

From Hostess to Political Surrogate: The Evolving Role of the First Lady of the United States

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This paper investigates the evolution of the role of the first lady of the United States, which is of particular interest because of its non-constitutional and non-formal nature that has become one of the most prominent and visible non-paid positions in the world. The first lady's responsibility has evolved from serving as a social hostess and a ceremonial presence at the side of the President, to serving as a spokeswoman for the country. More recently, in addition to her other duties, the first lady has acted as a political surrogate for the President. This study conducts a social movement rhetorical analysis, using the technique of discourse tracing, to examine how and why the culture of the office of the first lady has evolved. Finally, this study will add current political culture scholarship by investigating issues surrounding the 2016 presidential election.

Keywords: politics, first Ladies, organizational culture, elections

Introduction

Prior to 1933 and the election of Franklin Roosevelt, the first lady was a non-essential member of the White House. The spouse of the President did not even have an official name or position for many years. These women were expected to fill traditional wifely roles including supporting their husbands, hosting parties, and being ready to make the President look good to the public. Their roles were viewed as being representative of the importance of family in society. The culture of the office of the first lady changed when Eleanor Roosevelt stepped into the role and each subsequent first lady added to the cultural norms of the office by adding staff, legitimatizing actions and eventually becoming more involved in the political process.

Despite the changing nature of the office of the first lady during the modern era, ushered in by Eleanor Roosevelt, most of the scholarly research on the first ladies focuses on the women themselves. While these make for interesting case studies, what is rarely discussed is the evolution of the role of the first lady. In fact, the cultural and legal acceptance and expansion of the job of first lady in modern times are generally missing from the scholarly research. These first ladies are a tiny sorority of women who became first lady largely accidentally by virtue of a personal relationship that in most cases began decades before their husbands set sights on the White House (CQ Researcher, 1996). Yet each has left her mark on the culture of the office, adding and changing the organizational makeup of the position. As each first lady makes small modifications to the position, the organizational culture is inherently changed. Here organizational culture is defined as a complex and contested communicative system through which fundamental assumptions about the organization

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are made (Collier, 2009). Thus by examining organizational culture, this paper reveals how the modern first ladies carved out an accepted job entitled “The First Lady of the United States” from nothing.

Discourse Tracing

To grasp the changing organizational culture and the limitations and empowerments of the role of the modern first lady, the research conducted in this paper has to be rhetorical in nature. “The discourse of these influential women must be contextualized within the gender ideology of their time, revealing how some women were constrained in their rhetorical performances as others defied and expanded such gendered conventions” (Perry-Giles & Blair, 2002, p. 566). Since this requires looking at both the actions of the first ladies and the eras in which they matured and later held office, an interpretative social movement study using discourse tracing as outlined by LeGrecco and Tracy (2009) was undertaken. Discourse tracing is perfect for such a study because it “provides a language for studying social processes, including the facilitation of change and the institution of new routines” (LeGrecco & Tracy, 2009, p. 1516). This method allows the author to evaluate how societal norms and changing gender roles were related and interacted with the changing norms of the job of the first lady. By approaching the research, using discourse tracing, the author could also begin to account for the ways national-level macro changes enabled or constrained the development of the role of the first lady.

The History of the First Lady

While many Americans assume there has been a “first lady” since Martha Washington, this is not true. Initially the spouses of presidents were women whose role was the same whether they were inside or outside of the White House, to act as proper ladies; they held no title except for wife or lady of the house. Meyers (2004) explains for the first part of American history, the use of the term lady has specific connotations — a lady is “submissive, domestic, pious, and pure”. She continues by writing that a lady is also “illogical, weak, and dependent. She balances submissiveness with authority, and sexual attractiveness with dignity. She has skill, a well-groomed appearance, a well-modulated voice, maturity, poise and grace. She is seen as an ornament for her husband” (Meyers, 2004, p. 13). Thus the societal norm for a lady in society at that time was that she was the perfect hostess and wife; that she was the woman behind the man (Blair, 2008; CQ Researcher, 1996; Scharrer & Bissell, 2000; Simonton, 1996).

In fact, the presidential spouse is ignored in the Constitution and did not even acquire a title until the mid-19th century. Initially “contemporaries of the first president’s wife, Martha Washington, fumbled with and discarded such monikers as “Lady Washington”, “Presidentress”, “Mrs. President”, and “Marquise” (CQ Researcher, 1996, p. 514). The first known use of the term “first lady” was not until 1849 during Dolley Madison’s funeral when President Zachary during his eulogy called her “truly our first lady for half a century” (CQ Researcher, 1996, p. 514). It is from this uninspiring beginning that modern first ladies began developing their role from lady of the house into something more akin to what they now refer to as the “First Lady of the United States”.

