

"I looked up to my Daddy... my mother encouraged me but didn't lead me... my Daddy sort of led me... and of course when I married I got informed by my husband... I was totally uninformed... if it hadn't been for him, I'd be a typical housewife and dummy."

The two remaining "anti" women, although more modulated in reference to their fathers and husbands, gave indications that their relationships with men had been extremely influential. One woman emphasized that she had developed her strong conservative views in debates with her father. She offered also that she was her father's primary debatee as her mother was apolitical. Another woman credited her husband with her greatly improved ability to debate rationally.

Extremes Versus Tolerance or Ambivalence

Both pro- and anti-ERA women sounded somewhat extreme or closed in reference to "the facts" about ERA. This observation is consistent with the findings of no significant difference in the relative tolerance of ambivalence manifested in these two groups (Table 1). However, the comments offered by ERA opponents and proponents, regarding the consequences of ERA defeat/ratification, are suggestive of more subtle differences in thinking that were not reflected in our content-oriented analysis. ERA proponents, although vehemently in favor of ERA ratification, were not extreme in stating consequences of nonratification. They used words like "setback," "more difficult for women," and "psychological disappointment." ERA opponents, on the other hand,

were more extreme in their discussion of ERA ratification, predicting "a chaotic society," "a giant step towards socialism," "loss of daughters since they would all qualify for the draft and combat duty," or "the breakdown of the home." One "anti" woman claimed she had become politically active when she "saw there was a concerted effort to make children confused and lost." Another anti-ERA woman was noteworthy for her extreme opinionism and rejection of opposing views as illustrated in the following self-report:

"Most people are strictly uneducated... If the *good* people won't get involved, you can't expect the *ignorant* person to do anything. *The facts are the same for everyone... We knew we had right on our side...* we told our kids, you cannot follow all these *hoods* and *bums*... I'm not a middle-of-the-roader."

One pro-ERA woman illustrates modulation in dealing with political opposition:

"It's important to get people to work with you... We may not like each other, but we have mutual respect for each other... It helps if you can put yourself in their (the opposition's) position... Take their opinion into consideration... We both (the opposition and I) have reasons for our opinions..."

The absence of significant differences between these pro- and anti-ERA women in relative tolerance or intolerance of ambivalence does not account for the above cited individual differences in thinking. The actual prevalence of individuals characterized by absoluteness in thinking in either "anti" or "pro" groups requires further exploration with larger samples. The findings of this study suggest, however, that neither the tendency towards absoluteness nor the tendency towards modulation is necessarily representative of all members of either group.

Discussion

We conclude, on the basis of our sample, that politically active pro- and anti-ERA women, by and large, differ not only in their political choice but also in their underlying identity structures. We suggest that many anti-ERA women are likely to be operating out of Foreclosure identity status, whereas pro-ERA women are more likely acting out of Achievement identity status. We suggest that these groups of women are similar in that they have somewhat stable identities and are capable of making and acting on commitments that are congruent with their identities. We suggest further that, although intolerance of ambivalence may exist in both groups, it is more likely to appear among anti-ERA women because of the nature of Foreclosure identity formation.

Within this framework, ERA preference may be viewed as congruent with an individual woman's personality. The pro-ERA women, having struggled to individuate from parents to form their own identities, would

continue to struggle against societal pressure to define themselves within the constraints of a prescribed role and would fight obstacles against the future elaboration of their identities.

Anti-ERA women, on the other hand, would resist ERA ratification on the grounds that it presents options for women and challenges the absoluteness of the role that they have assimilated from their parents. We believe that, for many anti-ERA women, this challenge taps the fear associated with unmet conflict and unmet individuation from parents and significant others.

The Equal Rights Amendment states simple that "equality of rights should not be abridged or denied by any state on account of sex." In the opinion of these authors the extrapolation by ERA opponents from "equality of rights" to conclusions about a "chaotic society," "breakdown of the home," and "a concerted effort to make children confused and lost" is evidence of tremendous personal fear. In statements of these ERA opponents inequality of rights was presented as a protected, even privileged status. Equality of rights, on the other hand, was seen as frightening and chaotic and represented a loss of something cherished. In a country which ostensibly was founded on the principle of liberty and justice for all, the fact that some of its citizens cling lovingly to a status of inequality is incongruous. We believe that the particular stance of the anti-ERA activists can best be understood from the perspective of the Foreclosure personality for whom change is much more threatening than inequality.

Fear or absence of fear figures prominently in "pro" and "anti" perceptions of each other. In our interviews, the proponents said of the opponents that they are highly emotional, illogical, and seemed to be frightened of something. The opponents said of the proponents that they are arrogant but misguided in that they don't know what they have to lose.

In summary, our findings support our proposal that controversy among women over the ratification/nonratification of the Equal Rights Amendment gains meaning if viewed as a controversy over feminine identity. The ERA opponents rally around an identity of inequality which is viewed as a cherished and protected status. The ERA proponents rally around an identity of equality and view the ERA as protection against inequality.

This controversy allows us to speculate regarding the relationship between personal fears and cultural fears. We suggest that ERA highlights the significance of equality/inequality to the identities of women in our society. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) has previously identified gender inequality as the core of both feminine and masculine identity. In the words of de Beauvoir "he is the Subject, he is the Absolute - she is the Other"

(1949, p. 16.).

Jean Baker Miller (1976) has also addressed the relationship of permanent inequality between men and women and the implications of this inequality in heterosexual relationships. If the Equal Rights Amendment is a challenge to the definition of women as unequal, perhaps it also challenges the identification of women as "Other" with respect to man and the permanent inequality of heterosexual relationships.

We suggest that the fears of the anti-ERA activists reflect threat not only to their individual identities, but also threat to the cultural assumption of gender inequality upon which their identities are based. We feel that the ERA represents a cultural threat to the extent that our society is rigidly based on the definition of women as unequal with respect to men.

The fate of the Equal Rights Amendment depends on the ability of our society to redefine itself with respect to female/male relationships, and on the ability of individual women to redefine themselves with respect to equality.

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