The Conservative View on Gender Equality:
An Investigation into the Conservative Rebranding of Modern Feminism

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Introduction

Conservatism is a political and social philosophy which encourages traditionalism, and therefore promotes continuity within society. Conservative values within contemporary society require individuals to embody conventional values, and thus opposes the transformative change achieved by the feminist movement. The feminist movement is a multiphase crusade which scrutinises gender inequality within micro, meso and macro level society. Thus, the transformative change promoted by feminism, theoretically, counteracts the continuity endorsed by conservatives. Evidently, conservatism and feminism fundamentally oppose each other, so what are conservative women’s view on feminism and gender roles within contemporary society?

As a non-voting member of the Australian public, I have witnessed yet not contributed to, the increased prevalence of political conservatism over time; such as the increased popularity of ‘One Nation’, and conservative female leaders, Pauline Hanson and Julie Bishop. This increasing incidence of conservative values prompted me to speculate, is conservatism counteracting the gender equality achieved by feminism? Through this investigation, I gained insight into the views of conservative women, regarding masculine and feminine discourse. I examined the continuity of conservatism over time, exploring conservative anti-feminism and speculating if the transformative change of the feminist movement intervened with the continuity conservatism.

I hypothesise that conservative women will reject feminism as a consequence of aligning the ideology with leftism, and feminism will therefore be regarded as an embodiment of the liberal agenda. Despite the empowered position of conservative women within politics, I predict that conservative women within micro and meso level society will encourage traditional gender roles.

This topic parallels with the Depth Study: ‘Social and Cultural Continuity and Change’. Exploring how the firm values of conservatives require individuals to personify conventional customs. Continuity and change are intrinsically linked to my cross-cultural comparison, in which the endurance of conservatism during times of anti-feminism and pro-feminism is evaluated. A thorough comprehension of gender allowed me to explain the contrasting feminine and masculine paradigms constructed by conservative and feminist ideologies. In further analysis, beliefs and values and rights and responsibilities were integral concepts, articulating the conventions of both philosophies.
Throughout my research process questionnaire and interview were employed for thorough investigations into conservative women. Employing the case study methodology, I investigated a small group of women from the Country Women’s Association, utilising secondary research and interview to consolidate a coherent understanding of socially conservative behaviour. This research method was effective in investigating the impact of feminism on conservative agendas and the social consequences faced by non-supporters of the feminist movement. To attain a comprehensive understanding of conservative ideologies throughout varying social realms, I also interviewed a conservative member of the Catholic Church. Furthermore, I administered a questionnaire to gain both qualitative and quantitative data in an effective and fast manner. Interview and case study both allowed interviewees to formulate in-depth, personal responses, allowing me to ask follow-up questions. Questionnaires supplemented my research, providing quantitative as well as qualitative information for my cross-cultural component, in which I made cross-generational comparisons by examining the evolution of the conservative philosophy.

My cross-cultural comparison was based on generational difference. Conservatism is common among older generations as it entails the embodiment of traditionalistic values. Therefore, it is expected that young individuals who have been socialised in a progressive society would harbour more liberal agendas. Comparing individuals older than Generation Baby Boomer and with those younger than Generation X gave insight into the prevalent ideologies across different generations. Through this research, I aimed to improve my social and cultural literacy whilst becoming an ethical researcher.
Log

I commenced the research process by looking through previous PIPs and consulting numerous teachers regarding appropriate ideas that are relevant within modern society. I always knew I wanted to employ feminist theory, however this did not narrow down my topic choices. With assistance from my teacher, I finally arrived at the decision to link conservative women and feminism.

Progressively I began to investigate secondary sources which developed a deeper hypothesis. It was relatively easy to find newspaper and web articles in addition to academic research, as conservatism is a relevant movement within contemporary society and therefore is prevalent within political news.

Despite the fast progress I made during the secondary research process, my first-hand investigations were belated due to a lack of motivation. However, I regained momentum by writing interview questions. By the end of March, I had successfully written interview questions for socially conservative women within my meso level society, and individual interview questions for conservative women within macro level society. I emailed the president of five local Country Women’s Associations, and two high profile conservative women within Australian politics, Pauline Hanson and Julie Bishop, requesting interviews. I was unsuccessful in attaining a response from the high-profile conservative women.

However, during April I held my first three interviews with members of the Maitland City Evening Branch and the Newcastle Evening Branch Country Women’s Association: Deborah Schaefer; Alison Wright and Maureen Mitchell. Two of these interviewees were self-proclaimed conservative women, who were actively conservative within both micro and meso level society, while Alison provided a valuable feminist perspective. Two of these interviews were organised over email however after continued correspondence with the Newcastle Evening Branch, I was invited to attend their monthly meeting on April 23rd. During this meeting I was able to observe the members of the CWA before I briefly spoke about my PIP and secured the interview with Maureen.

Simultaneous to organising and conducting interviews during April, I constructed my questionnaire. Despite initial hesitation, my teacher convinced me that the statistics which could be collated from close-ended questions would provide substantial quantitative evidence. After composing and refining drafts, I distributed ten pilot questionnaires to my
classmates, on May 6th. After recollecting the pilot, I simplified the vocabulary, so the questionnaire was accessible to a wider demographic. Throughout May I distributed 30 questionnaires to female students and staff within my school and additionally distributed 25 more questionnaires to an older age demographic at my mother’s workplace and grandmother’s Catholic church. I then consolidated all of the results and amalgamated this with my secondary research which allowed me to have my first chapter finished by June.

