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Hillary Rodham Clinton: Feminism,
Success, and the First Ladyship

Heather J. Boyer

**Hillary Rodham Clinton:
Feminism, Success, and the First Ladyship**

By Heather J. Boyer

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This thesis was prepared under the direction of the candidate's thesis advisors, Dr. Wairimu N. Njambi and Dr. Martin J. Sweet, and has been approved by the members of her supervisory committee. It was submitted to the faculty of The Honors College and was accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences.

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Abstract

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This thesis will investigate the ways in which Hillary Rodham Clinton, former First Lady of the United States and the Junior United States Senator from New York State, appropriated strategies of liberal feminism in her political career as the first modern, working mother to serve as First Lady. A feminist First Lady, Clinton broke through the social expectations placed upon that role in an unprecedented manner by taking an active part in the political strategy and substance of her husband's administration. Her successful campaign for the United States Senate in 2000 as the first former First Lady to hold such an office proved that she has her own political clout independent of her husband. Hillary Rodham Clinton has all the marks of a liberal feminist success story: a strong political background and educational credentials, unfettered ambition, mastery of public discourse, her own political identity, and a real commitment to tough policymaking and representation in Washington. Yet despite this success, liberal feminism presents problems for the women's movement generally. After mapping the history of Hillary Rodham Clinton as a feminist political figure, I will examine whether liberal feminism is adequate in challenging patriarchal structures and other related forms of domination.

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This thesis is dedicated to the strong women in my life: my grandmother and my mother. These women have taught me that there are obstacles in life that I will have to work hard to overcome. They have given me the strength, courage, and confidence to work hard to overcome those obstacles. And to Hillary Rodham Clinton, and to all women and men that are willing to stand up to the boundaries of patriarchal society and destroy them to blaze a path for future female leaders.

**HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON:
FEMINISM, SUCCESS AND THE FIRST LADYSHIP**

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Introduction: Who is Hillary Rodham Clinton?

Hillary Rodham Clinton was First Lady of the United States from 1993-2001 and is the current junior United States Senator from New York State. She is the wife of two-term Democrat President William Jefferson Clinton and a graduate of Wellesley College and Yale Law School, members of the prestigious Seven Sisters and Ivy League associations of universities, respectively. Elected in 2000, she is the first female Senator from New York, and is the premier First Lady to be elected to a position in Congress. Hillary Rodham Clinton is a trailblazer among women in American politics. Following in the footsteps of other First Ladies such as Abigail Adams and Eleanor Roosevelt, Hillary Rodham Clinton has reshaped the socially codified role of First Lady to be an integral part of the President's administration. In fact, when her husband, William Jefferson Clinton, ran for President, he promised "two for the price of one" which suggested that with him, came his wife and her political expertise and talent.

"She has twisted all the clear dividing lines between what political philosophers have considered the private domain (that is wife, mother, and homemaker) and the public realm of power and influence in the civic life."¹ The way that Senator Clinton performed in the role of First Lady embodied the changing roles of women in society that liberal feminists of her generation had hoped to achieve. As First Lady, she showed middle-class American women that they could be strong and smart; they could raise kids and be successful in the workplace. Her marriage to Bill Clinton demonstrated her perseverance, patience, political prowess, and a very strong commitment to gaining influence. Senator Clinton gave the false impression that American women could have and do it all; demonstrating that women could compete for power in patriarchal society while also fulfilling the role of dutiful wife and

¹ Barbara Burrell, Public Opinion, The First Ladyship, and Hillary Rodham Clinton (New York: Routledge, 2001), 3.

mother. Raised in a very traditional, middle-class, blue-collar Republican household, attending college during the sixties and discovering liberalism, the law, and feminism, Hillary Rodham Clinton represents the progression of White American women from traditional to modern, established by the Women's Movement of the 1960's. While serving as First Lady, Hillary subverted the patriarchy of the first family and expanded the role of First Lady to best use her expertise as a litigator, a politician, and a liberal feminist.

Hillary Rodham Clinton was the first First Lady to enter the White House with a successful career and salaried professional employment experience. Americans were not sure what to think of her; some admired her, others abhorred her. She, however, was never ignored. Breaking through the boundaries of the public and private domains of the American presidency, Hillary's role in the Clinton Administration was widely questioned because of the lack of accountability of her position, and her burgeoning power as a leader in the administration. Critics pointed out that the President cannot fire her, and that the First Lady has no accountability to the voters or any other branch of government.² Hillary Rodham Clinton forced the American public to reevaluate the role of women in politics. She forced the consideration of the role of First Lady and the roles of women, spouses, and partners in general. The First Lady is not just a "ceremonial position" but rather the closest link to the President as a trusted policy advisor and a political asset.³ Hillary Rodham Clinton demonstrated that there is an element of political power in the personal realm, and that indeed, the "personal is political."⁴

Is Hillary Rodham Clinton a feminist icon? If she is a radical feminist, is she poised to take over the world, like some right-wing pundits suggest? If she is a liberal feminist, how

² MaryAnne Borrelli, "The First Lady as Formal Advisor to the President: When East (Wing) Meets West (Wing)," *Women and Politics* 24 (2002): 25-27.

³ Burrell, 17.

⁴ Andersen, Margaret. *Hunter College Women's Studies Collective*, (Oxford University Press, 1983.)

does her position impact the women's movement? Does she help the women's movement gain momentum in the political realm? In this thesis I will explore the lasting legacy that Hillary Rodham Clinton—the possible feminist icon, the mother, the wife, the First Lady, the politician, the advocate, the Senator and possible 2008 presidential contender—will leave on the political landscape of America. I will review how her embodiment of modern liberal notions of feminism has propelled her success, and factored into her reputation and political career.

One of the most controversial First Ladies in history, Hillary Rodham Clinton was successful in her own right: she attended Wellesley College, Yale Law School, and as a young lawyer, worked on the Nixon impeachment. Even when her husband became governor of Arkansas, Hillary Rodham Clinton continued to work as an attorney for the large, well-known Arkansas Rose Law Firm while balancing her role as First Lady of the state of Arkansas, a mother, and membership on several corporate boards. Many First Ladies chose to support their husbands and considered a successful husband to be their success too. However, Hillary Rodham Clinton was an accomplished attorney, and for her to go into the White House and revert to the role of the traditional First Lady would have been to waste her considerable talents, ambition, and experience. Hillary Rodham Clinton was able to support her husband's goals and be a political asset to him, working in the administration and continuing to develop her own political persona and power base. She, however, also could not escape from the more traditional (albeit activist) social roles of the First Lady.

Most books and articles, even those that portray Hillary Rodham Clinton in a negative light, never fail to note her significance and unique presence in the American public eye. A catalyst for debate about the general role of women in American society, Hillary Rodham Clinton assumed the position of First Lady, one of the most gendered positions in

the United States when her husband, William Jefferson Clinton, became the 42nd President of the United States. Felicity Barringer's November 16, 1992 article in the *New York Times* echoes sentiments reiterated in the media throughout the Clinton Administration, noting the irony of the expected role of the first lady as the ideal woman in patriarchal society—and of Hillary Rodham Clinton, the “wife-mother-lawyer” that was not going to fit into “a role framed by the expectations of the 19th century.”⁵ Though she grew up in a conservative household, Hillary Rodham Clinton's politics changed in the 1960's when she attended Wellesley College, where she was elected Student Body President, and was a student in an era of second wave feminism and burgeoning liberalism. Rarely mentioning Hillary Rodham Clinton's conservative roots, the public discourse surrounding the Senator focuses on criticizing her strong, aggressive, steadfast style of leadership along with her liberal feminist persona. As I mentioned earlier, Clinton was the first First Lady with outside career experience upon becoming First Lady.⁶ One of the reasons why Clinton's role as First Lady was significant is because her presence in the public consciousness introduced conservative American society to the changing roles of American women within the family.

Another significant achievement of Hillary Rodham Clinton is her successful win of a Senate seat in New York. Clinton was not only the only former First Lady to be elected to public office; she was also the first woman to be independently elected to statewide office in New York.⁷ Her successful transformation from First Lady to political candidate to Congresswoman demonstrated her ability to transform her public image, to become a political figure on her own terms, and to garner the support of voters for herself rather than

⁵ Felicity Barringer, “The Transition: The President-Elect's Wife; Hillary Clinton's New Role: The Job Description is Open,” *New York Times*, 16 November, 1992, sec. A.