The hardest step in the evolution of the role of the first lady was overcoming the gender norms associated with each time period in society. In the years before Eleanor Roosevelt, these women grappled with the proper role of the first lady and were “influenced by the gendered ideologies that prescribed, at least in part, their enactment of this highly gendered position of national prominence” (Perry-Giles & Blair, 2002, p. 566). In fact, the concept was of what constitutes the proper role of a first lady

Interacting with another variable frequently cited by first lady scholars — the non-constitutional nature of the first ladies position, Betty Boyd Caroli rightfully asks, “Aside from being there as a symbol, what is the role of the first lady? The Constitution mentions no assignments for the chief executive’s spouse, and yet she has become a prominent part of the presidency (Eksterowicz & Roberts, 2002, p. 5-6).

Most scholars agree that first ladies, even today, reflect societies concepts about family, motherhood and femininity and this view is molded by both society and the approach each first lady brings to the office (Blair, 2008; Eksterowicz & Paynter, 2000; CQ Researcher, 1996; Perry-Giles & Blair, 2002; Scharrer & Bissell, 2000). According to Blair (2008), the first lady is a role governed primarily by social norms; these norms are an amalgamation of traditional social practices, gender ideologies, and power relations that produce a common standard or abstracted ideal. In many ways, the role of the first lady represents the archetype of femininity at the time she is in office.

Early Modern Ladies (1933-1968)

Despite the fact that early modern first ladies began to push the job forward as the cultural norms of femininity began to change, discourse tracing shows there was a continuing need to publically juggle being a good wife, homemaker and mother with social activism. Like their 19th century predecessors, the activities of the early modern first ladies were still categorized under the guise of republican motherhood (Perry-Giles & Blair, 2002). In fact, many early modern first ladies couched their activism in the “more traditional role of ‘first mother’ concerned with the health and morality of the nation’s children” (Perry-Giles & Blair, 2002, p. 577). In this vein, discourse tracing reveals that these first ladies worked under the rubric of social housekeeping, defined by Meyers (2004).

Ladies unpaid work has historically included charity. The tenet of domesticity meant ladies should care for their own families as well as for their larger communities. Charitable women were usually White and elite, with the financial luxury for “social housekeeping” which meant they were expected to tend to the disadvantaged in society (Meyers, 2004, p.16).

Working through the expected norms of society, these first ladies helped to show American women how they could participate in the political sphere while still meeting the societal norms of being a good spouse and homemaker. Feminists suggest that by taking this approach these early modern first ladies helped transform the 20th-century version of the republican mother into an activist voice of national consequence (Meyers, 2004; Perry-Giles & Blair, 2002). During this period discourse tracing indicates that three first ladies stand out as influencing change within the role of the first lady: Eleanor Roosevelt, Jacqueline Kennedy and Lady Bird Johnson.

Eleanor Roosevelt. Eleanor Roosevelt’s tenure is credited with defining the “role of a modern, activist first lady” (Eksterowicz & Paynter, 2000). Eleanor came of age during the progressive movement where women were gaining access to higher education at state universities that were open to all and where elite women’s colleges that provided education equivalent to the men’s Ivy League colleges were opening their doors (Sklar, 2008). Also during her youth, women were mobilizing through formal groups to challenge working conditions, unfair wages and social injustices (Sklar, 2008). Although, Eleanor did not attend a university or college, at the age of 18 she became active in the newly-formed Junior League where she worked to improve the conditions of settlement houses and taught children living in them, especially young girls, basic educational skills (Harris, 2005). Eleanor also became very active with the consumer league working to

improve conditions in sweatshops (Harris, 2005). Thus, Eleanor was very much a product of the progressive era and was taking advantage of the voices being given to women. Moreover, during her husband's time as a New York State Senator, Eleanor became Vice President of a girl's school in Manhattan and taught History, English and Current Events. In this position, she made sure that the students learned about what was actually going on in the world in an attempt to counteract their sheltered backgrounds; she took her girls to courtrooms, to police lineups and to visit the New York City slums (Harris, 2005). Later on, during World War I, Eleanor, like many women of the period, became even more active. While she did not take a job directly related to the war effort, Eleanor increased her volunteer work to include the Red Cross, the Navy League and the Navy Relief Society (Harris, 2005). Following World War I, Eleanor became involved with the League of Women Voters, a group active in the both the suffrage movement and the subsequent movement to get women involved in politics (DuBois, 2002). Once her husband became President in 1933, Eleanor continued with her prior activism, but discourse tracing shows that she focused on projects that could help her husband. In this way, Eleanor met societal norms by showing the average American woman how they could participate in the political sphere while still being a good spouse and homemaker. Thus, Eleanor who is considered an activist first lady by many scholars can be seen through discourse tracing as carrying on the work of the progressive movement whose ideals she adopted.

