The purpose of this thesis is to analyze Hillary Rodham Clinton’s 1995 speech, “Women’s Rights are Human Rights,” delivered to the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women, and Laura Bush’s March 8, 2002, International Women’s Day Address, delivered to the U.N. Using Bonnie J. Dow and Mari Boor Tonn’s (1993) conception of political feminine style, this analysis argues that first lady rhetoric represents significant political speech by women and that political feminine style is a useful analytical tool for studying the words of female political rhetors. Additionally, this analysis suggests implications for Dow and Tonn’s methodology, as well as implications for the study of speeches by first ladies.
POLITICAL FEMININE STYLE AND FIRST LADY RHETORIC:

FEMINIST IMPLICATIONS OF A WHITE-GLOVE PULPIT

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Sarah Meinen
Miami University
Oxford, Ohio
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Advisor____________________________________
Dr. Ben Voth

Reader_____________________________________
Dr. Lisa McLaughlin

Reader_____________________________________
Dr. Marjorie Keeshan Nadler
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS. ................................................................. iv

Chapter 1: The Critical Problem

  Selection of Artifacts. ......................................................... 2
  Explanation of Rhetorical Situations ................................. 4
  Selection of Method. .......................................................... 14
  Significance of First Ladies. ............................................. 15
  Overview of Thesis. ......................................................... 22

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

  First Ladies and Their Changing Roles. ............................. 24
  Public/Private Tensions and the First Lady. ...................... 32
  First Ladies and the Emergence of Feminine Style. .............. 39
  Political Feminine Style as a Tool To Analyze First Lady Rhetoric. 43

Chapter 3: Rhetorical Analysis

  Clinton and Bush’s Rhetorical Situations. ......................... 50
  Using Personal Experience to Back Claims. ....................... 54
  Clinton’s Use of Personal Experience to Back Claims. .......... 56
  Bush’s Use of Personal Experience to Back Claims. ............ 60
  Politicizing the Personal. ................................................ 63
  Hillary Clinton Gets Politically Personal. ........................ 64
  Laura Bush gets Politically Personal ............................... 68
  Exhibiting the Feminine Ethic of Care .............................. 70
  Hillary Clinton’s Exhibition of the Feminine Care Ethic....... 71
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Chapter One: The Critical Problem

*I don’t intend for this to take on a political tone. I’m just here for the drugs.*

-- Nancy Reagan

The week of September 12, 2001, former first lady, Hillary Rodham Clinton, and sitting first lady, Laura Welch Bush, both stepped out wearing the same navy blue Yves Saint Laurent pantsuit. Their pictures, which ran side-by-side in the November 2002, issue of *Vogue*, revealed two women who looked remarkably different, considering they sported identical blazers and slacks. Bush chose a crisp, white button-down shirt and understated gold jewelry to accessorize her power suit; Clinton donned a turquoise twin sweater set, with the cardigan looped jauntily around her shoulders. While the caption under their pictures assured readers that their suits were the same, the first ladies’ fashion statements were anything but similar. Wearing the same suit, Laura Bush bore no resemblance to Hillary Clinton, and vice versa.

Just as Bush and Clinton manage to put dissimilar spins on the same outfit, so too, do they present different pictures of first ladyship. Filling the same role, the women define their job—and perform it—very differently. While Hillary Clinton drew criticism from the right, who claimed she overstepped her ceremonial and wifely bounds by playing a policy role in her husband’s administration, the left jeers Laura Bush for her reluctance to mount a public platform or address a controversial issue. Print and television new sources were quick to label Hillary Clinton a feminist, hurling the label like an insult and branding her a shrill. However, Laura Bush has been speaking out on behalf of global women’s rights since the US invaded Afghanistan; despite her repeated speeches about global women’s rights, few have used the f-word to describe her. Quiet
and unassuming, the reticent Bush does not polarize her audience like Clinton did throughout her stint as first lady, even though Laura, like Hillary before her, frequently discusses women’s rights.

A July, 2002, Pew Research Center poll records a 70 percent approval rating for Bush, speculating that her high numbers could be related to her “public policy speeches on education and the plight of women in Afghanistan” (Copp, 2002, p.30). Despite her healthy approval rating, Bush still lags behind her predecessor as the first lady who best represents the ideal president’s wife. 30 percent of those polled picked Clinton as the model first spouse; only 19 percent chose Bush (Copp, 2002). Perhaps the first lady’s role is evolving, changing to fit America’s updated version of ideal womanhood. Maybe Americans are more willing to accept public policy from the president’s wife, as we become more willing to accept women in public roles. However, just as everyday American women struggle to juggle domestic responsibilities with business and civic roles, so, too, is the first lady jostled between private and public worlds.