⁶ Burrell, 18.

⁷ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Online Edition, s.v. “Clinton, Hillary Rodham.” [Accessed 11 Oct. 2005] <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9095812>.

for her husband. Some authors further speculate about what Clinton would need to pursue the presidency and argue that she will indeed be a formidable candidate in the 2008 race.⁸ One can point to the ways in which she is raising funds nationwide and solidifying her base by positioning herself decisively on issues such as the War in Iraq and various domestic policy issues, in addition to the issues of children and families that she has always supported. Predictably enough, however, some critics point to Hillary as riding the tide of her husband's fame, and eschew her chances of a successful presidential campaign by attacking her individually as "angry," "aggressive," "a radical feminist" or "unpatriotic" rather than addressing her role as a lawmaker, policymaker, and public figure.

In this thesis, I will define liberal feminism and discuss how Hillary Rodham Clinton has served as a modern feminist role model, and compare her to another female political actor, Senator Elizabeth Dole, in order to gauge her political success, adherence to principles of feminism, political record, and public opinion. By comparing Senator Clinton with Senator Dole, I take two very successful women, and demonstrate that principles of feminism make Senator Clinton more effective as a leader. I will investigate the ways in which Senator Clinton compares to Senator Dole given their different political party affiliation and different career paths. I will evaluate the ways in which Senator Dole, the wife of former presidential candidate Bob Dole, arrived in the Senate as compared to Senator Clinton, having served as First Lady. I will scrutinize the political and social implications of the role of First Lady and how Hillary Rodham Clinton's position in the role of First Lady impacted the women's movement. I will compare the roles that Eleanor Roosevelt and Hillary Rodham Clinton took in their husband's administrations in order to report on the ways in which these First Ladies left their mark on the roles of women in politics and in the American public sphere. I

⁸ Susan Estrich, The Case for Hillary Clinton (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 1-5.

will chronicle the ways in which Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton ascended to political power and the ways in which public opinion challenged her. I argue that Hillary Rodham Clinton's success is based on her adherence to principles of liberal feminism, rather than her marriage to Bill Clinton. Furthermore, Hillary and Bill Clinton's egalitarian marriage and political partnership—both rely on each other in order to achieve political success—is indicative of the notion of liberal feminism. Additionally, I will take a critical look at the ways in which Hillary Rodham Clinton's liberal feminism affects the women's movement demonstrating the inadequacies of liberal feminism, while also noting Senator Clinton's iconic status in the women's movement. Although Hillary Rodham Clinton never refers to herself as a feminist, several authors, such as Barbara Burrell and Susan Estrich point out the feminist principles behind many of her behaviors.

Chapter One: Hillary Rodham Clinton in the Political Discourse

Faces of Feminist Theory

The strength of feminism lies in the ways in which the theory holds a place in every culture and society.⁹ bell hooks defines feminism as “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.”¹⁰ A very important part of feminist thought emphasizes that feminism as a practice is extended to women and men of every race, class, and sexuality. Because feminism is a political movement that denounces domination and endorses equality for all women and men, its goals are applicable in every culture and society worldwide. There are many different types of feminism practiced by women and men internationally; for the purposes of this paper, however, I will review two general types of feminism in order to demonstrate the kind of feminism that Hillary Rodham Clinton appropriated in her political uprising.

Liberal Feminism

Social, economic, and political equality are the goals of liberal feminism. Founded in liberal political theory, liberal feminism calls for the same civil rights and economic opportunities for women and men.¹¹ According to Tong, liberal feminists want women to be freed from oppressive gender roles and given the agency to choose to pursue the occupation of their choice—not just what is prescribed by patriarchal society.¹² Liberal feminists focus on increasing women’s stature as professionals and political figures rather than addressing class or race struggles. Liberal feminism is often critiqued as the “bourgeois, white, middle-class” feminism that is too closely entrenched in hierarchal systems of class

⁹ Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist Thought* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989), 1-7.

¹⁰ Bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2000), viii.

¹¹ Tong, 17-22.

¹² Tong, 17-22.

and capitalistic notions of power rather than challenging such systems. In sum, liberal feminists operate within existing power structures while at the same time working to bring about legal and economic equality for women.

Liberal feminism, as the modern feminist movement, became popular in the 1960's with the widespread fame of Betty Friedan's "The Feminine Mystique."¹³ Friedan posited that white, middle-class housewives were unhappy with "the feminine mystique," that is, the idea that they should be completely fulfilled by their domestic work and child-rearing.¹⁴ Friedan suggested that the way for women afflicted by the "problem with no name" to find fulfillment was to work outside the home in addition to their responsibilities at home. The problem with Friedan's solution, and indeed, liberal feminism as a whole, however, is that it fails to address issues outside of the Western, white, educated middle-class. Additionally, even for privileged women, the idea of being able to perform the roles of housewife and professional often stretches beyond the realm of possibility in a patriarchal society where the workplace is not suited to the needs of women. Because the public and private spheres are so distinct, it is difficult for a woman to achieve "true mastery" of both spheres. In our patriarchal society, the workplace is not conducive to the idea of parenthood, and all the time and effort necessary to raise a family; the public sphere is structured around men. Liberal feminism is problematic because it gives women a false sense of hope and a heightened chance of failure because it is nearly impossible to be successful in both spheres simultaneously.

Liberal feminism seeks to combine the private and public spheres so that women can succeed in both roles at the same time.

¹³ Joyce Milton. The First Partner Hillary Rodham Clinton (New York: William and Morrow Company, 1999), 30.

¹⁴ Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique (New York: Dell Publishing, 1984), 15.

Liberal feminists conceive the problem of women's confinement to the private sphere as central to their low socio-political status. Equality, wealth, and opportunity are located in the public sphere. Hence the issue of providing women with access to power becomes the issue of providing them with equal access to the public sphere¹⁵

In order for women to operate within the public sphere on equal footing with men, the public sphere would have to be restructured to be more inclusive of the female body. Gatens suggests that the public sphere is built around the vision of the male body, concerning itself with production rather than reproduction. In this sense, the only way that women would be able to thrive within the public sphere would be to juggle their roles in both spheres, or to not take advantage of the reproductive capabilities of their bodies.¹⁶ Since the male body is privileged in the public sphere, where social power lies, liberal feminism's goal of success (defined in terms of social and political power) is a rather misguided one. Women's success in the public sphere is more difficult given the existence of patriarchal structures, thus liberal feminism is problematic because it fails to address the core of domination and inequality in society.

Radical Feminism

According to Tong, radical feminists believe that women's oppression is "the most fundamental form of human oppression," and that women, as the first and most widely-oppressed group, absorb the most suffering of all forms of oppression because such subjugation is deeply embedded in every culture and society.¹⁷ Calling attention to the ways in which men control women's bodies through physical, political, and economic means, radical feminists believe that men construct female sexuality to serve their own needs. The goal of radical feminism is to enable women to escape from the sexual domination of men in

¹⁵ Moira Gatens, "Power, Bodies, and Difference," in *Destabilizing Theory Contemporary Feminist Debates*, ed. Michele Barrett & Anne Phillips (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 124.

¹⁶ Gatens, 124-125.

¹⁷ Tong, 71.

both public and private realms. Radical feminism is distinguished from all other forms of feminism because it addresses patriarchal theories.¹⁸ Radical feminists do not reject motherhood, but completely disagree with the ways in which it burdens women.¹⁹ For example, when a professional woman has a child, she is expected to take care of the child, mostly by herself. American society does not encourage men to take on the role of nurturer when they become fathers. The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 guarantees twelve weeks of leave for every twelve months of employment in order for employees to care for a family member, including a newborn or sick child.²⁰ In our society, however, women are more likely to take such a leave. Both men and women almost exclusively expect women (not men) to take time out of their careers to care for their children and family. Patriarchal society commands the terms of childrearing rather than individual women themselves, which radical feminists believe robs women of control over their own bodies. Radical feminism is anti-essentialist at its core, and completely rejects the biological basis for female and male gender roles as an oppressive structure and a tool of domination. In sum, radical feminism, in the words of Tong, posits that “sexuality is the root cause of women’s oppression and is vital to any woman seeking to understand her personal and political position in society.”²¹ Radical feminists point to the patriarchal design of the public sphere as unequal by design, and suggest that women will never be able to achieve equality in a system built by men for men.

