

BEYOND
THE
DOUBLE
BIND

*Women and
Leadership*

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The Binds That Tie

IN 1631, in *Cautio Criminalis*, Julius Friedrich Spee identified one no-win situation in which prosecutors placed women accused of witchcraft. The suspected witch was submerged in a pond. If she drowned, she deserved to; if she didn't, she was a witch. In the first case, God was revealing her nature; in the second, the devil. Under torture, women either did or did not admit to complicity with Satan. If they did, they were executed for their crime. If they didn't, their silence was attributed to solidarity with Satan and they too were marched off to the stake.¹

Although he didn't know it, Spee had identified a trap set for women throughout history. When our foremothers overstepped prescribed boundaries, they confronted situations constructed to ensure that they were guilty until proven guilty.

More often than not, the accused was vulnerable because she was unprotected by a father, husband, or son and had increased her susceptibility to suspicion by asserting her right to influence other women. These "witches" were likely to be older, unmarried, childless women who practiced healing, transmitted advice about contraception, or used speech in socially disapproved ways.

Unprotected by men and outside a woman's "natural" sphere, these women were presumed susceptible to the wiles of Satan. It was with him that they coupled at night. In his name, they slaughtered infants and tormented townspeople. Once suspected of witchcraft, a woman was propelled into the no-win situations described by Spee. Viewing the inevitable penalty attached to public speech and private healing, women were enjoined to stay where, the argument went, nature and nature's God required.

Three and a half centuries later, the penalties are disdain and financial loss, not death, and the sanctions social, not theological, but it can still be hazardous for a woman to venture out of her "proper sphere." Some advocates say that female military personnel, for example, do not report sexual harassment for fear of being tagged lesbians and, under the ban on gays in the military, driven from the service. Alternatively, they will submit to unwanted heterosexual activity simply to establish that they are not gay. Their behavior is circumscribed in more subtle ways as well. "You have to project an image that is feminine enough that you won't be called a dyke," reports a former female captain in the air defense artillery who was investigated and "cleared" of the charge of being a lesbian, "but not so feminine that you won't be taken seriously."²

Nor does a woman have to venture so far into what were once all-male preserves. Businesswomen and mothers, Democrats and Republicans, young and older—a broad spectrum of contemporary women describe themselves as caught in situations in which they too are damned if they do and damned if they don't. "I had learned from more than a decade of political life that I was going to be criticized no matter what I did," wrote former First Lady Rosalyn Carter in her autobiography, "so I might as well be criticized for something I wanted to do. If I had spent all day 'pouring tea,' I would have been criticized for that too."³

"I don't think I was as bad, or as extreme in my power or my weakness, as I was depicted—especially during the first year, when people thought I was overly concerned with trivialities, and the final year, when some of the same people were convinced I was running the show," wrote Nancy Reagan in her autobiography a decade later.⁴

Dilemmas like these burden youngsters as well as adults. As an adult, Barbara McClintock would win the Nobel Prize for identifying the "jumping" genes on corn. As a child, she played catcher on her block's baseball team. Embarrassed by having a girl in such a position, the boys on the team refused to let her play in an important game but the opposing team welcomed her on its side. "On the way home," reports a biographer, "her neighborhood buddies accused her of being a traitor. 'So you couldn't win,' Barbara realized, concluding reasonably enough that 'you had to be alone. You couldn't be in a society you didn't belong to. You were only tolerated by the boys . . . I knew I couldn't win—and that's a dreadful feeling as a child.'"⁵

The history of Western culture is riddled with evidence of traps for women that have forcefully curtailed their options. This is not to say that, in some circumstances, men haven't been ensnared by such constructs. Masculinity has its own constellation of double binds, including the assumption that decisiveness and competence are masculine traits, so that a man considered effeminate is open to questions about his ability. At the other end of the spectrum, drafting men but not women for military service constitutes a double standard, with men subjected to all the risks and women escaping them simply because they are women. Indeed, psy-

chologist Gregory Bateson, who formulated the concept of the double bind in an examination of schizophrenia, assumed that it was primarily mothers deploying double binds who induced schizophrenia in their sons.⁶

These facts aside, the double bind is a strategy perennially used by those with power against those without. The overwhelming evidence shows that, historically, women are usually the quarry.

Binds draw their power from their capacity to simplify complexity. Faced with a complicated situation or behavior, the human tendency is to split apart and dichotomize its elements. So we contrast good and bad, strong and weak, for and against, true and false, and in so doing assume that a person can't be both at once—or somewhere in between. Such distinctions are often useful. But when this tendency drives us to see life's options or the choices available to women as polarities and irreconcilable opposites, those differences become troublesome.

Business theorist Rosabeth Moss Kantor calls them "self-defeating traps."⁷ Author Joseph Heller termed them Catch-22s. Twentieth-century psychologists label them *double binds*. The notion has become a catchphrase to describe the dilemmas confronting contemporary women and is a commonplace in feminist scholarship. "This double yardstick of gender appropriateness and managerial effectiveness often leaves women in an unbreakable, untenable double bind," writes Nancy Nichols in the July–August 1993 issue of the *Harvard Business Review*. "Women who attempt to fit themselves into a managerial role by acting like men . . . are forced to behave in a sexually dissonant way. They risk being characterized as 'too aggressive,' or worse, just plain 'bitchy.' Yet women who act like ladies, speaking indirectly and showing concern for others, risk being seen as 'ineffective.'"⁸

"Women were again in a double bind," writes Jane Ussher in *Women's Madness: Misogyny or Mental Illness?*, "for the association of femininity with sexual innocence and purity or conversely, with insatiable lust, could be used to categorize women as mad. Thus the rigid image of 'woman' or 'femininity' could be used to punish, to convict, to control—women out of control were clearly sexual and dangerous, and mad."⁹

Even a sense of humor "catches women in a double bind," observes American Studies scholar Nancy Walker. "While they are not supposed to be creators of humor, inasmuch as this role would ascribe to them power and intellectual qualities denied them by the majority culture, they are supposed to applaud the humor of that majority culture and, above all, not take themselves too seriously."¹⁰

Others describe the dilemma without attaching "double bind" to it. "In my experience as a trial attorney," writes Carrie Menkel-Meadow, "I observed that some women had difficulty with the 'macho' ethic of the courtroom battle. Even those who did successfully adapt to the male model often confronted a dilemma because women were less likely to be perceived as behaving properly when engaged in strong adversarial conduct. It is important to be 'strong' in the courtroom according to the stereotypic

conception of appropriate trial behavior. The woman who conforms to the female stereotype by being 'soft' or 'weak' is a bad trial lawyer; but if a woman is 'tough' or 'strong' in the courtroom, she is seen as acting inappropriately for a woman.¹¹

Double binds are frequently involved in descriptions of women's speech. "In 1972, to be a woman in politics was almost a masochistic experience, a series of setbacks without a lot of rewards," writes Senator Barbara Boxer. "If I was strong in my expression of the issues, I was strident; if I expressed any emotion as I spoke about the environment or the problems of the mentally ill, I was soft; if I spoke about economics I had to be perfect, and then I ran the risk of being 'too much like a man.'¹²

Catch-22 is a synonym for double bind. "Mothers are caught in a perfect Catch-22," writes psychologist Paula Caplan. "They are supposed to be concerned with emotions and closeness in relationships, but because autonomy has been designated by the white male middle class in North America as the pinnacle of emotional health, both mothers and those offspring who remain close to them are treated as immature or even sick."¹³

Progress that women have made in the profession "will not ensure that more women or minorities will study or stay in science," writes Marguerite Holloway in *Scientific American*. "Many scientists describe the situation as a catch-22: more women will enter the field only when there are more women in it. And, they say, the only way out of the conundrum is to change society's attitudes toward women—and men."¹⁴

Attitudes aren't all that matter, however. Money talks too. "[M]oney is unlikely to flow into a campaign unless credentials are in place, along with a record of voter confidence expressed through successful elections," write Witt, Paget, and Matthews. "This catch-22 has been particularly maddening to women candidates: You need money to be credible, but you have to be credible to obtain money."¹⁵

The concept also has taken hold in the press. Here and elsewhere "double bind" along with its alternative expressions has become, in many instances, a protean concept and, as such, of limited use. At worst, it can hobble women who see double binds as indestructible, tensile constraints that will lash back just as women believe they have broken free of them.

My take on the history of women differs from that of those who argue that liberation for women is an endless war in which small battles are won only to be met with violent repression. In *Backlash*, Susan Faludi argues that gains for women have been subverted by a backlash engineered by those in power. As one reviewer noted, her case is "basically a conspiracy theory. . . . that a cabal of villains has been at work successfully intimidating a large class of victims: women."¹⁶

Except for its epilogue, pessimism pervades Faludi's text. "A backlash against women's rights is nothing new in American history," she writes in Chapter 3. "Indeed, it's a recurring phenomenon: It returns every time women begin to make headway toward equality, a seemingly inevitable

early frost to the culture's brief flowering of feminism."¹⁷ She cites the feminist movement of the mid-nineteenth century launched at Seneca Falls. "By the end of the century, a cultural counteraction crushed women's appeals for justice. Women fell back before a barrage of warnings virtually identical to today's."¹⁸ "The malaise and enervation that women are feeling today aren't induced by the speed of liberation," she asserts, "but by its stagnation. The feminist revolution has petered out, leaving so many women discouraged and paralyzed by the knowledge that, once again, the possibility for real progress has been foreclosed."¹⁹

Is this really the case? Is the history of women one of Sisyphean struggle against odds that remain constant and overwhelming? Not quite. Women's progress has been thwarted by double binds that, when surmounted, have in fact been replaced by other double binds, as I will show here. But as women have conquered the no-win situations confronting them, they have marshaled resources and refined aptitudes that have made them more and more capable of facing the next challenge, the next opportunity. At the same time, they have systematically exposed the fallacious constructs traditionally used against them, and changed and enlarged the frame through which women are viewed. Although the result is not a steady move toward equitable treatment of women, it is a world in which progress is certainly sufficient to justify optimism.²⁰

Enthusiastic reviews of Faludi's book by women's rights advocates suggest that it did touch a chord. The concept of backlash has been percolating through the women's movement for quite a while. "[T]here is a real backlash against the quality and personhood of women—in America, as in Islam and the Vatican," wrote Betty Friedan in 1981.²¹

Faludi tapped into a widespread feeling that the Reagan-Bush administration's challenges to equal opportunity and abortion rights placed women's rights advocates under siege. "The backlash years drove us, or certainly drove me, into feeling embattled and needing to huddle together against the inhospitable forces out there," reports Naomi Wolf. "And this created a subculture within feminism. We have to end that."²²

In Faludi's view, "Millions of individual women, each in her own way, spent the last decade kicking against the backlash barricades. But much of that effort proved futile."²³

As women's rights in education illustrate, however, even in the Reagan years, setbacks weren't permanent. Take, for example, the evolution of Title IX, an important component of the Education Amendments of 1972. It outlawed sex discrimination in elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schools receiving federal funds. That victory was solidified in 1974 by the Women's Educational Equity Act, which authorized funds for research in this area. In 1979, the Court added teeth by holding that individuals could file private suits against institutions over enforcement of the law.²⁴

In 1984, three years into the Reagan administration, the Supreme Court narrowed the mandate of Title IX significantly. In *Grove City College v.*

Bell,²⁵ it held that only those programs within an institution receiving federal funding—and not the institution as a whole—were bound by Title IX. So, since only the financial aid office was receiving federal aid at Grove City College, only its programs were subject to Title IX. But the rollback didn't hold. In 1985 the Civil Rights Restoration Bill was introduced. It passed in January 1988, while Reagan was still in office.

Faludi, however, finds little consolation in history. "This pattern of women's hopes raised only to be dashed is peculiar neither to American history nor to modern times," she says.²⁶ Yet at the close of the supposed backlash decade, women saw progress. In March 1992, 82% of the American women polled by CNN/Time reported that they "have more freedom than their mothers did." By 50% to 22% the same women also reported that they enjoyed life more than their mothers had.²⁷

I do not mean to suggest that discrimination against women no longer exists in American society. Instead, my point is that even in the face of an administration unsympathetic to many of the goals of the women's movement, there was progress—slow and insufficient, but progress nonetheless. To deny it, and in fact to close our eyes to the evolution of the struggle for women's rights, invites despair. To perceive gains for women as inevitably thwarted by crippling backlashes is to take on ourselves the role of the permanently shackled.

The thesis of *Beyond the Double Bind* is a simple one. Historically, women have faced and transcended double binds. Until recently, however, as one was overcome, another, often a ghost of the one surmounted, took its place. Meanwhile, vestiges of the surmounted bind lingered in the language through which women were invited to view their new challenges. But, over centuries, the lessons learned in breaking the binds persevered as well. These lessons open options for women that are either closed or less accessible to men. By exercising these options, women deny others the power to define and as a result confine them in false options. Put simply, over time women have learned to turn potatoes into vichyssoise.

A Bundle of Binds

The social binds that have undercut aspiring female scholars are illustrative. Women who sought to learn and teach faced a network of interlinked binds—binds that go farther back than those faced by Spee's witches in 1631. The New Testament's most often quoted statement about women demands silence, submission, and procreation. Indeed, it is reproduction that will enable a woman to expiate her personal guilt for the sin of Eve. "I am not giving permission for a woman to teach or tell a man what to do," says I Timothy 2:12–15. "A woman ought not to speak, because Adam was formed first and Eve afterwards, and it was not Adam who was led astray but the woman who was led astray and fell into sin. Nevertheless, she will be saved by childbearing."