Selection of Artifacts

Both Hillary Clinton and Laura Bush, despite their carefully cultivated, disparate images, have come before the United Nations to speak on behalf of global women’s rights. Their pro-women rhetoric is worthy of our analysis for several reasons. First, when viewed side-by-side, the words of the two women speak volumes about their chosen roles. Their subjects and situations may be similar, but the first ladies are significantly stylistically different. Second, a comparison of their speeches helps better illuminate the idea of political feminine style, first explained by Bonnie J. Dow and Mari Boor Tonn (1993). This type of rhetoric seeks to create a feminist counterpublic, a place
where previously private concerns can command public attention and a place where an alternative political philosophy can offer a critique of politics as usual. Additionally, both Bush and Clinton are public women – even though Laura claims she would be more content in the familiar private sphere. They have access to a national platform, and their words stand to impact millions. Because the first lady is not an elected official, she has more freedom to speak her mind, as she does not directly answer to voters. At the same time, the public might not listen as raptly to the first ladies words, as we would to the words of an elected official.

While first ladies are usually more popular than their husbands, they do not escape criticism, either (Burrell, 2001). As a result, their discourse gives us a firsthand glimpse of women who are forced to negotiate the rocky road that runs between the public sphere and the private sphere. The first lady dramatizes the average woman’s struggle to negotiate a public self in a society that tries to restrict her to private life; their conflicts are our conflicts, exaggerated and even more complicated than our own. Studying first lady rhetoric allows us to better understand women’s place in contemporary American society, helping us gauge the progress we have made on our journey toward public citizenship. In their book Women and Public Policy, M. Margaret Conway, David Ahern, and Gertrude Steuernagel (1999) argue that women have been denied a voice in much of the nation’s policy-making. As a result, they contend that we should pay close attention to the words of our country’s prominent public women.

For the purposes of this thesis, I will analyze Hillary Clinton’s September 5th, 1995, speech “Women’s Rights Are Human Rights” and Laura Bush’s March, 8, 2002, speech commemorating the UN’s International Women’s Day. Both speeches deal with
issues concerning global women’s rights, and I will use Dow and Tonn’s notion of political feminine style to conduct both analyses. Although the first ladies’ speeches are very different, *Newsweek* reporter Martha Brant claims that the two women share rhetorical similarities. After hearing Bush discuss the human rights’ abuses endured by the women of Afghanistan, Brant contends, “If I had closed my eyes, I could have sworn it was Hillary Clinton talking” (p.2).

It is important to note that, while Laura Bush has been speaking more often than she used to, she has given far fewer speeches than her predecessor. Of course, we have access to eight years worth of Hillary Clinton’s first lady speeches, and Laura has only been in “office” for a year and a half, at the time of this writing. Clinton and Bush also championed dissimilar issues, even though they have both entered the foreign policy arena to speak on behalf of global women’s rights. Therefore, their women’s rights addresses, both delivered to the UN, albeit to different audiences, seem best suited for comparison.

**Explanation of Rhetorical Situations**

Hillary Clinton spoke out for global women’s rights at the UN’s Fourth World Conference on Women, seven years before Bush and without the exigence provided by the Taliban’s harboring of terrorists. According to various newspaper and magazine accounts of the convention, Clinton “tongue-lashed” (Grady, 1995, p. 15A) her audience, delivering a speech that was “subversive” (“Hillary Clinton’s,” 1995, p.14) and “blunt” (“Blunt Talk,” 1995, p.A36). Some of her listeners wished “she’d stick to baking cookies and working on her hairstyle” (Grady, 1995, p.15A); others found her appearance in Beijing “both inspiring and disappointing” (Geewax, 1995, p.11A). Her speech
“Women’s Rights are Human Rights,” also received praise from mainstream media outlets, who acknowledged that touchy US/China relations impacted her message.