Her adherence to the values of the progressive movement can also be seen through two major cultural changes she made in the position of first lady. Eleanor became the first lady to hold regular press conferences; moreover, she only allowed female reporters to attend (Harris, 2005). This demonstrates her adherence to the progressive movement's ideals because "over time, news agencies that had closed their doors to women began hiring them because they found themselves scooped by the competition" (Harris, 2005, p. 491). Eleanor also insisted on inviting groups of students, representatives of women's organizations, girls from reform schools, and many other non-traditional groups to the White House. Her critics "began comparing the White House to a settlement house"; something Roosevelt considered a compliment because it fell in line with her progressive ideals (Harris, 2005, p. 492).

It is important to note that Eleanor did not break with the tradition of wifely duties. Her job as she saw it was to sell her husband's ideas to the people and her focus was "centered on the rights of the common people, with a strong emphasis on women, young people and minorities" (Harris, 2005, p. 493). By being a progressive woman willing to speak her mind and fight for equal rights, the President and his advisors quickly learned that "letting her take the lead protected him politically" (Harris, 2005, p. 495). In sum, discourse tracing shows that Eleanor was a product of her times. Although she did not create any new movements, she embraced the movements that were already in place and helped bring them to the common people. By targeting her messages to women, she helped them understand their role in the political sphere and helped them develop a political voice which separate from that of their husbands.

Jacqueline Kennedy. Although a much different first lady than Eleanor Roosevelt and the ladies who served in the interim, Jacqueline marked the next major cultural change in the office of the first lady. Although she was quite disinterested in politics, Jacqueline moved the role of first lady from a supporter of her husband and activist, to being part of the grand world scene (Eksterowicz & Paynter, 2000). Discourse tracing shows that Jacqueline straddled the period between progressivism and feminism in the women's movement in the United States (Davis, 1991), and as such, the norms of society were changing while she was in office. Jacqueline was raised in a wealthy family and attended the best schools, as the progressive movement had

sought. At George Washington University she excelled in writing and won several awards (Harris, 2005). Upon graduation, she, like many of the feminists who would follow her, began to look for a fulltime job, found one writing for the Washington Times Herald, and was promoted several times. Despite moving up the career ladder, what Jacqueline apparently was looking for, like most of the women of her generation, was a good husband (Harris, 2005). Discourse tracing shows that while later women would keep their jobs after getting engaged, Jacqueline met the social expectations of her era by resigning the day after becoming John proposed. Her education, however, did not go to waste as she continued to help her husband by working with him on speech writing, public speaking and adjusting his style to appear more likeable on television and in pictures (Harris, 2005). With Jacqueline's influence, the Kennedy Presidency and Camelot became symbols of a refined way of life that America would never return to after the tragedy and wars to come (Harris, 2005).

As Jacqueline entered the White House, discourse tracing shows that America was on the cusp of the sexual revolution, women's liberation and second-wave feminism. Yet Jacqueline continued to hold the traditional views of being a good spouse and homemaker. She was often publically quoted as saying her job was to support her husband, not share the spotlight (Harris, 2005). She represented what the American housewife of the early 60s wanted to be: young, beautiful and glamorous with two model children and a doting husband. Even women with different political views "were eagerly looking forward to some interesting changes in the social life of the White House" (Harris, 2005, p. 555).

Jacqueline quickly went to work to revamp the image of the White House from a dowdy old house to a fashionable residence that any modern housewife would want to emulate. She undertook a massive remodel of the White House:

"which restored the days of the mansion's pre-eminence in American decorative arts and furnishings ... to demonstrate that American culture was the equal of any in the world, and to emphasize that this nation could now assert its rightful place as a cultural world power" (Mayo, 2000, p. 587).

With the remodel complete, Jacqueline strove to make the White House parties the place to be, which helped grow her reputation and that of her husband both in America and abroad (Harris, 2005; Mayo, 2000). Discourse tracing shows that in many ways Jacqueline herself straddled the two competing generations in society; she spoke up for what she wanted and did not let others stop her, but she also deferred to her husband and did not want to take an active role in politics. Although Jacqueline had the look of the modern independent woman, she was actually the prototypical early-1960s wealthy housewife concerned with appearance and social events. It was actually her husband's work on civil rights along with the accession of Lady Bird Johnson to first lady following the assassination of President Kennedy that propelled the women's movement into its next phase.