¹⁸ Gatens, 120.

¹⁹ Tong, 71-75..

²⁰ Wikipedia, Online, s.v. “Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993.” [accessed 20 April 2006] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_and_Medical_Leave_Act_of_1993.

²¹ Tong, 137.

While liberal feminists believe that it is enough to alter society so that women and men have equal power, radical feminists believe that the public sphere is built to favor men, and cannot be altered to benefit women equally.

the relation between the public sphere and male bodies is not an arbitrary one. The political body was conceived historically as the organization of many bodies into one body which would itself enhance and intensify the powers and capacities of specifically male bodies²²

In other words, the public sphere is designed around the male body; women will never be able to attain full equality in a system that was designed for men. In order for a woman to succeed in the public sphere, she must emulate male or masculine coded behaviors in order to claim success.²³ Hillary Rodham Clinton's success in the public sector is due to her espousal of aggressive male-coded behavior, which disrupts the design patriarchal society's division of public and private spheres. If the public sphere were designed for women to flourish, there would be more consideration of female embodiment and women's concerns, such as reproduction. As a woman succeeding on men's terms in the public sphere, adopting male-coded behaviors, and bringing women's needs to the agenda of the patriarchal public sphere as it is, Hillary Rodham Clinton fits into the paradigm of liberal feminism.

The Expected Role of First Lady

The position of First Lady is very informal, and is only very loosely codified in the law in the 1978 "White House Personnel Authorization Act" which, according to Borelli, "formally identified the first lady as an assistant to the President."²⁴ However, as Burrell points out, the position of First Lady not only serves as an icon and role model in American society, but also wields social and political influence.²⁵ According to Clark,

²² Gatens, 132

²³ Gatens, 132-133.

²⁴ Borelli, 30.

²⁵ Burrell, 16-18.

historians note that resentment of the political influence often exerted by this unelected leader goes back to the dawn of the republic. Yet the 20th century rise of the career woman has highlighted a built-in tension between the traditional duties of the White House hostess and the modern role for an independent woman²⁶

The First Lady is expected to be a role model to the American people, yet she is unpaid and her duties are considered informal. Domestic work is considered to be women's work, so it does not get formally recognized. As the wife of the President, and the matriarch of the first family, no matter how politically significant and nationally recognized her work is, in the eyes of the American public, the First Lady's first responsibility is to her home, her husband and her family, and the American public expects their First Lady to fit into the patriarchal notion of the nuclear family.

The roles and responsibilities of the First Lady in the United States reflect gender norms. The gendered nature of the First Ladyship, according to Burrell, limits the woman to a small number of functions and attempts to constrain her role to hostess and homemaker.²⁷ According to Edie Mayo, a Smithsonian curator (quoted in Clark), the president's family reflects the value system of the country.²⁸ This includes his relationship with his wife and children. Similarly, Borelli points out that the post of First Lady is a cultural tradition that has evolved over time to reflect the values of the polity, the presidency, and the presidential family.²⁹

In the case of Hillary Rodham Clinton, it was threatening to patriarchal American society to see an unelected, socially and politically ambitious woman at the side of the President. What is notable about Hillary Clinton is that she publicly refused to succumb to the gender norms associated with the First Ladyship. According to Clinton herself, she did

²⁶ Charles Clark, "First Ladies," *The CQ Researcher* 6 (1996): 1.

²⁷ Burrell, 135.

²⁸ Clark, 3.

²⁹ Borrelli, 25.

not even begin to use the last name “Clinton” until it began to affect her husband’s bid for reelection as the Governor of Arkansas in 1982.³⁰ Another unprecedented move by Clinton as First Lady was to set up her office in the West Wing, rather than the traditional home of the First Lady’s staff in the East Wing. Milton makes the point that Hillary Rodham Clinton’s marriage to Bill was based upon political trust, intellectual respect, and companionship,³¹ what Hillary Rodham Clinton herself only touches upon, however, is that Bill supported all her career moves and was her political partner. Kelley points out the ways in which the Clintons, mostly Hillary, were criticized by Republicans because they presented themselves to the public as equal partners in marriage and in politics.³² Indeed, in concurrence with Kelley, Burrell points out that the media, right-wing pundits, and Republican leaders accused the Clintons of being too “leftist” and “non-traditional” during Clinton’s first campaign.³³ Republicans attacked Hillary because her presence in the White House threatened the balance of power in patriarchal society. If the woman in the White House is openly advising her husband and taking an interest in society, other women in the United States might start to mirror that behavior. Republicans argue against the idea of the First Lady, who is unelected, being permitted to have a voice in policy in Washington. There are, however, many unelected individuals that have the ability to influence policy. “To argue against the President’s spouse being able to take on a policy-making role is to constrain women from playing an equal role in the political life of the nation.”³⁴

³⁰ Hillary Rodham Clinton. Living History (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 91-93.

³¹ Milton, 81.

³² Colleen Elizabeth Kelley. The Rhetoric of First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton Crisis Management Discourse (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 221-223.

³³ Burrell, 30-31.

³⁴ Burrell, 144.

Burrell suggests that the public and private domains can be altered by the First Lady whose position is attained through her relationship to her husband.³⁵ In other words, the First Lady has the power to act in both the public domain—service to the country, acting on behalf of her husband’s administration—and the private domain—serving as a trusted companion to her husband. Therefore, she could conceivably influence her husband’s decisions, and act within the public and private domains to create change. The First Lady’s ambition is advanced through her husband’s career, and she has a considerable opportunity to influence public policy through her own projects. Hillary Rodham Clinton was a very large part of her husband’s administration from the beginning. Burrell posits that although her marriage to Bill structured her political career, Hillary Rodham Clinton became a political figure in her own right.³⁶ Borelli concludes with a significant point that if First Ladies simply ceded their careers to their husbands, they would be endorsing political inequality for women; by holding such a unique position that is cultural and political, formal and informal, the First Lady’s actions affect the power and legitimacy of the presidency.³⁷ The First Lady, as a public figure, sets an example for many women; indeed, her role is constantly being analyzed by the media and by her political counterparts. It is essential to all women that she asserts herself and uses her position for the betterment of the nation and society.

The First Lady: Personal and Political

Burrell examines the social and political implications of the position of First Lady through the lens of gender politics and traditional expectations of the person in that position. Even by looking at the semantics of the title “First Lady,” Burrell points out the expectation that, “first,” this person is a role model and icon for the American woman, and,

³⁵ Burrell, 13-14.

³⁶ Burrell, 23.

³⁷ Borelli, 42.

second, that she embodies certain traditional manners and a certain passive, polite demeanor: “lady.”³⁸ Traditional expectations of the First Lady, like archaic traditional expectations of women in general, confine her to her home and family, and do not offer her much opportunity in the outside world except to compliment and stand by her husband. The very social and symbolic position of First Lady and the expectations that society places on the woman in that position is indeed an extremely conservative notion of a woman’s role. As First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton worked to combine the public and private spheres, and to be an active participant in both spheres. Thus, she worked to maintain her position by setting policy and being a public advocate through her work with international women’s rights and healthcare, while also working to fulfill the idea of a proper hostess through state dinners and annual Easter egg hunts. She also wrote “It Takes a Village,” a book about how to raise children. These actions, combining the public and private spheres, position Hillary Rodham Clinton within liberal feminism.

The role of the First Lady has remained gendered throughout American history; the ways in which the First Lady’s traditional roles mirror the traditional roles of American women demonstrate the function of the First Lady in American political discourse. The First Lady is supposed to be a role model for American women in patriarchal society—she sets the tone for etiquette and takes on small roles and projects, never taking away the spotlight from the President. The First Lady is intended to be the first homemaker—her job is to take care of the President and the first family in the patriarchal style of the American family. She accompanies the President in social settings, but she does not exist in the political realm of the business of the presidency. “Women have not been fully integrated into political life because the constraints of their private lives, particularly their roles as

³⁸ Burrell, 14.

wives, mothers, and homemakers. These constraints are psychological and substantive.”³⁹ Hillary Rodham Clinton did not fit into this mold. She broke through the limits set by the mores of traditional society and combined those traditional elements of her role with her policymaking, advocacy speaking engagements, and political activity within her husband’s administration. Unwilling to be constrained by what she was expected to do as a woman or as the President’s wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton performed the role of First Lady in the way that she believed that she could best serve the American people, gain political capital, and maintain the goals of her husband’s administration regardless of the traditional expectations placed upon her by her position. As such, she was one of the most controversial First Ladies in the history of the United States. In fact, Hillary Rodham Clinton performed a feminist reconstruction of the first ladyship, and represented a generation of women that refused to succumb to the rules set by patriarchy.