Citing “weeks of controversy over whether she should attend” (Geewax, 1995, p.11A) and claiming “nobody in the United States wanted Hillary to go to the UN’s World Conference on Women except Hillary” (Grady, 1995, p.15A), the media framed Clinton’s speech as both a surprising success and a bit of a political failure. Even her harshest critics were forced to acknowledge her sticky rhetorical situation. Clinton wanted to speak out against human rights abuses and the poor treatment of the world’s women; unfortunately, the conference’s host country, China, stood guilty of committing the very offenses Clinton condemned. Grudgingly acknowledging that Hillary Clinton “out-Eleanored Eleanor,” (p.15A) Baltimore Sun columnist Sandy Grady (1995), described her “suffragette’s intensity about women’s rights and a mother’s outrage about abused kids” and decided “she was brave and eloquent in the Chinese dragon’s den” (p.15A).

Other critics were not so congratulatory. Atlanta Journal and Constitution reporter Marilyn Geewax asked “But where was the word ‘China’” (1995, p.11A). Geewax also cited a Republican congressman from New Jersey, Christopher Smith, who lamented that Hillary “missed an opportunity to condemn China” (in Geewax, 1995, p.11A). Arguing that the first lady’s veiled criticisms of Chinese government policies were too subtle to pack a punch, Geewax claimed that while Clinton gave an eloquent speech, she should have given China “a direct sock in the eye over human rights abuses” (1995, p. 11A).
While then Kansas Senator Bob Dole wanted the first lady to stay on American soil because he refused to support “this misguided conference with its radical, left-wing agenda” (in Grady, 1995, p.15A), most objections over Clinton’s attendance centered around US relations with China. Claiming that hostilities existed between the two governments, newspapers and magazines did not blame the Clinton administration for bad blood between the nations. Instead, *The New York Times* claimed “Beijing’s relations with Washington have been strained by a summer of tumult over the visit to the United States in June by the president of Taiwan” (Tyler, 1995, p.A1). *Newsday* explained “The Chinese believe the United States has been pursuing a policy of Cold War containment against them” (“Blunt Talk,” 1995, p.A36). The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* further explained objections to Clinton’s attendance: “There are justifiable arguments about whether Mrs. Clinton, given the intractable positions of the Chinese on human rights, should have gone to Beijing” (“First Lady’s Message,” 1995, p.10A).

However, Clinton’s decision to attend the conference was also problematic for future US/China policy relations. Both Democrats and Republicans feared that Clinton’s speech could anger Chinese officials, perhaps inflicting permanent damage on the tense relationship. Additionally, Hillary Clinton was an “unelected policymaker” (“First Lady’s Message,” 1995, p.10A), at best. Political pundits feared she might make threats or promises that the Clinton administration could not back or fulfill (Grady, 1995). Hinting that her husband took a weak stance toward China, *The Boston Globe* applauded Hillary, claiming “this Clinton” was not “too fearful of offending the Communist rulers of China” (“Hillary’s Triumph,” 1995, p.15A).
Asking “Could FDR muzzle Eleanor?” (p.15A), Grady claimed that Clinton’s speech would make her husband’s “rough agenda,” which already included “China’s sale of missiles to Pakistan, saber-rattling toward Taiwan, a $35 billion U.S. trade deficit” (p.15A), even rougher. Keeping a cooler head, Geewax (1995), offered “Whether Clinton’s angry, yet veiled, words will have any long-term impact on China’s barbaric birth-control policies is not yet known” (p.11A). Similarly, Newsday proffered a pragmatic opinion: “Because Hillary Clinton does not have a high official rank and because the Chinese should be able to understand the difference between rhetoric and policy, it is not likely that her statements will have a major negative effect on Chinese-American relations” (1995, p.A36).

Undoubtedly, Clinton faced many objections to her speech. Ranging from political misgivings to foreign policy reservations, those who denied her right to speak at the UN World Conference on Women produced solid objections. However, since the beginning of the 1992 Presidential Campaign, Hillary Clinton faced allegations that she was “running the show” (Anderson, 1999, p.150). Repeatedly undergoing makeovers designed to soften her image, Clinton faced almost constant criticism from her husband’s opposition. Perhaps objections to her Beijing speech were further attempts to reign in an unruly – and challenging—first lady.