Lady Bird Johnson. Lady Bird, much like Jacqueline, grew up during the progressive period, but Lady Bird was extremely focused on her education. She graduated high school at the top of her class and attended University of Texas Austin because it was coeducational and she sought the best education open to her. In fact, like the second-wave feminists that would follow, she often chided her friends who were at university for a "Mrs." degree (Harris, 2005). Lady Bird took full advantage of her university education, graduating cumlaude at the age of 21 with a degree in journalism, a teaching certificate and experience in typing and shorthand. Despite her apparent independence, Lady Bird was still a product of an era where women needed the help of men to succeed. In fact, she called on her father to pay for her husband's first run for office (Harris, 2005).

Nevertheless, Lady Bird had the education and business acumen to successfully run Lyndon's Congressional office when he was serving in the military during World War II. In fact, she did such a good job, that political pundits believed the 10th district would have elected her over her husband if they had been given the chance (Harris, 2005).

While developing into a political activist and partner to her husband, Johnson also began becoming a successful side-career when she used some inherited money to buy a radio station in Austin. She eventually became one of the most powerful persons (not just women) in Austin, owning (singularly rather than jointly) radio and television stations and land throughout the area, including the LBJ ranch which many thought standing for "Lyndon B. Johnson" but actually stood for "Lady Bird Johnson". Thus, discourse tracing shows that before the Johnsons had even reached the White House, Lady Bird was showing that she was not a typical late 50s early 60s housewife. She controlled a considerable amount of the family's wealth and many of the important decisions, so that when they moved to Washington, Lady Bird turned being a congressional wife into a full-time job, calling on important contacts for her husband and politicking for him and his causes daily.

Most notable about Lady Bird was that she was not afraid to get out and campaign on her own. During the Kennedy election, she traveled more than 35,000 miles, making solo appearances in 11 states. When the civil rights amendment, a huge cause of hers was up for debate while she was second lady, she took a solo 1,628-mile train trip through hotbeds of racism in her native South to fight equal rights. Discourse tracing shows that by standing up for what she thought was proper, Lady Bird would usher in a new age of feminism where equality seemed possible for all people regardless of race or gender (Davis, 1991; Payne, 1995).

Another lasting impact that Lady Bird had on society, particularly on the culture of the office of the first lady, came through her activism in what she termed her conservation program and her critics called her beatification program. While on its surface this program seemed no different from any other cause a first lady had promoted, Lady Bird, unlike her predecessors, was not content to sit on the sidelines, instead "she participated in legislative and lobbying strategy sessions with White House staff becoming the first presidential spouse to do so" (Eksterowicz & Paynter, 2000, p. 553). When the Highway Beautification Bill of 1965 passed, she considered it her greatest success and her husband acknowledged that she did all the work to make it happen, again signaling to America that the times were changing and women could achieve the same political achievements as men.

These three first ladies mark the transition for American women from fighting for the right to vote, access to education, a minimum wage and fair work standards, to a movement towards equality and freedom without the need for a spouse. In terms of the culture of the office of the first lady, the research shows that the role of the first lady expanded from one of being a behind-the-scenes support system to being a worldwide symbol of America. It is important to note that for the first time in history, each first lady during this period had a stated cause and worked diligently to achieve its success. Even Jacqueline, who chose to modernize and redecorate the White House, is responsible for producing the first version of the guidebook that can be bought on White House tours and which helps fund the White House even today (Harris, 2005). Discourse tracing in this period shows that most of the first ladies were acting in accordance with the societal norms of the time, and even if they were considered activists, they were still acting in accordance with established movements occurring within society and thus could be considered activists only when compared to their predecessors. The major exception to this was Lady Bird who appeared to be ahead of her times. Her actions fell in line with the women's liberation movement and second-wave feminism, both of which gained momentum in the early 1970s,

likely influenced in part by her activism in office (Davis, 1991).

Modern First Ladies (1968-2000)

The next major transition in the cultural norms of the job of first lady coincides with the start of the sexual revolution, women's liberation, and second-wave feminism as well as the election of Richard Nixon. Indeed, the women who would hold the title first lady during this time period came to maturity during the era of the equal rights amendment and sexual freedom, so they viewed the role of a wife differently than their predecessors. Further, as more families became dual-wage earners, women were taking career jobs, not just jobs until they were married. Thus modern first ladies, who had high-powered careers prior to their husbands seeking political office, were pushing up against the societal norms of what a first lady was supposed to act and sound like. In fact, it wasn't until this time period that the lack of a job description for the first lady began to be explored. Three first ladies during this time period appeared though discourse tracing as being responsible for expanding the role of the first lady by exemplifying the move towards gender equality and a spousal role in line with the average American family. These are: Betty Ford, Rosalyn Carter and Hillary Clinton.