My writing process was stilted during the trial examination period. However, I gained pace by completing my fourth interview with a member of Morpeth Catholic Church in late June. With my primary research complete, I finished my Central Material during the July holidays and found the writing process a fluent procedure; however, editing my PIP was taxing. I was relieved to finish my first draft during July and experienced a sense of satisfaction once I had successfully edited and completed my work.
Chapter 1: The Polarisation of Conservatism and Progressivism

Conservatism, by its name, announces that it conserves. Progressivism, by its name, announces that it progresses. The Oxford Dictionary defines conservatism as being, ‘averse to change or innovation and holding traditional values.’ Whilst it defines progressivism as the ‘support for or advocacy of social reform’. Thus, conservatism is not the opposite of progressivism, as it does not invoke regression, however, it does advocate a paradigm of total continuity.

Social conservatism, therefore, is the philosophy that social norms and societal expectations should maintain continuity through the preservation of traditional customs and ideologies. It is the belief that society is built upon a fragile network of relationships which need to be upheld through authority, traditional values and established institutions. Further, social conservatism is generally sceptical of social change and believes in maintaining the status quo concerning social issues. Social conservatives are comforted by the security created by the preservation of social norms. The socially conservative praxis is thoroughly permeated with an orthodox ethos. Therefore, this inherent aversion to social change prompts the question, is a rejection to progression engrained in the philosophy of conservatism?

Social conservatism was developed as a reactionary philosophy, to what was perceived as dangerous tendencies within the liberal movements toward political radicalism and a wholesale rejection of traditionalism. Historically, conservatism does not reject change, however it insists that change should naturally develop, rather than be revolutionary. In the face of external forces for change, conservatism is critical of proposals for radical social transformation. Therefore, conservatism cannot be viewed holistically as an ideology which opposes all social and cultural change, advocating the continuity of conventionalism, however, it can be viewed as a philosophy which seeks to reform society slowly. Conservatism therefore promotes evolutionary change. Author of ‘Can a Conservative be Progressive?’, Melonic, states:

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‘...a conservative makes a distinction between what may be called 'trends’ in thought and politics, and perennial ideas and questions that still hold true.’

The notion of conservatism opposing liberalism is challenged, as Melonic supports the ideology that:

‘Conservatism does not reject change per se, but insists that changes be organic, rather than revolutionary, arguing that any attempt to modify the complex web of human interactions that form human society... runs the risk of running afoul of the law of unintended consequences and/or of moral hazards.' (Mastin)

Interestingly, 78% of conservative women who participated in my questionnaire did not identify with the studied area of progressivism, feminism. However, 100% of conservative women within the sample agreed with progressive, feminist, ideologies. It could be suggested that this is due to the affiliation of the term 'feminist', with leftism and therefore, radicalism. This infers that the pretence of the progressivism was supported by conservatives, however the ‘radical’ and ‘leftist’ connotations which feminism maintains, were fundamentally rejected by the majority of conservative women, who rejected the title: feminist. Hence, conservatism does not, ideologically, oppose social change. However, it does implore that any reformation is achieved through gradual adjustments to social mores not radicalism. Moreover, Melonic confesses:

‘One of the right’s biggest mischaracterisations is that conservatives are against progress.’

This article was published on ‘The Imaginative Conservative’, and therefore it would appear that it holds a bias toward conservativism. However, this bias is advantageous as it rejects the stereotype of conservatives being anti-progressive, from a conservative perspective. This statement corresponds with the results gathered from my interviews with women from diverse conservative institutions, including the Country Women’s Association and Catholic Church. Initially, in order to establish their conservative stance, I asked whether they identified with the Oxford Dictionary definition of conservative, being ‘averse to change or...”

7 Questionnaire
innovation and holding traditional values.’ However, all four women interviewed found this definition difficult to identify with. Maureen Mitchell, a member of the Newcastle Evening Branch of the Country Women’s Association responded:

‘No. Overall no. I don’t think they [conservative women] are averse to change. They’re very traditional in some of their ways, and things that they do. But, they’re very innovative.’

However, when asked if she identified with The Collins Dictionary definition, ‘favouring the preservation of established customs and values’, Mitchell responded:

‘Yes. A better definition. They [conservative women] still want to be able to do the traditional things… I think it’s good to have a balance of traditional and modern.’

However, this investigation into the views and values of conservative women within the CWA is case study, and therefore should not be interpreted a generalisation of the views of conservative women in broader society. Although, whilst acknowledging the limitations of the case study, Maureen’s response amalgamates the ideologies of both social conservatism and social liberalism. This apparent oxymoron of ‘liberal-conservativism’ suggests that despite the prudish stereotypes of conservative women, their philosophy includes the capacity to withstand and support social change. The Country Women’s Association is branded as a conservative organisation which favours the preservation of established customs and values. However, the notion of progression within this traditional institution was delineated during an interview with Alison Wright, who spoke as a member of the Newcastle Evening Branch, (however not on behalf of the CWA):

‘Our branch actually put together a movement to support the same sex marriage vote, for same sex marriage to be legalised, and within our branch there was only a very small vote against supporting that happening.’

Thus, the famously traditionalistic CWA is contemporarily in favour of progressive movements, including the legalisation of same-sex marriage. Interestingly, Wright proceeded to state:

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9 Interview with Maureen Mitchell, 9 May 2018.
11 ibid
13 Interview with Alison Wright, 9 May 2018.
‘If you look at the ages of the people involved, [who voted against same-sex marriage support] on that particular day, and on that particular vote, a lot of those would be considered older women.’