Her policymaking skills, as head of her husband’s failed healthcare taskforce, had already taken a public beating, and Clinton’s sticky rhetorical situation became even harder to negotiate, thanks to US/China relations. She “gracefully avoided any direct role in US foreign policy issues with China” (“First Lady’s Message,” 1995, p.10A), but her “public preaching” (“Blunt Talk,” 1995, p.A36) was a far cry from “the softer, wifely
image she’s adopted lately” (Grady, 1995, p.15A). Grady went so far as to contend
“Republicans growled Hillary would do for foreign policy what she did for Whitewater
and healthcare reform – another catastrophe” (p.15A).

However, these pessimistic prophecies remained unfulfilled, and Clinton’s speech
generated its share of praise, as well. While Northwestern University includes the speech
in its online archive of the greatest speeches of all time,
(http://douglass.speech.nwu.edu/clin_a64.htm), the first lady’s conference appearance
was hardly the highlight of the event, which featured delegates from 180 nations; she
spoke at a panel on women’s health and security. If she was not the main event, Hillary
Clinton proved to be a popular addition to the guest list. Newsweek columnist Martha
Brant (2001) recalls the Beijing conference and the first lady’s stirring speech, noting
“I’d never seen a politician treated like a rock star. The audience of women from around
the world went absolutely crazy” (p.2).

Newsday proclaimed her “tough, forthright speech” to be “a smashing success”
directness seemed to please both Democratic and Republican members of the delegation
there” (Tyler, 1995, p.A1). Indeed, Democratic congresswoman Carolyn Maloney
praised the first lady for speaking “from the heart” and “with great power” (in Tyler,
1995, p.A1). The Baltimore Sun heaped further praise on the president’s wife,
maintaining, “She came, she saw, she gave them hell” (Grady, 1995, p.15A). Christopher
Anderson, a first couple scholar and celebrity biographer, claimed in his 1999 book, Bill
and Hillary, that Clinton’s Beijing’s speech was one of the triumphs of her tenure as first
lady. Clinton herself was reportedly pleased with the speech, commenting “To me, it was important to express how I felt and to do so as clearly as I could” (in Tyler, 1995, p.A1).

Although her first ladyship, like her husband’s eight years as President, was marked by constant scandal, Hillary Clinton’s appearance at the UN’s Fourth World Conference on Women was both low on scandal and generally well received. While some criticized her reluctance to single out the host country, a known perpetrator of human rights abuses, most praised her carefully worded speech, admiring her strong, yet politically wise, words. However, the conference itself did not fare so well in news reports. Lauren Danner and Susan Walsh (1999) argue that the media framed the conference in terms of disagreement and disorganization. Calling media coverage of the event further evidence of anti-feminist backlash, the authors claim that the real work of the conference was ignored by newspapers, magazines, and news programs, who instead focused on stereotypical portrayals of women and feminists. Danner and Walsh argue that the media unfairly labeled the conference a fiasco, keeping women in the dark about the substantive details of the historic meeting.

Perhaps Hillary Clinton’s speech, “Women’s Rights Are Human Rights,” was sufficiently nonthreatening to garner media praise. For much of her stint as first lady, Clinton faced harshest criticism when she was at her most powerful; the softer side of Hillary saw widespread support. Perhaps her Beijing speech was further evidence of this softer side; after all, an election loomed only a little over a year after she spoke at the conference.

If Clinton was a pleasing women’s rights advocate, America’s new first lady is even more accommodating; so seamlessly does Bush portray the “happy homemaker,”
the nurturer, the fulfilled, “natural” woman, that her women’s rights spokesperson status is jarring, a non sequitur. Editors at The Washington Post fought over who should cover Hillary, with the News Desk besting the Style section (Anderson, 1999); Bush’s comings and goings land squarely back in Style. While the Clinton’s campaigned as a precedent shattering “two-for,” G.W. and Laura ushered in a return to tradition, which is hardly shocking, in light of history. Susan Faludi (1991) contends “A backlash against women’s rights is nothing new in American history. Indeed, it’s a recurring phenomenon. . . . a seemingly inevitable early frost to the culture’s brief flowerings of feminism” (p.46). Faludi’s book, Backlash, argues that progress toward women’s rights and equality is typically answered by periods of status-quo affirming, antifeminism. Like Bess Truman followed Eleanor Roosevelt, Laura Bush bats clean-up for Hillary Clinton.