History of the First Ladyship: Actions and Reputations of Previous Noteworthy First Ladies

By combining the social and political realms of her role as both the president’s wife—and therefore, a member of his close inner circle of trusted advisors and supporters—and the ceremonial role of the First Lady as a social position, Hillary Rodham Clinton demonstrated the ways in which many First Ladies before her influenced their husbands. There were three very significant differences, however, to her position. First, Clinton never concealed her influence and desire to gain power within the Clinton Administration. As I stated earlier, she was harshly criticized for this by Republicans. Second, as the first modern working mother in the First Ladyship, she had the education and professional background to be a savvy presidential advisor. Third, in a “truly” liberal feminist fashion, her husband supported and acknowledged his support for her, and endorsed her work and political

³⁹ Burrell, 13.

legitimacy. The foremost example of this is when President Clinton appointed Hillary Rodham Clinton to chair his committee on Healthcare.

While society expects the First Lady to be the President's social partner, the public becomes alarmed when she acts as a political partner as well. Abigail Adams was referred to as "Mrs. President"⁴⁰ and was highly criticized for the ways in which she politically advised her husband. The First Lady, however, even and especially in the traditional role, is connected to the President's mission. Her success is based on her husband's career, and her interests and projects are loosely connected to the goals of his administration—she softens his image, makes him human rather than robotic, she ensures the success of his family, she gives him a familial dimension. She is the one that is at his side through the personal and the political struggles, so she is bound to make suggestions. A quiet secret of many first families, this spousal advice rarely threatened the American public in the past, and was almost never an issue in the media. However, with Hillary Rodham Clinton serving as the first modern working mother in the White House, and given her political legitimacy, experience, and participation, the Clinton Administration did not hide her role. In fact, Hillary Rodham Clinton was very legitimately qualified to be a part of the Administration, except she was confined to a figure-head sort of role.⁴¹ Calling into question the changing roles of American women in society, Hillary Rodham Clinton undermined the notion of the First Lady as simply a social figure, and forced the public to the realization that women's roles are becoming more and more complex in society.

The traditional First Lady had a staff housed in the East Wing of the White House, and her staff was mostly focused on social and domestic issues of the White House and the

⁴⁰ Burrell, 14.

⁴¹ Due to the personal nature of her relationship to the President, an anti-nepotism law made it impossible for Hillary Rodham Clinton to take a formal role in the administration.

first family. They decorate for Christmas, work on the First Lady's advocacy projects, and plan social events. Hillary Rodham Clinton changed that. She took a small office in the West Wing, situating herself where the power and action of the President's Administration took place. She attended cabinet meetings, and lead and focused discussions among the cabinet about the image, mission, and goals of the Clinton Administration. She also took part in many White House Staff sessions where she shaped the ways in which the Clinton Administration presented itself and its policies to the public. Taking such an active political role in her husband's administration was not out of the ordinary for Hillary Rodham Clinton, who had been very active in his administration when President Clinton was Arkansas Governor for 12 years.

During the Clinton campaign for the 1992 election, the public was presented with the image of a couple that works together socially and politically. So, when right wing pundits and Republican leaders accused the Clintons of being too liberal and non-traditional, what they were really criticizing is the notion of the dual political participation of women and men in American government and the changing notions of egalitarian marriage in America. It was not that Hillary Rodham Clinton was unqualified to serve in the President's cabinet. "Hillary Rodham Clinton brought the professional credentials and traits that would make her vie for a cabinet position if she was not the President's wife."⁴² Hillary Rodham Clinton was vilified in the media because she chose to combine the traditional role of Lady and also serve as a primary (though unofficial) figure of her husband's political administration.

Destroying Patriarchal Boundaries

As First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton broke boundaries and carved out a niche for a politically active, yet socially iconic partner that was relevant and could openly exercise

⁴² Burrell, 78.

power in the personal and political realms of the White House. By taking on Health Care reform, traveling the world, taking an office in the West Wing, writing books and demonstrating expertise in the area of children and families, and being known for her political activism more than her fashion is an adjustment that Hillary Rodham Clinton made to the role of First Lady. Although Clinton followed a trend of First Ladies that struggled to define the place of the First Lady in the complex world of the United States Government, she took the chance to make that position politically visible. Also, as a former First Lady, she has been the first to sustain such political visibility as a Senator. She indeed transformed the political visibility that she gained as First Lady to become a legitimate political actor in the public sphere through her election to the Senate.

During her tenure, Clinton weakened the role of the First Lady as a hostess and homemaker and instead demonstrated that although the First Ladyship is a position that one attains by being married to an elected President, it is a position that can wield political power, yet is also accountable to the public and the administration. She demonstrated a key idea of liberal feminism: actors in the private sphere can have a successful public role. Through her work with women and children, and the ways in which she worked to legitimize women's concerns, she brought the issues of the private sphere into the public realm—blurring the boundary between public and private, and introducing the legitimacy of the private sphere into public discourse. Hillary Rodham Clinton's power to challenge patriarchal society is unmatched by any former First Lady and although she was a divisive, controversial public figure, she provided the American public with a strong female role model.

Although the Clintons supported each other in an egalitarian marriage and as political partners, Hillary Rodham Clinton was the first First Lady to develop a political

persona beyond the First Ladyship. In the following subsections, I intend to demonstrate that the reasons that she succeeded in this transfer of power are parallel to principles of liberal feminist theory.

Politically Active Wives

Hillary Clinton followed a long line of politically active First Ladies. From Abigail Adams' famous reminder to her husband to "remember the ladies" and Nellie Taft who, according to Clark, strongly coerced her husband into his run for the presidency,⁴³ to Ladybird Johnson who successfully campaigned for her husband throughout the South in her own train, nicknamed "The Ladybird Special,"⁴⁴ and Rosalynn Carter who was the Honorary Chair of the President's Committee on Public Health,⁴⁵ First Ladies have adopted an active social and political role. Hillary Rodham Clinton, according to her own autobiography, enjoyed a friendship with former First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy,⁴⁶ but is most often compared to Eleanor Roosevelt. Many theorists point to Hillary Rodham Clinton as one of the most controversial first ladies in American history, yet throughout the history of the American presidency, the American public has often grappled with the role of this unelected woman, and the ways in which she should express her unofficial power in the public domain.

Burrell introduces the idea that Eleanor Roosevelt was most similar to Hillary Rodham Clinton. Both had a public commitment to policy concerns, both were criticized as being more liberal than their husbands, both served as strong role models for the expansion of opportunities for women in society, and both took on a political role in her husband's

⁴³ Clark, 8.

⁴⁴ Clark, 8.

⁴⁵ Borrelli, 36-38.

⁴⁶ Clinton, 135-138.

administration.⁴⁷ Roosevelt was the first First Lady to hold her own press conferences, and was also the first to take a public job as the Assistant Director of the Office of Civilian Defense, which President Roosevelt established as part of his New Deal program. According to Borelli, she was offered the position after she criticized the program's director, New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia.⁴⁸ Her ascension to this position was considered a failure due to the lack of implementation of her programs, and this lack of implementation is attributed here to anti-nepotism concerns about Roosevelt's actions. Eleanor Roosevelt was the foremost First Lady to generate public concern about presidential appointments of First Ladies to positions within the administration.

During the 1996 Presidential Election Bill Clinton ran against Bob Dole, a Republican Congressman. At the center of the media coverage of this election were the noteworthy political and educational credentials of their wives, Hillary and Elizabeth. According to Gutgold, the comparisons between these women were endless: both high powered Ivy-league educated attorneys, tough campaigners, and influential enough to be president in their own right.⁴⁹ However, the ways in which Dole and Clinton presented themselves were completely different. Gutgold posits that Dole was more careful to present herself as a marriage partner rather than a political partner.⁵⁰ The Dole campaign focused on presenting Elizabeth as the traditional wife, even though the couple has no children. In fact, the Doles rarely campaigned together because Elizabeth Dole garnered enough attention on her own.⁵¹ Gutgold attributes Elizabeth Dole's different public image to her choice of rhetoric:

⁴⁷ Burrell, 19.