Some theologians in fact argued that the first woman's abuse of the

power of speech and of teaching wholly accounted for the Fall. Since their maternal ancestor had misused her power of speech, argued some, Eve's daughters should be grateful that they retained the capacity to bear children. "The woman taught once, and ruined all," wrote St. John Chrysostom in 500 A.D. "On this account . . . let her not teach. But what is it to other women that she suffered this? It certainly concerns them; for the sex is weak and fickle, . . . [T]he whole female race transgressed . . . Let her not however grieve. God hath given her no small consolation, that of childbearing." Indeed, it is "by means of children" that women will be saved.²⁸

Even as some theologies began to emphasize the "purity" of womanhood instead of woman's original sin, the bind remained in place. A loose tongue bespoke loose morals. Women who did not remain silent might be burned at the stake as witches or heretics under the fundamentalist impulse; in other times and places, the woman who would not be enjoined to silence was condemned as unwomanly. So in 1617 the pseudonymous Constantia Munda responded to a misogynistic diatribe by pointing out the trap it embodied:

[Y]ou surmised that, inveighing against poor illiterate women, we might fret and bite the lip at you, we might repine to see ourselves baited and tossed in a blanket, but never durst in open view of the vulgar either disclose your blasphemous and derogative slanders or maintain the untainted purity of our glorious sex. Nay, you'll put gags in our mouths and conjure us all to silence; you will first abuse us; then bind us to the peace. We must be tongue-tied, lest in starting up to find fault we prove ourselves guilty of those horrible accusations.²⁹

Denied access to literacy and the learning that comes with schooling, women were condemned, as Munda pointed out, for their illiteracy, their inability to think profound thoughts or contribute to the great intellectual debates of their day. And since public speech was considered immodest, women were instructed that defending themselves or their work was unladylike. Those who did learn to read and write found that communicating their learning to others was difficult. Among other constraints, they were denied access to Latin, the language of scholarship. "If we be taught to read," wrote the pseudonymous Mary Tattlewell in 1640, "they then confine us within the compass of our Mother Tongue."³⁰

As the pseudonymity of Munda and Tattlewell suggests, some female writers escaped strictures by hiding their identities. Adopting a *male* pseudonym was the best route to publication, but this strategy presented other problems. When women resorted to it, evidence needed to rebut the claim that women have produced no great scholars often disappeared with their deaths. And when a masculine pseudonym was unmasked, the woman writer was ridiculed and her sexuality questioned. Indeed, the use of masculine pseudonyms led, by the sometimes extraordinary mechanics of the double bind, to some strange assertions. "The notorious sexologist of Vienna, Otto Weininger, maintained in 1903 that all the great women of history (Queen Christina of Sweden, Catherine the Great of Russia, math-

emetician Sofia Kovalevskaia, artist Rosa Bonheur) had been either homosexual or bisexual. Why else would intellectual women (George Sand and George Eliot, for example) take masculine names?" he asked.³¹

In books, libraries, and classrooms, men preserved the knowledge they developed; meanwhile, women were expected to hide their learning and were denied access to the lectern. "Being a Woman [I] Cannot . . . Publicly . . . Preach, Teach, Declare or Explain [my works] by Words of Mouth, as most of the Famous Philosophers have done, who thereby made their Philosophical Opinions more Famous, than I fear Mine will ever be," wrote Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle in 1663.³²

Women also were denied access to the professorships that facilitated dissemination of their ideas. So, for example, "[i]t took three attempts, four years, a German revolution, and the intercession of Albert Einstein to get [future Nobel Prize winner] Dr. Emmy Noether the most junior faculty position possible—without pay."³³

Noether was told that she could not be a faculty member but could serve as a faculty assistant. "Thus, the 1916–1917 university catalog read, 'Mathematical-physical seminar. Theory of invariants: Prof. Hilbert, with the assistance of Fr. Dr. E. Noether, Mondays 4–6 p.m. free of charge.' She could not even earn the usual student lecture fees."³⁴

Once women gained the power of the pen, they faced a set of assumptions that disparaged their actions and impugned their motives. The sanity of female authors was called into question, even as late as the nineteenth century. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf quotes the reaction of a young woman to a new work by a female author. "Sure the poor woman is a little distracted," observes the reader, "she could never be so ridiculous else as to venture at writing books, and in verse, too."³⁵

Absorbing the Limits

Some learned women accepted their exclusion as in their own best interest. For many, the price of authorship was anonymity. A noteworthy instance was eighteenth-century scientist Thiroux d'Arconville, an associate of Voltaire. Conditioned by centuries of strictures on public presentation by women, she believed that "intellectual women garner only ridicule; if their work is good, they are ignored; if it is bad, they are hissed at." As a consequence, she worked within the confines of her own home and veiled her science in a cloak of anonymity.³⁶ Things did not change much when the century turned. In 1811, the educator and playwright Madame de Genlis advised: "If a woman does write books, she should avoid all publicity; she should show a great respect for religion and austere morals; she should not respond to critics of her work for fear that in the response she might transgress feminine delicacy, modesty, and softness."³⁷ But in an academic world built on the notion that truth emerges in the clash of ideas, the author unwilling to defend her work damned it.

Indeed, the work of women particularly needed defending. Women who wrote learned prose or elegant poetry were dismissed as derivative or the by-product of creative happenstance. "If what I do prove well, it won't advance," wrote Anne Bradstreet in the 1650 edition of *The Tenth Muse*. "They'll say it's stol'n, or else it was by chance."³⁸

The Absence of a Legacy

When women published under their own names, academic institutions did not usually perpetuate or their libraries preserve their work. As a result, great women scientists, philosophers, historians, and authors vanished from history. And without the traces of their lives and work, new generations of women could be subjected to the assumption that if women were capable of such intellectual activities, they would have produced the very forms of evidence that had been suppressed.

Generation after generation was expected to rediscover the wheel. "In the preface to Erxleben's 1742 defense of women's right to higher education, the medical doctor Christian Leporin noted that Anna von Schurman had published a book on the education of women in the previous century, but that 'despite all my efforts, it was not to be had.'" With Schurman's work misplaced by tradition, Dorothea Erxleben—Leporin's daughter—never had the opportunity to sharpen her young mind on Schurman's mature thought. Erxleben could not have known that the same fate would befall her own work. Some fifty years later, Amalia Holst noted that Erxleben's *Inquiry into the Causes Preventing the Female Sex from Studying* was "no longer available." Holst could not procure a copy, nor could Erxleben's stepson—a professor.³⁹

The stolen legacy of our foremothers denied generation after generation the role models that testified to the possibility of female learning. Generation after generation assumed that it was the first to surmount the biases; as one generation succeeded, its legacy was lost to the next. Cumulatively, that vacuum made it possible for misogynists to reiterate their claim that women had not demonstrated a capacity for original thought because it was not in their nature to do so.

A similar collection of arguments was used to justify excluding work by women from the canon. Critics rationalized the omission, or what Joanna Russ terms "suppression," with a familiar litany:

- She didn't write it.
- She wrote it, but she shouldn't have.
- She wrote it, but look what she wrote about.
- She wrote it, but "she" isn't really an artist. . . .
- She wrote it, but she wrote only one of it.
- She wrote it, but it's only interesting/included in the canon for one, limited reason.
- She wrote it but there are very few of her.⁴⁰

The suppression of scholarly work by women was the product of a bind I call silence/shame. Other binds came into play in the education of women, among them the proposition that admitting women to the classroom would harm men.

When women entered the classroom in respectable numbers at the turn of the century, the guardians of the diplomas hypothesized that men would leave disciplines dominated by women; if that proved untrue, then the presence of women in the classroom would undercut men's education by distracting them. "Women, charged with sex repulsion and sex attraction, both of which interfered with the holy process of educating the future leaders (males) of the country, simply could not win," writes historian Barbara Miller Solomon.⁴¹

Admitting women into the masculine sanctums of higher education would dilute the manly virtues of the institution, if not of the country itself. So in 1925 *The Nation* parodied opponents of female admission to Columbia's School of Law. "If women were admitted to Columbia Law School, the faculty said, then the choicer, more manly and red-blooded graduates of our great universities would turn away from Columbia and rush off to the Harvard Law School!"⁴²

Nevertheless, women persisted. They gained access to learning through the libraries of fathers, brothers, and husbands. They gained access to schooling by arguing, among other things, that to properly fulfill their roles as mothers and educate the next generation, they required the knowledge books and classrooms could provide.

By the time the Education Amendments of 1972 put Title IX on the books, a lot of ground had been covered. Armed with education and gaining increasing access to the public sphere, women had claimed the tools that tore down barriers against them, stripping bare the pseudo-sciences that snared them in double binds. So, for example, the work of female legal scholars framed the Supreme Court ruling that outlawed fetal protection policies in the workplace, and the testimony of a female psychology professor lay the ground for the Supreme Court's decision, in *Hopkins v. Price Waterhouse*, that promotional decisions may not be determined by imposing gender stereotypes on women in the workplace.

Moving from education and public speech into action, women fought for and finally won the right to vote. The ballot became another major weapon in the war against binds. When exercised in force, it could be used to threaten the political survival of those who opposed women's rights. It also had the potential to put women in positions of influence, ready to create social change, when the opportunity arose. So, for example, after Congressman Howard Smith in a move designed to scuttle the entire proposition, amended Title VII of the Civil Rights Act to include the word "sex," Congresswoman Martha Griffiths led the battle so that it stayed there. Once the legislation was passed, she policed the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to ensure that sex discrimination was taken seriously. Lindy Boggs did the same for equal credit protection.

And it was Congresswoman Patsy Mink who shepherded Title IX through the House in 1972. By barring discrimination in educational institutions that received federal support, Title IX opened graduate programs and tenure-track jobs once closed to women. I am of the generation that benefited—my first university job was created under the affirmative-action pressure induced by the impending passage of Title IX.

By persisting, women of past generations proved the truth of Sarah Grimke's observation in the nineteenth century that educational reformer Horace Mann would "not help the cause of women greatly, but his efforts to educate her will do a greater work than he anticipates. Prepare woman for duty and usefulness, and she will laugh at any boundaries man may set for her."⁴³

The Construct of the Double Bind

Grimke might not be surprised at women in the U.S. Congress or women justices of the Supreme Court, but neither would she fail to recognize the sorts of constraints women still face. They are the vestiges or ghosts of the same double binds that have confronted women throughout history.

As described by Gregory Bateson in the mid-1950s, double binds involve a powerful and a powerless individual, or, in the cases of interest to us, social and institutional norms and a vulnerable class—women. For Bateson and his associates, a double bind occurs if two or more persons, one of them the victim, undergo a repeated experience in which one "primary negative injunction" conflicts with a second, both "enforced by punishments or signals which threaten survival," and from which the victim has no means of escape.⁴⁴

In her 1975 book *Language and Woman's Place*,⁴⁵ linguist Robin Lakoff applied Bateson's notion to society's requirements of women. "Now the command that society gives to the young of both sexes might be phrased something like: 'Gain respect by speaking like other members of your sex,'" writes Lakoff. "For the boy, as we have seen, that order, constraining as it is, is not paradoxical: if he speaks (and generally behaves) as men in his culture are supposed to, he generally gains people's respect. But whichever course the woman takes—to speak women's language or not to—she will not be respected. So she cannot carry out the order."

Bateson and his colleagues concluded that responses to a double bind include "helplessness, fear, exasperation, and rage."⁴⁶ They theorized that schizophrenia could be induced by repeatedly subjecting vulnerable individuals to double binds. Other scientists found that in so-called "normal individuals," double binds increase expressed anxiety as well.⁴⁷

Rhetoric, as critic Kenneth Burke notes, is a reflection as well as a selection and a deflection. Rhetoric makes sense of otherwise inchoate experiences. It structures. It orders. It focuses. *It attempts to limit our angle of vision to that of the writer or speaker.* A double bind is a rhetorical construct that posits two and only two alternatives, one or both penalizing the

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person being offered them. In the history of humans, such choices have been constructed to deny women access to power and, where individuals manage to slip past their constraints, to undermine their exercise of whatever power they achieve. The strategy defines something “fundamental” to women as incompatible with something the woman seeks—be it education, the ballot, or access to the workplace.

When a bind casts one alternative as loathsome, it points to the other as a woman’s only appropriate choice. So, childbearing is expected to be chosen over intellectual pursuits, silence over shame, and invisibility over acknowledgment of aging. When both alternatives in the construct carry clear penalties, as equality and difference do when they are defined by male norms, the woman is encouraged to abandon whatever goal has aroused the equality or difference debate. Finally, when a bind casts two supposedly desirable states as mutually exclusive, the woman is invited to believe that she is incapable of attaining success.

The intended result is stalemate for those whose sex chromosomes are XX rather than XY. You might say that this book is a study of the binds that tie.

Double binds are constructions derived from theology, biology, and the law, and rhetoric’s fashioning of each. In some cases, the external constraint is invariant. Men cannot bear children; women can. Men cannot breastfeed; women can. In other cases, the constraint is either hard and fast or fabricated, depending on one’s belief system.

Theology

For a fundamentalist, the story of Adam and Eve reflects the way it really was. The sin of Eve condemns women to childbearing; in the New Testament Paul bars them from preaching on that account. Many avowed Christians deny this construction as a simplistic and archaic view; other people treat the whole story of Eve and Eden as the conjuring of those wanting to justify an absolute patriarchy. For others, the scriptural text is absolute, and the dictates of religion are as constraining as the laws of gravitation and matter. They describe the natural order of life—sin against them and be damned. Only through silence, submission, and reproduction could women be redeemed. Since silence and motherhood were twinned, a corollary assumption was formed of the alliance: Public speech by a woman is the outward sign of suspect sexuality.

Biology, created by God, enforced this “natural order.” Since women could bear and nurture infants, it followed that they must. Once a child is born, the assumption that the mother has primary responsibility for raising offspring kicks in. Nothing inherent in a woman’s physiological makeup uniquely equips her for *childrearing*. The suggestion that childrearing is a woman’s natural role is not a statement of natural law, but an assertion. Yet it was granted for millennia.

The scientific community of earlier centuries perpetrated the idea that

abandoning her natural sphere carried physiological penalties, among other punishments. “Female illnesses” were the outward signs of an unsubmitive soul “[T]he most significant cause of a woman’s menopausal disease, virtually every [nineteenth-century] doctor believed, lay in her violation of the physiological and social laws dictated by her ovarian system,” writes historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg. “Education, attempts at birth control or abortion, undue sexual indulgence, a too fashionable life style, failure to devote herself fully to the needs of husband and children—even the advocacy of woman’s suffrage—all might guarantee a disease-ridden menopause.”⁴⁸

Such assumptions prompted the infamous “rest cure” prescribed for female patients in the nineteenth century, and bedeviled the development of safe contraceptive drugs and devices.

The Law

For women to venture beyond the confines of rearing children in the home would destroy the natural order of things and in fact subvert the state. So scientific advances toward safe means of birth control were met with legal constraints. Moreover, women who married literally disappeared under the law of coverture.

“By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law,” wrote William Blackstone in 1765, “that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs everything.”⁴⁹ Under the law of coverture, married women could not sue, sell, or contract without first getting their husband’s permission. They were, in the eyes of the courts, represented in and through the man they had married.