Clinton was purported to be her husband’s closest advisor; Bush claims she will be her husband’s “emotional ballast” (Marton, 2001, p.138). However, the US invasion of Afghanistan demanded that Bush become a part of her husband’s political machine. In her first first-lady first, Laura Bush became the first first lady to deliver the president’s weekly radio address by herself. On November 17, 2001, she wished the country a Happy upcoming Thanksgiving and urged Americans to count their blessings, as she simultaneously condemned the Taliban for its atrocious treatment of Afghan women. Bush used the address to rally support for her husband’s war, and she was not the only first lady mounting what presidential spouse historian, Robert Watson, calls “the white-glove pulpit” (2000, p.215) to testify on behalf of women’s rights. British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s wife, Cherie, also garnered support for the US-led war on terrorism by criticizing the way the Taliban regime treated its women (Sylvester 2001).
While the Whitehouse admitted that its attention to women’s issues was “part of an orchestrated campaign” (Mackenzie, 2001, p.A8), most mainstream news outlets praised her radio address, calling it “a bit of history” (“First Lady” 2001, p. B8), a “secret weapon” (Sylvester 2001, p.14), and “a striking rebuke” (Mackenzie 2001, p. A8). The Buffalo News even compared the reticent Laura Bush to the ever-active Eleanor Roosevelt, claiming her speech catapulted “the Bush administration into the forefront on international women’s rights” (“First Lady” 2001, p. B8). Her foray into the world of advocacy a mainstream success, Bush has since taken to the podium several times to discuss the “plight” of Afghan women, and she seems to be getting more comfortable in the spotlight with each performance. Just like America witnessed the President’s public speaking skills improve in the aftermath of September 11th, so too have we watched the First Lady find her voice as a public advocate.

While some analysts have rushed to declare Laura Bush a closet feminist, the National Organization for Women quotes Riffat Hassan, a Muslim college professor, who teaches religious studies and humanities at the University of Louisville. Hassan claims “We are not talking about feminism in Afghanistan – we are talking about basic human rights” (in Benet, 2001, p.1). However, in this situation, it becomes increasingly harder to separate the two. For years, second-wave feminism has condemned the Taliban for its anti-woman actions. Speaking out for women’s rights and against this oppressive regime, Laura Bush is articulating a feminist viewpoint. Perhaps it is hard for feminists like me, long dissatisfied with liberal feminism’s insistence that inserting women into hegemony’s institutions will be enough to achieve parity, to reconcile her positive, pro-woman message with the mixed signals the Bush administration sends to women. Barbara
Friedman (2002) argues, “Women already knew about the Taliban. Before CNN, MSNBC, and the rest of the big boys aired their exclusive reports from inside Afghanistan, the story had already been told, about women, for women, and in most cases, by women” (p.139).

Columnist Noy Thrupkaew points out “if the administration’s feminist puppet show looks too good to be true, that’s because it is” (p.17). While Thrupkaew acknowledges that Laura Bush’s advocacy on behalf of global women’s rights is a good, feminist statement, he cautions readers to remember that Bush’s husband’s administration might not be so woman friendly. Citing conservative opposition that has kept Bush from throwing his support behind the UN’s CEDAW treaty, Thrupkaew contends that failure to ratify this treaty is a step away from a feminist agenda, not another step toward feminism. Ironically, feminist opposition to G.W.’s administration and policies may keep us from perceiving Laura’s speech as woman-friendly.

Similarly, one of Afghanistan’s own feminist organizations, RAWA, smells the politics behind Bush’s repeated messages affirming human rights, cautioning that the end of the Taliban does not rule out the existence of “other criminals on the scene” (Mackenzie, 2001, p.A8). Although women do play a role in the new Afghan coalition government, their role is far from equal. The same, of course, could be said for our own government. Still, the Bush administration receives praise for its championing of women’s rights, and Laura Bush’s quiet voice continues to be the loudest pro-woman noise coming from the Bush camp.

In a recent interview with ABC reporter Cokie Roberts, Bush maintained that she was motivated to speak out on behalf of Afghan women because she was so enraged at
the Taliban’s treatment of them. Bush argued “I guess when we saw how oppressive the Taliban was, when we compared the wonderful freedoms that we have, and the so, so many advantages we have . . . those things led me to, to speak out about it” (in Roberts, 2002). On the one hand, the first lady is speaking for women’s rights because she is part of her husband’s administration’s “puppet show.” On the other hand, she has become a women’s rights advocate because she feels personally motivated to speak on behalf of human rights violations. Fortunately, Laura Bush wants to speak on behalf of a women’s issue because, as first lady, she is “allowed” to mount a public platform to advocate for women.