Wright implies that conservative women of older generations, were less inclined to support progressivism. This impression that stereotypical, anti-progressive, conservatism is rooted in older generations links to my questionnaire results, as only 33% of questionnaire respondents were above the age of 51, and 78% of these women indicated they were conservative. Further to this, only 45% of women above the age of 51 identified as feminists and 22% of these women were conservative. Therefore, it can be extracted that conservative women in Generation Baby Boomer and the Silent Generation were more inclined to reject progressive titles, like feminist. Chamorro-Premuzic (Ph.D.) suggests:

‘Intellectual curiosity tends to decline in old age, and that this decline explains age-related increases in conservatism. At any age, people differ in their typical levels of curiosity, and these differences have been attributed to the broader personality trait of Openness to Experience... Furthermore, open people are also more likely to display counter-conformist attitudes, challenge the status quo and disrespect authority.’

Therefore, this research would suggest, although women older than Generation Baby Boomer are more inclined to maintain the archetypal, rigid stigma of conservative women, conservatism is not inherently opposed to social progression and cultural innovation and this is exemplified by the CWA’s vote to support same-sex marriage. This confronted my liberal bias, as I was able to challenge stereotypes I previously held over conservative women. However, conservative women do implore that social reform is achieved organically, through gradual and passive adjustments to social norms: evolutionary change. This counterintuitive notion of social liberalism and social conservatism amalgamating redefines the stereotypes of socially conservative women. Therefore, if conservatism can embrace change in its most organic form, without aggression or radicalism, what are conservative women’s views on feminism and its radical connotations?

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14 ibid
15 Questionnaire
Chapter 2: Conservative Anti-Feminism

The prevailing principle of the Second Wave of Feminism was that of equality between men and women. Feminist historian Estelle B. Freedman thus defined the essence of feminism,

"Feminism is a belief that women and men are inherently of equal worth. Because most societies privilege men as a group, social movements are necessary to achieve equality between men and women".  

The Second Wave therefore focused on achieving equality through advocating women’s workplace, sexuality, family and reproductive rights. This movement opposed the rigid gender roles which were perpetuated within Western societies through images of affluent domesticity and feminine/masculine dichotomies. Such opposition to feminine societal expectations was exemplified in Betty Friedan's ‘The Feminine Mystique’, which criticized the idea that women could only find fulfillment through childrearing and homemaking:

“Each suburban wife struggles with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipcover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children, chauffeured Cub Scouts and Brownies, lay beside her husband at night- she was afraid to ask even of herself the silent question - ‘Is this all?’”

However, this movement is often perceived as an ‘anti-marriage’ regime. This is clarified by conservative political commentator and writer, Ben Shapiro, who stated:

“Second-wave feminism said marriage is bad, marriage is stupid and if you’re engaged in marriage – this is sort of Betty Friedan feminism – then you are engaged in a kitchen holocaust”

Yet, this stigma is not primarily the responsibility of the values and ideologies which the Second Wave promoted, it was also constructed through the radical protests and actions through which equality was achieved. Within my questionnaire, I asked my respondents – “Do you think that the aggressive feminism of the 1960s-80s, has given feminist values negative connotations?” To which 60% of the women interviewed answered yes. From this,  

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19 ibid
21 This video has since been deleted.
44% of conservative women answered yes while 61% of non-conservative women agreed that radical feminism has instilled a negative stigma around feminist ideologies.\(^{22}\) One particular conservative woman who did not identify as a feminist, however ‘strongly agreed’ with the ‘values and rights which feminism advocates’ answered:

‘Yes – Change should occur gradually and passively. Radicalism is unnecessary.’ \(^{23}\)

Similarly, a conservative woman who did not identify as a feminist, however ‘agreed’ with the ‘values and rights which feminism advocates’ answered:

‘Yes – it was a very difficult position and we owe a lot to our early feminists but sometimes the approach was antagonistic and put people off from the main function of the campaign.’ \(^{24}\)

These responses reiterate the conservative aversion to transformative change, as radicalism is deemed unnecessary and excessive. Most notably, the radicalism of the campaign was aligned with leftist ideologies and therefore fundamentally opposed the conservative view. This stigmatized feminism was therefore the catalyst for conservative, anti-feminist counter-crusades.

Christian Conservatives initially instigated anti-feminist campaigns on the basis that feminism violates a famous passage in the Epistles of Paul, in which Paul says:

"But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Corinthians 11:3).\(^{25}\)

This notion was supported by my Catholic interviewee, Josephine, who stated:

‘Early Christian conservatives believed the feminist movement, particularly that of the Second Wave, undermined, and I suppose, demonised, the male dominated Christian Church.’ \(^{26}\)

Moreover, the social and political conservatives of the 1960-80s such as Phyllis Schlafly, an American constitutional lawyer and conservative political activist, believed that gender roles were responsible for the success of Western society and that masculine and feminine

\(^{22}\) Questionnaire

\(^{23}\) ibid

\(^{24}\) ibid


\(^{26}\) Interview with Josephine (a member of the Morpeth Catholic Church), 29 June 2018.
attributions were integral for social coherence. Schlafly, like many other conservative women, believed in the necessity of gender roles and according to Schlafly's reading of history, in the United States, the most "basic unit of society" is the family and the most important members of society are logically women. Schlafly’s ideals continued to perpetuate contemporary society with the idea that gender roles are beneficial, as the article, ‘How Conservative Women’s Organisations Challenge Feminists in U.S Politics’, refers to her beliefs. Schreiber, stated:

‘It is true that some conservative leaders like Eagle Forum founder Phyllis Schlafly believe that women should be primarily wives and mothers at certain points in their lives... Groups like the Concerned Women for America maintain that it is women’s moral obligation as wives and mothers to fight for and protect their families.’