“Now if a woman holding public office were to marry, two possibilities would follow,” observed the German philosopher Johann Fichte in *The Science of Rights* (1798). “First, she might not subject herself to her husband in matters regarding her official duties which would be utterly against female dignity . . . secondly, she might subject herself utterly to her husband, as nature and morality require. But in that case she would cease to be the official and he would become it. The office would become his by marriage, like the rest of his wife’s property and rights.”

From the invariant facts of a woman’s physiology—her ability to bear and nurse children—came a host of assumptions rooted in “nature and morality” that cast women in double binds. Codifying these assumptions were the powerful institutions of the church, the scientific community, and the state. Enmeshed as they were in theology, biology, and law, the binds were seemingly non-negotiable—until women began slipping the knots.

Beyond the Double Bind will identify five binds, their archaic origins, and the ways their vestiges continue to shape contemporary culture. These binds include the following constructs:

- Women can exercise their wombs or their brains, but not both.
- Women who speak out are immodest and will be shamed, while women who are silent will be ignored or dismissed.
- Women are subordinate whether they claim to be different from men or the same.
- Women who are considered feminine will be judged incompetent, and women who are competent, unfeminine.
- As men age, they gain wisdom and power; as women age, they wrinkle and become superfluous.

And, in a latter-day bind, women who succeed in politics and public life will be scrutinized under a different lens from that applied to successful men, and for longer periods of time.

At their base, these binds concern power and place. Across Western history a metaphor has emerged to express each. The first—who is in charge?—is expressed as a contest over who will wear the “breeches” and operates on the zero-sum notion that there is one pair of pants per couple. The second—place—is manifest in the claim that in their proper place, women nurture. That notion is often symbolized by the assumption that women should stay in the kitchen.

In the *Canterbury Tales*, the story of the Wife of Bath is about “the fight for the breeches.” Centuries later the question remained current. Asked who wears the pants in his family, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher’s spouse Denis responded, “I do, and I also wash and iron them.”⁵⁰

The figurative enjoinder not to wear the pants in the family was incarnated in requirements that women in public wear appropriately “feminine” dress. Feminist activist Flo Kennedy recalls the era when women first began to wear slacks. “I can remember—I was still practicing law at the time—going to court in pants and the judge’s remarking that I wasn’t properly dressed, that the next time I came to court I should be dressed like a lawyer. He’s sitting there in a long black dress gathered at the yoke, and I said, ‘Judge, if you won’t talk about what I’m wearing, I won’t talk about what you’re wearing.’”⁵¹

Historically, the place for women is in the private sphere of the home—centered, metaphorically, not in the bedroom or the parlor, but in the nursery and the kitchen. “A man is in general better pleased when he has a good dinner upon his table, than when his wife talks Greek,” observed Samuel Johnson in the mid-eighteenth century.⁵² Two centuries later, the spouse of the Democratic nominee for president, Hillary Clinton, was ensnared in a dispute over the meaning of her remark that she chose not to stay home and bake cookies and have teas. In such instances, food is taken as a symbol for home and home for “a woman’s proper place.”

Some activists stepped out of that noose by granting that a woman’s place is in the home, while enlarging our notion of what constitutes home. “Home is where the heart is, where your loved ones are,” argued Carry

Nation in her efforts to save men from the saloon. “If my son is in a drinking place, my place is there.”⁵³

The binds that constrain women’s power and women’s place are not, in fact, discrete. Their relationship is prismatic—one magnifies another. Each of the chapters on binds will trace the origins of the double bind, track the social sanctions put in place to preserve it, and chart the progress women have made in overcoming it—in the process drawing power and advantage from what were moves originally designed to disable. A final chapter will summarize the strategies available to surmount the residues of the binds that in the past have tied.

Underlying the binds are specific constructs: The no-choice-choice; the self-fulfilling prophecy; the no-win situation; the unrealizable expectation, and the double standard. Each circumscribes choice.

The no-choice-choice is the focus of Chapter 3, “Double Bind Number One: Womb/Brain.” This bind casts the world as either/or, with one option set as desirable, the other loathsome—hence a no-choice-choice. Women could use their brains only at the expense of their uteruses; if they did, they risked their essential womanhood. Exercise of the uterus was associated with the private sphere, exercise of the brain with the public. Here was a question of a woman’s proper place: Those who chose to exercise their intellects in public life upended the natural order, endangered the family, and called into question whether they were really women. Women broke the bind by gaining access to education and using the tools of scholarship to establish that childbearing does not destroy intellect, and vice versa, and then gaining access to forms of contraception and birth control that made reproductive choice and timing possible.

Once women ventured into public space, they confronted binds designed to deny them power and to undercut what power they could attain. In Chapter 2, I explore how Hillary Clinton was caught in a derivative of the womb/brain bind—the social assumption that someone who valued career must despise those who elect full-time homemaking. As the *New York Times* put it during the 1992 campaign, “She is a lightning rod for the mixed emotions we have about work and motherhood, dreams and accommodation, smart women and men’s worlds.” Scores of other media sources agree. “[T]he squirming over Hillary Clinton,” said the *Los Angeles Times*, “isn’t so much about a First Lady as about ambivalence over women, power, work and marriage.” Clinton became a national test case, subjected in fact to *all* the binds traditionally deployed against women.

Self-fulfilling prophecies are the subject of Chapter 4, “Double Bind Number Two: Silence/Shame.” Sociologist Robert K. Merton defined a self-fulfilling prophecy as “a *false* definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come *true*.”⁵⁴ The silence or shame bind condemns women for failing to do something they are forbidden to do. So, for example, women were forbidden to speak and then condemned for failing to produce great oratory. The first condition becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy of the second. The bind was overcome

by women who weathered the social sanctions imposed on women who spoke, in the process demonstrating a capacity to speak. Through the exercise of public speech they were able to access other resources such as the courts and the ballot.

No-win situations are the subject of Chapter 5, "Double Bind Number Three: Sameness/Difference." In the no-win situation, by winning, you lose. If the no-choice choice is "either-or," this bind is "neither-nor." In it, women are judged against a masculine standard, and by that standard they lose, whether they claim difference or similarity. The bind is broken by positing a form of equality not solely based on a male norm.

Unrealizable expectations are a corollary of the no-win situation. Treated in Chapter 6 addressing the bind of femininity/competence, unrealizable expectations are also designed to undercut women's exercise of power. By requiring both femininity and competence of women in the public sphere, and then defining femininity in a way that excludes competence, the bind creates unrealizable expectations. By this standard, women are bound to fail. The power of the bind is rooted in a woman's willingness to grant someone else the right both to *define* and *impose* the requirement of femininity. The presence of this bind has led those studying women and leadership to conclude that women "have to reconcile contradictory expectations to succeed, contradictions not imposed on men."⁵⁵

Denying others the power to define appropriate behavior breaks the bind. Being feminine as femininity was traditionally defined may be incompatible with being competent, but being a woman is not. When that view was embraced by the Supreme Court, women's rights advocates gained important ground in their fight to alter persistent attitudes that did what the law once had done—keep women in their assigned place.

The *double standard* is a construct that reinforces the competence/femininity bind. Blossoming as women gain power, it functions by ensuring that they cannot successfully exercise it. Women's sexuality is treated differently, their actions judged differently, their competence tested differently and for a longer period. Our expectations of women are more difficult to meet. At the core of this bind is the assumption that woman is other and defective.

Chapter 7, "Double Bind Number Five: Aging/Invisibility," examines the double standard holding that as men age they acquire wisdom and power, while women gain wrinkles and hot flashes. In pervasive stereotypes about female aging, we see the residues of the womb/brain and femininity/competence binds as well. These binds are reinforced throughout the culture. Chapter 8, "Newsbinds," lays out examples from news.

The final chapter contrasts stories that presuppose backlash and those that assume bind-breaking and argues that it is the latter, not the former, that best capture the history of the struggle for women's rights. It also charts the ways and means now available to women and men bent on bind-breaking.

That struggle has not, once and for all, been won. Neither have many

other struggles over the rights of groups who have been history's victims, yet few would argue that we have not progressed since the days that the ballot was routinely denied to women as well as to African Americans and other minorities. The vestiges of ancient prejudice die hard, and the ways in which they are fought are matters of disagreement among those who fight them. The civil rights movement has included advocates of non-violence and Panthers, integrationists and isolationists. So the women's movement has found itself split into opposing camps more than once over time.

One problem with the backlash hypothesis is that it assumes that the movement has been a homogenous whole, moving steadily toward agreed-on goals. That view is not born out by history. Once suffrage was gained, for example, the movement split, with one flank advocating and the other opposing the Equal Rights Amendment. Feminist opponents of divorce reform laws in the early twentieth century turned into advocates,⁵⁶ and when an attained goal proved counterproductive—as did special protections in the workplace and different ages of sexual consent for men and women—advocates changed directions.

What can be construed as a backlash often was a serious disagreement among women's advocates about means and ends. When the Supreme Court faced the issue of a minimum wage for women in *Adkins v. Children's Hospital* in 1923, for example, some women's groups—including Alice Paul's National Women's party—favored the court's position, which ruled the law unconstitutional. Others supported what they saw as protection for women.⁵⁷ A similar divide separates those who favor and oppose bans on pornography.

Faludi's argument for backlash is, moreover, selective, and the resulting spin on events invites despair. A blue-collar female union member loses her job under conditions she considers discriminatory, sues, and loses. "Desperate for work to support her two children, King cleaned houses, then took a job as a waitress. She lost all her benefits. 'Today I cleaned the venetian blinds at work,' she says. 'I make \$2.01 an hour and that's it, top pay. It's demeaning, degrading. It makes you feel like you are not worthwhile.'"⁵⁸ Of note is the fact that the woman's case was decided at the District Court level not on grounds of sex discrimination but on a question of the applicability of OSHA regulations. The first opportunity that the Supreme Court—with three Reagan justices on it—had to hear a comparable case framed as sex discrimination, it held for the plaintiffs, 9–0.⁵⁹

Although feminist historians lined up on both sides of the case, Faludi also treats the loss of the class-action suit by women presumably denied commission-sales positions at Sears as a major defeat for women. Ignored entirely is Ann Hopkins' vindication in 1989, at both the District and Supreme Court levels, in her suit against Price Waterhouse for sex discrimination.

Selectivity is at work in Faludi's economic claims as well. While women continue to earn less on average than men, such economic factors as part-

time work, time out of the labor force for childbearing and rearing, and a shorter work week account for some of that difference. So, for example, Census Bureau data indicate that in 1992 married women with preschoolers were less likely to work year-round and more likely to work part-time than mothers whose children were six years old or older.⁶⁰ And in key places, Faludi is simply wrong. The difference between the earnings of men and women, which Faludi says hasn't improved much since 1955,⁶¹ in fact has changed. And change occurred during the supposed "backlash" decade that is Faludi's focus. In 1980, women earned 64 cents for every dollar earned by men; in 1990, that figure had jumped to 72 cents.⁶² But more important is that in her presumed backlash decade of the 1980s, the gap narrowed more dramatically than it had in the 1960s or 1970s.

None of this is to suggest that the wage gap and other forms of discrimination do not persist and urgently require change. They do. My point is that even in the 1980s advocates won some major victories.

There have been periods in which the women's movement was largely quiescent, as it was from the early 1920s until the early 1960s. Other times are characterized by steady, ongoing activity, and with it progress. Beginning in the early 1970s, the Court has overturned laws that enshrined unequal access, unequal opportunity, and unequal obligations based on sex in estate administration,⁶³ as well as unequal access to fringe benefits in the military,⁶⁴ employment benefits,⁶⁵ and alimony.⁶⁶

Viewed in broad perspective, progress has been clear, whether in the areas of employment rights, reproductive rights, rights to credit, or protections from sexual harassment and gender stereotyping. In denying such advances, and their cumulative effects, we risk seeing ourselves as perpetual victims.

Not all contradictions fit Bateson's definition of the double bind. Paradoxes pervade literary, philosophical, and theological discourse throughout the culture. Where they are not grounded in fallacies, they may be used to elicit higher levels of awareness. In some Eastern religions, for example, contradictions are the focus of meditation. The goal is to free the contemplative from the material world in which the contradictions seem to inhere. Even in physics, the idea that light is both a particle and a wave is seen as a paradox: As the question was framed by classical science, it had to be one or the other; it could not be both. The poet Pat Parker incorporates another contradiction, this one regarding human behavior, in her poem "For the white person who wants to know how to be my friend": "The first thing you must do is to forget that i'm Black. Second, you must never forget i'm Black."⁶⁷ In all three cases, enlightenment results from paradox.

Alternatively, as Rosalyn Carter suggested in her autobiography and as other leaders such as Gloria Steinem have pointed out, recognition that you will be condemned no matter what you do can liberate a person to do whatever she wants.

The double bind is durable, but not indestructible. Examined as rhetorical frames, double binds can be understood, manipulated, dismantled. The

bind that crops up after one has been vanquished is often a pale ghost of the more vigorous form that preceded it. *Backlash* is a more insidious idea. Seen as an external and invariable constraint, it does real damage when women accept and *internalize* its assessment of social and political reality. "The most effective backlash against feminism almost always comes from within, as women either despair of achieving equality or retreat from its demands," writes Wendy Kaminer.⁶⁸ I agree. As a rhetorical construct, *backlash* can be as constraining a frame as the constructs that form double binds. The notion that moments of progress for women are met by an inevitable and inevitably successful backlash turns the political and social activity of women into Sisyphean gestures. *Backlash* invites women and their allies to give up.

A more inclusive view of the history of women shows them surmounting, sometimes one by one, a series of double binds whose roots are deeply embedded in the past. Women who unmasked one dilemma faced the next and challenged it, bumped into a third and pirouetted around it, confronted another, and denied it its power. In the process they enlarged the scope of science, changed laws, altered behaviors, and changed the political complexion of this country. If they do not disable themselves with the rhetoric of disempowerment and victimization, they will enter the twenty-first century able to stand, speak, dance, and redefine the world as the need arises.

2

Hillary Clinton as Rorschach Test

WHAT is sauce for the gander has until recently been poison for the goose. We see this in press treatment of and citizen reaction to Hillary Clinton, which manifest the binds that tie women in the public sphere. "Coverage of Hillary Clinton is a massive Rorschach test of the evolution of women in our society,"¹ observed Betty Friedan.