Columnist Mary Dejevsky (2001) criticizes this Western hypocrisy; the US seeks to improve women’s international rights while ignoring struggles for equality occurring within Western countries. While most American women do not endure basic human rights violations, Western women are not yet the political or economic equals of men. That the first lady is in charge of the rhetorical war on Afghanistan, Dejevsky argues, signals the existence of “gender apartheid” by separating “women’s issues from mainstream politics and regard[ing] women as the only people capable of representing their cause” (p.5). Other Bush administration critics brand Bush’s speeches about global women’s rights part of an elaborate PR campaign to attract 2004 voters, especially women, to her husband’s ticket (Quenqua, 2001). To avoid this gender apartheid, Bush and the men in his administration should back-up or at least echo the first lady’s message. Instead, women’s rights are relegated to the status of a women’s issue, not an issue of humanity.
Since her radio address to the nation, Bush has spoken repeatedly about Afghan women’s rights and rights for women across the globe. On March 8, 2002, she gave another speech championing both of these causes. This time, she spoke to the UN on its International Women’s Day, which was celebrated in Afghanistan for the first time since before the Taliban came to power (Daniszewski, pA3). The focus of this year’s Day? The plight of Afghan women, of course; ceremonies in New York and Kabul specifically “focused on uplifting Afghan women” (Duke, 2002, p.C1). Other Women’s Day gatherings recognize Afghan women as “one focus” (Naiman, 2002, p.67), but also include discussions about the nature of twenty-first century feminism.

For the first lady, March 8th was about more than International Women’s Day. *The Washington Post* explains, “The opportunity—and necessity—of playing a more activist role as first lady has been apparent to Bush since the terror attacks” (Duke, 2002, p.C1.) Besides speaking at the UN, Bush also attended a United Negro College Fund dinner, and she paid a visit to a Manhattan grade school near ground zero. Despite her busy schedule, Bush “spoke today with uncommon flourish about human rights in general,” and she “appeared to have gained her sea legs as a campaigner for domestic and international social issues” (Duke, 2002, p.C1). While her speech garnered little media attention, the paltry reviews of her speech were favorable, suggesting that the first lady might be growing more comfortable in the public eye.

**Selection of Method**

To analyze the first lady rhetoric of both Clinton and Bush, it is necessary to employ a feminist rhetorical analysis. Both Clinton and Bush remain icons of liberal feminism, and both have used their public platform to speak on behalf of women’s rights.
Political feminine style allows us to carefully examine the content of their speeches, while at the same time assessing the feminist potential of their message. Dow and Tonn (1993) argue that rhetors exhibiting political feminine style must do three things. First, they use personal experience to back claims. Second, they politicize the personal, and third, they exhibit the feminine ethic of care. Political feminine style allows speakers to bring women’s private experience to the public arena, privileging personal ways of knowing and giving credence to lived experience. Dow and Tonn claim that this style has the potential to create a counter-public, feminist sphere that recognizes the significance of women’s experiences and knowledge. Using political feminine style to advocate women’s rights, Bush and Clinton help make women’s issues the issues of all people.

We cannot overlook feminist messages spoken by our first ladies, who remain a powerful symbol of America womanhood. In her 1990 speech to the graduates of Wellesley College, sitting first lady Barbara Bush quipped, “Somewhere out in this audience may even be someone who will one day follow in my footsteps and preside over the White House as the president’s spouse. I wish him well” (in Ryan, 1992, p.383). While women have made significant inroads into the world of politics, and while the current presidential administration boasts a female National Security Advisor, the fact remains that Mrs. President is the closest an American woman had ever gotten to the highest office in the land. Examining the feminist messages contained in first lady rhetoric will allow us to assess how far women have come towards political power, and how far we still have to go.
Significance of First Ladies

Presidential spouse historian Robert Watson (2000) claims that the unofficial office of first lady has not changed as much as we would like to think it has since our country was founded, despite the contributions of stand-out first ladies like Eleanor Roosevelt. He argues “The office parallels the country’s notions about womanhood . . . The first lady is expected to champion women and women’s issues. She also embodies the qualities of femininity and family” (Watson, 2000, p.78). While the first lady’s duties have grown to include more than hostessing and housekeeping responsibilities, the president’s wife has consistently personified traditional notions of femininity and womanhood. She is a woman who sacrifices her career for her husband’s political greatness, a woman who raises and nurtures the first family, who gives interviews to ladies’ magazines, entertains foreign dignitaries, and fulfills any number of unobtrusive, private roles.