Although, Schlafly was a member of The Greatest Generation and the conservative women who led the Christian Anti-feminism crusades during the 1960-80s simultaneously were members of the Greatest Generation and The Silent Generation. Therefore, in order to investigate the views of contemporary conservatives on gender roles, I asked my interviewees, ‘Are traditional gender roles prevalent within your life?’ To which every conservative woman interviewed, replied no. All interviewees were Generation X.

Similarly, within my questionnaire I posed the same question, to which only 28% of respondents stated that gender roles were prevalent in their life. However, from this, 80% of those who stated gender roles were evident within their life were above the age of 51, and 54% of those who stated gender roles were evident within their life were above the age of 60.

Therefore, my research would suggest that gender roles are more prevalent within the lives of Baby Boomers and earlier generations, than they are within the lives of Generation X and younger.

Within my questionnaire, I also asked – ‘In which spheres are gender roles most prevalent within your life?’ To which 100% of respondents above the age of 51, who stated that gender roles were evident within their lives selected either ‘Home and Family’, ‘Workplace’ or both.

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30 Interviews with Maureen Mitchell, Deb Schafer, Alison Wright and Josephine.
31 Questionnaire
Out of all the conservative women who took part in the questionnaire, 67% were above the age of 60. Out of these conservative women, 50% stated gender roles were evident within their lives. However only 11% of conservative women between 51-60 stated gender roles were evident within their lives, and only 11% of conservative women between 41-50 stated gender roles were evident within their lives. Interestingly, out of the 11% of conservative women between the ages of 16-20, not one woman stated gender roles were prevalent within their life. Therefore, my findings suggest that gender roles are decreasingly prevalent within the lives of women of successive generations. My research indicates this is due to the prevalence of archetypal conservatism in older generation, in which libertarianism is absent.

Through the rejection of traditionalism within the Second Wave of Feminism, feminists consequently conflicted with the values and ideologies perpetuated by conservatives. However, the conservative women who opposed the Second Wave of Feminism were evidentially individuals of Generation Baby Boomer and older. Within contemporary society, it is these generations who are seen to maintain gender roles within their micro spheres, whilst Generation X and younger are less inclined to subserve to traditional gender roles. The indisposition of conservative women toward feminism was influenced by the contrasting views of conservative and feminist women toward traditional gender roles in addition to the stigmatization of liberal feminism and the radicalism of second wave feminist movements, as the leftist connotations fundamentally opposed conservative ideologies. However, as contemporary conservative women, as members of Generation X and younger, are less inclined to identify with traditional gender roles, what are contemporary conservative women’s view on modern feminism?

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32 Questionnaire
Chapter 3: Conservative Feminism

Feminism is the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of the equality of the sexes. Feminists are persons who support this equality. It is important to recognise that, while aiming for objectivity, I identify as feminist and maintain a bias toward feminism. My questionnaire was distributed to 55 women and 100% of these women agreed with feminist ideologies. However only 63% of these women, identified as feminists. Out of this 63%, only two women were conservative. Such aversion to the title feminism is exemplified by conservative Senator Pauline Hanson. In an ‘A Current Affair Interview’, Tracy Grimshaw asked ‘You said once that you don’t see yourself as a feminist. Is that still true?’, to which Ms Hanson replied ‘Yes.’

Like conservatism and progressivism, conservatism and feminism seem superficially opposite. However, every conservative woman who did not identify as feminist within my questionnaire, subsequently did not disagree with feminist ideologies, as 20% strongly agreed, 60% agreed and 20% were undecided on their perspective. So why is there such an aversion to the title feminist?

In an article by Samantha Leach, ‘Conservative Millennial Women Are Here for Female Empowerment—Just Don't Call Them Feminists’ the contemptuous response to the term ‘feminism’ is epitomised, as Leach recalls:

“Do you consider yourself a feminist?” A palpable silence took over, as Agness Lips (Founder and President of the Network of enlightened Women) dove right into criticism of contemporary feminism, arguing that it’s become an embodiment of the liberal agenda, as opposed to the pursuit of female equality… It became clear that while garden-variety girl power was alive and well here, feminist is predictably a dirty word.

Leach makes it apparent that the term feminism has become aligned with leftism, opposing the traditionalistic views of conservative women. However, it is evident that these women are not opposed to change, or female empowerment per se, yet they are opposed to the

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33 Questionnaire
35 Questionnaire
‘radicalism’ of the way in which feminists achieve: reiterating their disinclination towards transformative change and support of evolutionary change. This anti-left ideology is therefore conflated with anti-feminism. This was clarified by Alison Wright, a member of the CWA, within an interview when she replied to the question, ‘Conservative women are often thought to be anti-feminist. Do you have any thoughts as to why that might be so?’

‘I don’t think all conservative women are anti-feminist, I think that’s a generalised view. By all means, there is probably a portion of conservative women who are, and I guess in a way, women who are liberal, in the sense of liberalism, can probably be anti-feminist as well. So, I guess the idea that most conservative women are anti-feminist, harks back to the idea of people who are conservative which are unwilling to change...’

Yet this aversion to the term ‘feminism’ continues to perpetuate contemporary time and society, as conservative woman and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Julie Bishop rejects the title feminist,

"I don't find the need to self-describe in that way [as a feminist]"

In an article in the Sydney Morning Herald, journalist Ireland stated,

‘Ms Bishop stressed that while she recognised the women's movement and the barriers that it had faced, "feminist" is “not a term that I find particularly useful these days”.

Ms Bishop continues to justify her statement:

‘It's not because I have some sort of pathological dislike of the term. I just don't use it... It's not part of my lexicon.”