Betty Ford. Betty Ford is credited with

“single-handedly, transforming the country's perception of what it meant to be the first lady of the United States. Not only did she expand the definition of that role but she also dramatically redefined the way the country talked about personal matters such as breast cancer” (Harris, 2005, p. 609).

Betty is the first lady who publically supported women's liberation, the equal rights amendment, and women's choice via abortion. Furthermore, she was outspoken and in tune with the times as she publically stated 60 minutes that she expected her children to have pre-marital sex, and thought that if she was younger, she would try marijuana (Harris, 2005). Betty's openness and activism on current political issues resulted in her pushing up against and expanding the prior norms of how to act as first lady. Discourse tracing shows that her openness, while it might have caused some tension in the White House, caused American women to embrace her as a modern woman who insisted on speaking her mind about the real world that she and everyone else was living in.

The biggest challenge to her willingness to speak frankly came in September 1974, when she was diagnosed with breast cancer and had a mastectomy. Up until this time, the first lady's health information was not publically available (Harris, 2005). In fact, no first lady had ever discussed her health in a public speech. In one act Betty changed the cultural norms of the office forever. “Immediately after her breast cancer surgery, Betty released a statement detailing the specifics of her illness, the details of her surgery and her doctor's plan for her subsequent follow-up treatment” (Harris, 2005, p. 619). In that one statement, Betty broke tradition of decades by disclosing the exact nature of her medical condition and opening a dialogue with her constituents about what had previously been a taboo topic. Betty was a woman of the 1970s and knew the time was right for a first lady to step out from behind the President with her own issues. Discourse tracing shows she was embraced by feminists for helping to take the lead on social change (De Hart, 2009), but also by society as a whole for being honest. By coming out with her diagnosis and encouraging women to be tested, it is estimated that millions of women took control of their own sexual and reproductive health and got exams (Bailey, 1999). Because of Betty's openness, the health issues of the first lady are now considered public knowledge, marking another move towards the idea of the Presidency as a partnership.

Discourse tracing shows that the other major impact Betty had on the office was through her active lobbying for the equal rights amendment and *Roe v Wade*. These two controversial issues were out of the hands of the President and considered too politically volatile to be discussed openly by President Ford. Yet Betty refused to temper her opinions to placate the political experts in her husband's office. "This is what I believe is the message she sent out to the nation" and the nation responded to her favorably (Harris, 2005). She was the type of feminist activist the White House had never seen before, but it was clear that after Betty, future first ladies needed a cause and a mind of their own, because as Betty Ford argued before the Women's Economic Conference in 1974. "It is important that we, as women take a lead" ((Perry-Giles & Blair, 2002, p. 582).

Rosalyn Carter. Rosalyn Carter, although less liberal than Betty Ford in many respects, was also raised to speak her mind and to be an equal partner in her marriage with Jimmy. From the time they got married, she helped him run their peanut business by handling the entire financial side of the business (Harris, 2005). She and Jimmy also supported feminist values early on when they supported integration in their Georgia community, even when it meant that their peanut farm was boycotted and they were subjected to death threats. This family activism brought them to pursue politics together and to be successful as democrats coming out of the growing conservative south (De Hart, 2009; Harris, 2005; Payne 1995). When Jimmy was elected governor of Georgia, Rosalyn made it her mission to learn everything she could about mental health issues in the state and then recommended that the Georgia switch from large mental health institutions to smaller ones based on her own hands-on-research (Harris, 2005). This change "was dramatic and it was one of Jimmy's greatest legacies from his term as governor, but he knew and didn't mind saying so, that the accomplishment had been Rosalyn's" (Harris, 2005, p. 634).