Lewis Gould (1996) maintains “Americans are ambivalent about presidential wives. The public expects the First Lady to fulfill a multitude of roles flawlessly, and there is criticism for any departure from perceived standards” (p.xv). For many years, these standards remained fairly consistent, as a large majority of American women fulfilled strictly private roles. However, thanks, in part, to second wave feminism, millions of women – moms, no less – entered the public world of work, leaving traditional women’s roles behind, mixing domestic and wage-earner responsibilities. As Watson notes:

The complexities and difficulties of the office [of first lady] become apparent when the many and changing aspects of womanhood are considered. Women, and thus first ladies, are no longer just wives or mothers. Women run businesses,
serve in elected office, write books, and raise children. The first lady faces the challenge of being simultaneously modern and traditional (2000, p.78).

Gould (1996) agrees, noticing “the criteria for success as a First Lady constantly change as the public’s view of women evolves and develops” (p.xv). While women leave home for work, our society is forced to reconceptualize our definitions of femininity and women’s roles; women are forced to contend with both private and public interests. Just because it has become commonplace for women to have careers, does not mean we are exempt from our housekeeping chores and child-rearing roles. Whereas men have always been public citizens and have been able to eschew private duties for public ones, women’s entrance into the public sphere has a Cinderella-like plotline. We can go to the ball if we want to, but only after we’ve finished the cooking and the scrubbing and the laundry.

As America’s millions of working women come to terms with their public and private roles, so too does the first lady both epitomize and grapple with the same problem. She is caught in the middle of the public and the private spheres; she straddles the line between the two worlds, becoming the public example of our country’s ideal private woman. A wife first and an individual second, the first lady’s importance appears to recede as more and more women serve in elected office. However, as Anthony Eksterowicz and Kristen Paynter (2000) argue “the office of the first lady has become more professional in nature and has been moving in the direction of full integration with the president’s White House” (p.547). Although Hillary Clinton staked out space for herself in the West Wing, Laura Bush moved the first lady’s office back to the East Wing. This move parallels the new first lady’s journey back into the private sphere, as
she refuses to occupy the space her predecessor started to carve for her in the public policy arena.

Both Clinton and Bush reflect our own public ambivalence and confusion about women’s roles and our status. Barbara Burrell (2001) argues “The symbol of first lady in U. S. politics joins in a unique way the two domains of public and private life” (p.12). While “attempts have been made to neutralize stereotypes of female politicians” (Burrell, 2001, p.21), little has been done to combat the stereotypical image of first lady, whose greatest source of power is her sheer proximity to the president. While the public contributions of presidential spouses must be ladylike enough to pass political and public muster, their private, intimate contributions go unnoticed, unpublicized, or unrecognized. Nonetheless, many first lady historians and biographers speak of the woman behind the man, the power behind the throne, the influence of pillow-talk on presidential policy, giving us the impression that presidents’ wives should be happy with their behind-the-scenes contributions to their husbands’ administrations. Those wives who seek public policy input are simply power-hungry. Suzanne Dixon contends “The first lady icon presents a problem for women who seek real power and its open acknowledgement. It still involves some attempt to prove that political women are not natural” (in Brown, 2001, p.263).

Early first ladies were called “Mrs. President” or “Presidentress” (Anderson and Baexendale, 1992); however, the first lady label is not the root of the presidential spouse’s problem. Instead, her public/private dilemma mirrors our society’s conflicting views about the place and power of its women. Despite the limitations of her role, the first lady has a national platform, untold political influence, and the potential to help
women command public sphere respect. Feminism and the first ladyship should go hand in hand; the president’s wife is supposed to champion women’s issues, and she could be a source of women’s empowerment. In the words of former first lady Rosalynn Carter “The first lady is in a position to know the needs of the country and do something about them. She can have real influence. . . It would be a shame not to take advantage of that power” (in Anthony, 1991, p.273). Alice Anderson and Hadley Baexendale (1992) agree that first ladies can be feminists, holding “most of our Presidential wives have been natural feminists even when they were not outspoken about it” (p.iv).