Evidentially, despite agreeing with gender equality and maintaining a belief system that resides with ‘opportunity-feminism’, conservative women maintain a perpetual aversion to the title ‘feminist’. Within my questionnaire, I asked the respondents - ‘Do you believe it is easier to identify with feminist values without being labelled as a feminist?’ 59% of respondents agreed that it was easier to not be labelled. From this, 56% of conservative

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37 Interview with Alison Wright, 9 May 2018.
39 ibid
40 ibid
women agreed that it was easier to identify as a feminist without being labelled\textsuperscript{41}. A particular conservative woman who did not identify as a feminist, however ‘\textit{strongly agreed}’ with the ‘\textit{values and rights which feminism advocates}’ elaborated on her answer:

‘\textit{Yes - Feminism was a movement which achieved its results radically, although it was advocating a positive change, I do not want to identify as one of them.}’ \textsuperscript{42}

Conservative women remain reluctant to identify with the label ‘feminist’ in spite of agreeing with the principles of feminism - the economic, social and political equality between the sexes. Consequently, a contemporary subsection of feminism has been constructed to amalgamate the traditionalistic values of conservatism, with the progressivism and equality achieved by the feminist movement.

‘\textit{I am a conservative feminist.}’ \textsuperscript{43}

If contemporary social conservatism holds the capacity to withstand and support social change, amalgamating liberalism with traditionalism, is this the title modern conservatives are to assume in regard to feminism? This was the response of Country Women’s Association member Deborah Schaefer, when asked if she identified as a feminist. Admittedly, Deborah confessed that she had never considered her view on feminism until reading the interview questions prior to the interview. When interviewees Maureen and Josephine were asked the same question, and their body language and hesitation implied that they too, were reluctant to identify as feminist as they had never considered the term before. This interview question therefore imparted a sense of discomfort during the interview. Conservative women are inherently opposed to transformative change yet agree with the ideologies and rights which the feminist movement advocates. Libertarian is defined by the Cambridge Dictionary as the belief that people should be free to think and behave as they want and should not have limits put on them by governments\textsuperscript{44}. Evidentially, the contemporary conservative ideology provides the flexibility for conservative women to consider themselves libertarians\textsuperscript{45}.

\textsuperscript{41} Questionnaire
\textsuperscript{42} ibid
\textsuperscript{43} Interview with Deborah Shafer, 20 April 2018.
‘Conservative feminism takes a more cautious stance on issues of concern to women than radical or liberal feminism...’

Therefore, this research implies that just as conservatism and progressivism are not polarised, conservative-feminism is not an oxymoron. Conservative women who consider themselves as libertarian-conservatives do not support that law or government should exercise its institutional power to ‘prescribe a particular role for women or discourage them from exercising free choice regarding occupation, marriage, and style of life’

To be a conservative feminist means reconciling what liberals have deemed as the irreconcilable: conservatism and feminism. The two are not mutually exclusive terms, “Conservatives don’t have to relinquish the banner of feminism to liberal ideology.”

Traditional values and promoting gender equality between men and women are not inherently contradictory. The Country Women’s Association advances the rights and equity of women, families and communities in Australia through advocacy and empowerment, especially for those living in regional, rural and remote Australia. Additionally, it is the largest women's organisation advancing the rights and equality of women, children and families in Australia.

This description resounds with the feminist definition: the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men, yet the CWA is reluctant to assume the title of a feminist organisation. An article by ABC News titled ‘Youth’ branch of Country Women’s Association, keeping age-old traditions alive states that ‘Part of the attraction is learning ‘old’ skills, like cooking, baking and sewing’. Peculiarly, this advocation of traditional gender roles does not resonate with feminist ideologies. This paradoxical value system was justified by CWA member Maureen Mitchell who stated,

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46 ibid
47 ibid
52 ibid
'They still want to be able to do the traditional things, whereas some feminist movements say okay stop that all together. But I think it’s good to have a balance of traditional and modern.'

Maureen proceeded to explain that the Country Women’s Association does not enforce traditional gender roles, however it provides the opportunity to develop traditional skills whilst simultaneously withholding the open-mindedness to promote independence and equality. She was adamant that these were not considered *gender roles* but were contemporarily regarded as *life skills*. Therefore, the CWA is an exemplary embodiment of conservative feminism which is depicted as:

`‘A means empowering women in the workplace, politics and in society to achieve equal opportunity. It does not and should not mean radicalizing feminism to connotatively and definitively include only liberal issues.’`

Therefore, from this research it can be concluded that conservative women are not averse to the progressivism of the feminist movement and agree holistically with the notion of achieving equal rights for both men and women. However, they remain reluctant to identify with the title ‘feminist’ due to its radical tendencies and its association with leftism. As a liberal feminist researcher, I found it difficult to agree with the values proposed by conservative-feminism and personally disagreed that conservative women can assume the title of feminist while disagreeing with fundamental issues which liberal feminism combats. Although, through overcoming my bias, it was made clear that to create an accessible feminist regime in which the idiosyncrasies of conservatism can be amalgamated with evolutionary change, ‘conservative-feminism’ has been constructed. Conservative women have thus rebranded modern feminism to construct a new feminist sect in which women’s rights can be advocated without holding connotations to leftism.

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55 Interview
Conclusion

Feminism is rooted in progressivism and theoretically opposes the fundamentals of conservatism. Conservative institutions were the vanguard of original anti-feminist movements, as second-wave feminism, was stigmatized as anti-patriarchy and anti-marriage. However, through my research I found that contemporary conservatism has expanded to allow conservative women to maintain a libertarian agenda. Through my research process I was enlightened that during the progression through the third and fourth waves of feminism, conservative women have ceased viewing feminism as single-faceted ideology and have consequently constructed a conservative feminist regime.

