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# Women in the White House: How Gender-Based Obstacles Affected Edith Wilson and Hillary Rodham Clinton While First Ladies

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WOMEN IN THE WHITE HOUSE:  
HOW GENDER-BASED OBSTACLES AFFECTED EDITH WILSON  
AND HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON WHILE FIRST LADIES

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## Abstract

While there has never been a female president or vice president of the United States, a comparison of First Ladies offers a good case study on how far women have progressed in American politics. Through a comparison of Edith Wilson and Hillary Rodham Clinton, this study seeks to compare the gender-based obstacles for a First Lady at the beginning of the twentieth century and the end of the twentieth century. The analysis of this study shows that despite the progression of feminism over the past one hundred years, it remains just as difficult to be a woman in politics due to decreased privacy, increased media attention, and the continued expectation to fulfill feminine gender roles. As the 2016 general election approaches with a female presumptive nominee for the Democratic Party, this study provides insight into the rationale and negative implications for continued low female representation in American politics.

## Introduction

“We have chosen the path to equality, please don’t let them turn us around,” Vice Presidential nominee Geraldine Ferrero pleaded of women just days before the 1984 election. She recounted her journey from being a homemaker into politics. She said these are both fine careers but that women must be given the choice. Her point was that her nomination as the first female vice president of a major party had been such a major step forward that further progress was almost certain. However, this view was tested eight years later when Hillary Rodham Clinton came into national view as possibly the next First Lady. The reaction to her activism, feminism, and involvement in politics proved that women had not come so far as Ferrero believed.

This research began from the question, “how far have women really come in American politics?” No woman has ever been president or vice president of the United States, but a good case study can be developed by looking at the unofficial office of First Lady. Historians agree that Rodham Clinton was the most influential First Lady. But nearly a century earlier, Edith Wilson used the position to exercise substantial power. One way to measure how far women have come in politics is by comparing the kinds and significance of gender-based obstacles that Wilson and Rodham Clinton faced in trying to use the position of First Lady for political purposes.

Several factors make this a good comparative case. First, Wilson and Rodham Clinton served as First Lady nearly a century apart, giving enough time to see significant, structural change. Second, both served as First Lady at the apex of strong feminist movements. Wilson was First Lady during First Wave Feminism, which culminated in the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup>

amendment, giving women the right to vote. By comparison Rodham Clinton grew up during and was deeply influenced by Second Wave Feminism, which stimulated far greater legal and social equality for women. Third, both Wilson and Rodham Clinton wielded real power. Wilson's office was unofficial and Rodham Clinton's was in part official, but both were able to influence political events.

Comparing how gender-based obstacles affected Edith Wilson and Hillary Rodham Clinton yields a surprising conclusion. It has not become easier to be a woman in a political role. Increased media attention and overall decreased privacy due to technological advances have made it all but impossible for the kind of secrecy that Edith Wilson enjoyed. Today women in politics, including Hillary Rodham Clinton, are held under a microscope of mass media and public scrutiny. Over the twentieth century, women gained increased social, legal, and economic equality, but women's ability to exercise political power has progressed much more slowly.

This study opens with a look at how First Wave Feminism influenced the gender roles that Edith Wilson would have been expected to fulfill. The next section looks at how Edith Wilson exercised substantial power and influence during the president's illness by controlling the information he received and access others had to him. As a result she received substantial criticism for being a woman with power. She was accused of using her husband's illness to bolster her own political agenda.

The third section on Second Wave Feminism gives context for the environment in which Hillary Rodham Clinton grew up. As a product of this movement, she was passionate about being a career woman but susceptible to the idea that a liberated woman had to do it all. The

fourth section describes obstacles Rodham Clinton faced during Bill Clinton's campaign and presidency. She made it clear that she intended to be deeply involved in her husband's administration, but she received a backlash for not being maternal or feminine enough. Once her husband took office, Rodham Clinton was subjected to continual criticisms from humorists, pundits, and the general public that mocked her sexuality, her body, and her lack of femininity. The concluding section reflects on changes in the media climate surrounding the presidency, the persistence of gender role expectations for women in politics, and the implications of this study for understanding the 2016 presidential campaign.

## Background on First Wave Feminism

First Wave Feminism began as an organized movement in 1848 with the Seneca Falls Convention that drafted the *Declaration of Sentiments*. This document was modeled after the *Declaration of Independence* to air the grievances of women.<sup>1</sup> While the first wave of feminism began as a movement to include suffrage, welfare rights, and access to contraception and abortion, the movement narrowed over time to focus on the issue of women's right to vote.<sup>2</sup>

The first wave of feminism sought to correct social and legal inequalities justified by the nineteenth century ideal of separate spheres. Separate spheres was an ideology created to rationalize husbands and wives working, and often living, in different locations as a landed agriculture economy transformed into an industrial cash economy. When cash became a

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<sup>1</sup> "The Seneca Falls Convention and the Early Suffrage Movement," *National Women's History Museum* (2007), <https://www.nwhm.org/online-exhibits/rightsforwomen/SenecaFalls.html>.; Rory Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms* (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008), 29; Jennifer McKinney, "History of Women in the U.S." (unpublished lecture, Seattle Pacific University Introduction to Women's Studies, Seattle, WA, January 21-26, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Maggie Humm, "First Wave," in *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1995), 98.

necessity in American life, people who had lived their entire lives on farms had to leave their land to find paid work. Because women were tied to young children at home, men went to the factories to work for wages. Separate spheres ideology claimed that men were naturally (biologically) suited for paid labor and interacting with capitalism in the public world. On the other hand, it was said that women were inherently moral, nurturing creatures, who should be kept away from the corrupting influence of economics and politics, confined to the private sphere in the home. Separate spheres gave birth to two gendered ideals: the Cult of True Womanhood and the Cult of the Self-Made Man.

The Cult of True Womanhood, also known as the Cult of Domesticity, dictated the roles of the ideal woman in the nineteenth century. Proper women were expected to adhere to the four tenets of the Cult of True Womanhood: piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness.<sup>3</sup> “True” women were not supposed to work for wages but to confine themselves to the home. These elite women did not partake in domestic labor or childrearing either but hired it out to poorer women. Women were encouraged to find their sole fulfillment in life in being a wife and mother, so they had no reason to want to leave the home.

The Cult of the Self-Made Man was dichotomous to the Cult of True Womanhood. Self-Made Men fulfilled the American dream by creating themselves from nothing, by pulling themselves up by the bootstraps to create their own wealth and legacy. The Self-Made Man created a family fortune and legacy through commerce and politics, institutions that were considered exclusively male. Because the separate spheres ideology held that men were

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<sup>3</sup> McKinney, “History of Women in the U.S.”; Dicker, 21-2.



amoral, Self-Made Men did not feel the pressure live up to a moral standard but rather to provide financially.<sup>4</sup>

The Cult of True Womanhood and the Cult of the Self-Made Man established gender ideals, for those wealthy enough to afford them, in a culture of newly created separate spheres.<sup>5</sup> Men, who entered factory work to make their way in a cash economy, became a part of the “public sphere,” while women, who continued home production and agricultural work, took on the “private sphere.”<sup>6</sup> As women became more and more excluded from leadership in the public sphere, they were expected to take on the virtues that were considered inherently and God-Ordained as female.<sup>7</sup> Women were considered the moral, religious centers of the home because they rooted the family in the home.<sup>8</sup> In order to be considered True Women, and therefore socially superior, women had to be married and relinquish all agency in their lives to their husbands.<sup>9</sup> Because the public sphere was amoral and corrupting, women were supposed to focus on domestic life within their homes.<sup>10</sup>

Other social forces, however, pushed women into the public sphere. While the Cults of True Womanhood and the Self-Made Man were ideals within the culture, they were economically feasible only for a small percentage of the population. Many women worked outside of the home as a way to contribute to household income.<sup>11</sup> Other women acquired a vocal presence in public life through involvement in organizations dedicated to social reform, a

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<sup>4</sup> Jennifer McKinney, "Gender and Family." (unpublished lecture, Seattle Pacific University Sociology of Gender, Seattle, WA, February 8-12, 2016); Dicker, 24.

<sup>5</sup> McKinney, "Gender and Family."

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> McKinney, "History of Women in the U.S."

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*; McKinney, "Gender and Family."

<sup>9</sup> Dicker, 22.

<sup>10</sup> Dicker, 24.

<sup>11</sup> McKinney, "History of Women in the U.S."

legacy of the Second Great Awakening.<sup>12</sup> However, when women were barred from joining male-run abolition societies, the women formed their own organizations to fight not only for the slaves' freedom, but also for their own.<sup>13</sup>

First Wave Feminism was an outgrowth of these forces that had brought women into public roles. Feminism quickly focused on women's suffrage, believing that the most basic way to include women in public life was to enfranchise them.<sup>14</sup> Eventually the fight for suffrage broke into two constituent parties, one that supported a federal amendment for suffrage and one that advocated for statewide adoption of suffrage.<sup>15</sup>

The fight for women's suffrage continued for decades, with varied wins and losses by state. At the national level it came to a head in the early 1900s. Since Woodrow Wilson, elected President in 1912, initially opposed women's suffrage, Alice Paul organized a pro-suffrage march on the eve of his inauguration.<sup>16</sup> Wilson famously responded that the issue of women's suffrage had never been brought to his attention.<sup>17</sup> Wilson continued to oppose suffrage until 1915 when he vocally supported women's suffrage in his home state of New Jersey.<sup>18</sup>

In 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment was passed, guaranteeing "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State

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<sup>12</sup> Dicker, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Dicker, 26-7.; McKinney, "History of Women in the U.S."