⁴⁸ Borelli, 34-35

⁴⁹ Nichola Gutgold, "Managing Rhetorical Roles: Elizabeth Hanford Dole from spouse to candidate 1996-1999," *Women and Language* 24, no. 1 (2001): 2-4.

⁵⁰ Gutgold, 3-5.

⁵¹ Gutgold, 2.

as a rhetor, Elizabeth Dole challenges current structures of domination but realizes that in the political system she must do so with a carefully chosen set of rhetorical strategies, strategies that have gained her acceptance and an audience. She asserts herself through a communication style that includes the use of narratives, inclusive pronouns, moral content and feminine appearance⁵²

Dole is extremely careful not to present herself as a feminist. According to historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, (quoted in Clark), Dole had, “a softness to her ambitious edge...she’s managed, throughout her life, to camouflage those career ambitions so that people don’t feel threatened by her.”⁵³

Dole has served on the Federal Trade Commission under President Nixon, as the Secretary of Transportation under Reagan, and as the Secretary of Labor under the first President Bush. She was also the president of the American Red Cross. In 2000, Dole ran unsuccessfully for the Republican presidential nomination. She pulled out of the race after she was unable to raise enough funds to continue her campaign. In 2002, Dole was elected to the Senate as a representative of North Carolina.

Political Roles of Hillary Rodham Clinton

Hillary Rodham Clinton campaigned alongside her husband, who joked that the American public was getting “two for the price of one.”⁵⁴ According to Brown University political scientist Darell M. West, “she saved her husband’s candidacy in 1992” by publicly announcing that they had worked through their marital problems privately after rumors of Bill Clinton’s affairs surfaced.⁵⁵ A politically active First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton worked on the administration’s failed Health Care Reform Act, and traveled all over the

⁵² Gutgold, 3.

⁵³ Clark, 2.

⁵⁴ Encyclopedia Britannica, Online Edition, s.v. “Clinton, Hillary Rodham.” [Accessed 11 Oct. 2005] <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-9095812>.

⁵⁵ Juliana Gruenwald, “1996 Democratic Convention Guide – First Lady: Hillary Clinton : Heat From Spotlight,” CQ Weekly, 17 August 1996, 14.

country and the world to promote the goals of her husband's administration as well as to influence domestic policy on children and families.

In a controversial move during the transition process, President Clinton appointed Hillary to chair his "President's Task Force of National Health Reform" and challenged the task force to return results within 100 days of the beginning of his presidency. Borelli suggests, "[Hillary Rodham] Clinton had credentials as a political and policy advisor, which supported her claim to formal power."⁵⁶ In fact, Borelli chronicles the ways in which the President believed that Hillary was qualified for the position due to her service as chair of education and health reform committees in Arkansas and her service on the board of the Arkansas Children's Hospital as a member of the Southern Regional Task Force on Infant Mortality.⁵⁷ Hillary Rodham Clinton was criticized because the meetings of the task force were closed to the public, thus accordingly, Clinton was investigated for the task force's compliance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act, but the Office of Governmental Ethics found no wrongdoing on the part of the First Lady.⁵⁸ In her own autobiography, Clinton acknowledges the failure of Health Care reform. Citing disagreement within the Democratic Party in Congress as well as too short of a timetable to compile information and the insurance company's special interests, Clinton explains why the Health Care initiative failed, while not accepting the blame for it.⁵⁹ Borelli states that a majority of the public polling data did not attribute the task force's failure to the First Lady,⁶⁰ however, after the very public failure of the committee, Hillary Rodham Clinton retreated from formal political power until her declaration of candidacy for the US Senate. Instead, she concentrated on

⁵⁶ Borelli, 38.

⁵⁷ Borelli, 38.

⁵⁸ Borelli, 39.

⁵⁹ Clinton, 233.

⁶⁰ Borelli, 39.

promoting the rights of women and children internationally, and the publication of her book “It Takes a Village” in 1995.

Media Representation of Hillary Rodham Clinton

There are two main facets of Hillary Rodham Clinton’s image construction. The first is the ways in which her strategists and political advocates have constructed her image. An example of this is the ways in which she attempted to put more effort into fulfilling the traditional role of first lady with her newspaper column about daily life in the White House, similar to the one published by Eleanor Roosevelt. The second is the ways in which patriarchal media and popular discourse have constructed her image, and this can be demonstrated through attacks on the radio, through political cartoons, in editorials, and in remarks from members of the Republican Party. Dolan points out,

Male leaders are generally expected to have wives, and those wives are expected to perform a long list of public duties. Yet there is still the expectation that they remain subordinated to their husbands, that they serve the office and the country, and help their men, without claiming power or influence⁶¹

Thus, the public viewed Hillary Rodham Clinton as someone who claimed power by working beside her husband which made patriarchal American society uncomfortable.

According to Anderson, Hillary Rodham Clinton successfully reshaped her image: “the ‘Hillary’ of the New York Senate race looked markedly different from the ‘Mrs. Clinton’ of the 1992 presidential campaign or the ‘Rodham Clinton’ of the health-care reform

⁶¹ Francis Dolan, “The Dawn of the Hillary Clinton Backlash: An Introduction,” *Genders* 33 [electronic journal] (Boulder: University of Colorado, 2001) [cited 5 February 2006]; available from http://www.genders.org/g33/g33_dolan.html.

campaign.”⁶² Anderson suggests that Clinton generated a rhetorical response to the ways in which her public image was destroyed and used that strategy to blur the lines between femininity and feminism. Clinton’s book, *It Takes a Village* helped her restore her feminine and motherly image, and situated her to speak strongly against international violence against women—positioning her as both powerful and feminine. This in turn allowed her to create her own political identity while taking advantage of public sympathy after her husband’s sex scandals in order to position herself as a candidate for the Senate. Hillary Rodham Clinton gained political capital in the face of public sympathy during and after the Starr investigation. At the same time as the media painted her as a “stereotypical feminist” for her ambition and public support of women and women’s rights, she spoke out as a ‘victim’ of her husband’s infidelity and a ‘scorned wife’, rising above the whole controversy and gaining valuable political capital for her Senate race.

Anderson quotes Shawn Parry-Giles who argued that news organizations typecast Clinton with feminist stereotypes. Anderson, however, posits that Clinton used these stereotypes to restore a positive public image and expand her political identity.⁶³ Anderson claims that Clinton used her book, *It Takes A Village* to restore her motherly and feminine image and step back from her reputation as an aggressive career woman.⁶⁴ Anderson also proposes the idea that Clinton turned from First Lady to successful candidate by balancing her desire for increased power and political agency for women with the public desire for a feminine first Lady.⁶⁵ Indeed, she managed her public image by fulfilling her liberal feminist ideals—balancing her own liberal feminist political agenda with American society’s desire for

⁶² Karrin Vasby Anderson, “Hillary Rodham Clinton as “Madonna”: the role of metaphor and oxymoron in image restoration,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 25 no. 1 (2002): 1.

⁶³ Anderson, 3.

⁶⁴ Anderson, 4.

⁶⁵ Anderson, 12.

a feminine and motherly First Lady through her tour of South Asia which gave her the opportunity to speak out strongly but also provided the photo opportunities with third-world women, children, and her own daughter that demonstrated her motherly side to the American people. Hillary Rodham Clinton's strong advocacy of women and children internationally—climaxing with her speech at The United Nation's Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 where she famously proclaimed that "women's rights are human rights"—demonstrated the ways in which she used her position as first lady of the United States to send a liberal feminist message to an international audience.