My Personal Interest Project proved my hypothesis that conservative women would align feminism as leftist and radical, however I was wrong in hypothesising that they would promote the continuity of gender roles, as it was concluded that conservative women are not opposed to evolutionary change, such as the eradication of stereotypes over time, but are opposed to transformative change. It became evident that the values of the modern conservative woman may align with contemporary feminist values, yet I did not predict the diversion of conservative-feminism as a new feminist sect.

The questionnaire was essential in allowing a statistical and qualitative comparison between conservative and non-conservative views on feminism, yet it proved difficult to find women who overtly identified as conservative within my meso level society and who would be willing to participate in the questionnaire. I was therefore unsuccessful in receiving responses from an equal amount of conservative and non-conservative women. The three interviews with the Country’s Women’s Association members and the interview with a member of the Catholic Church, which were conducted were successful in providing a thorough insight into the views of conservative women, effectively and appropriately providing relevant data. This was an appropriate research choice, as it was integral in my case study of the Country Women’s Association. The interviews were reliable and valid, due to the multiplicity of them. My secondary research was substantiated by the Internet, as academic journals, articles and studies were readily available through research databases. However, if I was to undertake this process again I would have had read more of the secondary material before composing the interviews and questionnaires, as some of my secondary research could have been better supported with primary statistics had I written questions which were better informed by the secondary information. In hindsight, it would have also been effective to hold a focus group.
with women from the CWA and Catholic Church combined, to see how a group of conservative women consolidated their views on feminism.

Resultantly, I have acquired a greater respect for the conservative ideology as I was exposed to the personal plight of conservative women during the interview process. As a contemporary feminist who maintains a left-wing agenda, I was able to overcome superficial prejudices held against conservative women, whose values ideologically oppose my own. My research has allowed me to become an ethical and culturally aware researcher and has enabled me to develop my worldview. Despite my liberalism, the research process has allowed me to grow to maintain a greater empathy and understanding for the conservative agenda.
Resource List

Primary Research

Interview

All four interviews which I held were extremely useful, and relevant to my PIP. During the interviews with Maureen Mitchell and Deborah Schaefer I gained a thorough insight into the views and values of socially conservative women whilst simultaneously increasing my knowledge of the CWA, to assist in my case study. Interestingly, both women identified as conservative and simultaneously supported feminist ideologies. Mitchell and Schaefer both spoke independently, and not on behalf of the CWA, yet they elicited that it is not as stereotypically conservative as perceived and were adamant that progressivism was evident within both the organisation and their personal lives. Moreover, Alison Wright, a feminist member of the CWA, gave an alternate perspective of the organisation’s conservatism as she did not hold a conservative bias. Wright gave a thorough and in-depth recount of her notably liberal lifestyle, whilst justifying her feminist gaze with anecdotal evidence. It was useful to juxtapose the views of the conservative and non-conservative members of the CWA. Lastly, during my interview with Josephine from the Morpeth Catholic Church, I was informed of the past differences between feminism and Catholicism as she recounted the anti-feminist movements of second wave feminism. Josephine’s religious conservatism was consolidated with the socially conservative views of Mitchell and Schaefer, so my primary research was accurate and reliable as it was not based on one individual. This research method has highly useful, as the contrasting perspectives were informative and valuable. All four women were reliable sources as they were interviewed in favour of their bias, giving unique insight into the topic. The research conducted was extremely valid as the interviews were organised and conducted with ethical practices in mind.

Questionnaire

Through my questionnaire, I was able to consolidate large amounts of qualitative and quantitative data relating to conservatism and feminism. The data collected suggested that most conservative women agreed with the values and beliefs advocated by the feminist movement, however, they were reluctant to identify as feminist. Additionally, it was identifiable that the majority of conservative women were part of the Silent Generation or Generation Baby Boomer, and there was a limited number of conservative women younger
than Generation X. It was made evident that there was an aversion to the label feminist, and most respondents correspondingly agreed it is easier to identify with an ideology without being labelled and that the radicalism of feminism invoked a stigma. Moreover, many respondents believed that gender roles were no longer necessary within contemporary society, however when they are evident, they are most prominent within the domestic sphere. By taking ethical practices into consideration, I ensured that the research method was reliable and valid. This was the most useful primary research method, as the responses gathered provided sufficient statistical data which supported my interview responses and primary research. I was cautious when maintaining ethical research practices, therefore all questionnaires were treated with confidentiality and respondents were assured anonymity which also increased reliability and validity.

**Secondary Research**

Alex 2012, *Misunderstood: What it Means to be a Conservative Feminist*, Network of Enlightened Women (NeW), June 4, <https://enlightenedwomen.org/misunderstood-what-it-means-to-be-a-conservative-feminist/>. The author details the nuances of conservative feminism and articulates that identifying yourself as feminist should not automatically align you with the political left. This was extremely useful in the construction of my thesis, that feminism and conservatism are not opposite. However, this was published without reference to a specific author, by the Network of Enlightened Women. NeW, is a conservative organisation for collegiate women and therefore holds an obvious bias toward the conservative ideology. The article is valid as it holds the support and opinions of many different conservative individuals within society and presents them in a respectful manner. The website does hold bias as it strictly only portrays the perspective of conservative women.

Butler, F 2017, *We Conservative women know the party has a problem with feminism – it's time we reclaimed it*, Independent, 6 November, accessed 13 February 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/conservative-party-feminism-women-carers-children-policy-economics-left-out-a8040081.html>. The author maintains a clear and personal bias toward the political right during her examination of the affiliation of feminism with leftism, whilst advocating that the political right should adorn feminism with its own conservative meaning. This was a
useful article in establishing the thesis that the conservatives can embrace feminism in a conservative manner, however its reliability is tainted by the conservative bias.