<sup>14</sup> Dicker, 41.; McKinney, "History of Women in the U.S."

<sup>15</sup> Dicker, 40-1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 44, 48; McKinney, "History of Women in the U.S."; Sarah J. Moore, "Making a Spectacle of Suffrage: The National Woman Suffrage Pageant, 1913," *The Journal of American Culture* 20, no. 1 (1997): 89, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1542-734X.1997.00089.x/abstract>.

<sup>17</sup> Dicker, 49.

<sup>18</sup> Lewis L. Gould, *American First Ladies: Their Lives and Legacy* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 240.

on account of sex.”<sup>19</sup> While there were still issues of equality that mattered to first wave feminists, the main objective of the feminist movement had been achieved.<sup>20</sup>

## The Undue Influence of Edith Wilson

The fight over women’s suffrage framed the circumstances in which the First Lady assumed unprecedented political power. Edith Bolling Galt Wilson was not a woman with political ambition.<sup>21</sup> She never sought public office, nor was she active in social and political circles.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, she gained more power and access than almost any American woman of the twentieth century due to her marriage and the circumstances of her husband’s health. She did not have any political training and very limited formal education. However, her relationship as a wife allowed her unprecedented access to the president. When he became severely ill, this access translated into power over his administration.<sup>23</sup>

In April of 1919, Woodrow Wilson suffered a thrombosis in his brain. In October of that year, he suffered a stroke that left him partially paralyzed.<sup>24</sup> Edith Wilson responded by concealing his illness from the public, his cabinet, and his closest advisors.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Dicker, 54; "19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution: Women's Right to Vote," *National Archives*, <http://www.archives.gov/historical-docs/document.html?doc=13>.

<sup>20</sup> McKinney, "History of Women in the U.S."

<sup>21</sup> Betty B. Caroli, *First Ladies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 150.

<sup>22</sup> Gene Smith, *When the Cheering Stopped: The Last Years of Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Morrow, 1964), 13-4.

<sup>23</sup> Smith 126; Gould, 237; Caroli, 143.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, 106; Judith L. Weaver, "Edith Bolling Wilson as First Lady: A Study in the Power of Personality, 1919-1920," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1985): 51, accessed October 8, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27550164?seq=1#page>.

<sup>25</sup> Gould, 242-3; Caroli, 149; Weaver, 51, 54; Allida M. Black, "The Modern First Lady and Public Policy: From Edith Wilson Through Hillary Rodham Clinton," *OAH Magazine of History* 15, no. 3 (2001): 16, accessed January 28, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25163436>.

After the president's stroke, Edith became the de facto head of the executive branch. Edith claimed that she never made any decisions about policy. However, she did control the president's schedule, who saw him, and what mail reached him.<sup>26</sup> Very suddenly the most influential person in Washington was a woman with no interest in politics. Edith Wilson had more access, information, and power than any other person in the United States government in the last year of Wilson's presidency.<sup>27</sup>

Due to the secrecy of President Wilson's illness, the public did not know about her role in the executive branch. Therefore, Edith's critics while she was First Lady were limited to government officials who knew of her influence.<sup>28</sup> Their criticism centered on the fact that it was a woman exercising this influence and power. However, by framing herself as a concerned wife, not a politician, Edith circumvented much more potential disapproval. Edith often said that she did not want the role she had taken on and that she only did it as a concerned wife. She claimed everything she did was for her husband's health and well-being.<sup>29</sup> Her goal, she said, was not to effect change in the United States but to keep her husband alive.<sup>30</sup>

Despite her disclaimers, Edith Wilson used her personal influence over the president to exercise substantial political power.<sup>31</sup> Edith never liked Wilson's closest advisors, so she made herself his sole advisor by restricting their access to the president.<sup>32</sup> Wilson's most important advisors were his personal secretary Joseph Tumulty, his advisor on European diplomacy

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<sup>26</sup> Gould, 242; Smith, 107; Weaver, 56.

<sup>27</sup> Caroli, 151; Smith, 13-4.

<sup>28</sup> Smith, 98-9.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>31</sup> Weaver, 51, 60.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 51, 53, 60; Gould, 239-40, 242-3; Black, 16.

Colonel House, Secretary of State Robert Lansing, and personal physician Dr. Cary Grayson. When Wilson died in 1924, Dr. Grayson was the only one remaining. Edith disposed of the rest.<sup>33</sup>

With Dr. Grayson's help, Edith concealed the seriousness of the president's illness. They circulated rumors that his illness was overwork, influenza, indigestion, and nervous exhaustion.<sup>34</sup> While Dr. Grayson diagnosed that Wilson had suffered significant brain damage, Edith maintained that his "brain was clear and untouched."<sup>35</sup> Later, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer revealed that the cabinet did not know about the severity of the president's illness.<sup>36</sup>

Since Edith controlled Wilson's schedule, she was able to bar access to the president. She did not allow Tumulty, House, Lansing, or Vice President Marshall to meet with him.<sup>37</sup> Instead she met with them on a limited basis.<sup>38</sup> In order to prevent Wilson from asking to meet with them, she misinformed him about them being out of town.<sup>39</sup> When she became convinced that they were trying to maneuver the president out of office, she convinced the president of their disloyalty.<sup>40</sup> She pressed him to fire them or force them to resign.<sup>41</sup>

The executive branch operated very inefficiently in the last year of Wilson's presidency.<sup>42</sup> Edith did not take on the administrative duties, and she did not effectively

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<sup>33</sup> Weaver, 53

<sup>34</sup> Smith, 91, 98-9.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 98-9; Weaver, 55.

<sup>36</sup> Weaver, 55.

<sup>37</sup> Gould, 242-3; Caroli, 149; Weaver, 51, 54; Black, 16; Smith, 129.

<sup>38</sup> Smith, 129.

<sup>39</sup> Weaver, 64.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 55; Gould, 243.

delegate them. She simply ignored matters that she found unimportant or did not want to deal with. During the president's illness, Edith received all letters, documents, and papers from the cabinet.<sup>43</sup> She determined what the president would see; everything else went unread and unanswered. On many issues, Edith rubber stamped whatever decision was made by Congress. Other issues she ignored.<sup>44</sup> This incompetence led to delays and diplomatic problems. Feeling the strain of a government slowdown, Tumulty compiled a list of issues to be addressed by Wilson. From this list Edith decided to allow Woodrow to write a message to the railroad company and to settle the coal strike. However, she thought he had exerted enough energy and did not tell him that Costa Rica required diplomatic recognition. Costa Rica was unrecognized as a country for two months while Edith kept the paperwork from the president.<sup>45</sup> In another governing gaffe, the United States also nearly went to war with Mexico. Secretary of State Lansing requested an audience with President Wilson because a U.S. consular agent had been kidnapped by Mexican rebels. Edith refused to allow Lansing to speak with Woodrow, so Lansing acted unilaterally by improvising foreign policy. This incident nearly led to a war with Mexico because the cabinet could not confer with the Commander in Chief.<sup>46</sup>

Edith's influence was felt most strongly in the negotiations over the Treaty of Versailles and the question of U.S. membership in the League of Nations.<sup>47</sup> During the negotiations she would not allow the president's advisors to see him. She met with them instead. And when they

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<sup>43</sup> Weaver, 56.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

counseled compromising with the Senate to get the treaty revised, she stubbornly refused.<sup>48</sup>

Historian Judith Weaver has concluded that Edith's intervention was crucial.

“Her jealousy of Wilson's advisors mixed with her intense and blind loyalty to her husband's opinion on the Treaty, contributed to its defeat. . . . Because of her own belief that her husband was perfect, Edith was not willing to listen to the advice of those who counseled compromise. . . . The President's only close adviser during the entire League fight was Edith. He received no reports on public opinion and heard no views except those he wished to hear. The result was the destruction of the treaty.”<sup>49</sup>

### A Woman with Power

Much of the criticism Edith received from congressmen and members of the administration was focused on the fact that a woman had usurped a male role. While the ideology of separate spheres from Victorian sentimentality was no longer at its height by the Wilson administration, it influenced how gender roles were constructed for Edith.<sup>50</sup> Edith, and her contemporaries in the government, was raised during the late 1800s, when separate spheres was the pervasive model of gender.<sup>51</sup> Separate spheres dictated that politics was a masculine pursuit because it was amoral, which men inherently were.<sup>52</sup> Women, who were

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<sup>48</sup> Caroli, 151; Weaver, 69.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*; Smith, 112; Caroli, 149.

<sup>50</sup> McKinney, “Gender and Family.”

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> McKinney, “History of Women in the U.S.”

considered inherently moral, were not suited for politics.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, Edith Wilson's involvement in the Wilson administration was viewed as a break with traditional gender roles.