Thus, upon entering the White House in 1976, two things were clear: 1) Jimmy and Rosalyn were true political partners, and Rosalyn had a clear objective for what she wanted to accomplish while in office. Discourse tracing shows that the Carter embraced a new type of political partnership in line with the views of modern marriage. In particular, Jimmy was the first President to overtly refer to his wife as his partner (Harris, 2005) and Rosalyn, with his support, was coming off a huge policy-making success in Georgia and wanted to replicate it on a national stage. Achieving national reform was extremely important to Rosalyn. When they had campaigned "she made one promise in her own name, which was to conduct a study of the nation's mental health needs" (Borrelli, 2008, p. 36). By making what might have been the first, first lady campaign promise, Rosalyn felt like it was her duty to the American people to oversee the presidential commission on Mental Health that her husband established. Although her appointment as chair of the new commission appeared to be a foregone conclusion, on the day the President issued the executive order establishing the commission, the Office of Legal Counsel issued a statement prohibiting Rosalyn from accepting the appointment or formally playing any role in the commission on grounds of nepotism. The ruling stated, "to accomplish the required detachment from the Commission's Federal function, Mrs. Carter should at least have no formal authority or duties relating to the commissions work and avoid being the moving force behind its operations" (Borrelli, 2008, p. 36). Although the President, and the people who elected him, were ready to have Rosalyn lead the commission, the government was not ready to have a first lady with so much governmental power. The report concluded

"It is my understanding first ladies have in the past assumed this type of advocate's role in connection with Government programs in which they were especially interested and it would seem to make no difference here that Mrs. Carter may have an honorary title that only really serves to highlight her interest" (Borrelli, 2008, p. 37).

This ruling was problematic because it took away all the accomplishments women had made since the 1930s both politically and personally and tried to shove Rosalyn back behind her husband to act as the woman behind the man. But discourse tracing shows that society had moved beyond this metaphor and more specifically that a woman like Rosalyn who identified as a second-wave feminist and believed in equality between the sexes (De Hart, 2009) would be unwilling to step down from her role as partner to the President. This ruling was in line with the traditional roles of husband and wife, leaving the role of politics to the husband and the role of helpmate, hostess and informal advisor to the wife. Therefore, the ruling was criticized as being behind the times, but the reality was, it was the first formal ruling about what the role of the first lady was, so it was historic, even if it was antiquated. For her part, Rosalyn spoke out against the ruling, perceiving it as a political ploy to keep her out of “formal power for which she had served a rigorous apprenticeship in state and electoral politics” (Borrelli, 2008, p. 37).

As part of her formal promise to the people and her own sense of right and wrong, Rosalyn accepted the honorary chairperson role and then proceeded to disregard all the guidelines set for by the Office of Legal Counsel. She selected the members of the committee, presided over the meetings, lobbied throughout congress and the White House, gave numerous speeches and interviews and testified before the senate Labor and Human Relations Committee. Through her “informal” role she was “universally recognized as being instrumental” to the bill’s passage (Borrelli, 2008, p. 37). By working through the system, she successfully proved that a first lady could become a political actor in her own right.

Hillary Clinton. With the arrival of Hillary to the office, America had its first baby-boomer first lady. She had been at Wellesley at the height of the civil rights movement, who was a dedicated feminist, and most of all, she had her own career and kept it throughout her husband’s various political stops. Hillary attended Yale law school and excelled, even receiving national attention for her graduation speech, though she caused a stir for wearing a black armband to support the student strikers around the country in light of the Kent State shootings. Despite the fact that Bill and Hillary met in law school, her own career was important and so they did not marry until 1975 when she was nearly thirty years old, and like many modern women, she did not have her first, and as it turned out, her only child, Chelsea until she was nearly 35.

While Bill was moving up in Arkansas politics, Hillary was moving up the legal career ladder, until Bill became Governor in 1978 and it became a conflict of interest for her to continue to practice law. Knowing she could never be happy being a housewife, Bill appointed Hillary the chair of the Arkansas Rural Health Advisory Committee. Shortly thereafter, Jimmy Carter appointed her to the Federal Legal Services Corporation (Harris, 2005). While Hillary was happy juggling a career, a child and her obligations as first wife of Arkansas, when Bill lost his reelection bid, much of the blame was placed on Hillary who was seen as a liability. “Many of his constituents were suspicious of her independence and her openly liberal views. It did not help that even as the wife of the Governor, she never used her married name, but continued to call herself Hillary Rodham” (Harris, 2005, p. 679). Thus discourse tracing shows that even though women around the country were keeping their maiden names and juggling work and family, Hillary was running up against the expectation that the first lady be seen as the mother of the nation or state whose first duty was to act as a good spouse and mother to her family. Before Bill ran again, Hillary quietly changed her name to “Hillary Clinton” and she vowed to take a traditional spousal role during his reelection to the Governor’s office. However, once Bill won, Hillary was not content to act as a hostess and Bill put her in charge of the educational reform task force, once again as the discourse tracing shows, putting her at odds with his more traditional constituents, something that never seemed

to bother Hillary and Bill's overwhelming popularity at the time allowed postponing any discussion of the issue.