The author gives a detailed insight into the prevalence of conservatism in older generations, as he explains that as people age, they become less open, while ‘open people are also more likely to display counter-conformist attitudes, challenge the status quo and disrespect authority’. This theory was central to the construction of the cross-generational component evident within my first chapter. The author, Chamorro-Premuzic, withholds a Ph.D in psychology and is an ‘international authority in psychological profiling and people analytics.’ Thus, the author’s expertise in the studied area invoke a sense of reliability in the source, whilst its validity and usefulness are exemplified by the informative content.


The author articulates the gender expectations which are perpetuated within the CWA, ‘part of the attraction is learning ‘old’ skills, like cooking, baking and sewing.’ This was influential in developing my thesis as I was prompted to question what their stance on feminism and the eradication of gender roles was. This article was published by ABC news, a reliable source within Australian media. It was extremely useful in developing my thesis and allowing me to extrapolate how the CWA embodied traditionalism.


This source was integral in developing my understanding of the history of conservative anti-feminism and was central to composition of my second chapter. The author recounts the socially and religiously conservative anti-feminism movements during the second wave of feminism. The author highlights the contradiction in anti-feminism as the aim of their campaigns were gender equality, simultaneously to the
aim of feminist movement. However, the author explains the different interpretations of equality by both parties, "conservatism has consistently opposed feminism for 40 years, it has failed to do so in any coherent ideological manner." The author of this article, Françoise Coste, is a professor at the University Toulouse, who teaches American Civilisation and extends her research into American Politics, American Conservatism, Republican Party, US Presidency and Women's Rights. Due to the authors extensive knowledge in both feminism and conservatism, this is an unbiased study which is useful, relevant and valid.


This source clarified the conservative view of third wave feminism and the misinterpretation of feminist values, as the author makes states 'theirs [feminists'] is not an ideology based on equality, but misplaced victimhood.' This article frequents the terms 'manspreading', 'mansplaining' and 'micro-aggression'. Cousens explains the futility of third-wave feminism. This source gave a colloquial, conservative perspective of the feminist ideology. This was published in The Spectator which is a weekly magazine which frequents the topics of political culture and conservatism. Thus, it can be assumed that this article holds a predisposition toward the conservative ideology.


The author of this article articulates how the CWA is stereotyped yet clarifies the "increasing incorporation of histories like that of the CWA into feminist narrative." The author believes that the CWA maintains a feminist agenda as it has ‘always had the welfare of Australian country women at the heart of its agenda’. It is made evident that the CWA supported same-sex marriage legalisation and ‘advocating equal pay’. Crozier-De Rosa, a lecturer in history at the University of Wollongong, has composed a reliable and valid source which informed me that despite being politically conservative, the CWA can be socially progressive.

This website was my main source of information on the history of the first three waves of feminism. I already had a thorough understanding of the first three waves, however I used this site to consolidate my knowledge. The information is relevant as it provides an overview of the three phases, however despite its usefulness, it was published on Progressive Women’s Leadership, and the author states her main agenda is to ‘play on a team bound by the goal to empower women in professional achievement.’ Therefore, it can be concluded that the article withholds a bias toward progressivism which effects its reliability.


The Feminine Mystique was one of the most influential feminist books of the second wave, in which the author details the oppressiveness of patriarchal discourse. This was a useful source in determining what feminist views were being opposed by simultaneous anti-feminist movements during the second wave. Friedan is a renowned feminist and therefore her work holds an obvious bias toward feminist ideologies. Yet, it remains relevant and valid, as it usefully contextualised my research into anti-feminism.


The author details the views of Julie Bishop in regard to feminism and articulates that she doesn’t ‘find the need to self-describe in that way’. The article elaborates that Bishop doesn’t disagree with feminism, ‘I just don't use it.’ This was central in formulating my thesis, that conservative women do not disagree with feminism, they just maintain an aversion to the label. However, this was published by a privately-owned newspaper which may withhold a hidden bias against the political left, or right.

The article was informative of the views and stances of millennial conservatives and indicative of how their views of female empowerment align with feminist beliefs, yet they don’t identify as feminists because of the strong politically left connotations. The article identifies statistics and additionally gives the perspective of conservative women who are able to explain why they don’t identify with feminist activities. This supported my thesis that conservative women would have an aversion to the term feminist, due to its leftist connotations. This article was written by a feminist author, and therefore would have a suspected bias against feminism. However, Leach actually acknowledges her bias and documents her growth to accept conservative millennials, with an empathetic understanding toward conservatism after her research. This article was valid and reliable in establishing the contemporary view of young conservative women, however its usefulness was tainted by the strong focus on US politics which I did not address in my PIP.


This source presents an interesting counter-argument which discredits the validity of conservative feminism. The author colloquially refers to conservative feminism as ‘anti-choice feminism’, and makes the argument that conservative feminism is not feminism, however it is anti-feminism. This article is however invalid as it was published 8 years ago, and makes a detailed analysis of the politics of abortion, which is not relevant to my PIP. Additionally, the author holds a clear bias toward leftism, as it strictly portrays reasons why conservative women cannot be feminist and does not offer a conservative point of view. Overall, the source was only mildly useful.

The author gives a brief overview of the history of conservatism and the reason for its construction, depicting it as a reactionary response to radicalism. The author also clarifies that being conservative does not necessarily mean anti-progressive, ‘*conservatism does not reject change per se, but insists that changes be organic*’. Yet, it is made explicit, ‘*this website was created as a personal project by Luke Mastin. He has no official training in philosophy and this site is intended as an entry level resource by a laymen for the layman.*’ Thus, despite the informative content and usefulness, the author has no credentials and therefore reduces the reliability of the source.