While very few people knew the extent of Wilson's illness, government officials became aware that Edith was operating the executive branch. During a session of Congress, Senator Albert Fall shouted, "We have a petticoat government! Mrs. Wilson is president!" He requested a congressional recess until a legitimate president was instated.<sup>54</sup> If Edith were acting as president, Senator Fall would have a legitimate claim that the presidency was invalid because it would have been a faulty succession of power. However, Senator Fall's comment does not accuse Edith of seizing power unlawfully. Instead, he criticizes her gender. A "petticoat government" was a popular, pejorative term to refer to a government run by a woman, who had ventured too far into the masculine realm of politics.

Another famous statement was made against Edith in Congress. A senator said that Edith was "the Presidentress who fulfilled the dream of suffragettes by changing her title from First Lady to Acting First Man."<sup>55</sup> This statement too employs gendered language to diminish Edith and villainize her role. The speaker uses the term "presidentress," which is not a term used for female presidents but instead makes the role feminine and diminutive. It is made lesser by being made female. The speaker conveys a disdain for a woman holding that role by minimizing its importance. He also accuses Edith of changing her title from a feminine one to a masculine one. This language demonstrates the pervasiveness of separate spheres; a change in

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*; Dicker, 24.

<sup>54</sup> Nancy Hendricks, *America's First Ladies: A Historical Encyclopedia and Primary Document Collection of the Remarkable Women of the White House* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2015), 234; Smith 112; Caroli, 117.

<sup>55</sup> Hendricks, 234; Smith, 113.



roles would necessitate a change of sex. He argues that Edith is trying to make herself more important by making herself a man. Finally, the speaker accuses Edith of fulfilling the dream of suffragettes. In doing this, he associates Edith with women who broke gender roles and sought to change them. However, Edith was not a suffragette or a feminist, and she did not support women's right to vote.<sup>56</sup> The attack was in fact an attempt to associate her with suffragettes in order to undermine her credibility.

While others saw Edith as breaking gender roles, she perceived herself as a wife fulfilling her duty. By her own assertion, she was a True Woman. She rationalized her political work as wifely duties that were essential to her husband's health. She was not acting out of political ambition or to advance her own career.<sup>57</sup> She was acting as a wife. Regardless of how she rationalized it, she crossed into the masculine public sphere. True Women confined themselves to the home.<sup>58</sup> However, Edith hired her own staff, met with congressmen, and advocated for policy on Wilson's behalf.<sup>59</sup> She was deeply entrenched in politics, which was considered unfit for morally superior women. Edith would not consider herself a feminist, even as a working woman.<sup>60</sup> She worked, she claimed, only because it was necessary to fulfilling her role as a wife.

Edith Wilson ardently proclaimed that she acted in her husband's best interests. She claimed that everything she did was to protect his health and life.<sup>61</sup> However, despite what she espoused, Edith did not only act to preserve Woodrow's health. She often stated that because of his health, Wilson could not be stressed. Therefore, refusing to allow him to resign from an

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<sup>56</sup> Caroli, 147.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>58</sup> Dicker, 22.

<sup>59</sup> Gould, 240; Weaver, 69.

<sup>60</sup> Caroli, 147.

<sup>61</sup> Smith, 122.

inherently stressful job was not in his best interest.<sup>62</sup> Edith did not only care about her husband's life but his legacy and political agenda. She did not have strong political convictions, but she fought for his while he was incapacitated.<sup>63</sup> She did not allow him to resign as president.<sup>64</sup> This demonstrates that Edith was thinking beyond Woodrow's life to the legacy that he and his administration would have. Because she was not able to separate her husband from the President of the United States, the presidency suffered. She remained so focused on ensuring her husband's personal legacy by keeping him in office that the executive branch effectively shut down. She achieved her stated goal; Wilson survived his presidency but at the expense of diplomacy, executive action, and his own League of Nations.

While Edith did take abuse for her role in her husband's presidency, she was not considered a political threat because she did not frame her role as being political.<sup>65</sup> She was not interested in making change.<sup>66</sup> While the executive branch was inefficient and, at times, non-existent from 1919-1921, Edith allowed Congress to proceed with their business.<sup>67</sup> Edith was not an effective executive, but she was also not an active one, which appeased Congress. Had Edith sought to use her role to pass agendas or influence policy, she certainly would have received much more backlash from Congress.

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<sup>62</sup> Gould, 242.

<sup>63</sup> Smith, 13-14.

<sup>64</sup> Gould, 240, 242.

<sup>65</sup> Smith, 126; Caroli, 150.

<sup>66</sup> Smith, 129.

<sup>67</sup> Gould, 24; Weaver, 56.

## Background on Second Wave Feminism

Second Wave Feminism, also called Women's Liberation, emerged in the late 1960s as a part of a wider cultural reaction against the norms and values of the 1950s.<sup>68</sup> When women who were involved in the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War protests experienced discrimination in those movements, they launched the Women's Liberation movement to address their concerns.<sup>69</sup>

Women's Liberation activists differed from their predecessors in First Wave Feminism. They tended to be young, mostly in their twenties. They were concerned with redistributing wealth and power among the sexes in all aspects of life.<sup>70</sup> Women's Lib sought to "challenge the private as well as the public, the psychological as well as the economic, the cultural as well as the legal sources of male dominance."<sup>71</sup>

Women's Libbers grew up in the era of the breadwinner/ homemaker ideal of family. This ideal pervaded American middle class culture during the "long sixties" (1954-1974).<sup>72</sup> Because it was a middle class ideal, about 65% of American families were able to live within the model.<sup>73</sup>

Many women, however, found it difficult to live out the homemaker ideal. They were supposed to feel personally fulfilled by housework and child rearing alone. But because of mass

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<sup>68</sup> Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordan, "Chapter Twenty-Four: Second-Wave Feminism" in *A Companion to American Women's History*, ed. by Nancy A. Hewitt (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 416-7; Margaret Walters. *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 104.

<sup>69</sup> Baxandall and Gordan, 417; McKinney, "History of Women in the U.S."

<sup>70</sup> Baxandall and Gordan, 416-7.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 417.

<sup>72</sup> McKinney, "Gender and Family."

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*; Brigid Schulte, "Unlike in the 1950s, there is no typical US family today," *Washington Post* (Sept. 4, 2014), <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2014/09/04/for-the-first-time-since-the-1950s-there-is-no-typical-u-s-family/>.

migrations to the suburbs, women felt increasingly isolated.<sup>74</sup> This sense of isolation was made worse by the belief that something was wrong with feeling unfulfilled by homemaking. In 1963, Betty Friedan diagnosed this problem as the feminine mystique, detailing the malaise of women who felt unfulfilled by homemaking alone and proving that they were not unique in this discontent.<sup>75</sup>

As the long sixties drew to a close, living on a single income became less and less feasible for most families.<sup>76</sup> Women who had experienced a lack of fulfillment in their own lives started wanting more for their daughters and taught them that they could grow up to do and be anything that they wanted.<sup>77</sup> This generation—the baby boom daughters of housewives—began to object to unequal treatment in the workforce and at home.<sup>78</sup> These young college-educated women became the activists of Second Wave Feminism.

Second Wave Feminism had many victories. Women continued to gain equality in the workplace as they worked towards equal pay after the Equal Pay Act of 1963. Women gained the right to equality in educational programs under Title IX of the Educational Amendments of 1972.<sup>79</sup> The 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade* allowed women increased autonomy over their bodies and granted reproductive rights.<sup>80</sup> Second Wave Feminism made strides for women's equality, but it did not complete the work of equality.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> McKinney, "History of Women in the U.S."; Walters, 102; Schulte.

<sup>76</sup> McKinney, "Gender and Family."

<sup>77</sup> McKinney, "History of Women in the U.S."

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> "Title IX, Education Amendments of 1972," *United States Department of Labor*, <https://www.dol.gov/oasam/regs/statutes/titleix.htm>.

<sup>80</sup> "Roe v. Wade (1973)," *PBS* (2006), [http://www.pbs.org/wnet/supremecourt/rights/landmark\\_roe.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/supremecourt/rights/landmark_roe.html).

<sup>81</sup> McKinney, "History of Women in the U.S."

Then in the 1980s there was a backlash against feminism from both the Christian church and the wider culture. One result of the backlash was the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment. The ERA passed Congress in 1972 but was defeated in the ratification stage by the persistence of anti-feminists. Another consequence of the backlash was the “Superwoman” ideal for mothers.<sup>82</sup> The Superwoman was supposed to ‘do it all’ and have it all—personal success, a family, and femininity.<sup>83</sup> However, a substantial increase in the cost of living meant that few families could get by on a single income.<sup>84</sup> Therefore, women had to work full-time, but they were still expected to perform the child rearing and household labor tasks. On average, women who worked full-time outside the home spent an additional thirty-two hours per week on household labor, not including time spent on child rearing.<sup>85</sup> While women were expected to pick up paid work to help with household finances, men were not expected to reciprocate with household labor. So the Superwoman ideal simply meant women were expected to work a double shift. By the 1990s, the ideal of Superwoman decreased, as women began to realize that no one could do it all.<sup>86</sup> However, the expectation for women to continue the household labor persisted, even if they were also working outside the home.