The mirror that segments of society hold up reflects some dark and ugly sentiments as well as some nobler ones. "What do you call a cross between a draft-dodger and a dyke?" asks a caller on Kevin McCarthy's call-in radio show in Dallas on March 25, 1994. "Chelsea." "What do you call the meanest woman in the world?" "Tonya Rodham Bobbitt."

At issue in public and private discussions of Hillary Clinton first in the campaign and then in the White House were fundamental and to some extent unresolved relationships between concepts taken as antithetical for women by those of our grandmothers' generation: women versus power, work versus marriage, childrearing versus career.

Hillary Clinton did not live in a world of either-or, however, but of both-and. The Yale-educated wife of a powerful man, she had earned the respect of the nation's lawyers while raising a child and managing a career. The fact that she had to earn her husband's respect as well is a revealing reflection on the constraints still facing women. In mid-summer of the 1992 campaign, Bill Clinton implied that his confidence in his spouse's abilities as a lawyer did not extend to her capacity to combine a career with marriage and motherhood. "I am most proud of how she's raised Chelsea," he told *People* magazine. "I say that because from the first time I met her, I knew she would be a great lawyer. She's achieved a lot of things I'm proud

of, from the time we were on the mock trials together in law school to the Watergate committee to leading educational reforms here in Arkansas. I always knew she could do that." What then did he doubt that she could do? "But the fact that she was able to have this incredibly full professional and public life and still be a wonderfully successful person as a good mother and wife, and grow over the years is, I think, her greatest achievement."²

In addition to having to prove even to her spouse that a successful lawyer could also be a good wife and mother, Hillary Clinton faced the assumption that as the wife of a presidential candidate she both held and sought illegitimate power—power unmerited by her credentials, exercised with the delicacy of a Lady Macbeth or Marie Antoinette.

Hillary Clinton became a surrogate on whom we projected our attitudes about attributes once thought incompatible, that women either exercised their minds or had children but not both, that women who were smart were unwomanly and sexually unfulfilled, that articulate women were dangerous. As a lawyer she had examined the nature of the double binds affecting female attorneys. In the campaign she learned the nature of double binds as they play out in life.³

Midway through the primary season, nationally syndicated columnist Ellen Goodman identified some of the no-win situations in which Hillary Rodham Clinton was cast:

When she held onto her own name in 1980, she was blamed for her husband's defeat. When she gave it up, she was criticized for self-defeat. When she stuck up for her husband and marriage on "60 Minutes," she had to prove that she was no Tammy Wynette. When she proved it, the Tammy Wynette fans wanted to know what's wrong with standing by your man. At campaign rallies, when she speaks with a strong political voice, someone invariably asks, "Why don't you run?" If she were as quiet as [Republican candidate Pat Buchanan's spouse] Shelley Buchanan someone would undoubtedly ask if her husband was an impossible chauvinist.⁴

"Perhaps this [criticism of Hillary Clinton] signals the ambivalence society has toward changing roles in an era of backlash against women," editorialized *El Nuevo Herald*. "Men may be projecting on Mrs. Clinton their hostility toward feminism, while women, distressed by their multiple responsibilities, may be projecting their frustrations."⁵

Of interest here is not so much the campaign strategy that ultimately transformed a lawyer in the Rose law firm in Arkansas into a First Lady, but rather the complex interplay between Hillary Rodham Clinton and the labels through which she was viewed by reporters, columnists, supporters, and antagonists. In them, we see the residues of the complex and sometimes contradictory expectations we carry into our encounters with women. Understanding how 51% of us are shaped by and shape a particular set of dilemmas that I term double binds is the task of this book.⁶

What pundits called "the Hillary factor" was brought to the fore by two of the more often replayed sound bites of the 1992 presidential campaign. The first occurred in the hour after the 1992 Superbowl, in a special 60

Minutes interview, when she responded to a charge that her husband had engaged in a twelve-year affair with a nightclub singer. There Mrs. Clinton averred that she was “not sitting here, some little woman standing by my man like Tammy Wynette.”

The second incident was her response to charges that she capitalized on her relationship with the Arkansas governor to draw state business to her law firm or, alternatively, that he had funneled funds to the firm. In response, Hillary Rodham Clinton noted that she “could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas,” but instead chose to follow the career begun before her marriage.

Over time, even otherwise careful scholars conflated the two. “[A]s late as 1989,” write journalist Linda Witt, political scientist Karen Paget, and historian Glenna Matthews in *Running as a Woman: Gender and Power in American Politics*, “according to the editor in chief of the *New York Times*, the all-male-is-normal paradigm—except at tea parties, of course—was the *Times*’ editorial philosophy, and the only women who might be news would be those wives who inappropriately exercised their husbands’ authority. This may explain why Hillary Clinton’s statement—‘I’m not just a little woman who can stay home and bake cookies and have teas’—so startled the nation’s news editors. It virtually ended weeks of front-page explorations into her husband’s alleged extramarital affairs.”⁷

“Stand by Your Man”

The contexts of the original statements were quickly lost in press accounts and the featured portions taken as controversial comments on a woman’s role. The generative moment for the “stand by your man” comment occurred when interviewer Steve Kroft implied on the *60 Minutes* segment that the Clintons had “reached some sort of an understanding, an arrangement” in remaining married. “You’re looking at two people who love each other,” replied Bill Clinton with a tone of irritation. “This is not an arrangement or an understanding. This is a marriage. That’s a different thing.” Added Hillary, “Now, I’m not sitting here some little woman standing by my man like Tammy Wynette. . . . I’m, I’m sitting here because I love him and I respect him and I honor what he’s been through and what we’ve been through together. And you know, if that’s not enough for people, then heck, don’t vote for him.”⁸

“Determined not to appear like a victim, Hillary Clinton said coolly that loving her husband throughout the trouble spots in their marriage did not mean she was ‘sitting here like some little woman standing by my man like Tammy Wynette,’ recalled the *Los Angeles Times*.”⁹

“Mrs. Clinton responded with a loyal wife’s indignation, an ambitious politician’s fervor, and a practiced litigator’s skill to the long-expected bed-mail. . . . She is nobody’s ‘little woman’” observed *New York Times*’s¹⁰ columnist William Safire.

From a woman rated one of the nation’s top one hundred lawyers,

supporters heard a defense of her husband and their relationship made out of respect and love, not from the viscerally felt obligation of a wife to condone whatever her husband had done. On the other hand, in “cookies and tea” her champions heard the right of a woman to choose both marriage and a career. Critics perceived an indictment of women “loyal” to their husbands in the first case, and in the second an indictment of both motherhood and traditional homemakers.

The country and western singer whose song enjoined women to stand by their men publicized her response to Mrs. Clinton. “Mrs. Clinton,” she wrote, “you have offended every woman and man who love[s] that song—several million in number. I believe you have offended every true country music fan and every person who has ‘made it on their [sic] own’ with no one to take them to the White House.”¹¹

“Cookies and Tea”

“Cookies and tea” was transmuted as well. When reporters simmered Hillary Rodham Clinton’s fragmentary response to charges by Jerry Brown down to a sound bite, they did what she had not explicitly done: pitted traditional homemaking against career, diminishing in the process the legitimacy of the first. Lost in the reduction was the context in which Clinton had made the statement.

In a televised debate on the eve of the Illinois and Michigan primaries, former governor Jerry Brown accused Bill Clinton of funneling business to his wife’s firm. Implicitly, Brown also accused Hillary Clinton of trafficking in her relationship with her husband to secure state business for her law firm. Hillary’s response shifted the issue from one of possible conflict of interest in the public sphere to the more traditional question, Does a woman belong in the public sphere at all?¹²

Clinton aides George Stephanopolous, Paul Begala, and Richard Mintz staffed the pseudo-event that gave rise to the comment, a March 16 breakfast at a Chicago diner with subsequent handshaking with passengers entering the El. Pressed about Jerry Brown’s charges, the Democratic contender told reporters to “Ask her. Ask her. You know what he said last night was absolutely false. He said I hustled business for her law firm. It was a typical thing to say of a person who respects the fact that women can be professional, can have their own work and do their own jobs.”

Clinton expanded on his defense of his wife, attacked Brown for regularly reinventing himself, and noted “if he wants to go after my wife I’m gonna hit him just like I did last night.” Here as in the debate, Clinton cast himself as the aggrieved husband defending his assaulted wife.

In a statement outside his hotel earlier that morning, the Arkansas governor translated what Brown had said into the language of the back alley brawl. “I went back over what we dealt with last night,” he said. “And I think we know I have some old-fashioned values. If somebody jumps on my wife, I’m gonna jump em back. . . . And he jumped on her and I

jumped him back and I still feel good about it this morning. I think most people will identify with that." By noon a different set of old-fashioned values would be at issue.

Twenty minutes later at the Busy Bee restaurant he returned to the theme. "[7:51 A.M. EST] I've got a lot of new ideas but I have some old-fashioned ones too and if he goes after her again, I'll hit him again." That comment set old and new as the boundaries for the day's discussion. A literary critic would call it presentiment.

Stand by your wife was the organizing principle of Clinton's statements. "[7:52] You know I don't mind what he says about me and I've never said anything about him or Senator Tsongas except where we differed on the issues. If he wants to go after my wife I'm gonna hit him just like I did last night." The rules of attack differ when wives are involved.

Hillary, meanwhile, had literally been standing by her man. At 7:51, by her husband's side, she entered the discussion stating that she had not "shared in one dollar of state funds that has ever gone to my firm," noting that she didn't know "what else I could have done," and defending the fact that her firm represented banks.

At 7:54 Bill Clinton again assumed the role of "Rocky." "I don't mind hitting him personally after what he said about Hillary last night."

That posture had strategic advantages. As Republican consultant Roger Ailes told the audience of the *Today Show* on March 17, "Jerry Brown helped Clinton because a man defending his wife gains points." Brown's attack, however, pinned Hillary Clinton in a double bind. If she marshaled the rebuttal, she would seem to be acting as a candidate in her own right, the debate now between her and Brown. If she didn't, she raised questions about her competence as a lawyer, about her ability to defend against Brown's charges, and about the truth of her claims to *60 Minutes* that theirs was a partnership.

Indeed, as the more hide-bound traditionalists saw it, Bill as champion of Hillary was inconsistent with Hillary's rejection of the "little woman" role in the *60 Minutes* interview. A woman in need of such chivalrous conduct ought to be at home tending the hearth and nursing the children—not dodging bullets with her partner at the OK Corral. "Stop trying to have it both ways"; columnist William Safire advised, "you cannot be gallant about a feminist."¹³

At 7:57, reporters broached the question to Hillary herself. What was her response to Brown's charges? Her fragmented syntax suggests that she is groping for an answer. By stressing that she is being attacked for trying to have "an independent life" and having her "own life," Mrs. Clinton underscores her husband's assertion that she did not benefit financially from his governorship. But by introducing both "an independent life" and "motherhood" into her rambling answer, Hillary made it possible to read into "cookies and tea" another idea entirely. "I thought number one it [Brown's attack] was pathetic and desperate," she said, "and also thought it was interesting because this is the sort of thing that happens to the sort of

women who have their own careers and their own lives. And I think it's a shame but I guess it's something that we're going to have to live with. Those of us who have tried and have a career, tried to have an independent life and to make a difference and certainly like myself who has children but other issues, uh you know I've done the best I can to lead my life but I suppose it'll be subject to attack but it's not true and I don't know what else to say except it's sad to me."

Asked whether there wasn't a way to avoid the appearance of conflict, she responded "I wish that were true. You know I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas but what I decided to do was fulfill my profession which I entered before my husband was in public life. And I've tried very, very hard to be as careful as possible and that's all I can tell you."

As she uttered the "cookies and tea" remark (at 7:58), Clinton aides, in the words of one, "felt the air go out of the room," and noting "that look" in NBC's Andrea Mitchell's eye, ended the press opportunity at 7:59. "That's the sound bite of the day," noted one reporter moving outside to use his cellular phone to file. As he was doing so, the aides drew Mrs. Clinton aside to recommend that she recontextualize the statement.

The extent to which Hillary Clinton was surveying the terrain only after she had walked it is apparent in the fact that she did not realize the "cookies and tea" remark could be heard not as a rejection of the role of full-time hostess for a governor, but as an indictment of stay-at-home motherhood. One reporter who overheard the discussion between Mrs. Clinton and the campaign aides recalls that she initially argued that her statement could not be interpreted that way.

The aides persuaded her otherwise. Twenty minutes later, the Clinton staff encouraged reporters to move from covering Bill, who was shaking hands with passersby, to Hillary. "You know," she told them, "the work that I've done as a professional, as a public advocate, has been aimed in part to assure that women can make the choices that they should make—whether it's full-time career, full-time motherhood, some combination, depending upon what stage of life they are at—and I think that is still difficult for people to understand right now, that it is a generational change." As she made this statement, not all the cameras had moved to her. When they arrived, she reworked the remark. This accounts for the disparity between the versions recorded by the *Washington Post* and NBC News.

Hillary Clinton made her last statement at 8:24 Central Standard Time. Thirteen minutes later, the story would be on the AP wire. For those who wonder at the comparative power of television and print to set agendas, the subsequent treatment of "cookies and tea" is instructive. At 8:37 Chicago time, the AP wire service transmitted its story, dropping those portions of the original statement that distracted from the piece's focus: conflict of interest. "His wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, said she always made sure her work as a partner at the prestigious Rose law firm in Little Rock, Arkansas,

did not create any appearance of conflict. 'I've done the best I can to lead my life,' she said as she campaigned with her husband. 'I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas. I've tried very, very hard to be as careful as possible.'¹⁴

It was the broadcast story, however, that worried the campaign staff. "CNN started running 'cookies and tea' almost immediately," recalled a staff member. Within hours CNN was broadcasting Hillary Clinton saying, "I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas, but I—what I decided to do was to fulfill my profession, which I entered before my husband was in public life. And I've tried very, very hard to be as careful as possible." In mid-afternoon, CNN's *Inside Politics* led with the statement. But in closing the show, the link between the statement and the sentence about the law firm was dropped. Gone was the claim that she'd tried to be careful. The sound bite was beginning to migrate from a statement about conflict of interest to a claim about homemakers and career-women.¹⁵

On NBC, Andrea Mitchell, whose nonverbal reaction to the original statement had worried Clinton staffers, dropped the "careful" statement and introduced the quote with the words "But in trying to rebut him [Brown], she [Hillary Clinton] may have offended a lot of women voters who work at home." Mitchell also noted that "Worried campaign aides urged her to soften her message right away," and then quoted Mrs. Clinton's statement from the second news encounter: "To be a full-time mother and homemaker and to be a full-time career person, to balance the two, to have those decisions at different stages of your life are very tough ones."