This source was essential in providing formal definitions for the major concepts within my PIP. I compared definitions from the Collins Dictionary and Thesaurus with those of the Oxford Dictionary to consolidate a thorough understanding of all terms. This is a valid and renowned dictionary which was extremely useful in allowing me to have a full comprehension of my PIP topic. There can be little bias in the source as it is not providing any opinions, only an agreed definition.


The author outlines that progressivism and conservatism are not inherently opposites, ‘*one of the lefts biggest mischaracterisations is that conservatives are against progress*’. This was a central source for the composition of my first chapter, as it addresses the conservative stereotype of m=being anti-progressive. This published on *The Imaginative Conservative*, and therefore holds a bias toward the political right. However, as this bias is defending a stereotype, it is advantageous and valid in disproving preconception.

The author examines the stigmatization of conservatism, and conveys that conservative women are often forward thinking and reports that one conservative woman stated, ‘*We are absolute advocates for women’s opportunities and success.*’ Nelson reports on Empowered Women and their agenda, establishing that leftism and rightism are opposite, yet feminism is not reserved to either political side. This article was useful in developing my understanding of the opposition of leftism and rightism in regard to feminism, as the author remains neutral and does not present a personal opinion. However, a hidden source of bias may evident, as this article was published on a journalistic website without reputation.


This source was essential in providing formal definitions for the major concepts within my PIP. I compared definitions from the Oxford Dictionary with those of the Collins Dictionary to consolidate a thorough understanding of all terms. This is a valid and renowned dictionary which was extremely useful in allowing me to have a full comprehension of my PIP topic. There can be little bias in the source as it is not providing any opinions, only an agreed definition.


The author outlines what conservative feminism is, and how it has been constructed as separate feminist sect within contemporary society. Posner also explains the apparent oxymoron of conservative feminism, and articulates that conservatives may maintain a libertarian agenda and ‘*do not believe that law or government should prescribe a particular role for women or discourage them from exercising free choice.*’ Written by a legal scholar and published by the University of Chicago, and therefore
withholds a valid academic reputation. This study was useful and constructive during the writing of my third chapter, and a reliable source of information.


The author provides a contemporary view of the divide between conservative women and feminism, with specific reference to the 2017 Women’s March and allusions to the current conservative political success within the USA. The author suggests that white privilege could be a reason for the conservative aversion to feminism, as they’re ‘accustomed to having access to power.’ This information was relevant to modern society but held little relevance to my PIP. The author was openly feminist and held a leftist bias against the conservative view. The usefulness and validity of this source is very limited as the author focusses on American conservatism. However, if used in conjunction with many other texts with similar underlying concepts, its usefulness and validity may be increased.


The author establishes that feminism is affiliated with leftism, and explains that right-winged women have commonly denounced feminism, referencing Julie Bishop. However, the author interestingly makes the point that feminism needs to embraces rightism, ‘feminists cannot claim to represent the interest of all women when it cherrypicks which women its going to support’. This source was useful in informing me of the political affiliations of the feminist movement, however despite the fact Schetzer is a regular journalist for the Advertiser, it may not be reliable and valid as the newspaper may be subject to a political bias which I am unaware of.

This source exposes the juxtaposition between political left and right. The author detailed the beliefs and values held by notorious conservative, Phyllis Schafly, “*It is true that some conservative leaders like Eagle Forum founder, Phyllis Schafly believe that women should be primarily wives and mothers at a certain point in their lives...*” However, the article did inform me that conservative women believe their policies are for the betterment of women, and just because their ideologies opposed the fundamentals of liberal feminism, does not mean they oppose women’s rights. This article was published on an academic website by a lecturer at the San Diego State University, and does not hold any obvious biases. Thus, this was useful and relevant to my topic and remained a valid and reliable source for my research.


This article challenges the assumption that feminism and conservatism oppose each other and argues that the equality of the sexes should not be aligned with a particular political agenda. However, this article is clearly bias against liberalism as Sternberg refers to leftist ideologies as a vindictive force through which women’s ‘opinions on everything from abortion to the economy must be prefabricated by the liberal thought machine.’ Despite the sources usefulness, it is not overly reliable due to its obviously strong right-winged affiliations.


This website gave me an overview of the contributions which the CWA made to Australian society, and more relevantly, to Australian women. The site details that one of the aims of the CWA is ‘to improve conditions and welfare of all women and families’. As this is a government run website, addressing the concerns of a governmental organisation, the information is reliable, useful and valid.

The author clarifies that feminism is accessible for all, and questions whether agreeing with liberalism on issues such as abortion is a necessity for believing in gender equality. Although, the article did disclose a dense amount of information regarding Northern American politics which is invalid for my PIP. There is little bias present in this source, as both left and right winged beliefs are voiced, although it may be possible that alternate perspectives may not be mentioned due to the publishers choice.


This source provided a biographical insight into the conservative values and ideologies held by the conservative anti-feminist. It elucidated information regarding her opposition of the ‘*Equal Rights Amendment*’ as ‘*she argued that the ERA would take away gender-specific privileges currently enjoyed by women.*’ However, there is no designated author for this website and anyone is able to add information to it. Thus, despite its usefulness, the information is not reliable and therefore may be subject to a hidden bias due to author anonymity.


The author of this source provides a thorough comprehension of the intricacies of social conservatism and what defines it. It provided me with a comprehensive understanding of the socially conservative ideology, which is defined as an ideology ‘*built upon a fragile network of relationships which need to be upheld through duty, traditional values and established institutions*’. However, there is no designated author for this website and anyone is able to add information to it. Thus, despite its usefulness, the information is not reliable and therefore may be subject to a hidden bias due to author anonymity.