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*; Jennifer McKinney, "Gender, the Labor Market, and Household Labor." (unpublished lecture, Seattle Pacific University Sociology of Gender, Seattle, WA, February 15-19, 2016); Susan Bordo, "Double Bind" in *Women's Studies Encyclopedia, Volume 1*, ed. Helen Tierney (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 384.

<sup>83</sup> Bordo, 384.

<sup>84</sup> McKinney, "Gender, the Labor Market, and Household Labor."

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*; McKinney, "History of U.S. Feminisms"

## Hillary Rodham Clinton

Hillary Rodham Clinton's life in politics has been doubly controversial. Not only has she faced the usual controversies surrounding her policies and actions, she has also faced gendered criticisms that no man has had to deal with. The media has intruded into her personal life, including her sex life. Humorists' jokes about her have been usually crude and sexist. Throughout her career as a public servant she has had to overcome withering attacks for violating female gender roles.

### Early Life and Career

While Edith Wilson did not identify with First Wave Feminism, Hillary Rodham Clinton was a product of Second Wave Feminism. She had personal ambition for professional accomplishment in the public sphere, and this is what got her into trouble. Like so many Second Wave feminists, Hillary was raised in a family that encouraged education, and her mother often told her that she could be anything she wanted when she grew up.<sup>87</sup> Mrs. Rodham personally hoped that Hillary would be the first woman justice appointed to the Supreme Court, a possibility that had not been available to women of her generation.<sup>88</sup> Despite this encouragement, Hillary faced sexist obstacles from a young age. As a child, she had asked NASA how she could become an astronaut, but she was flatly told that NASA did not hire women.<sup>89</sup> Years later, after law school, Rodham faced another gender-based setback when she applied for a commission as a Marine Corps attorney. She was informed that the Corps would not hire her

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<sup>87</sup> Gould, 425.

<sup>88</sup> Caroli, 290.

<sup>89</sup> Gould, 425.

because she was a woman.<sup>90</sup> She was very aware that her sex was precluding her from opportunities that would have been open to equally qualified men. In a later speech she went through a long list of barriers she had faced because of her sex, enumerating scholarships that she couldn't apply for, schools she couldn't go to, and jobs she couldn't get.<sup>91</sup>

Because of these early experiences with sexism, Rodham developed an ethos to prove that she could do anything that a man could do. After graduating from Wellesley College, where she gave the student-elected commencement address, Rodham attended Yale Law School.<sup>92</sup> She graduated as one of thirty female students in a class of 160.<sup>93</sup> After she was rejected by the Marine Corps, she first worked as a commercial litigator, then as a trademark-law specialist for Rose law firm, where she was made the first woman partner in 1979.<sup>94</sup> She worked for the Children's Defense Fund and was a staff attorney for the House Judiciary Committee during the impeachment of Richard Nixon.<sup>95</sup> She was twice named one of the hundred most influential lawyers in the United States by the *National Law Journal*.

### The 1992 Presidential Campaign

When her husband Bill began his presidential bid for the 1992 election, Rodham Clinton was faced with constructing a new role for herself. As a well-established career woman, she

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<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 428; *There has been some speculation about the accuracy of this claim.*

<sup>91</sup> Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Remarks at the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the First Women's Rights Convention" in *Speaking of Hillary*, ed. Susan K. Flinn (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 2000), 199.

<sup>92</sup> Gould, 426; Wendy Wasserstein, "Hillary Clinton's Muddled Legacy" in *Speaking of Hillary*, ed. Susan K. Flinn (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 2000), 224.

<sup>93</sup> Gould, 426.

<sup>94</sup> Frank J. Macciarola and Richard P. Wulwick, "Congressional Interference with the President's Power to Appoint," *Stetson Law Review* 24, no. 3 (1995): 652,

<http://www.stetson.edu/law/lawreview/media/congressional-interference-with-the-presidents-power-to-appoint-24-3.pdf>.

<sup>95</sup> Gould, 427-8.

faced criticism for not being maternal or domestic enough. So, as a product of Second Wave Feminism, Rodham Clinton took on the role of the Superwoman, the woman with a full-time career and a full-time family.<sup>96</sup> She became “the embodiment of the modern woman who juggled career and family under the most difficult circumstances.”<sup>97</sup>

Bill Clinton’s campaign tried to capitalize on Rodham Clinton’s qualifications and service record as a potential First Lady. The campaign ran slogans stating that this was a “buy one, get one free” presidency. Rodham Clinton herself stated, “If you vote for him, you get me.”<sup>98</sup> This became known as the “two-for-one” talk, which did not mask either Clinton or Rodham Clinton’s intentions for Hillary to be involved in the administration.<sup>99</sup> She was, at this time, considered to be an asset to the campaign because of her impressive work credentials. The rationale was that the American people would prefer a brilliant First Couple, rather a First Lady who had never had a professional career.

This kind of talk brought extra attention to Rodham Clinton, but she faced a unique amount of criticism for a candidate’s wife. Typically, First Ladies weren’t scrutinized until after the election or until the beginning of the administration, but Rodham Clinton had high visibility during the campaign.<sup>100</sup> She was the first First Lady to be given sustained attention by polls, which asked questions directly about her.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Caroli, 297.

<sup>97</sup> Gould, 436.

<sup>98</sup> Barry C. Burden and Anthony Mughan, “Public Opinion and Hillary Rodham Clinton,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 63, no. 2 (1999): 237, accessed October 8, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2991256>.

<sup>99</sup> Charlotte Templin, “Hillary Clinton as a Threat to Gender Norms: Cartoon Images of the First Lady” in *Speaking of Hillary*, ed. Susan K. Flinn (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 2000), #.

<sup>100</sup> Gould, 431.

<sup>101</sup> Burden and Mughan, 239.



One of the first criticisms she received during the campaign was about her name. She had elected to keep her maiden name when she married and did not adopt the Clinton surname.<sup>102</sup> Critics interpreted this as feminist extremism.<sup>103</sup> Polls showed that voters resented Hillary for keeping her name, which affected Bill Clinton's polling numbers.<sup>104</sup> Partly to keep the attention on Bill's campaign, and partly to divert attention from allegations of scandals, Rodham adopted the surname Clinton and insisted that she be called Hillary Clinton during the campaign.<sup>105</sup> The name change effectively directed attention away from her feminism. However, after the inauguration she readopted her maiden name, instructing the press corps to address her as Hillary Rodham Clinton.<sup>106</sup>

Rodham Clinton also came under fire in 1992 for offending and alienating homemakers. In an interview, she said, "I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas, but what I decided to do was to fulfill my profession which I entered before my husband was in public life."<sup>107</sup> This comment was interpreted to mean that not only did Rodham Clinton not intend to take on the traditional domestic roles of a First Lady, but also she had disdain for women who chose those roles. This magnified the perception that she was the kind of feminist that looked down on women who chose to be homemakers. After this political gaff, Rodham Clinton agreed to adopt a public persona of domesticity and motherhood.<sup>108</sup> Rodham Clinton

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<sup>102</sup> Gould, 428; Jeannie Banks Thomas, "Heckling Hillary: Jokes, Late-Night Television, and Hillary Rodham Clinton" in *Geek Chic: Smart Women in Popular Culture*, ed. Sherrie A. Inness (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 183; Gould, 428.

<sup>103</sup> Templin, 208.

<sup>104</sup> Gould, 429.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> Burden and Mughan, 237; Gould, 432.

<sup>107</sup> *Feminism*, ed. Nancy Dzedzic (Detroit: Gale Cengage Learning, 2012), 163; Burden and Mughan, 238.

<sup>108</sup> Caroli, 302.

had already had difficulty winning over the public, prior to the cookies and teas comment, because her predecessor to the East Wing was Barbara Bush, who had made it abundantly clear that she was not involved in policy making.<sup>109</sup> In order to capitalize on the new domestic image, Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barbara Bush competed in a cookie bake-off, which was published in *Family Circle*.<sup>110</sup> The Clintons had always shielded their daughter Chelsea from publicity, but as part of her new image Rodham Clinton allowed Chelsea to be photographed in order to highlight her maternal nature. She began talking about having a sibling for Chelsea and the possibility of adoption.<sup>111</sup> She started wearing softer, more feminine clothes, which created a gentler and kinder persona, putting away clothing that would remind people of her high-powered career.<sup>112</sup> The campaign also began to downplay her role as an equal partner to Bill. The campaign emphasized her ‘traditional’ qualities that would appeal to the women that Rodham Clinton had offended by minimizing the role of housewives.

### In the White House

Rodham Clinton maintained her feminized image throughout the campaign; however, once in the White House, she made it clear that the “two-for-one” Clintons were in power. In addition to her name change, Rodham Clinton took an office in the West Wing, as well as the traditional First Lady’s office in the East Wing.<sup>113</sup> She was the first First Lady to make this bold

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<sup>109</sup> Black, 18.

<sup>110</sup> Caroli, 302; Ellen Goodman, "Hillary's Problem" in *Speaking of Hillary*, ed. Susan K. Flinn (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 2000), 44.