Other reporters saw the second sound bite as a simple extension of the first. "They took her away and she came back and tried to respond to it. I think it was a fuller explication of what she had tried to say [with cookies and tea . . . follow my profession]. I do think it was what she meant," recalls Gwen Ifill of the *New York Times*.¹⁶

As Clinton campaign aides and the press shifted their focus to the electoral effect of "cookies and tea," two facts were shunted aside. First, the majority of women, including married women, work outside the home.¹⁷ It was possible that the statement would enhance Bill Clinton's prospects by increasing Hillary's identification with working women. Indeed, a *Houston Chronicle*-Hotline poll during the Republican convention found 50% of employed women supporting Clinton with 38% for Bush.¹⁸ Second, women who stay at home are more likely to be both conservative and Republican and, as such, not targeted voters for a Democratic ticket.

Nonetheless, Mitchell's suggestion that the comment was a serious gaffe became the dominant news frame. That interpretation was given a helping hand by Republican consultant Roger Ailes, who told viewers of the *Today Show* the next day (March 17, 1992) that "She offended the Tammy Wynette vote again this week by saying she's not going to stay home and bake cookies. I mean, this is the only—the only reason I sort of still have

some warm feeling toward Pat, is I think Pat Buchanan is a little warmer than she is."

Print reporters continued to focus on the original issue of conflict of interest. The next day, Dan Balz of the *Washington Post* offered two optics: conflict of interest and the appropriate public and private role of women. The article, titled "Clinton's Wife Finds She's Become Issue," reported both the "cookies and tea . . . profession" remark ("a comment that caused aides to shudder") and the statement about career choices. Separating them was the observation that "[m]oments later, she was the more politically correct voice of professional women."

There are telling generational differences in the ways in which the remark is reported. Writing for the *New York Times*, Gwen Ifill, 39, heard it simply as "a zingy comeback."¹⁹

By March 26, the press spin was clear. After excerpting "cookies and tea" without the law firm reference on *Nightline*, Jackie Judd observes, "Never mind that Clinton went on to say feminism means the right to choose work or home or both; the damage had been done. She'd been tagged an elitist and an ultrafeminist." Nowhere in the remarks of either Clinton was feminism mentioned or at issue.

A month after the initial remark, NBC's Lisa Myers would report that "although she helps her husband among some constituencies, she also hurts him. Many women still are fuming over this remark." Hillary Clinton is then shown saying "You know, I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas, but I—what I decided to do was to fulfill my profession."²⁰ Gone is the context—conflict of interest; absent is the information that she had begun her career before he entered public life.

The next piece to disappear was fulfilling her profession. Gradually, the sound bite was winnowed to staying home baking cookies and having teas.

"You certainly did, however, touch more than a few nerves out on the campaign trail with this now infamous line 'I suppose I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas,'" noted Katie Couric in a *Today Show* interview with Hillary on April 2. "I know you have since said that was not meant as a slight to homemakers or women who choose to stay at home and work, but it did sound like a put down." In that interview, Hillary opines that "I wish what I'd said before and said after had all been part of the sound bite but I'm learning that that's not always what you could expect."

In September a poll confirmed that "cookies and tea" was still resonating with the electorate. When the *Today Show* reported the poll, it was a working woman, Katie Couric, who questioned Hillary's backing away from the implications of the statement.

KATIE COURIC: ". . . when you compared working women and stay-at-home moms, it seemed apparent to me that her comment about, 'could have stayed home and made cookies,' really has—has some residual effects in terms of—of turning stay-at-home moms off."

TIM RUSSERT: "That's one in five. That's pretty striking, particularly for someone—for a first lady. And it's also her comment about, 'Stand by your man.' And there's a certain, I would say, reference point where people began to look at Hillary and said, 'She's not like me. She is different.' And for better or for worse, the word feminist can have some negative overtones in America even in 1992. I think she's working very hard to change her image in that regard and try to become per—become more perceived as Bill Clinton's wife, the mother of Chelsea, who, yes has a career, but she understands her own value as a woman, including that of being a mother and a wife."

COURIC: ". . . [which] is conversely turning off some working women who say, 'Hey, what's—so bad about being an ambitious, career-minded woman? Why does she have to pretend, or why does she have to take on this new role?'"²¹

"Cookies and tea" and "stand by your man/Tammy Wynette" entered the public vocabulary as telegraphic references that neither activists nor focus group participants felt a need to define or explain. Like "It's not over until the fat lady sings" and "Here's looking at you, kid," its context and meaning were now assumed. But, in fact, the meanings heard in the phrases varied widely.

On March 26, conservative columnist William Safire weighed in with the charge that cookies and tea statement betokened "elitism in action."²²

In mid-summer, conservative activist Phyllis Schlafly stoked the coals by treating the "cookies and tea and Tammy Wynette comments" as ideological markers of feminism, an affirmation that the prospective First Lady saw homemakers as second-class citizens. At the same time, she implicitly framed womb/brain, competence/femininity, and equality/difference binds. She condemned Clinton for dismissing wives and homemakers and expressing disdain for those who merely stand by their man. She also averred that Clinton stood for sameness, not difference, in wanting women to be treated just like men.

"Hillary Clinton's view about marriage, and the feminist view is that wives are a servant class [sic] a dependency relationship, a second-class citizen, and that is what they believe, and it's pretty obvious from many statements that Hillary has made, for example, when she looked down her nose at the homemaker who stays home and baked cookies, that was a typical feminist remark, when she went on *60 Minutes* and said she wasn't going to be just a little wife [n.b.: Hillary Clinton had said 'little woman'] who stands by her man like Tammy Wynette. Now all of these things indicate that it is the feminist view, and that is a putdown of the homemaker, and people don't like that and I think that's perfectly fair game to talk about, because after all, the feminists do say they want to be treated like a man, and if she wants to be treated like a man. . . ."²³

In mid-May, focus groups discussing Bill Clinton's electability took up the subject of the candidate's wife by concentrating on these same key phrases.

A 32-YEAR-OLD WHITE MALE ELECTRICIAN, MARRIED, THREE CHILDREN, WITH A SPOUSE IN THE LABOR FORCE: "What about Little Miss 'I won't stand by any [sic] man' Hillary?"

A 23-YEAR-OLD FEMALE CASHIER, SINGLE, NO CHILDREN: "She did. Didn't you see *60 Minutes*? You're just trying to for[?] an excuse to vote against [inaudible] and . . ."

THE ELECTRICIAN: "I don't need an excuse not [interrupted]"

A 27-YEAR-OLD FEMALE HOMEMAKER WITH TWO PRE-TEENAGE CHILDREN, WHOSE SPOUSE WORKS IN MANUFACTURING: "It comes down to whether she, I mean he, well both are against the family, 'cookies and tea.'"

THE CASHIER: "Why should she bake cookies and tea? All that stand by your man, Tammy Wynette. Why should she? She's a lawyer, for God's sake."

THE ELECTRICIAN: "I don't care what she is. I'm not going to vote for her. (laughter) OR for him."

AN UNIDENTIFIED MALE VOICE: "What about [voting for?] Tammy Wynette?" (laughter)

A 20-YEAR-OLD FEMALE COLLEGE STUDENT, SINGLE: "I'd vote for her, for Hillary [voice: "—not Tammy?"] No, for her. You can get cookies at the bakery."

Also in mid-May a group of young women in Atlanta, eighteen to thirty years old, moved from a discussion of the economy to the need for women to work and from there to a discussion of "cookies and tea":

FIRST WOMAN: "You know, I really identified with Hillary over 'cookies and tea.'"

SECOND WOMAN: "Juggling two careers is something [interrupted]. She shouldn't have to be an appendage for him to be president."

THIRD WOMAN: "Did you know she has a daughter?"

SECOND WOMAN: "Uh how old?"

THIRD WOMAN: "I'm not sure. Young."

SECOND WOMAN: "Who do you think takes care of her? Do you" [unintelligible]

THIRD WOMAN: "We do. [laughter] The same as the rest of us. You can bet it's not Bill."

FIRST WOMAN: "If he's president he can stay in the White House and make the cookies." [Laughter and someone says "and tea." Another voice adds, "Yeah, sure."]

Interestingly, among the patterns that emerged in the focus groups was the tendency of those who could vote for Bush or Perot to hold that after

"cookies and tea" Bill silenced Hillary. By contrast, those who would ultimately support the Democratic ticket were more likely to conclude that she *voluntarily* refashioned her role.

Late the same summer, in a suburban group outside Detroit, a retired, married, white male salesperson, father of six grown children and self-identified Republican, declared: "You want somebody you're proud of as an American. . . . This isn't a guy that ran a thing like in Arkansas there that's—what is it? 50th in the country as far as advancement goes? It's a cesspool down there almost. I don't like the wife either. . . . And it isn't the cookie thing." Moderator: "What is it?" Retired salesperson: "I don't like the thing like children suing their parents and stuff like that. I'm not ready for this as a taxpaying American citizen." Moderator: "Where did you hear about children suing their parents? Salesperson: "Through the media . . . I tend to listen to all the different ones. I listen to ones I disagree with as well." Moderator: "Have you ever heard her responses to that or Clinton's response to that?" Retired salesman: "No. She has not responded. Well, they put the blinkers on her. After the cookie deal, they told her to shut up."

By contrast, the 46-year-old married male (a small business owner and father of two teenage daughters) who concludes this exchange voted for Clinton.

FIRST WOMAN: "Uh huh. She became more, sort of the typical candidate's wife. Retiring, more quiet. More like standing behind her husband, less verbal."

SECOND WOMAN: "It was pronounced."

THIRD WOMAN: "Oh yeah. I mean, we were comparing a lot of what she said, what she was doing to all of a sudden. . . . I don't even recall seeing her in any of the film clips or. . . ."

FIRST WOMAN: "Except for standing behind her husband."

SECOND WOMAN: "Right. With the mouth shut."

MALE: "My perception of it though is she was the one who made the call. That she herself looked back at what had happened during that period of time and looked at what was happening in the polls concurrently and determined that if she did not position herself otherwise, neither she nor he would be in the position that they wanted."

Lost to reporters' tendency to simplify, dramatize, and feature conflict was Hillary Clinton's tardy but nonetheless expressed recognition of the difficulty of the choices faced by women in both the private and public sphere. Telegraphed as "cookies and tea," the decontextualized statement projected a war between the uterus and the brain, motherhood at odds with career, private sphere as the antithesis of public.

In this worldview, the choices facing women were dichotomous and antithetical: motherhood and homemaking, symbolized by cookies and teas, or a career. With such surrogate symbolism one way of breaking the trap was to establish that a career women could bake cookies; Hillary

Clinton did just that, winning the *Family Circle* cookie bake-off against Barbara Bush with 55.2% of the vote.

The bake-off elicited one of the more bizarre journalistic moments of the campaign. On June 17, Paula Zahn and Connie Chung engaged in the following exchange on CBS.

ZAHN: "[W]e're going to be talking about one of the defining moments of the political campaign here in 1992—Hillary Clinton on a woman's role in politics."

HRC (on tape): "You know, I could have stayed home and baked cookies and had teas, but I—what I decided to do was to fulfill my profession, which I entered before my husband was in public life."

CONNIE CHUNG, co-host: "Ouch."

ZAHN: "Well, now it turns out Mrs. Clinton has, in fact, been in the kitchen."

CHUNG: "Yeah."

ZAHN: "And doing quite well, thank you."

CHUNG: "Uh huh. You know why? Because Barbara Bush has, too. They've been allowed to—*Family Circle*, actually, has published their best chocolate chip cookies recipes. And I—we can try them, can't we. . . ."

ZAHN: "Oh. We—I want to."

CHUNG: "Cause they are right here? You can even vote for your favorite with a postcard to the magazine."

ZAHN: "I like those."

CHUNG: "All right."

ZAHN: "Clinton's chips."

CHUNG: "All right."

ZAHN: "Bush's batch. Charlie, you want a Republican cookie this morning or a Democratic one?"

Another means of arguing "both-and" was the traditional one employed by the Temperance League against liquor, by suffragists for the ballot, and by advocates of women's need for education. That too was dusted off as Hillary Clinton argued that her activities on the hustings protected the hearth.

Reading Hillary to say "cookies and tea are not for me," the press and the Republicans incarnated her sound bite in a war of the wives: Barbara Bush—mother, grandmother, and homemaker who had dropped out of college to marry George—and high-salaried Yale lawyer Hillary Rodham Clinton. "Offering a contrast between a 67-year-old grandmother of 12 who dropped out of college to marry and never again held a paying job and a 45-year-old attorney who earns six figures a year and has only one child, this 'race' has been said to represent a symbolic referendum on all America's conflicted feelings about feminism, family and child-rearing," wrote a reporter for the *Washington Post*.²⁴ "One sharp generational contrast many Republicans hope to draw is between Barbara Bush—who embodies the

'GI generation' of women who put their first priority on their families—and the career-minded Hillary Clinton," wrote one reporter.²⁵ "After four years of demonstrating to the country that she is *not* Nancy Reagan, the President's wife tonight is staking out a new identity," reported the *Los Angeles Times*. "Barbara Bush, mother of five, grandmother of 12, college dropout, uncomplaining spouse of 47 years, is *not* Hillary Clinton."²⁶ "The true generation gap looms like an abyss between Barbara Bush, the 67-year-old happy homemaker, and Hillary Clinton, the 44-year-old outspoken overachiever," noted Robin Abcarian in another piece in the *Los Angeles Times*.²⁷ Here we have a doubled double bind. Outspoken condemns speech while overachiever questions competence and ambition.²⁸ "Happy" functions as an antonym for "outspoken," "homemaker" for "overachiever."

In some reports, the omissions were telling. "Barbara Bush, warm, friendly and grandmother of 12 children, is considered by Republican strategists the ideal of family values," noted *El Mundo*, "and a powerful counterweight to the wife of Bill Clinton, a lawyer who fights for women's rights."²⁹ As past head of The Children's Defense Fund, Clinton is best known not as a women's rights but as a children's rights activist. Are we to assume that because she is a warm, friendly grandmother of twelve, Barbara Bush is not a champion of women's rights? Why is Mrs. Bush described as warm and friendly but Mrs. Clinton bereft of adjectives? Is Clinton, by implication, cold and unfriendly? And why in the catalog of offspring is the Clintons' daughter Chelsea uncounted and unmentioned?