Anderson concludes,

Rodham Clinton was able to inhabit a public persona that was feminine and powerful, social and political. When Rodham Clinton began to enact oxymoron through her discourse, she found a balance that allowed her to be well-received by the American public and, at the same time, achieve legitimate political agency...Rodham Clinton had to inhabit femininity even as she broadened its parameters...She had to accept a ceremonial role in order to make it also political ⁶⁶

In other words, to accomplish her feminist agenda, Hillary Rodham Clinton had to accept the public's conceptions of femininity and caring. For society to accept Clinton's feminist agenda calling for female empowerment, she had to first remake her image as a traditional First Lady, carrying her husband's message of democracy and capitalism to the world. Post colonial feminists point to the ways in which Western feminists appropriate the suffering of third world women in order to create a political voice for themselves. According to Sara Mills, Western women appropriated "third world" women in order to achieve a dominant subject position for themselves "at the expense of indigenous women's subject position and sense of agency."⁶⁷ Hillary Rodham Clinton used her position as the First Lady of the most

⁶⁶ Anderson, 12.

⁶⁷ Sara Mills, "Post Colonial Feminist Theory," in Contemporary Feminist Theories, eds. Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 105.

powerful country in the world to speak out for “third world” women, universalizing their suffering, while at the same time using the anguish of those women in order to bolster her own political image. Throughout her time as First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton used the media and America’s fascination with her in order to bolster her political agenda and career, and build acceptance for her feminist agenda in the United States and internationally.

Chapter 2: Situating Hillary Rodham Clinton in Liberal Feminism

In this section, I will focus on five general factors that are both integral to Clinton’s success and demonstrate liberal feminist principles of leadership, strength, and change. Liberal feminism seeks to free women from oppressive gender roles in patriarchal society and to give them the agency to choose their own role without the cultural pressures to conform to what men expect of them.

The first factor in Hillary Rodham Clinton’s success is her strong credentials. Not only did her stellar educational and professional background help her to gain legitimacy in the political sphere, it enabled her to be a powerful force behind her husband’s election and subsequent reelection, as well as policymaking decisions. Second, Hillary Rodham Clinton refuses to hide her strong ambitions; she wants to leave her mark in American political history, and continues to be a tireless advocate of her beliefs and the causes that she cares about the most. While she was first lady, Clinton stood by her husband and played a role in meeting the goals of his administration, but also took part in projects that were important to her burgeoning political identity: balancing the social politics of femininity with the political activism of feminism. Third, Hillary Rodham Clinton is a master at managing her rhetoric and reinventing her public image while still pushing the boundaries of patriarchal society. She was able to take advantage of the ways in which she was stereotypically portrayed in the media in order to carve out a more favorable image by playing to America’s cultural norms

while at the same time advancing her ambitions. Fourth, Hillary Rodham Clinton was able to make the successful transfer from First Lady and political wife to successful candidate and powerful New York Senator. Unlike Elizabeth Dole whose victory to Senate was achieved only after a failed run for the presidency, Clinton was able to immediately move and shift her public image from wife to candidate, demonstrating the strength of her resolve and political muscle, as well as a political character independent of her husband. Fifth, Hillary Rodham Clinton has remained in the American political consciousness as a knowledgeable, aggressive policymaker who entered Washington as a seasoned veteran of the political game. Although at one point Clinton was accused of hiding behind the wife and mother façade to appease the American public, that image never overcame the image of a strong professional, capable of fighting and winning political battles. The strength of Hillary Rodham Clinton is her ability to succeed and maintain power and influence on her own terms in the male-dominated institution of patriarchal society and government as a liberal model of feminist success.

Hillary Rodham Clinton has strategically managed her feminism in order to be accepted by mainstream America. Clinton embodies the liberal feminist idea of “having and doing it all.” From a liberal feminist point of view, this means that she balances a successful career and triumph in the public sphere with the responsibilities of the private sphere which include the mother/nurturer role of maintaining a home and caring for a family. Although she is constantly criticized and challenged for it, she is a highly successful woman in patriarchal society and has proven, with her election to the Senate, that she is capable of managing a career in the public sphere where she makes the decisions. Throughout her first ladyship, Clinton battled patriarchal society in order to restructure outdated and outmoded expectations of the First Lady. Hillary and Bill Clinton are political partners as well as

marriage partners, and their individual successes and achievements are each valid to, supported by, and equally relevant to their partnership. This is inconsistent with the patriarchal model of the family in whereby the man is supposed to be the head of the household and the woman is supposed to be in his shadow. Liberal feminist principles of marriage call for such egalitarian partnerships that promote mutual responsibility and equality between partners.⁶⁸ The strongest parts of the Clinton's public image are their professional and political bonds; they work together and support each other's goals.

A Liberal Feminist Success Story

Hillary Rodham Clinton is a feminist success story and a role model for women and men. A very educated, intelligent, and politically experienced woman, Senator Clinton is representative of the Gloria Steinem brand of liberal, mainstream feminism that expects women to have the opportunity to ascend to power, to have a family, and to break through barriers in a widening political sphere. It is the brand of feminism that is simply and generally defined on the most basic level by the desire for equality of social, political, and economic opportunity for everyone. The all-encompassing notion of liberal feminism is its ability to adapt to new opportunity and to support all women and men in their choices. It is the feminism that seeks to strike at the foundations of patriarchy and release women from gender roles that force them to be submissive and silent, and release men from gender roles that force them to be virulent and violent. This is the notion of feminism that coincides with Hillary Rodham Clinton's success.

Hillary Rodham Clinton: "A Lesson Learned"

Hillary Rodham learned a valuable lesson when the Healthcare Reform Task Force failed to get their legislation through Congress. Through that experience, she learned what

⁶⁸ Hooks, 78-84.

did not work in the political game and instead worked to restructure her image and position to adopt more traditional elements of the First Ladyship while also creating a niche for herself in Washington. Through this action, she earned a larger support base, yet she continued to make and influence policy in Washington and worldwide. As she took on more traditional roles such as a newspaper column and international advocacy on behalf of women and children, she continued to gain political capital, power, respect in the Democratic party, and respect among the voters. From within the traditional paradigm of First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton publicly undermined the patriarchal notion that a wife's only success is to support her husband. Whether people agreed with Hillary Rodham Clinton or not, she forced our society to take a serious look at the role of women politically and economically, and to recognize that a woman can be a wife and a mother while also being successful in the workplace. As the first modern working mother to serve as First Lady, she presented a liberal feminist image of the First Lady and of the power of the modern American professional woman to the American public.

Femininity vs. Feminism: Elizabeth Dole vs. Hillary Rodham Clinton

As I mentioned earlier, although Elizabeth Dole was never the First Lady, she held two cabinet positions, served as president of a large non-profit, and was also married to a powerful Congressman who was a candidate for the presidency. Having a strong educational background, a successful career in the public sector and being married to a very powerful man, Elizabeth Dole's credentials are very similar to Hillary Rodham Clinton's on paper. The difference between Clinton and Dole and the factor that leads Clinton to greater success is ideological. Clinton's refusal to simply "stand by her man" or hide her credentials or success so that her husband can shine more brilliantly leads her to more success. In terms of liberal feminism, Clinton succeeds by endorsing her husband by situating him on her

level; feminism, as previously stated, is about equality. Dole, however, situates her husband above herself, damaging her credibility in the public sector, and endorsing patriarchy. Clinton's feminism trumps Dole's femininity in predicting success in the public sector. Whereas Dole has never threatened patriarchal society and continues to conform to its expectations, Clinton challenges the expectations of women in male-dominated society just enough to get the public's attention. While both Dole and Clinton used rhetorical strategies to transform their public image, Dole used such strategies to the political benefit of her husband only, and thus, cost herself legitimacy and success as a presidential candidate. Clinton, on the other hand, used her rhetoric to create a favorable image for herself as a political figure in the public sphere, and to ensure that the public saw her as a candidate and a politician *in addition to* her role as wife and mother. In liberal feminist fashion, Clinton used her role as wife and mother to blur feminism with femininity and public with private, gaining legitimacy and garnering an audience to support her role as a savvy politician. Also, Hillary Rodham Clinton proves to be an aggressive policymaker and strong advocate on behalf of her constituents in her role as a Senator, and is able to subvert and destroy gendered expectations of women through her forcefulness and aggressive pursuit of policy and accountability in government.