This public perception of Hillary as a "political" first lady was made worse by Bill during the 1992 campaign when he would say "buy one get one free" during campaign speeches. As evidenced by Bill's rhetoric, Bill and Hillary campaigned as a team, despite warnings from democrats and republicans alike that

"The Presidency is an 'I': Americans do not expect to elect a couple to run the government," according to Paul Costello, former press spokesperson for Rosalyn Carter and Kitty Dukakis (Mower, 1992). As a result, some are skeptical of a First Lady who oversteps her 'wifely bounds' (Beasley, 1988). (Eksterowicz & Roberts, 2002, pp. 6-7)

Once elected, Hillary had to find a place within the Clinton administration that fit her political ambitions. She put together a large staff and moved them into the West Wing where all the Presidents staff was located and Hillary herself took an office in the West Wing right above the oval office. While trying to find her place, she made sure that she was fully integrated into the staff of the President and her chief of staff became an assistant to the President and attended the daily staff meeting. As Eksterowicz and Roberts (2002) observed, no matter how good Hillary's intentions were, she had to be conscious of how she was being perceived as a wife, mother, and more broadly, the mother of the country. Discourse tracing shows that unlike previous first ladies, Hillary never quite grasped these separate roles and viewed herself as a political equal to her husband. Consequently, when Bill asked Hillary to chair the task force on health care and have a plan ready for Congress within the first 100 days, the press and public reacted poorly.

"The first lady was expected to be first and foremost the White House hostess, and Hillary took that part of the job seriously. But she also had a serious commitment to social issues and the press had a problem squaring the two. How could a woman be worried about centerpieces for White House dinners, and at the same time worry about a national health-care plan?" (Harris, 2005, p. 684)

Despite the criticisms, Hillary accepted the chair's position of the high profile health care task force that had been the centerpiece of Bill's campaign. The task force met in private, which caused health care advocacy groups to file suit requesting that the task force, has meetings open to the public (Borrelli, 2008). The lawsuits, however, had another deleterious effect, as the litigation continued over two years; interest groups began to question whether the first lady was able to head up the task force. Hillary's approval ratings plummeted and she quietly stepped down from the task force and removed herself from formal political activities until her run for the Senate in 2000. Noteworthy, the legal ruling in *AAPS et. al. Clinton* changed the role of the first lady forever, "for the first time, the first lady is formally identified as a political actor in her own right" (Borrelli, 2008, p. 40). Perhaps more importantly for the evolution of the role of the first lady, the majority opinion "identified this individual as a de facto federal official for the purposes of the Federal Advisory Committee Act. The first lady, then, was a legitimate and formally defined post within the White House similar to the Vice President or any other appointed position" (Borrelli, 2008, p. 40). In other words, no longer could it be said that the first lady may only take roles that are advocacy positions for her husband, and she may accept political appointments in her own right. Nevertheless, despite this major victory, Hillary never took advantage of this ruling because, as the discourse tracing shows, she was never able to overcome the stigma of her perceived failure as a political leader and her overstepping the role of the first lady. Reeling from the political backlash associated with her initial advocacy of health-care reform, Hillary fell back into a more traditional first lady role, focusing on women's issues by writing a weekly column and working on her book *It Takes a Village*.

Hillary was forced to once again stand on her own when Bill was accused of cheating with several women during his second term and was subject to impeachment hearings. Hillary felt deeply betrayed by Bill's behavior but she truly believed that it was a personal matter and that he had not betrayed the country in any manner, so she fought against his impeachment. While the hearings were going on, she hit the road to campaign extensively for democrats in the midterm elections (Harris, 2005). Her success as a campaigner and her approval rating caused the New York Democrats to approach her to run for the open Senate seat of Daniel Patrick Moynihan in the 2000 election. Before Bill was even out of office, Hillary announced her intention to run for the Senate seat claiming that by then Bill would be out of office and he couldn't run for a third term and it was her turn. But her announcement "raised a lot of eyebrows" (Harris, 2005, p. 690) and caused an even greater backlash against her. Indeed, discourse tracing suggests that her actions confirmed that she never intended to act as a first lady, but rather used the position and marriage to a cheating Bill, to pursue her own political career. This backlash shows how much both the office and the societal norms had changed since the period of the early first ladies, since all the presidents in that period had acknowledged paramours, and there was never any repercussions on the first lady for standing by her husband.