<sup>111</sup> Templin, 212; Kristy Scott, "A Pale Image of the Real Hillary" in *Speaking of Hillary*, ed. Susan K. Flinn (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 2000), 222.

<sup>112</sup> Caroli, 302; Goodman, 44.

<sup>113</sup> Caroli, 303; Gould, 432; Black, 18; Burden and Mughan, 238.

move, which not only gave her increased access to the president and staff but symbolically signified her involvement in policymaking.

Within a week of President Clinton's inauguration, he appointed Rodham Clinton to be the chair of the Presidential Health Care Reform Task Force.<sup>114</sup> Controversies flared over this appointment but not because she was considered unqualified, nor on the grounds that it was nepotism.<sup>115</sup> In 1967, the Federal Anti-Nepotism statute had been enacted, which stated that un- or underqualified relations could not be hired simply by virtue of their relations to a federal employee.<sup>116</sup> However, as a graduate of Yale Law School, a former commercial litigator, a trademark-law specialist, and having twice been named one of the most influential 100 lawyers in the United States, Rodham Clinton had the credentials to serve as Attorney General, and certainly to serve as the chair of a task force.<sup>117</sup> Instead, critics focused on how her presumed failure might hurt the president.<sup>118</sup> As his wife, Rodham Clinton was expected to be a reflection of the president. This made her responsible for his legacy far more than any appointed executive official, and far more than any man, would be. In other words, opposition to her chairing the Task Force was focused less on her qualifications and more on her relationships and her ability to fulfill female gender norms.

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<sup>114</sup> Gould, 432; Caroli, 303.

<sup>115</sup> Macciarola and Wulwick, 626.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 625, 629.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 652.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 649-50.

### Criticisms from Humorists

During her time in the White House, from 1993-2001, even after her work on the task force ended, Rodham Clinton continued to face gendered attacks from professional humorists, pundits, and the public. All three groups perpetuated the idea that Rodham Clinton was the living embodiment of the transgression of female gender norms.

Professional humorists have a unique place in popular culture. Audiences know that their jokes are, to a degree, untrue or exaggerated, but they also believe that the jokes reflect sentiments that are being felt in the wider culture. Charlotte Templin, a professor at the University of Indianapolis, wrote about cartoon images of Rodham Clinton. According to Templin, “Cartoonists have to be provocative. . . Cartoonists routinely invoke stereotypes and indulge in hyperbole and ad hominem attacks . . . But cartoonists also share fundamental biases with the societies they critique, and therefore cartooning has a heritage that has at times been racist and sexist.”<sup>119</sup> The same analysis can be applied to other genres of humor. Therefore, humorists become cultural authorities. When these authorities exaggerate political news, “it is not surprising that in some cases, the jokes about . . . Hillary Clinton present and perpetuate actual beliefs.”<sup>120</sup>

One trope employed by humorists was to connect Hillary and Bill in a joke, thereby discrediting two public figures for the price of one. These jokes generally surround the Clintons’ sex life, Bill’s infidelity, or the shame of public scandal. In a monologue, Jay Leno joked that Hillary couldn’t decide whether to drop the Rodham name or the Clinton name because they

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<sup>119</sup> Templin, 203.

<sup>120</sup> Jeannie B. Thomas, “Dumb Blondes, Dan Quayle, and Hillary Clinton: Gender, Sexuality, and Stupidity in Jokes,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 110, no. 437 (1997): 308, accessed October 8, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/541162>.

were equally embarrassing.<sup>121</sup> Leno implied that a woman with her own identity is just as shameful as being associated with a cheating husband. This effectively discredited both the Rodham and Clinton surnames in a single joke.

Other jokes, which focused on the Clintons' sex life, or lack thereof, either emphasized Bill's cheating habit or speculation that Hillary was a lesbian. These jokes generally came to the same end—the Clintons don't have sex. Leno speculated on the possibility of Rodham Clinton running for president, saying, "You know why I think she's running? I think she finally wants to see what it's like to sleep in the president's bed."<sup>122</sup> This joke diverts attention from Rodham Clinton's obvious professional qualifications and back onto her position as a wife—particularly a failed wife who couldn't even sleep with her husband. Jokes that target Rodham Clinton as a lesbian, therefore an unfit wife for any man, often focus on Rodham Clinton's physical appearance. Conan O'Brien joked that Chelsea Clinton campaigned for her mom in lesbian bars and said after "I've never seen so many women with my mom's haircut."<sup>123</sup>

Other humorist depictions of the former First Lady play off the image of her as a "frigid bitch." Jay Leno commented, "I'm surprised they did a portrait of Hillary. I thought maybe an ice sculpture would have been more appropriate," and Conan O'Brien joked about Hillary shaped nutcrackers, which "Bill Clinton calls chillingly lifelike."<sup>124</sup> These jokes perpetuate the idea that Rodham Clinton is cold and emotionless, not to mention emasculating. Gender roles dictate that women are supposed to be emotional, warm, and submissive. These jokes, which

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<sup>121</sup> Thomas, "Heckling Hillary," 183.

<sup>122</sup> Daniel Kurtzman, "Hillary Clinton Jokes: Late-Night Jokes About Hillary Clinton," *About Entertainment* (April 12, 2015), <http://politicalhumor.about.com/od/hillaryclinton/a/hillaryclinton.htm>.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

are not overtly attacking her gender, underhandedly remind the listener that she fails as a woman.<sup>125</sup> By the time Jay Leno retired, Hillary Clinton had been the brunt of 939 of his jokes, as well as a punchline in some of the 4,607 jokes told about her husband.<sup>126</sup>

During her time as First Lady, Rodham Clinton responded to attacks on late-night television by accepting an invitation to appear on Letterman. Letterman opened the interview by asking about the Clintons' new home, near his in Chappaqua. He remarked that "every idiot in the area is going to drive by honking now." Without missing a beat, Rodham Clinton shot back "Oh, was that you?". The audience loved that Rodham Clinton was able give jokes as good as she got them. Following this interview, Rodham Clinton won a surge of public support by showing that she was not cold and humorless but personable and fun.<sup>127</sup>

### Criticisms from Pundits

Rodham Clinton did not only receive criticism from humorists but from academics, reporters, and politicians. While generally more nuanced and less sexually graphic, the mainstream media perpetuated many of the same ideas about her as humorists.

Camille Paglia, a professor at University of the Arts, is an outspoken critic of Rodham Clinton.<sup>128</sup> Paglia has been described as "the poster woman of conservative discourse on gender," a position starkly at odds with Rodham Clinton's position on gender.<sup>129</sup> Charlotte Templin describes Paglia's essay "Ice Queen, Drag Queen: A Psychological Portrait of Hillary" as

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<sup>125</sup> Templin, 208.

<sup>126</sup> Tom Kludt, "Jay Leno Told 4,607 Jokes About Bill Clinton," *Talking Points Memo* (Feb. 5, 2014), <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/livewire/jay-lenno-bill-clinton-jokes-study>.

<sup>127</sup> Thomas, "Heckling Hillary," 184.

<sup>128</sup> Thomas, "Dumb Blondes," 298.

<sup>129</sup> Templin, 210.

the only “example of print journalism in a mainstream publication that compares in any way [to the graphic cartoon images of Rodham Clinton].”<sup>130</sup> Paglia is significant because her voice, as a woman, speaking out against another woman for failing at gender roles rings truer than a man making the same accusation. When a man attacks a woman for gender roles, it rings of sexism, but when a woman does the same, it has the bite of feminine betrayal.

Many of the names that Rodham Clinton have been called were coined by Paglia. She’s referred to Hillary as an Ice Queen, Sister Frigidaire, a political drag queen, man-woman, and bitch-goddess.<sup>131</sup> Every one of these terms is gendered by the use of queen, sister, woman, bitch, and goddess, all of which can only apply to a female. Whether or not the reader of Paglia’s articles registers the gendered attack in terminology, it sets up a mentality of gendered discourse before Paglia directly attacks Rodham Clinton’s gender.

Paglia’s primary attack on Rodham Clinton is that she is an unfit woman. She claims that Hillary modeled herself after her father, which meant that she “had to learn how to be a woman; it did not come easily or naturally.”<sup>132</sup> For someone who is biologically female, the assumption is that being a woman is the natural or normative progression. However, Paglia argues that Rodham Clinton progressed through “stages of self-development from butch to femme,” calling her the drag queen of modern politics.<sup>133</sup> She also stated that Rodham Clinton, while intelligent, had “difficulty integrating her intelligence with her sexuality.”<sup>134</sup> Rather than claiming that a woman couldn’t or shouldn’t be both smart and sexy, Paglia reverted to the idea

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Camille Paglia, "Ice Queen, Drag Queen: A Psychological Portrait of Hillary" in *Speaking of Hillary*, ed. Susan K. Flinn (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 2000), 30, 35; Thomas, "Dumb Blondes," 298.

<sup>132</sup> Paglia, 30.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 33; Thomas, "Dumb Blondes," 298.

that Rodham Clinton was an unnatural woman, so sexuality was not natural to her, and she was incapable of being both.