In an era in which polls are the nouns of political sentences, a pollster asked in mid-March about the comparative favorable ratings of Barbara Bush and Hillary Clinton. The *Washington Post*-ABC News poll "found Barbara Bush with a 75 percent favorability score while Hillary Clinton was seen favorably by only 28 percent."³⁰

Marriage as a Zero-Sum Game

But in one respect Barbara Bush and Hillary Clinton were painted in the same strokes. With marriage a zero-sum game, if one spouse was strong the other must be weak. Directly or indirectly, attacks on the strengths of the women simultaneously assailed the strength of their mates, and Barbara and George Bush came in for some of the same treatment.

"(Barbara) is described as Nancy Reagan with impeccable WASP manners, a backstage manipulator of a weak husband who makes Hillary Clinton look like a novice," wrote the *Los Angeles Times*.³¹ The same assumption pervaded columnist William Safire's characterizations of Nancy Reagan. "My point," he wrote in 1987, "is that Mr. Reagan is being made to look wimpish and helpless by a wife who has crossed the line from valuable confidante to behind-his-back political manipulator."³² "Don't sell Nancy Reagan short," he wrote in another column. "[S]he may be tougher than she lets her husband appear to be."³³

Former president Richard Nixon took the same tack. The campaign should make judicious use of Hillary Clinton, he observed. "If the wife comes through as being too strong and too intelligent, it makes the husband look like a wimp."³⁴ "Mr. Nixon," said the report in the *New York Times*, "praised Barbara Bush as a model of a wife who has her own opinions without upstaging her husband, and suggested that many Americans are still put off by a male politician who does not seem to be as strong as his wife. The former President allowed that, unfortunately, some voters agree with Cardinal de Richelieu, who said, 'Intellect in a woman is unbecoming.'"³⁵

The notion is not uniquely Western. In Japan, the engagement of diplomat Masako Owada to Crown Prince Naruhito was greeted with predictions "that given the new crown princess's background and character, she would dominate her husband and fundamentally change things inside the palace." "She's Japan's Hillary Clinton," observers told a U.S. reporter.³⁶

"There's never been a candidate's wife quite like Hillary Clinton," noted Jackie Judd on *Nightline*, "outspoken, independent, smart, but her strengths have been used to make Bill Clinton look like a wimp, even by a president who used to be accused of wimpiness himself." Judd then shows Bush saying, "And then there's Clinton, a very formidable candidate, but would Mario Cuomo run as Hillary's vice president?"³⁷

On the same program, Ted Koppel asks a guest, "[T]o what degree are we still such a retrogressive society that when we see a smart, tough woman up there, we almost infer that it reflects badly on the guy, that maybe he can't handle it on his own, maybe she's the one who wears the pants in the family, you know, one of those old clichés?"

The claim that Hillary was in charge had also been reflected in comparisons between Bill and Hillary that advantaged Hillary. The suggestion was that they could not both be comparably effective. In the zero-sum game, one has to be better. Marriage can't be a win-win partnership.

"She was in control," noted Steve Kroft who interviewed the Clintons about the Gennifer Flowers accusations for *60 Minutes*. "Hillary is tougher and more disciplined than Bill is. And she's analytical. Among his faults, he has a tendency not to think of the consequences of things he says. I think she knows," he said, not divining the emergence of cookies and tea. "She's got a ten-second delay. If something comes to her mind she doesn't think will play right, she cuts it off before anybody knows she's thinking it."³⁸

"Hillary Clinton seemed almost eager to put to rest the [Gennifer Flowers] issue and the rumors. Bill Clinton looked as though, on the whole, he'd rather be in Philadelphia. . . . She managed to have a sense of humor about it; he appeared less relaxed," said the *Washington Post*.³⁹ Bill Clinton "looked like a scared kid . . . Hillary Clinton, on the other hand, appeared impressively impervious, suggesting perhaps that the wrong Clinton is running for office."⁴⁰ "Indeed, many who watched the couple's appearance . . . thought that, in many ways, Mrs. Clinton handled the questions better than her husband did," observed the *New York*

Times.⁴¹ The notion persisted after the election. "Hillary Clinton's reputation in Arkansas was as the disciplined half of the Clinton-and-Clinton governing duo, the one who perhaps lacked her husband's rhetorical skills, but did her homework and didn't promise what she couldn't deliver."⁴²

In late September 1993, CNN and *USA Today* actually asked a national sample "Who do you think is smarter, Hillary Clinton or Bill Clinton?"⁴³ The replies: 40% answered Hillary, 22%, Bill, and 17% said "Both are the same."

In its benign form, this reportorial frame suggested that one complemented the other. "An Arkansas political columnist once melded their names into 'Billary Clinton' with good reason," noted a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*. "They are complementary, a political and marital team; if they were a law firm, she would be the litigator, he the mediator."⁴⁴ In its malign form, "Billary" said that B[ill] was whatever [H]illary made of him.

Along the same lines, conservative columnist William Safire described Bill Clinton as "looking like a hanger-on hungering for home-baked cookies." When Hillary delivered a lengthy introduction after his win in Illinois, Safire charged her with "usurpation of the candidate's moment."⁴⁵ In a revealing slip, Hillary Clinton's biographer Judith Warner misquotes this passage to say "Safire accused Hillary of 'usurpation of a candidate's strength.'"⁴⁶

The contrasts between the Clintons also pointed out who made more money and by how much. Hillary reportedly earned three to four times her husband's \$35,000 salary.⁴⁷ After noting the salary disparity, a piece in the *Los Angeles Times* added, "He earns less, as governor, than a successful Park Avenue dog walker."⁴⁸

In a marriage based on the partnership model, one might assume that it doesn't matter who contributes what to the common pool on which the family draws for its needs. But after the election, the country learned that who was supporting whom was in fact an issue for one member of the first household. Asked on January 13 whether Hillary would have a job outside the White House, the president-elect replied, "No. I don't want her to have a job outside the White House. I want her to help me. You know, besides that, I want to support her. She's been supporting me for 15 years. This is going to be the first time—we've been married since 1975, and the only year where I made more money than she did is the first year we were married. So I've got a lot of catching up to do. I haven't supported her very well all these years, so I want her to work there."⁴⁹

Until the Republican convention bewildered voters with its mean-spirited misrepresentations of Clinton's political positions, the Democratic nominee's spouse was more often than not cast as the *defective* other in her pair-offs with Mrs. Bush. She was not simply a feminist, but a *brash* feminist. "The campaign has pitted two strong women on each side against one another," noted the *Washington Post*. "Barbara Bush, the matriarch; Hillary Clinton, the brash feminist."⁵⁰ Her cookies and tea remark was that of

a "defiant feminist."⁵¹ A pollster for *Time* went so far as to ask respondents whether they agreed that Hillary Clinton "doesn't pay enough attention to her family."⁵²

When Hillary Clinton is described as tough, the word is most often a pejorative that exists a whisper away from the condemnatory "hard" and "hard-edged." "She may not want to be the candidate, but Hillary Clinton is a practiced politician, one who is not afraid of a fight, not in Arkansas politics. . . . Friends say Hillary Clinton is smart, tough, the next generation of political spouse. Critics say she is coming off too tough," noted a reporter on the *NBC Today Show*.⁵³

The words "tough" and "soft" have strange usages in American public address. In politics, "tough" doesn't mean difficult or hard to chew. A candidate tough enough to do the job is, in a word, competent. A candidate tough on crime and communism is interventionist and aggressive. Similarly, hard and soft form a related set that expresses a distinction between feature stories and straightforward reporting about real-world events. Indeed, "[o]ne irreverent woman journalist once commented that it came as no surprise to her that 'men made a distinction between 'soft' and 'hard' news and found the 'hard' kind much more desirable.'"⁵⁴ Simply put, *tough* embodies testosterone.

Madison Avenue ties "softness" to toilet tissue, the skin of babies and women, and low-key selling techniques. Saying that something is soft can mean vulnerable (as in Churchill's description of the soft underbelly of Europe). In politics, it seems to be an antonym of tough and hard or hard-edged.

Soft is also implied by other indictments of masculinity. Bush went to great lengths, as a result, to dispatch his "wimp" image and when Republican consultant Roger Ailes wanted to express disdain for Senator Paul Simon, who was opposed by an Ailes' client, Ailes described Simon as a "weenie."

Among other uses, these presumed tough/soft antonyms and their progeny signal whether a male candidate is taking stands on issues in what is presumed to be a gender appropriate way. At issue in 1988 was whether Dukakis was "tough" on crime, in 1972 whether McGovern was "soft" on Communism. When red-blooded, adrenaline-charged candidates went so far as to snort that their opponents were "squishy soft" on communism, the masculinity of the other party's candidate was on the line.

In the political arena, where toughness ostensibly means discipline and courage, the real subtext continues to be masculinity—just as it is in war and contact sports.

If men and women are seen as yin and yang, animus and anima, bipolar opposites, complementary parts of a whole, then it follows that an attribute necessary to one is not needed in the other. Moreover, what is *positive* in one is *negative* in the other. The assumption that men and women are inevitably and naturally ordained opposites is one of the sources of the

double binds women historically have faced. Breaking those binds requires that we recognize fundamental human similarities as well as differences between women and men.

Recasting Hillary Rodham Clinton

Where "soft" condemns a male candidate, it rains praise when sprinkled on the wife of the Democratic nominee. Until she "softened" her appearance, behavior, and speech. Mrs. Clinton's activities in the public sphere were enwrapped in adjectives such as "hard," "tough," "aggressive," and "feminist." The reports of the Republican convention and the convention itself used the word "feminist" as an epithet, an assault with a lethal part of speech. By contrast, Hillary Clinton's efforts to re-identify with the role of wife and mother were swathed by the press in softness. Characterization and condemnation of her speech would be tied to the former role, not the latter. During the primaries, after the votes for Super Tuesday indicated a clear victory for her husband, Hillary had transformed a speech introducing him into a speech in her own right. "Not just an introduction, this is a speech by Mrs. Clinton," observed NBC's Tom Brokaw.⁵⁵ She also spoke after Clinton's win in Illinois. Again network anchors expressed chagrin. In her wife-and-mother incarnation, Hillary was seen as silent or speaking softly.

"Hillary Clinton defined as the essence of hard-edged feminism," noted the *Washington Post*.⁵⁶ "They don't like Hillary because she's a working mom with a hard edge," reported the *Chicago Tribune*.⁵⁷ "Mrs. Clinton is trying to balance her image as a tough-minded working spouse and her new, softer look," observed the *New York Times*.⁵⁸

Slipping to the surface were hints that the "harder" side of Hillary Rodham Clinton was genuine, the other a charade, as if a woman could not be both tough and soft, or tough in some environments, soft in others. "Despite the kinder, gentler image Clinton has been working hard to project, her harder edge showed through in a few unscripted moments. When Brown delegates interrupted her address, she shot back, 'I've never known Jerry not to speak.'" ⁵⁹ "Now the critics snicker that, with polls telling her that her old assertive self hurt—especially, alas with women—she's softening her image," noted the *New York Times*.⁶⁰ "But I've noticed a definite change in her style, from being openly combative at the start of the race to being far more judicious now," one pundit, Dr. Myra G. Gutin, told the *New York Times*. "She's cloaking her aggression in velvet."⁶¹

When framing her choices in caricature, the reporters parodied one pole of the womb/brain choice but not the other. Implicitly her status as mother was treated as evidence that Hillary was all right after all. "Hillary Clinton's campaign to get her husband of 16 years elected has taken an unacknowledged mid-course change in emphasis," noted a profile in the *Los Angeles Times*, "to put forward the kinder, gentler Hillary Clinton, to

round off some of the sharper edges, to convince voters that she is not an ambitious, hectoring manipulator but one more working mom juggling through hectic days—a new American traditionalist, as down-home likable as she is intellectually admirable."⁶²

"Hillary Clinton, who was portrayed in a political cartoon as the rubber-clad, whip-wielding vixen, gave up the role this week domesticating her image with ladylike teas and cookies and motherly appearances with her 12-year-old daughter, Chelsea,"⁶³ said the *New York Times*, apparently believing that Clinton previously played the role of vixen. How else could she "give it up"?

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* captured the antitheses this way: Was she a "cold, mouthy . . . career-crazed . . . feminist who commandeers microphones, a gaffe-prone, power-starved liability," or a "warm, down-to-earth mother"?⁶⁴ Hillary Clinton was compared to Lady Macbeth, Eva Peron, and tagged the Winnie Mandela of American politics. Was she, reporters asked, a supportive spouse or "the overbearing yuppie wife from hell"?⁶⁵

Meanwhile, Republicans, said the press, painted her "as an unwifely feminist with undue influence on her husband's policy-making—Gloria Steinem with the claws of Madame Nhu."⁶⁶ "[I]n portions of the George Bush generation," noted one profile, "she has come across to some as a bossy, humorless Valkyrie with a briefcase, the arrogant advance scout of an unknown, unnerving shift of generation and class."⁶⁷ "Claws of Madame Nhu" and "bossy, humorless Valkyrie" were, of course, the dramatic riffs of the reporters on far more pedestrian Republican prose.

Some articles hinted that for the Clintons career and marriage formed an unholy alliance. The *Los Angeles Times* reported "Now in the general election, the brassy, career-minded wife who alienated some homemakers is being tested at every turn by Clinton's opponents."⁶⁸ "People said they were driven, this couple," observed the *New York Times*, "hanging on to each other for appearance, or self-protection, tied by a thread of ambition."⁶⁹

Adaptations by Mrs. Clinton and the Democratic campaign created a climate in which attack would backfire. Those alterations in image and tone were prompted in part by an April memo from Clinton pollster Stan Greenberg reporting that public disapproval of Hillary and her relationship to the Democratic contender opened the Democrats to a Republican attack on "family values." The public believed, implied the memo, that Hillary Clinton wanted power for herself.⁷⁰

Clinton modified her approach. Where her speechmaking had provoked comment in the primaries, she was now more often seen applauding from the sidelines. Noted at the Democratic convention was the fact that she had, moreover, "softened" her hair style and her clothing. "Though some voters say they like her precisely because she is a modern role model, so many others have been put off by her assertiveness that she has begun

favoring her softer side," wrote the *New York Times*.⁷¹ "En route from Arkansas to New York the wardrobe had been softened to favor pastels," commented the *Chicago Tribune*.⁷²

In the process of "softening" her appearance and her tone, the press observed, Mrs. Clinton also had begun to more clearly focus on her dedication to the cause of children. And the voice in which she spoke, noted the reporters, was now the voice traditionally identified with women who move from private to public spheres in order to defend the virtues of the home.