Since the late 1960s the role of the first lady became both more public and more defined. No longer could first ladies hide their medical conditions. The first lady had become a codified position along the lines of any appointed official. In fact, the court had ruled that despite not being elected, the first lady could hold appointments within the White House. However, this period also marked the growing feminist tendencies of the first ladies, and while Betty Ford and Roslyn Carter's behaviors were in line with society's expectations, Hillary Clinton was heavily criticized for being too political and for abandoning the more traditional duties of the first lady as a mother and homemaker.

The Post-Hillary Backlash

Given Hillary's perceived failure to achieve the proper balance between the societal norms of the career woman and that of the traditional family-centered woman, and her abrupt self-interested run for the US Senate, first ladies since Hillary have not been able to take advantage of the codification of the first lady position (Borrelli, 2002). In fact, due to the backlash from Hillary's recent campaigns, both republicans and democrats have converged on the view that first ladies are subordinate to the President and that wives are there to support their candidate husbands (Winfield & Friedman, 2003). Discourse tracing shows no major developments in the culture of the office of the first lady in recent years due to the Hillary backlash; the first ladies have had to revert to be the woman behind the man instead of an equal partner. This has been a challenge for all the candidates' wives because they are all "beneficiaries of second-wave feminism, well educated, articulate, and capable, with professional achievements independent of their husbands" (Winfield & Friedman, 2003, p. 557). In fact, the presidential campaigns have consistently moved away from rhetoric that suggested that the women would be their husbands' closest advisors to rhetoric, and that suggested that they would play the supportive wife role. Further, the education and personal achievements of the first lady candidates have been downplayed, with the campaigns instead focusing on their role as mother and volunteer. In other words, they have evidenced a return to the societal view of the first lady as "republican mother" and "social housekeeper".

Both Laura Bush and Michelle Obama exemplify the return to the first lady as the mother of the country; both women come from second-wave feminism traditions, attended prestigious schools, had successful independent jobs, and held interests outside of their husband's political roles. In both cases, however, during

the campaign and once in office, they focused on being the supportive spouse and have taken on a traditional role of wife, mother and “mother to the country”. Discourse tracing indicates that both have smartly chosen to portray themselves in this role, regardless of their personal beliefs or party affiliation, because society is not ready for another first lady who can be closely compared to Hillary.

Gender Roles and 2016

As they approach the 2016 election, several major questions remain. First, can a first lady overcome the societal limitations placed on the first spouse due to gender stereotypes? Hillary had tried to bring a more feminist perspective to the White House with Bill and her acting as powerful partners running the country. Authors such as Blair (2008) and Simonton (1996) contend that society was not ready for a first lady like Hillary and as a result, which will not be ready for another Hillary for many years. Discourse tracing suggests that first ladies are most successful when they meet the expectations of society and do not try to push society faster than it is ready to move. In fact, Hillary’s political approach may have set the office of the first lady back, giving momentum to the far rights’ call for more traditional spousal relationships and spurring a new generation of young women who don’t identify as feminists.

Discourse tracing also suggests that when the majority of society accepts strong co-partner marriages, an overtly strong feminist first lady along the lines of Hillary will finally be able to succeed as the first lady. Looking at 2016, given the discord among republicans and the right wings’ push against the rights of women, it is possible that the female vote will swing to the democrats allowing a strong co-partner like Dr. Jill Biden to become first lady. While this is possible, it seems more likely that all feminist eyes will be on another candidate, Hillary herself.

Which leads to the second, and perhaps the more important question, what if Hillary Clinton is the next President of the United States? Clearly this will bring the Hillary backlash back to the forefront, but if she can be elected, this would put one of the most popular former Presidents in the role of first mate. Given the reversal of gender roles and his expertise in politics, one would assume that Bill will be successful in taking advantage of the ruling in *AAPS et. al. v. Clinton* and be very active in the Hillary Clinton administration. However, because of the unique nature of his role as a former President and then first mate, it is doubtful that his four or eight years in office as first mate will have any real effect on the culture or role of the first lady. He will simply be seen as outside the role. This is particularly true when traditional gender roles are considered.

Women, more than men, are judged by their style, even their manner of speaking. ‘Expectations for how a woman should speak are at odds with expectations for how a person with authority should speak,’ says Deborah Tannen, a Georgetown University linguistics professor who has written widely on gender roles. ‘If we speak as women are expected to, we aren’t taken seriously, and if we speak with authority we’re seen as not feminine and too aggressive. (CQ Researcher, 1996, p. 553)

Thus, Bill will not be viewed as a first lady in the traditional sense, and future first ladies will have to continue to grow the role of first lady building upon the work of the ladies that came before them by focusing on societal norms and trying to adapt their activism to fit the established expectations of society.

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