Because, Paglia claims, Rodham Clinton was an unnatural and unfit woman, her cold nature alienated her husband and drove him into infidelity.<sup>135</sup> But she does not stop with criticizing Hillary. She calls Bill a “female man,” implying that the Clintons do take on the traditional gender roles of a heterosexual couple, but in reverse.<sup>136</sup>

While Paglia was the most direct and vicious critic of Rodham Clinton in academia, plenty of other pundits also took their shots at the First Lady. Rodham Clinton was covered extensively by the media and polls, even prior to the 1992 election.<sup>137</sup> One of the most discussed aspects of Rodham Clinton’s role, like many women in politics, was her physical appearance. She became famous for her pantsuits, and the media discussed the headbands that she wore so much that she stopped wearing them.<sup>138</sup> In order to stem to discussion of her appearance, Rodham Clinton hired cosmetics and fashion consultants to revamp her look.<sup>139</sup>

Even mainstream media figures felt free to transgress the usual bounds of decency when reporting on Rodham Clinton. Tucker Carlson of MSNBC said, “Every time I hear Hillary Clinton speak, I involuntarily cross my legs,” alluding to his fear of castration by such a powerful and outspoken woman.<sup>140</sup> Similarly, Chris Matthews, a political commentator, author, and talk-

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<sup>135</sup> Paglia, 33.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>137</sup> Gould, 431.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 429.

<sup>140</sup> Dziedzic, 93.



show host, removed all nuance from his critique of Rodham Clinton's male supporters by calling them "castratos in the eunuch chorus."<sup>141</sup>

Politicians also leveled gendered criticism against Rodham Clinton, particularly as a way to discredit Bill in his presidential run. At the 1992 Republican National Convention there were multiple speeches vilifying Rodham Clinton, as a method to draw votes for Republican candidates.<sup>142</sup> The most virulent speech against her was given by Pat Buchanan, a presidential candidate and political commentator. Buchanan's claims that Rodham Clinton supported that "twelve year olds should have the right to sue their parents . . . [and she] has compared marriage and family as institutions to slavery," directly attacked her track-record with children at the Children's Defense Fund, as well as her image as a detached mother and wife.<sup>143</sup>

Politicians, including then-president Bush, dubbed 1993, "the year of the woman," rather than "the year of the wife," as "journalists still struggling with how to report on female candidates (and to discuss their ideas instead of their wardrobes) faced new questions when writing about political wives."<sup>144</sup> The "year of the woman" is as gendered a term as "the year of the wife." The idea that journalists did not know how to look past gender to write about candidates of either sex in the 1990s is disappointingly retrogressive. They apparently could not rise to the challenge of interrogating a woman's mind instead of her body.

The way that academics, reporters, and politicians talked about Rodham Clinton often relied on stereotypes of gender roles. The gendered terminology they used contributed to how the public perceived her. Similarly, the choices that the media made on what to report about

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<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Gould, 431.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Caroli, 299.

Rodham Clinton shaped the public's perception her as a woman, a politician, a mother, and a wife.

### Criticisms from the Public

As a public figure, Rodham Clinton was subject to criticism and comments from the general public. These attacks were informed by but separate from humorists and pundits. Disapproval from the general public was constructed in the form of jokes, which were widely circulated via the Internet. Because of the anonymity of the Internet, it is often impossible to know the sex, age, ethnicity, or any other personal information about a joke's creator, but the widespread circulation shows a broad acceptance of such jokes over demographic groups.

The attacks on Rodham Clinton are overwhelmingly gendered and particularly focus on her body.<sup>145</sup> All politicians, male and female, suffer the attacks of jokes. However, jokes about male politicians focus on their past, career, or life, where jokes about Rodham Clinton focus on her body, genitals, and sexuality.<sup>146</sup> Some male politicians have been the butt of jokes about their physical appearance, like George Bush being depicted as an ape or Barack Obama's exaggerated ears, but they have not been sexualized like women.<sup>147</sup> Instead of mocking her politics or career record, the public took the approach that "if you do not agree with her politics, make fun of her body."<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Thomas, "Dumb Blondes," 307.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Thomas, "Heckling Hillary," 179.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

Jokes about Rodham Clinton's body and sexuality took two distinct directions. She was criticized for being both a sexually promiscuous whore and a frigid bitch.<sup>149</sup> These jokes mock Rodham Clinton for her husband's infidelity, blame her for his dalliances, and suggest that she may have been unfaithful, too. One such joke goes,

Last winter, one of Clinton's aides came to him and said that someone had peed in the snow the words "Clinton sucks." Clinton said if it happened again, to have it analyzed. Sure enough, it happened again, and the aides got it analyzed and told Clinton that it was [Vice President] Gore's urine and Hillary's handwriting.<sup>150</sup>

In these jokes, the punchline is to the effect of "Hillary is sleeping with (fill-in-the-blank famous person)," often the vice president. The irony of these jokes is that Bill Clinton was the one famous for having extramarital affairs, but the infidelity is being pinned on his wife. These jokes also worked to discredit Bill through Hillary, showcasing not only the infidelity in his marriage but also in his administration.

In other jokes, Rodham Clinton is portrayed as sexually frigid and, often, a lesbian. Such jokes often portray Bill as oversexed and Hillary as withholding. One such joke goes, "What is President Clinton's definition of safe sex? Hillary's out of town."<sup>151</sup> This joke, which was popular in 1995, even before the Lewinsky scandal, shows a public perception of a sexless marriage and a philandering husband. Another joke asked, "How did Bill and Hillary Clinton first meet? They

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<sup>149</sup> Thomas, "Dumb Blondes," 298-9.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 298.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 300.

were both dating the same girl in high school.”<sup>152</sup> The fact that this joke is factually flawed (the Clintons met in law school), does not diminish the desired effect of portraying Hillary as a lesbian and Bill as a womanizer. This, and other jokes in the “sexual frigidity/ lesbian” category try to discredit her intelligence and professional accomplishments by demonstrating that she is not a “real” woman.

An additional category of jokes focus on Hillary’s genitalia and body.<sup>153</sup> Two threads of these jokes exist; one functions to emasculate Bill and the other to “masculate” Hillary. In the first vein, one such joke goes, “What does Hillary Clinton do when she gets up in the morning? She shaves her pussy and then sends Bill to work.”<sup>154</sup> By using slang that refers both to female genitalia and a derogatory term for men, the joke first seems to refer to Hillary’s genitals, then it turns and emasculates Bill as a “pussy.” Jokes that serve to “masculate” Hillary still rely on genital references, but they portray her as possessing male genitalia. For example, “Why doesn’t Hillary Clinton wear miniskirts? Because her balls would show.”<sup>155</sup> Other jokes refer to her “pulling out,” a male act in sex.<sup>156</sup>

In what may have been a reflection of the impact of these jokes, polls measuring Rodham Clinton’s popularity rose and fell depending on how well she conformed to traditional gender norms. The media maintained separate polls on Hillary and Bill, which shows the difference in their approval ratings at moments in time.<sup>157</sup> Directly following Bill’s inauguration, Hillary’s approval ratings were around 70% favorable, a high that wouldn’t be matched for

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<sup>152</sup> "Funny Hillary Clinton Jokes," *Jokesallday!*, <http://jokesallday.com/hillary-clinton-jokes/>.

<sup>153</sup> Thomas, “Dumb Blondes,” 301.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> "Funny Hillary Clinton Jokes"

<sup>157</sup> Burden and Mughan, 239.

another five years. Rodham Clinton maintained a mean monthly favorability of 57% over the first five years in the White House.<sup>158</sup> Her favorability tended to fall as she became more politically active. Her highest approval rating of 73% was reached in 1998 while she was least active.<sup>159</sup> This demonstrates a trend with the public who seem to prefer uninvolved First Ladies. Barbara Bush, who made it clear that she was not involved in policy, maintained a 90% approval rating.<sup>160</sup>

The other notable reason for Rodham Clinton's popularity spike, and Clinton's dramatic fall, was the Monica Lewinsky scandal. While Bill's numbers dropped, Hillary's rose to an all-time high when she stood by her husband. The public responded well to Hillary reasserting her role as a wife. Even though Hillary claimed not be "some little woman standing by my man like Tammy Wynette," she refused to criticize Bill.<sup>161</sup> Myrna Blyth, the editor-in-chief of *Ladies Home Journal*, explained that "She may not be behaving like a first *wife* should behave, but women believe she is like a first *lady* should behave—loyal and dignified" [italics added for emphasis].<sup>162</sup> The distinction between a first wife and a first lady is a significant one, because it shows how the public, specifically women, still categorized a woman's roles and how those roles aligned with gender norms.

Hillary Rodham Clinton was, during the Clinton presidency, "a litmus test not only for her husband's administration but for the nation's unsettled attitudes about working women,

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<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>159</sup> Wasserstein, 224.

<sup>160</sup> Black, 18; Goodwin, 122.

<sup>161</sup> Wasserstein, 225; Black, 18.