"A high school student . . . asked Hillary Clinton a question that has bedeviled her husband's Presidential campaign for months. He wanted to know what her role would be in a Clinton Administration. . . . 'I want to be a voice for children in the White House,' she said softly. . . . The label is well-suited to Mrs. Clinton's experience as a longtime advocate of children's rights, but is also carefully tailored to match voters' expectations of what is appropriate work for the President's wife."⁷³

"Hillary Clinton is talking softly and gently these days about her interest in children," observed the *Chicago Tribune*. "Her primary goal, she says, is to make life better for children."⁷⁴

Reporters saw "soft and silent" as Hillary Clinton's new watchwords. So too did the Democratic campaign. Where Barbara Bush would speak from the podium of her party's convention, Hillary Clinton would not. With deft stage management, the Democrats used their convention in July to swaddle Hillary Clinton in protective layers that for decades have shielded women in the public sphere from attack. Daughter Chelsea emerged from the background to be displayed on the cover of *People* with her loving parents. Mrs. Clinton no longer spoke in her own right. With these moves came press descriptions that put him back in charge of the relationship. "Mr. Clinton has done what it takes, from restyling his hair to confessing his sins to muting his wife."⁷⁵

She now spoke when invited by him or when his failing voice dictated that someone speak in his stead. And when called on to play this role she "echoed" her husband's views, said the press. Gone was the assumption that she spoke on her own behalf.

As Lynn Sheer of ABC pointed out, in her first incarnation Mrs. Clinton had violated what once was a sacrosanct rule for spouses. "Rules to Wives of Candidates" issued by Republicans back in 1972, advised them: "When your husband is speaking, watch him proudly. Never appear bored. Never detract from him. Steer clear of controversial statements."⁷⁶

No longer was she usurping; instead she was "pitching in" and spoke words one might easily associate with a mother.

ANDREA MITCHELL: "Clinton has campaigned so much in Michigan that he jokes about taking up residence. His voice almost gone, Hillary Clinton has been pitching in."

MRS. HILLARY CLINTON: "We'll have to be real quiet to be able to hear him."

GOVERNOR CLINTON: "If you will be my voice tomorrow, I'll be yours for four years."⁷⁷

And in Illinois, "Hillary Clinton urged Illinois delegates on Tuesday to vote for her chocolate-chip recipe in a bake-off with Barbara Bush," reported the *Chicago Tribune*. "The kinder, gentler, more pastel Hillary heaped praise on the mayor and Chicago's unique political history."⁷⁸ The Republicans, however, hadn't noticed.

Politics speaks in the language of veneration and vilification. In 1992 the Democratic and Republican exchanges over Hillary Rodham Clinton mirror the extremes available to characterize powerful women. Literature sold in the Republican "Spirit of America" hall next to the arena at the Republican convention called Mrs. Clinton a "femi nazi."⁷⁹ Republican National Committee Chair Richard Bond described her ideology as "radical feminism."⁸⁰ From the podium she was denounced as "a militant feminist lawyer who equates marriage with slavery,"⁸¹ the "ideological leader of a 'Clinton-Clinton' administration that would push a radical-feminist agenda,"⁸² "a feminist extremist,"⁸³ "a champion of 'radical feminism' who believes that 12-year-olds should have the right to sue their parents,"⁸⁴ and as a "radical feminist," who along with her husband pushes an agenda that includes "abortion on demand, a litmus test for the Supreme Court, homosexual rights, discrimination against religious schools and 'women in combat.'"⁸⁵ A *New York Times* article put the pieces together and saw them portraying "an unwifely feminist."⁸⁶ Outside the Republican convention, a live elephant crushed a Hillary doll. *Spy* magazine pushed such rhetoric to its absurdist extreme in February 1993 by depicting the First Lady as a leather-clad dominatrix with a whip.

According to incumbent President George Bush, Hillary Clinton was not simply an aggressive lawyer but "a very aggressive lawyer" who had "inject[ed] herself into the issue business" as part of a Clinton campaign that included the claim "two for one" and had an "activist past." As a result, he felt justified in "going after the wife."⁸⁷ The Democrats responded by questioning George Bush's testosterone level. Of the Republican attacks on Hillary Clinton, the Democratic nominee observed, "Nobody ever talked about a co-presidency. There wasn't a co-governorship in Arkansas. You'd think George Bush was running for first lady instead of for president half the time."⁸⁸

Press response to the Republican attacks was disapproving. Dan Rather labeled Buchanan's speech "raw meat," the *Washington Post* suggested that Buchanan "sprayed his targets" and "assailed" Hillary Clinton,⁸⁹ and issued "blistering opening attacks."⁹⁰ The *Post* had expected the convention "to be a festival of Clinton-bashing" but noted, as if it were unexpected, "As it turned out, the target has been not only the candidate, but also his

wife, Hillary.⁹¹ "Pat Buchanan can be mean and intolerant, as he demonstrated on Monday night, when he . . . misrepresented Hillary Clinton's views on children," opined Colbert King in an op-ed.⁹² The *New York Times* declared: "They bashed Hillary and Bill Clinton. Day after day some Bush surrogate spoke of Governor Clinton's sex life. But probably nastiest of all were the references to Mrs. Clinton."⁹³

"Bashing" was the word of choice to describe the attacks, which also were tagged "unnecessarily divisive." Military descriptions escalated. "In his unnecessarily divisive attack on homosexuals, Hillary Clinton and abortion rights, Buchanan hurled his polemicist's spear," reported the *Los Angeles Times*.⁹⁴

Employing the rhetoric of war to describe the Republican rhetoric recontextualized Hillary. The Republican attacks positioned her the same way that her husband had in the Busy Bee cafe in the hours before she undercut that view with the "cookies and tea" observation. But this time, the "softer and more silent" spouse fit the role of vulnerable victim when attacked by the Republicans—and protected wife when defended by her man.

The new role, of course, created problems of its own. Where before she was criticized for being outspoken, now Hillary was chided for failing to be herself. "We ought to have reached the stage where we accept women for what they are, not try to put them in some cookie cutter," noted feminist leader and former Congresswoman Bella Abzug.⁹⁵

While drawing attention to this apparently calculated "makeover," the press nonetheless shifted adjectives in response to the Republican forays. No longer was Hillary Clinton portrayed as tough, hard-edged, and Machiavellian. She was cast instead in a role rich with empathy, the unjustified object of unfair attack. Characterizing the Republican attack as an assault with a blunt instrument, the press created, by implication, a vulnerable heroine. And they implicitly invoked the cultural rule: Men don't attack women, they protect and defend them.

The Republicans, for their part, played straight into their hands. Where Hillary had been read as a champion of the liberated woman, Marilyn Quayle was seen as the defender of traditional homemaking. But in her speech at the Republican National Convention, the vice president's wife seemed more explicitly intolerant of the choice of career than Hillary Clinton had ever seemed about traditional homemaking. "Most women do not wish to be liberated from their essential natures as women," she proclaimed. "Most of us love being mothers or wives, which gives our lives a richness that few men or women get from professional accomplishments alone." And in what was widely seen as a jab at Hillary, she added, "Not everyone believed that the family was so oppressive that women could only thrive apart from it."

Where Hillary Clinton had stumbled into "cookies and tea" in a crowded restaurant in Chicago, here was a carefully scripted, nationally televised address from the podium of the Republican National Convention. Women in our focus groups, Republican as well as Democratic,

including many who had expressed serious reservations about Hillary Clinton's views of marriage, family, and career, now ricocheted into her corner. "I could not believe it," said a 28-year-old homemaker and mother of three in Dallas, who earlier had stated she would probably vote Republican. "I said to my mother, I don't know where she gets off speaking for women. She makes the other one, Hillary, seem warm and cuddly for comparison." "My essential nature says that I am not going to vote for her essential nature," added a 56-year-old grandmother who works as an insurance broker. "They are trying to attract to, the right wingers who think women, those at home, housewives, belong in caves," said a 43-year-old male mechanic and father of two. "My response was to defend Hillary who I don't even like. You just have to say, it has nothing to do with the president. It's politics." "I can't get over the hypocrisy of it at all," said a 24-year-old male high school teacher and father of one. "[Marilyn] Quayle is a lawyer . . . runs his office . . . chases around making speeches . . . is the brains of the two. She and Hillary could be twins. Where does she get off attacking working women?"

"The Republicans have described the enemy and she sounds like me," wrote Dianne Klein in a column in the *Los Angeles Times*.⁹⁶ The freedom to choose emerged as a responsive refrain. "We must also remember that it is not so important which road we choose to travel but that the decision to choose is ours to make," wrote a law student in an opinion piece for the *Los Angeles Times*.⁹⁷

When Pat Buchanan and Marilyn Quayle suggested that Hillary Clinton would destroy the family as well as traditional roles for women, reporters responded, in effect, that it was the Republicans who had violated tradition by "bashing" a woman.

The tide suddenly turned. As the *New York Times* noted prophetically, "Hillary-Taunting" had its perils "if the electorate comes to see it as intolerance of working women in general."⁹⁸ Conservative commentator George Will expressed the same sentiment on ABC after George Bush's acceptance speech. "Tonight was a sustained innuendo against the Democratic Party—that they don't like marriages, families, women in the kitchen, or children. . . . They're saying Bill Clinton—and generically Democrats—are bad people. . . . I think there are an awful lot of Democrats who are going to be profoundly offended by the innuendo."

What the evolving press analysis of Hillary Clinton as working woman, working mother, working wife ultimately produced was commentary about the stereotypes that had governed the perceptions and coverage of Hillary Rodham Clinton. "The irony is that if Mrs. Clinton were up on that podium as a candidate, she would be golden, with her Yale Law Degree, her board positions, her smarts and her looks," noted the *New York Times*.⁹⁹ "But Hillary Rodham Clinton is running for First Lady, an anachronistic title for an amorphous position. The job description is a stereotype that no real woman has ever fit except perhaps June Cleaver on her good days."

The ongoing scrutiny provided the country with an extended opportunity to examine its changing understanding of women in power. In the end, Clinton defused voter's fears that she would function as the power behind the throne by adopting the guise women used historically to gain power: She would be the advocate of children, she said—softly.

Forming the backdrop to the instinct to condemn Hillary were the twin assumptions that working women are feminists, and feminists devalue full-time homemaking and homemakers. "Women who choose not to work . . . don't sit home and bake cookies," observed Lee Hart, spouse of 1984 and 1988 presidential contender Gary Hart. "One of the problems in the early years of the feminist movement was the real put-down of women who chose to stay at home, take care of the children and be a mother."¹⁰⁰ Hart was echoing the comments of historian Jean Bethke Elshtain: "In many early feminist accounts mothering was portrayed as a condition of terminal psychological and social decay, total self-abnegation, physical deterioration, and absence of self-respect," Elshtain maintained. "Mothers were demeaned under the guise of 'liberating' them."¹⁰¹

Whether a fair characterization of early feminism or not, this idea was fueled by clashes such as the argument between Betty Friedan and Simone de Beauvoir over whether mothers should be compensated for staying at home caring for their children. In June 1975 Friedan argued that "There could be a voucher system which a woman who chooses to continue her profession or her education and have little children could use to pay for child care. But if she chooses to take care of her own children full time, she would earn the money herself." "No woman should be authorized to stay at home to raise her children," replied de Beauvoir. "Society should be totally different. Women should not have that choice, precisely because if there is such a choice, too many women will make that one."¹⁰²

Confirming a Woman's Right to Choose

But an important result of the 1992 campaign controversy was in fact the affirmation to the contrary that it produced. Nearly lost in all the fuss was the fact that women as different as Barbara Bush, Hillary Clinton, and Marilyn Quayle would finally come to recite the same premises: that the truly liberated woman was free to choose full-time homemaking, full-time career, or some combination.

Quayle, in an effort to calm the negative reaction to her convention address, said, "We don't have to reject the prospect of marriage and children to succeed. We don't have to reject our essential natures as women to prosper in what was once the domain of men. It is no longer an either-or situation."¹⁰³ And Hillary Clinton added a stock line to her repertoire. At the hint of an opportunity, she reiterates that each woman should choose what is best for her. She carried the same message into the White House. When asked by Larry King whether she had changed the pattern for First Ladies, Clinton responded, "Larry, I don't think there should be a pattern.

I really think that each individual ought to be free to do what she thinks is best for herself and her husband and her country. I have a lot of respect for all the women who have been in this position and I think every one of them made a significant contribution, but they may have done it in a different way. . . . Everybody should be permitted to be who they are."¹⁰⁴ Barbara Bush took the same position when told initially of the "cookies and tea" remark. "Everybody's different and that's a great thing," she said.¹⁰⁵

After the media had put its spin on Hillary Clinton's "cookies and tea" remark, Clinton aides revised it to fit the new media frame, and the media accepted those revisions, in the process sharpening the focus on women's roles. More pointedly, the media began to examine the frame itself.

By November 20, 1992, a caption on the photo of Barbara Bush greeting Hillary Clinton at the White House read, "Tough Political Insider Meets Warm Friend and Devoted Mother." The crash of stereotypes hitting the ground in shards could be heard in the next sentence. "Both descriptions fit Hillary Clinton and both fit Barbara Bush, who met at the White House to search for other common ground."¹⁰⁶

Gwen Ifill, who wrote the story for the *Times*, recalls, "The story came before the picture. The photographer came and showed me the picture. They took my lead and made it the cut line. When I was writing that story I decided to play to stereotypes that applied to both women. Barbara Bush had been portrayed as a warm, fuzzy grandmother. Hillary Clinton had been portrayed as a hard careerist. It didn't take much to see that the opposite had been said about both. They both had been stereotyped."¹⁰⁷

The original context in which "cookies and tea" had been uttered—charges of conflict of interest surrounding Mrs. Clinton's Arkansas law practice—would re-emerge during the Clinton administration in the form of allegations about investments that came to be known simply as Whitewater. But continued press coverage and argument over appropriate roles for women had exposed stereotypical assumptions to the harsh light of day, and they did not weather it well. In a real sense, voters had chosen to send both Mr. and Mrs. Clinton to the White House. Once there, Hillary Rodham Clinton reclaimed her birth name and became the point person in the most important proposed piece of domestic legislation of her husband's first term.