Hillary Rodham Clinton: No Label

In her autobiography, Hillary Rodham Clinton never refers to herself as a feminist. In fact, her embodiment of feminism appears only twice in her autobiography. The first time was when she referred to the ways in which she was illustrated by GOP leaders in the wake of her comment: "I'm not sitting here, some little woman standing by my man like Tammy Wynette" in a 60 Minutes interview. Then, 51 days later, she made a similar comment: "you know, I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas,

but what I decided to do was fulfill my profession.” According to Clinton, Republican leaders labeled her a “radical feminist” and warned that a “Clinton-Clinton Administration” would push a radical-feminist agenda.⁶⁹ As I established earlier, Hillary Rodham Clinton is not a radical feminist. In her autobiography, however, the index points to 121 entries about women and women’s issues.

Feminism is largely misunderstood as a cultural movement in the United States, and though, according to bell hooks, “feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression,”⁷⁰ there is a fear in society (probably rooted in second wave feminism) that feminism is a movement to *reverse* sexism. Feminism is about equality, not about reversing the roles of sexism. Hillary Rodham Clinton has been illustrated by right wing conspirators such as Rush Limbaugh as a “feminazi” because her activism, credentials, ambition, and political power allows her to bring women’s issues to the forefront of the political arena.

Women and the Political Sphere

The political domain is a long-established institution of patriarchy. The demeanor and technique of political behavior required to operate within the political institution is domineering and oppressive. Feminist scholars have pointed out the ways in which traditional aspects of political behavior and political institutions are shaped by gender politics and hierarchy.⁷¹ Namely, in a political institution, men have power and influence in a system of hierarchy over women and over other men. Once women become politicians and part of the political hierarchy, they have the ability to slowly change the focus of lawmaking. Andersen cites research that suggests that female politicians are more likely to be active in women’s issues that include education, health, welfare, child care, and abortion rights, but

⁶⁹ Clinton, 110.

⁷⁰ Hooks, viii.

⁷¹ Margaret Andersen, “Women Power, Politics” in Thinking About Women Sociological Perspectives on Sex and Gender, ed. Margaret Andersen (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1997), 283.

cautions against the essentialist notion that points to women as different from men due to psychosexual makeup.⁷²

In examining the meaning of politics, liberal feminist scholars wish to expand the notion of the political to merge the public and private spheres.

Feminist scholars...have defined political more broadly and have argued that traditional concepts of the political have been marked by an incorrect conceptual dichotomy between the public and private spheres of life. Assuming that the political is only that which occurs in the formal, public sphere overlooks significant political activity by women in other arenas, and limits our understanding of the political only to those institutions where men have predominated⁷³

Through their work in the private sphere, women inherently contribute to public and political life, but their significant contributions often go unrecognized in the public sphere because these contributions are dismissed. Many first ladies before Hillary Rodham Clinton hid their influence. One of the reasons why Hillary Rodham Clinton is so controversial is due to the fact that she puts herself and her agenda in the spotlight. Even when she used tradition and femininity to soften her agenda, as a liberal feminist, Hillary Rodham Clinton worked to promote women's concerns in the public sphere. In this sense, the First Lady is the public face of the amalgamation of the public and private spheres. Hillary Rodham Clinton, in the private role of First Lady, assumed a public role as a presidential policy advisor, and an active part of the administration. The problem with merging the public and private spheres was that it gave the First Lady the power to take a private (*i.e.* women's) position and exercise its informal (*i.e.* unimportant) power in the public (*i.e.* male) sector.

The Making of a Political Image

According to Mayhew, the foremost goal of a politician is to get reelected, and in order to get reelected, voters have to know who a politician is. Name recognition is one of

⁷² Andersen, 296.

⁷³ Andersen, 302.

the most important tools that a politician has in achieving their goal of reelection. In order for a politician to get their name out, they have to do something to get people's attention. As the current junior Senator from New York, there is little doubt that people know about Hillary Rodham Clinton from her days as one of our country's most controversial First Ladies in history. She is also a very polarizing figure, and has struggled throughout her public service career to maintain a favorable image in the American political discourse while at the same time widening the scope of women's power in government. As I suggested earlier, however, she is consistently attacked by the media and right-wing extremists and throughout the two terms of her First Ladyship, Clinton's image changed as often as her hairstyle in a tug of war between her political adversaries within the media, and her own staff. Additionally, when she decided to run for Senate, Clinton changed her image once again in order to appeal to moderate New Yorkers in the 2000 Senate election.

A Career-long Advocacy of Women and Children

Throughout her career, Hillary Rodham Clinton has been an advocate for women and children. In fact, during law school at Yale, Hillary Rodham Clinton met Marian Wright Edelman and became involved with her organization, The Children's Defense Fund. During her second year of law school at Yale, Clinton focused on children and the law; she interned at the New Haven Legal Services office, learning first hand about the struggles between parental and child's rights under the law. After law school in 1972, Hillary moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts to work for the Children's Defense fund with Marian Wright Edelman. She worked on a study which revealed why some school-age children were not enrolled in schools, and discovered that many of them were handicapped; at the urging of the Children's Defense Fund and other activist organizations, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act.

First Lady of Arkansas

As the First Lady of Arkansas from 1978-1980 and again from 1982-1990, Hillary Rodham Clinton chaired education and health reform committees, was a member of the Southern Regional Task Force on Infant Mortality, and served on the Arkansas Children's Hospital Board.⁷⁴ During Bill Clinton's first term as governor of Arkansas in 1978, chairing the Rural Health Committee, Hillary worked with the governor to institute a Health Care Reform plan that successfully increased the amount of clinics, doctors, nurses, and midwives in rural Arkansas.⁷⁵ She also successfully chaired the Education Standards Committee which helped Arkansas raise school standards and drew the attention of the nation.

Hillary Rodham Clinton's Role in the Clinton Campaign

Going into the 1992 Presidential campaign, Hillary Rodham Clinton was illustrated in the media as unfeminine, and more concerned with her career than with her marriage. "She was perceived as a career woman who did not care for homemaking; outspoken, obstinate, very intelligent, very opinionated, very sure of herself, and overwhelmingly obsessed with power and career."⁷⁶ It was during the race for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1991 that the Clintons had their first brush with image making on the national stage. However, it was not their first time working to remake the image of their union in order to garner the admiration of voters. When Bill Clinton lost his bid for reelection to the Governorship in Arkansas in 1980, it was believed that one source of voter resentment was

⁷⁴ Borrelli, 38.

⁷⁵ Clinton, 94.

⁷⁶ Kelley, 222.

Hillary's refusal to take his last name as her own.⁷⁷ In 1982 when Bill Clinton successfully regained the Governorship, Hillary Rodham added Clinton to the end of her name, believing that it was more important for him to become the governor than for her to keep her maiden last name.⁷⁸ Throughout their public life, the Clintons worked to change their public image in order to gain popularity in the polls.

Although Bill Clinton was always the candidate until the Senate elections of 2000, such political image making always required Hillary to make changes in her appearance and demeanor. Even though he was the contender, Hillary remained one of the focuses of the media and the political opposition. Bill and Hillary Clinton exhibited a shared commitment to public service, and their continued support of each other's careers both strengthened their political power and brought them increased scrutiny from the public. Their political confidence in each other—and more specifically Bill's political confidence in Hillary—demonstrated a commitment to feminist egalitarian marriage and partnership. According to Burrell, a political wife's ambition is advanced through her husband's career.⁷⁹ So a political wife devotes her work to promoting her husband and his career; in the Clinton marriage, each partner's career was important, and her legitimacy, intelligence, and success did not disappear when, for the first time, as First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton was not privately employed.

⁷⁷ Kelley, 218.

⁷⁸ Clinton, 91-93.

⁷⁹ Burrell, 16.

CONCLUSION

In the veiled patriarchy of the United States today, it is dangerous to identify as a feminist. So although Hillary Rodham Clinton operates within the realm of liberal feminist values, attitudes and beliefs, she does not openly identify as a feminist. In fact, one of the few ways that Hillary Rodham Clinton's actions and behaviors do not conform to liberal feminism, is that she does not publicly identify herself with the feminist movement. Hillary Rodham Clinton left her mark on the White House and the American political landscape as a controversial First Lady that did not fit within the confines of patriarchy.