<sup>162</sup> Lois Romano, "Reflections of a Woman: Whatever her reasons, Hillary Clinton Stands by Her Man. And the Public Approves" in *Speaking of Hillary*, ed. Susan K. Flinn (Ashland: White Cloud Press, 2000), 277.

political ideology, and family values.”<sup>163</sup> Statistical analysis shows that Hillary’s popularity did not rise or fall with Bill’s but that she was judged as her own person. While this both helped and hurt her approval rating at times, she was given the benefit of being separate from her husband. At the same time, her approval ratings always showed that the public judged her largely on the degree to which she conformed to proper gender roles and behaved as a true woman.

## Conclusions

With an increase in media attention, a decrease in privacy, and a continuity of gender expectations, it has continued to be as difficult to be a woman in politics in the early twenty-first century as it was in the early twentieth century. Given the evidence presented, Hillary Rodham Clinton faced just as much gender-based criticism as Edith Wilson, despite the progress of women’s equality in social, economic, and legal arenas.

### Secrecy vs. Media

The role of the media has been instrumental in how politics is done in America. The expansion of media into television, the Internet, and social media has decreased privacy for everyone. Mass media has added extra dimensions of scrutiny that simply did not exist prior to the advent of television and the Internet.

In 1920, Edith Wilson made the decision not to release her husband’s medical information. While there was some public speculation about Wilson, his absence from public

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<sup>163</sup> Black, 19.

life went virtually unnoticed by the average American. While doctor-patient confidentiality would still prohibit a physician from leaking medical information today, the fact that Wilson was treated at home by a personal physician allowed for much more secrecy.

In Wilson's day the media did not seek to expose the president—up through John F. Kennedy's administration they cooperated with the president to keep medical secrets. Today, that level of secrecy would be impossible. Because of mass media, including TV, the Internet, and social media, the president is a very visible figure. President Obama, the current president, delivers weekly updates to the public via video feed, posts to Twitter and Instagram several times a day, and makes official statements on live TV. If he were sick or incapacitated, it would become apparent within days, if not hours, that he was missing from public life. The Wilsons did not have to deal with this level of public inspection on their private lives. While those closest to Washington, D.C. may have noticed Wilson's absence, the average American would not have seen a difference in their day-to-day life.

One quantifiable measure by which Hillary Rodham Clinton was paid more attention than Edith Wilson was in polling. Because their approval ratings did not rise and fall together, it is clear that the public viewed Bill and Hillary as separate public figures. Rodham Clinton's approval ratings were highest at the times that she was the least active in the administration, showing that the public approved of her role as a wife, mother, and domestic First Lady. In the times that she was politically active, her approval fell.

Mass media has decreased privacy for everyone, including male and female politicians. However, the way that the media treats women is different from how it treats men. As exemplified through the criticisms from humorists, pundits, and the public, which were often

aired on television, the Internet, and social media, Hillary Rodham Clinton is a microcosm of this aggression. Women are overly sexualized and condemned to double standards. They are accused of being both too sexual and not attractive (or sexual) enough. They are criticized for being intelligent or are the butt of dumb blonde jokes. Their clothes and appearance make headlines, regardless of their accomplishments.

Men already have an advantage in politics because the legacy of Separate Sphere remains. Men are assumed to be better at politics because of inherent traits that they supposedly possess. They are ambitious, amoral, cut-throat, hard-working, and strong. When a woman tries to make her way in politics, she is judged as a woman (docile, sweet, loving, and submissive) and as a politician (ambitious, ruthless, and assertive). Because these are opposing traits, the woman cannot come out on top. If she is perceived as too feminine, she is weak. If she is perceived as too masculine, she's a bitch or a ballbuster. These terms are reserved only for women and show a contempt for women with strength. A female politician has to either be a good woman or a good politician, never both. Inevitably, she will be criticized for the traits she lacks.

Mass media is a new and now unavoidable reality that not only intrudes on private lives but also gives everyone a forum to have a public opinion and make a vocal judgment. Because women in politics have to fulfill both the role of the woman and the role of the politician, they open themselves to criticism on both fronts. There is no equivalent that the Wilsons had to deal with while they were in the White House because limited technology ensured them a private life, which aided in their secrecy. If they were subject to the mass media coverage of the



twenty-first century, Edith and Woodrow Wilson would not have been to keep the president's disability a secret.

### Expectation to Fulfill Gender Roles

Edith Wilson and Hillary Rodham Clinton were both faced with strict gender ideals that dictated what it took to be the perfect woman. The breadwinner/ homemaker ideal that Rodham Clinton was judged on grew out of the legacy of Separate Spheres of Wilson's time. They faced similar gender roles but were criticized differently.

The Cult of True Womanhood was pervasive in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but it was understood to be an elite ideal. Very few women could actually afford to live as True Women. Only 10%-15% of families could afford to live on a single income, so the Cult of True Womanhood was an exclusive standard. The common people could not fully live into it.

The breadwinner/ homemaker ideal of the long sixties, however, was a middle-class reality. Around 65% of families could afford to live into this model. Rodham Clinton was raised in this model, as were her contemporaries, so it was the ideal by which she was judged. She could have easily afforded to be a stay-at-home mom, but she chose not to be. Because more people could relate to the ideal and enact it, Rodham Clinton was criticized for choosing not to.

Edith and Hillary both had power, which defied the gender roles of their day. However, they presented themselves differently. Wilson presented herself as a True Woman and dutiful wife. She worked in the public sphere of politics, but she didn't publicize that. In fact, she vocally denied her role in the administration. Even though she did not really fit into the role of

True Woman, Edith Wilson maintained that she did, and she acted the part. Hillary Rodham Clinton took the opposite approach. She seldom pretended to be a homemaker but was ardently a career woman. Rodham Clinton did not try to blend in with homemakers but alienated them by saying that she did not want to be one of them.

Edith had an easier time having power because she presented herself as a wife doing her duty, not as an ambitious woman seeking power. Hillary made it clear that she was motivated to be in politics on her own steam.

Throughout time there have been gender expectations that dictate how women should act. While there is a general acknowledgement that not all women can or do live within these expectations, women who appear to live within them avoid trouble. Edith Wilson was not a True Woman. However, she acted as though she fit in, and she ardently proclaimed that her only duty was to her husband. Even though she did not fit the ideal, she played the part well enough to escape prolonged criticism. On the other hand, Hillary Rodham Clinton disdained the homemaker role. For doing so, she received heavy criticism. Not only was she not living up to the role of a perfect woman, she was presenting herself with masculine traits, like ambition and strength.

### Current Implications

In 2016, Hillary Rodham Clinton is the presumptive Democratic nominee for president. No other woman in the United States has ever come as close to the presidency. When, however, her campaign is compared to her husband's 1992 presidential campaign, there are blatant differences. In 1992, Hillary was first presented as an equal partner to Bill, but when she

faced backlash, she reformed her image. She became a feminized housewife, who focused on children, her appearance, and domestic duties. For the 2016 campaign, however, Hillary announced that if she is elected, Bill will not take on the traditional roles of the First Lady, such as picking china and flower arranging.<sup>164</sup> Instead, she, as president, would take on those typical tasks of the First Lady and would rely on Bill for advice about the economy.<sup>165</sup> Bill Clinton is certainly qualified to give advice about the economy, but the fact that he would not take on the domestic roles as “First Gentleman” shows the gendered nature of these roles—they are women’s roles. Even if she is the most powerful person in the world, Hillary Clinton is still expected to perform traditional female tasks in the White House. In fact, if Rodham Clinton were trying to minimize Bill’s role in her presidency, she would relegate him to the domestic roles of the First Lady. However, by taking on those roles herself and involving Bill in policy, she opens herself up to “two-for-one” attacks and criticisms based on decisions made during his presidency.

Chelsea Clinton has taken on other aspects of the “First Lady” role. In 1992, when Hillary was criticized for not being maternal enough, she allowed Chelsea to be photographed. This time around, Chelsea has brought herself into the public eye, stumping for her mom and reminding people how well her mother raised her. She regularly tweets about her own daughter, again reminding the public that Hillary is maternal as a grandmother. When Chelsea

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<sup>164</sup> Jill Filipovic, "Hillary says Bill won't select the china. He should," *Stars and Stripes* special to *The Washington Post* (May 22, 2016), <http://www.stripes.com/opinion/hillary-says-bill-won-t-select-the-china-he-should-1.410946>.

<sup>165</sup> Cooper Allen, "Clinton says she'll still 'pick the flowers' at state dinners," *USA Today* (Dec. 20, 2015), <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2015/12/19/hillary-clinton-bill-debate/77654296/>.

decided to join the campaign trail, the first event she hosted was a “Family Holiday Celebration” with her mom, drawing attention to the family, as well as the feminine role of hosting.<sup>166</sup> Chelsea has often attended events about women and children, as well as participated in Women for Hillary meetings.<sup>167</sup> This reminds women that candidate Rodham Clinton is still a maternal woman.