The break from the past was seismic. A decade and a half earlier, First Lady Rosalynn Carter had stirred controversy by merely attending cabinet meetings. "When I got into trouble with the press," she recalled, "it was about going to Cabinet meetings. . . . I just sat in a chair by the door and listened. I never entered into any conversation or discussion."¹⁰⁸

Hillary Clinton's competence was acknowledged by those who heard her Congressional testimony. "Hillary Clinton, on Capitol Hill, Wins Raves, If Not a Health Plan," read the front-page headline in the *New York Times*.¹⁰⁹ In the opening paragraph where she "captivated and dominated two usually grumpy House Committees," Clinton was credited with the traditionally masculine (she "dominated") and well as feminine (she "capti-



This picture, which appeared on the front page of the *New York Times* on November 20, 1992, was captioned, "Tough Political Insider Meets Warm Friend and Devoted Mother. Both descriptions fit Hillary Clinton and both fit Barbara Bush, who met at the White House to search for other common ground. Mrs. Bush gave Mrs. Clinton a tour a day after their husbands met there." (Jose R. Lopez/NYT Pictures.)

vated") virtues. She was tough ("trolling for votes") and caring ("offering . . . reassurance"). "So beyond restating the health plan's principles and offering every bit of reassurance she could muster, she was there trolling for votes."¹¹⁰ In another line "[h]er voice [was] momentarily snappish," a phrase unlikely to be applied to a man; at another point she garnered a more typically male adjective when she gave "Republicans a steely reception at both committees when they expressed doubt about the financing of the system."¹¹¹

"I was aware of the pairings ("captivated . . . dominated") when I wrote the lead," recalls Adam Clymer. "I wanted to convey that she was a very special witness who had both the knowledge and the authority that came with her position and was an attractive, smart woman who affected Congress for that reason as well."¹¹²

Transcending the Traditional Constraints

The descriptions of Mrs. Clinton's presentation suggested that for the moment, at least, she had overcome two of the no-win situations haunting women. She had transcended the narrow range of attributes traditionally assumed to constrain a woman speaking in public—the ancient restraints of silence or shame. And she established her competence without sacrificing her femininity. Typically antithetical adjectives, adverbs, and verbs were now paired to laud Hillary Clinton's success. "But no previous First Lady has occupied center stage so *aggressively* or *disarmed* her critics more effectively (emphasis mine)," noted another article in the *New York Times*.¹¹³

Reporters and columnists informed their readers that with her performance, Hillary Clinton had widened the range of options open to future presidential spouses. "As the debate over the Administration health care plan she helped to create comes to the fore," noted a *New York Times* caption, "Hillary Rodham Clinton is solidifying her position as the power beside, rather than behind, the throne."¹¹⁴ "The national consciousness has shifted, slightly but perceptibly," noted Jane R. Eisner, the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* deputy editor of the editorial page. Hillary Clinton "proved the early critics wrong, and for that I believe, many women in this country are privately grateful."¹¹⁵

When a national sample was asked late in September 1993 to agree or disagree with the statement "She [Hillary Clinton] is a good role model overall for American women," 76% agreed. To the statement: "She is a good role model for mothers," 61% agreed; 46% found her "too pushy"; 41% said that she "is too strong a feminist."¹¹⁶

Queried about his changed attitude toward Mrs. Clinton, Republican Senator Robert Dole, who is married to Red Cross President Elizabeth Dole, noted, "I'm used to smart women. At least Hillary doesn't ask for blood."¹¹⁷ "She has established her qualifications," observed Representative John Dingell. Concern about her role has "all abated."¹¹⁸ "[S]he has earned the respect of everyone (except the wackos) with her handling of the health care issue. Indeed, she has gotten everyone (except the wackos) to agree that we need health care for everyone," commented talk show host and columnist Larry King.¹¹⁹ On September 28, 1993, a *USA Today* poll found 60% approving and 29% disapproving of Hillary Clinton's handling of health-care policy.¹²⁰

The change was reflected in our focus groups. In Minneapolis, in mid-October 1993, a group of white, middle-aged, middle-class individuals who had met throughout the 1992 campaign reassembled. Midway through the discussion, attention turned to Hillary Clinton's testimony before the Congressional committees.

FEMALE NEWSLETTER EDITOR: "[T]he only experience I have of Hillary Clinton is through the papers and I can only speak to that. But it seemed as if everyone was saying, 'This woman knows her stuff' and that

even the Republican House and Senate have a great deal of respect for her and her knowledge and that any question that they had for her, she was able to answer, but of course, I am getting this from the newspaper. I didn't watch any hearings."

MALE GRADUATE STUDENT: "I did."

MODERATOR: "What was your reaction?"

MALE GRADUATE STUDENT: "She sounded so confident. That she handled the questions from people so straightforward with each person. That before they got to the newscasters who did the analysis of it, you could feel the shift in the room of people really paying attention and respecting how she handled herself . . . [she] was so genuine. It was a sharp contrast to him, I thought."

MODERATOR: "To whom?"

MALE GRADUATE STUDENT: "To Bill Clinton. The contrast being that I never understood where the slick stuff came from until I heard her speak. When I heard her speak, she sounded like she had some real centering, some real balance to what she was saying when she would answer questions. She could do the back and forth, but she had a kind of professional tone to her. She didn't backslap with it and she literally answered everybody. It was sort of amazing. So I was really impressed."

MODERATOR: "Did the fact that she was a woman make any difference in your response?"

MALE GRADUATE STUDENT: "As impressed if she were a man? No, maybe not. I think my impression was probably because I had been slanted toward thinking . . . that she was sort of like pushy from behind and that she was kind of like trying to angle stuff."

FEMALE ENGINEER: "More manipulative than really knowledgeable."

MALE GRADUATE STUDENT: "Yeah, that is the word, than knowledgeable and I just picked up such brief snippets of things from the newspapers, but when I actually heard her . . . it was a really long time before anybody broke in. It must have been an hour's worth of questions back and forth to her presenting and people really . . . I don't know who the Senator was, but one guy was really trying to get to her and it was just like water off of a duck's back. She had her answers. She didn't take offense to the kind of remarks that were being made and yeah, so I am guilty of being overly impressed because she seemed much more than I thought she was."

FEMALE HOMEMAKER: "Part of it was the shock, you know the surprise as you said because you have been led to believe something different about her."

FEMALE PHYSICIAN: ". . . she is an excellent role model for women. Someone who knows her stuff and presents herself very well she doesn't have to look at her notes. . . . You know, she just handles it all and all the press and even the medical papers have been pretty favorable towards her. Even though physicians in general are having a hard time with this

health care reform stuff. So I am very impressed and my respect for her has grown tremendously."

Even Richard Nixon had come around. No longer was he concerned that a strong woman makes her husband look like a wimp. Instead he told the *Today Show's* audience on February 17, 1993, that "if I wouldn't criticize Bill Clinton I certainly wouldn't take on Hillary, because she is a very intelligent, very strong, very effective First Lady. I think it's very appropriate for her to do what she believes is the right thing to do. . . . [A]s far as Hillary Clinton is concerned, with her great abilities, her intelligence and her strong beliefs, she can be a very effective help to her husband, the president, and I think the American people will like that. For example, if she can come up with a solution on health care, then I say we're all for it, because we certainly need one. The national health care is a scandal."¹²¹

Questions about career and motherhood, however, lingered. Larry King asked Clinton, for example, why she and Bill had not had a second child and learned that they had tried. And long-lived assumptions about who is responsible for child care continued to surface. A widely circulated story, unconfirmed by the White House, reports that when Chelsea sought an aspirin at school, the nurse insisted that she obtain parental permission. "Call my Dad," says Chelsea. "My mom's away."

In November, our Minnesota focus group struck up a dialogue about Hillary Clinton's role as a mother. Joyce, who stayed at home with her three young children, was disturbed by press comments that Hillary had "put to rest" any questions that a woman could be a good mother and also have a "tremendous" impact on national affairs. "I am sure it has impacted her relationship with her child and that to say that it doesn't is misleading." There followed a lengthy discussion in which both male and female respondents suggested, variously, that Bill Clinton's responsibilities might also complicate his role as a father; that having a mother who was prominent and successful might have a positive impact on a child; and that a 13 year old might not need as much mothering as younger children. The majority of respondents defended Hillary's both-and role, with the emphasis on her function as a role model for other women. The discussion largely centered on what were considered overwhelming demands placed on women who had to juggle homemaking and career. What was resisted was the possible re-emergence of the "super-Mom" idea as it was embodied in Hillary Clinton. Respondents suggested that necessary compromises between home and career had become acceptable, and questioned whether the female partner should accept the full burden of household responsibilities.

While this discussion explored and attempted to untangle the various vestiges of the womb/brain bind, in other dialogues other binds remained fully operative. When the Minneapolis focus group was shown a clip of an interview of Hillary Clinton by Katie Couric, the group's response subtly

undercuts Clinton's claim to equality by focusing at length on facets of her *appearance* that signal difference. It is hard to imagine a male eliciting a comparable response.

FEMALE: "She looks like June Cleaver in the clip there."
[inaudible]

FEMALE: "Yeah, where are the pearls?"

FEMALE: "It doesn't seem to be appropriate hair for her. . . ."

The discussion of the hair style continues. Then:

FEMALE: "I wonder if this hair style doesn't have something to do with having to sell her health plan to the House or Senate."

MALE: "Well it certainly is not one to make you think of her as at all appealing. My first reaction to it was, like, 'Yeuhh.' I certainly wouldn't want to run my fingers through that hair."

After more discussion of the hair, this:

MALE: "I have heard rumors that she had her face lifted."

MODERATOR: "Anyone else?"

MALE: "Me."

FEMALE: "Not I."

MODERATOR: "Has anyone else heard it?"

MALE: "I did. I heard that she had a facelift and it was very noticeable if you looked and I don't see enough of her to know."

FEMALE: "You heard that rumor also?"

MODERATOR: "What did you hear?"

MALE: "It was a bad job. . . ."

In a similar vein, publication of a series of portraits of Hillary Clinton in *Vogue* elicited a rush of stereotyped notions from the media that pitted femininity against competence. If Hillary Clinton's "softer" approach had helped turn the tide of public opinion in her favor, it had not resolved an old dilemma. One can, say the canards, be feminine, expressed photographically in soft focus and flowing silk, or masculine—expressed *not* in appearance but in substance, coded here as "an individual," and "tough"—the hoary cover for "competent" but not both.

"It just seems kind of odd," said Michael Deaver, once President Ronald Reagan's image maestro. "Now that she's proven herself as an individual and been tough, why then get back to an image strictly based on femininity?" In other words, appearing "feminine" risks perception of competence, toughness, individuality. Either/or, not both/and.¹²²

Barely veiled in *New York Times* reporter Maureen Dowd's summary of reaction is the assumption by supporters and critics that power and motherhood, testifying and baking are incompatible. If they co-exist, one must be more real than the other. "Her admirers say that she has adroitly helped the country adjust to the notion of a First Lady sharing power with her husband by periodically *doling out* softer, more traditional images like

hostess, mother and wife," notes Dowd. "But some complain that her cascading images—changing hairstyles so many times, testifying on the Hill about health care one minute and chatting happily about Christmas layouts—are dizzying and unsettling, and suggest that the 46-year-old First Lady still wakes up every day struggling to create a persona. 'It doesn't feel genuine,' said Sheila Tate, who worked as an aide to Nancy Reagan and George Bush" (emphasis added).¹²³

Although it is invigorating to believe that a visible, talented, powerful woman can once and for all dispatch the stereotypes into which others would box her, that's just not the way the world works. Despite her "disarming" but "aggressive" performance on the Hill, residues of the silence/shame bind pocked the surface of an exchange in a segment of the *McLaughlin Group* after the hearing.

"Was she a vixen?" McLaughlin wondered, in an exchange laden with double meaning. "No," responded an admiring Mort Kondracke, "She was *good*." But if not a vixen, Fred Barnes points out, neither was she a virginal saint. The canine interlude from Jack Germond is an unexpected metaphorical fillip.

MORT KONDRACKE: "She did it with skill and with flair."

JOHN McLAUGHLIN: "You mean like a vixen?"

KONDRACKE: "No, not like a vixen. She's good. She is very good. . . ."

McLAUGHLIN: "Is she tough?"

KONDRACKE: "She's tough."

McLAUGHLIN: "Is she resilient?"

KONDRACKE: "She's resilient."

McLAUGHLIN: "Is she brilliant?"

KONDRACKE: "Yes, I'd say she's brilliant."

JACK GERMOND: "I don't know why we're all marveling at her performance just because she's a First Lady and we've never seen this before. We've never seen a dog play first base, either, but you know it's going to happen one of these days."

FRED BARNES: "The comments by people like Rostenkowski (D. Ill.) and most of the other members of these committees were patronizing. Of course she did a good job testifying. Arney [who had claimed earlier that the Clinton plan was a "Dr. Kevorkian prescription that will kill 3.1 million American jobs"] was one of the few people willing to treat her as a smart, tough person, and not as Mother Teresa."¹²⁴

If her testimony on health-care reform seemed to confirm that a first lady could lead, indeed that the Clintons were operating a partnership on health reform, discussion of the demise of the plan presupposed her responsibility and his accountability. The questions raised focused not on her gender but on the hazards of entrusting a liberal family member with power. Would a better plan have been produced by someone more accountable to the

electorate or more likely to be fired if she failed? Had Hillary overridden Bill's best instincts and drawn the White House to a plan more liberal than the country would accept?

The experiences of Hillary Rodham Clinton as spouse of a Democratic contender and as First Partner are an ongoing demonstration of the power of cultural binds that enjoin women in general, and of the ways in which women continue to surmount or maneuver around them. These binds are not new conspiracies, but invocations of ancient constraints—traps that emerge in different guises over time, even as they continue to lose their teeth. What those basic constraints are, how they have been modulated to fit contemporary issues, how they play into each other, and how women continue to expose and loosen them, form the subject of this book.