Hillary Rodham Clinton's professional and educational credentials before becoming First Lady could have ensured her a stellar career in the public or private sector independent of her husband. Instead, she chose love and was able to successfully combine marriage, motherhood, and career, one of the goals and hallmarks of liberal feminists. Second, although the American public took years to accept it, Hillary Rodham Clinton had the ambition to make her mark on Washington on her own terms, and continue her career in public service after Bill Clinton left the White House. Another point of liberal feminism is its emphasis on women gaining power in society through career and politics. Hillary Rodham Clinton constantly adjusted her public image in order to appease the American public and gain her own political fame at the same time. She moderated herself in order to both further her ambition and fulfill the American notion of what a traditional First Lady should be. After healthcare reform failed, she stepped out of the policymaking spotlight and

instead used her talent to address social issues. The brilliance in her actions and rhetoric was the way in which she buried her feminism in femininity and capitalism. In other words, she manipulated the boundaries of femininity in order to both gain power and appear more traditional. Instead of challenging policy and being aggressive in the United States, she brought her act overseas and went on a sort of consciousness raising tour to promote women's rights. So although she fought as an activist for social, political, and economic equality, her actions were accepted and her aggressiveness was praised rather than punished because with a message of cultural imperialism, she was preaching American ideals internationally from a woman's, mother's, and wife's perspective to other women, mothers, and wives. She successfully combined the public and private realms and challenged patriarchy while conveying the image of an American First Lady. Hillary Rodham Clinton will always be famous in the American political consciousness for the ways in which she made history by transferring her power from the private realm to the public realm.

Hillary Rodham Clinton's Feminism as the Deconstruction of Political Discourse

Hillary Rodham Clinton's style is an example of a feminist style of politics which combines the public and private realms in order to draw attention to a more social political cause. One of the main facets of liberal feminism and feminist politics is to combine the social and cultural with the traditionally political. According to Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, feminist deconstruction of political discourse requires the rethinking and reuse of the primary terms of political discourse in order to include women and reposition them within history, the law, and the greater political discourse of society.⁸⁰ The First Lady has the unique opportunity to perform this feminist deconstruction of political discourse because

⁸⁰ Judith Butler and Joan Scott, "Introduction," in Feminists Theorize the Political, eds. Judith Butler and Joan Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), xiv.

her role is acknowledged as both public and private. As the First Lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton took a clearly feminist step to remake political discourse by altering the public and private domains. Where she found success, however, in that remaking of political discourse was on the issue of women's rights—an issue where she could bring women, their issues, and their needs on to the political stage and into the realm of political discourse. According to Burrell, the First Lady is a cultural position that has become institutionalized.⁸¹ Over the years, the position of First Lady has become part of the political discourse, and thus has gotten the power to combine the social and political in order to bring women's concerns and demands to the political institution.

Problematizing Liberal Feminism

Liberal Feminists are committed to working within the system and maintaining the status quo while increasing women's presence in the existing power structures. The problem with liberal feminism is that it does not challenge the existing power structures that tacitly enforce racism and classism, and in many ways perpetuate the system of patriarchy by not completely challenging it. By leaving out the struggles of women that are oppressed by systems of racial and class discrimination, capitalism, and Western imperialism, liberal feminists sacrifice true equality for power and self-aggrandizement. The ways in which liberal feminism is invested and entrenched in systems of capitalist, hegemonic, and culturally imperialistic institutions means that such systems go unchallenged and therefore the ultimate goal of liberal feminism—social, political, and economic equality—is unreachable for many groups of women that fall outside the white, western, educated middle-class.

⁸¹ Burrell, 140.

Another problem with liberal feminism is that it forces women to find their success in every arena in order to gain power. True liberal feminist success is defined in women like Hillary Rodham Clinton who are able to succeed in patriarchal terms, but also play to traditional stereotypes of femininity such as dutiful wife and mother. The institutionalized system of patriarchy continues to oppress many women because they realize that it is almost impossible to hold down a career and be the perfect mother and wife at the same time without any additional pressure on men.

Although Hillary Rodham Clinton is a testament to liberal feminism, her success is in a man's world. In liberal feminist fashion, she went to third world countries to impose Western beliefs of capitalism and democracy upon women struggling to feed their children and to survive under oppressive regimes. In order to gain support from the United States, the message that Clinton brought to these third world women encouraged them to strive to succeed in Western terms—capitalism and democracy. Building a positive image for herself as an icon of Western feminine strength and resolve, she privileged Western styles of gaining power without much consideration for other cultures. Even though Clinton traveled and spoke on behalf of women internationally, she was fighting for Western ideals as well as women's freedom from Western ideas of oppression. Hillary Rodham Clinton challenged institutions of patriarchy and oppression for third world women, but she challenged it in culturally imperialistic terms, demonizing other cultures along with the practices that oppressed the women in those cultures.

Why the Women's Movement Needs Hillary Rodham Clinton

Hillary Rodham Clinton has achieved success in the public sphere on a national and international level. Although she has triumphed through adherence to liberal feminism—which truly does not address the concerns of all women—as a woman with power in the

current system, the movement needs her to demonstrate what women are capable of, and the unfair ways that they are challenged. Hillary Rodham Clinton is one of the most powerful female public figures in the world. Liberal feminists work to change the system from within, destabilizing the system by creating space for additional feminist ideas.

Senator Clinton also publicly demonstrates the struggle for women to succeed in the public sphere. With similar, indeed stronger credentials than many of her male colleagues in Congress, she consistently demonstrates the gross inequality of the institution of Congress and the public sector. Indeed, as a product of white, middle class society, two of the best universities in the nation, a successful career in corporate law, and two terms in the White House, Hillary Rodham Clinton is criticized in the media for her appearance, her “aggressiveness,” and her “anger.” Instead of looking at her job performance, Republican and right wing pundits continue to attack her personally, rather than professionally and politically. With her credentials, if Hillary Rodham Clinton were a man, there would be no doubt that she would clinch the Democratic nomination for 2008. As a woman, however, she has to work twice as hard to prove herself. Hillary Rodham Clinton occupies a space that is essential to the success of the woman’s movement because her presence demonstrates the base of inequality in our society.

Hillary 2008

As a liberal feminist, Hillary Rodham Clinton has worked herself into the existing power structure in the United States. Working to slowly challenge the hegemony from within, in order to gain power, Hillary Rodham Clinton uses aggressive tactics and pressure in order to gain political power and the respect of her mostly white, male colleagues. Already having had experience as a White House policymaker, Hillary Rodham Clinton would prove a formidable candidate in the run for the presidency. If Hillary Rodham

Clinton remains the front runner for the Democratic nomination, she could become the first woman to win a major party's presidential nomination (not to mention the uproar if she would win the election). Although Hillary Rodham Clinton is highly qualified to run for president, having served as an activist First Lady and a term in the Senate, she is consistently challenged and attacked because she's aggressive. Playing on the American political consciousness but keeping to her own style of leadership could prove a formidable task for any woman. As a master of rhetoric and image management however, along with stellar academic and professional connections and a popular reputation in the media, Hillary Rodham Clinton will be a formidable candidate for the first female president of the United States.

If Hillary Rodham Clinton were to succeed in her run for the presidency, the balance of power in the United States and indeed, the world would slowly begin to level. With a female president, women's issues would be brought to the table, and would have to be considered. A female president would create a space for women and minorities to attain success in the public sphere, and set the stage for the balance of power to shift in favor of women. It would start to be less taboo for a woman to be more professionally successful than her husband, and would allow men to gain a place in the private sphere, creating more egalitarian relationships and stronger families.

Of course, liberal feminism, and a female presidency would not adequately address the concerns of so many minorities that suffer due to the domination inherent in our system of government, however, it would be a powerful start. Indeed, even if Hillary Rodham Clinton does not get the nomination, or if she runs but does not win, she still will destabilize the notion that only males are capable of attaining the position of the most powerful person in the world. Of course, in order to get as far as she's gotten, Hillary Rodham Clinton has

had to conform to male-coded, patriarchal standards of behavior, and manage her public image in order to be accepted by the American public. Realistically, however, her role is not to create change. It is to create the space for others to create change, and that is why she remains significant in the feminist movement. Hillary Rodham Clinton has met the ideals of liberal feminism; however, as it has been publicly chronicled in the media, she's struggled with that battle for her whole life. Her example gives feminists a case-study to point to the ways in which our society is inherently unequal, and creates the space for women and minorities to do something about it. Though Hillary Rodham Clinton is a feminist success story, she truly demonstrates the inadequacies of liberal feminism in addressing the concerns of all women.

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