In an age when social media is key for marketing and getting out the vote, the way that candidates present themselves online dictates much of how they are viewed. Hillary’s twitter bio begins “wife, mom, grandma,” then lists her professional achievements, including First Lady, Senator, Secretary of State, and presidential candidate.<sup>168</sup> Similarly, Chelsea’s begins “mom, wife” before listing her occupation and achievements.<sup>169</sup> Bill Clinton’s bio reads “Founder, Clinton Foundation and 42<sup>nd</sup> President of the United States. . .” with no mention of being a husband, father, or grandfather.<sup>170</sup> While this distinction is seemingly insignificant, reflects the difference in how men and women are still expected to present themselves. First and foremost, women are supposed to be wives and mothers. For men, on the other hand, not only is not being a husband or father not the first priority, it is not even listed. In 1992, Hillary was first presented as an equal partner, as an asset to the administration. She received a backlash for not being feminine enough, so she changed her role. In 2016, Bill is presented as

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<sup>166</sup> Dan Merica, "Chelsea Clinton to step up role in her mother's campaign," *CNN politics* (Dec. 15, 2015), <http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/15/politics/chelsea-clinton-hillary-clinton-campaign/index.html>.

<sup>167</sup> Nick Corasaniti, "Chelsea Clinton to Campaign in New Hampshire amid Threat from Sanders," *The New York Times* (Jan. 12, 2016), <http://www.nytimes.com/politics/first-draft/2016/01/12/chelsea-clinton-to-campaign-in-new-hampshire-amid-threat-from-sanders/>.

<sup>168</sup> "Hillary Clinton @HillaryClinton," *Twitter* (May 22, 2016), <https://twitter.com/HillaryClinton?lang=en>.

<sup>169</sup> "Chelsea Clinton @ChelseaClinton," *Twitter* (May 22, 2016), <https://twitter.com/ChelseaClinton?lang=en>.

<sup>170</sup> "Bill Clinton @billclinton," *Twitter* (May 22, 2016), <https://twitter.com/billclinton?lang=en>.

an equal partner and an asset, not as a First Gentleman, but as an economic policy advisor. He has not had to change his image because he hasn't faced the backlash that his wife did.

### Significance

Feminism is not a strict linear progression. While victories have been won, other battles have been lost, resulting in decreased rights for women. There is a popular misconception that women gained equality during Second Wave Feminism. Not only is this untrue, it makes fighting for equal rights harder. Feminism is still necessary today if not only for the purpose of engaging women politically.

In 1920, while Edith Wilson was First Lady, women gained the right to vote in the United States. Women always had the ability to be elected in the United States, but once women could vote for women, it became more plausible to have elected women representatives. While the United States has improved its rate of electing women, it lags far behind other developed and developing nations. For a country that prides itself on being a leader in the world, for bringing positive change to other countries, the United States is sorely lacking where women in government are concerned.

As of 2015 there were more women legislators in the United States than at any point in its history—one hundred. While one hundred is a significant number of women elected, they make up only 19.4% of Congress. The U.S. ranks 97<sup>th</sup> out of 185 countries for percentage of women in the national legislature. The U.S. is outstripped, not only by other Western nations,

but by Islamic countries that are considered far more restrictive of women, including Afghanistan (27%), Iraq (26.5%), the United Arab Emirates (22.5%), and Saudi Arabia (19.9%).<sup>171</sup>

The United States has never had a female president. If Rodham Clinton is elected president, she will join a group of twelve current female heads of government and eleven female heads of state worldwide. From 1964 to 2014, sixty-three out of 142 nations had had a female head of government or state.<sup>172</sup> The 2016 election will decide the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States, sixteen of whom have served since women gained suffrage. Yet a woman has yet to be the nominee of a major party for president, let alone the president.

The United States cannot hold itself up as an ideal for other nations to emulate when it cannot guarantee the equality of half of its population. If it cannot live up to its claims of equality and empowerment, the U.S. has no business inflicting its values on other countries. Electing women to national offices not only signifies representation for women but also brings women's issues to the forefront of national politics. In order to bring more women into politics, the barriers of gender-based obstacles that discourage them from national politics have to be dissolved. Women need to be truly equal, both socially and politically. Only then can the United States truly be a great nation that practices what it preaches and empowers women. As more women hold office, a new generation of girls can be inspired to pursue politics because they see that it is possible.

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<sup>171</sup> "Women in National Parliaments," *Inter-Parliamentary Union* (Apr. 1, 2016), <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>.

<sup>172</sup> Lauren Kent, "Number of women leaders around the world has grown, but they're still a small group," *Pew Research Center* (July 30, 2015), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/07/30/about-one-in-ten-of-todays-world-leaders-are-women/>.

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## Appendix: Personal Faith Statement

While at Seattle Pacific, I have identified beliefs that are truly important to me and worked to understand them in context of Christian faith. I have never felt more called to be and act as a Christian than when I took “Introduction to Women’s Studies” with Dr. McKinney.

While this was not an explicitly Christian course, the content felt just as faithful as any theology course to me. I discovered a passion for feminism and social activism on behalf of women that I felt sure was divinely inspired. Because of this strong sense of calling, I added women’s studies as a minor to compliment my history major.

Because of my passion for social justice, I strongly identify with the Mennonite model of scholarship, which focuses on egalitarianism and pacifism. Through women’s studies I have become particularly passionate about gender issues. The Mennonite model takes seriously the idea of “changing the world” because of their strong belief in equality of all people—a belief that I share. It makes a lot of sense to me why Mennonite scholars would gravitate to the social sciences, because sociology takes a hard look at the issues that many Christians would prefer to ignore. However, Mennonite scholars are empowered by these issues and seek to correct them in the world.

Women are vital, not only to my personal theology, but to the kingdom of God. I wholeheartedly believe that in God’s eyes, men and women are equal. However, practices and beliefs within the church have created an ideology of androcentrism. My personal feminist theology is based around the article “Why I Am A Feminist,” by Dr. Kevin Neuhouser. His answer is simple: because Jesus was, so I must be one, too. Jesus never treated his female disciples any

differently than the men. He trusted the women and showed that women were glorified in God equal to men.<sup>173</sup>

Another faith tradition in which I find a lot of power and resonance is Catholicism. In *Models for Christian Higher Education*, Monika Hellwig writes about what distinguishes Catholic scholarship from Protestant scholarship.<sup>174</sup> While I do identify as a Protestant, there are many tenets of Catholicism that appeal to me. I have never seen a conflict with faith and academia, and I was raised to believe that God made me smart for a reason, so I should nurture that gift. For this reason, I appreciate that Catholicism does not segregate the sacred and the secular. In Catholic universities, academics are all sacred, not just theology courses. In this way, intelligence can be cultivated and encouraged without the fear of affronting God.

Another reason that I like the Catholic model of scholarship is that it takes history seriously. As a history major, context and historical background are very important to me when studying any era. However, I feel that this is an aspect often missed by Christians when examining Scripture. Catholics, on the other hand, rely so heavily on tradition that history is vital to their worship. While Catholics are not stuck in the past, they do “save, treasure and keep alive for future generations whatever was good and fruitful in the experience, thought, and action of the faithful in the course of the centuries,” honoring the wisdom of those who came before themselves.<sup>175</sup> I’ve always been intrigued by saints and martyrs because of their historical role. The veneration of the saints is a historical aspect of faith and worship because it

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<sup>173</sup> Kevin Neuhouser, "Why I Am A Feminist," *The Falcon* (Oct. 4, 2006), <http://www.thefalcononline.com/2006/10/why-i-am-a-feminist/>.

<sup>174</sup> Monika Hellwig, *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Survival and Success in the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1997).

<sup>175</sup> Hellwig, 15.

looks to tradition and respects those who came before. While all Protestant churches are different, generally I've found that they lack the same passion for tradition, and thus for context, that Catholicism boasts.

Ecumenism is very important to me—something that I did not discover until I started studying with people of different faith traditions and backgrounds. While Catholicism has a long history of exclusivity, I am optimistic about its progress towards ecumenism, particularly since Vatican II and, more recently, with Pope Francis. Ecumenical conversations lead to deeper understanding, not only of another person and their faith, but also how I understand my own. Faith has to be able to be challenged, or else the basis of the faith was never very strong at all. By allowing different perspectives and viewpoints, I believe that faith can be strengthened; either through reaffirming convictions or questioning that leads to new, stronger beliefs.

George Marsden, in *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, presents a final model of scholarship. Marsden asserts that not only can Christians be scholars but also that they are uniquely qualified for academia.<sup>176</sup> The aspect that I draw from Marsden into my personal statement of Christian scholarship is the idea that Christians bring a faithful perspective to their work, regardless of whether or not the content is explicitly religious. This is because “if we affirm a reality that includes a being of immense intelligence, power, and concern for us, every other fact or belief will have some relationship to that being.”<sup>177</sup> My particular areas of interest to study are the American presidency, twentieth century social history, and women's history. None of these areas directly address religion, and I do not feel obligated to address God

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<sup>176</sup> George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>177</sup> Marsden, 83.

explicitly in my work, because I bring a Christian perspective to all the work that I do. This idea relates to the Catholic idea that the sacred and secular are not separate but that everything is sacred. No matter what work I do, God is infused in it by virtue of being God.

My personal creed of Christian scholarship encompasses many aspects from different scholars and faith traditions. I believe in social activism motivated by the neighborly love for humanity to which God calls Christians. While this social activism and engagement plays out differently for different people, the act of being engaged is vital to my idea of scholarship. Supplementing my foundation in social change are ecumenical conversation, reverence for tradition, egalitarianism, and the sanctity of knowledge.

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