Watson (2000) discusses the first lady’s significance, contending “The first lady is deserving of study simply because the institution as been part of the presidency since the founding of the nation” (p.26). Moreover, she is deserving of study because she personifies the public sphere/private sphere dichotomy that impacts the daily lives of America’s millions of women. Society dictates that women should work outside the home, but it also encourages us to have children, raise them, and nurture our de rigueur spouses, inside the home. As more and more women hold advanced degrees and live professional lives, it stands to reason that the wife of the most powerful man in the country is also educated and career-oriented.

However, Burrell (2001) argues that newspapers, magazines, and television news programs vilified Hillary Clinton because she refused to abandon her professional image while her husband held office. Only after Hillary relinquished her controversial role as head of Bill Clinton’s healthcare task force, donned a head band, and published cookie recipes in lady’s magazines did the American people warm up to her. When Bill Clinton was first elected in 1992, Hilary Clinton, named the head of her husband’s healthcare task
force, promised Americans that she would take an active role in public policy making. However, like struggling department store Sears, Hillary received a mid-nineties makeover that showed constituents her “softer side,” in an attempt to increase her approval rating.

Christopher Anderson (1999) contends that controlling Hillary’s image was nothing new for Clinton staffers in the white house. Ever since Bill Clinton’s first political campaign, an unsuccessful run for Congress in 1974, Hillary’s image cost the candidate some votes. To help Clinton reclaim the Arkansas governorship in 1982, Hillary acquired his last name, some makeup, and a new haircut, all designed to help soften her image and increase her appeal. Anderson argues that Hillary Clinton moved reluctantly toward the political middle, softening her stance on domestic policy issues, as well, because she realized that she and her husband needed to appeal to the majority of voters, if they wanted to bring about widespread social change.

While Anderson paints Hillary Clinton as an ugly, radical duckling transformed into a sleek political swan, Laura Bush’s life story gets a very different slant. The first lady, who reminds reporters that she did not marry her husband until she was over thirty, is quick to stress both her career as a teacher and librarian and her lengthy sojourn as a stay-at-home mom. Sarah Wildman (2001) calls Bush “the Play-Doh first lady: Mold her into whatever shape you want, then stamp her back down into a pile of putty for her next audience” (p.19). Wildman is quick to justify Bush’s chameleon nature, arguing that feminism has complicated the first lady role:

The twenty-first century first lady must be poised. Polished but not slick. Accessible but not intimate. Smart but not ambitious. Motivated, interesting, and an advocate – but never political. Beautiful but uncaring about her appearance. Happy. She must retain her own identity but negate it where it diverges from her
husband’s. And if a first lady appears unhappy with those requirements, even a little, she weakens the administration and is pilloried not only by its enemies but by its friends. (Wildman, 2001, p.18).

Whereas Hillary Clinton was a visible first lady, thanks, in large part, to the visual diary of her duties and appearances released almost daily by her office (Anderson, 1999), Laura Bush flies under the radar. It’s no accident that she’s the antithesis of her predecessor; since the very beginning of Campaign 2000, first ladies-in-waiting took great pains to define themselves in opposition to Hillary. Taking into consideration presidential spouse candidates Cindy McCain, Ernestine Bradley, Tipper Gore, and Laura Bush, journalist Peter Trapper (1999) contends “in an attempt to avoid the negative images – aggressive, assertive, acerbic, and worse – that have dogged Hillary Clinton, the other four ladies-in-waiting are sending softer messages” (p.1). Trapper argues that controversial first ladies like Hillary Clinton are usually followed by more conservative presidential spouses. Most recently, much maligned Nancy Reagan was replaced with affable Barbara Bush. Dashing Jackie Kennedy followed a staid Mamie Eisenhower; now, traditional Laura fills Hillary’s avant-garde shoes. Proud of her throwback label, Bush says “I’ve always done what really traditional women do, and I have been very, very satisfied” (in Marton, 2001, p.351).

According to Wildman, voters seem to be satisfied with Laura Bush, as well. She maintains:

Hillary forced the issue, fighting against the limitations and contradictions of her role, trying to carve out a public identity true to her private self – through her struggles, implicitly asking us to make up our minds about a woman’s proper role in society. Laura Bush, by contrast, does not try to answer that question. She does not even acknowledge it. Which, deep down, may be exactly what we want (2001, p.24).
Wildman argues that Laura Bush has successfully conquered feminism, circumventing the dread f-word label by refusing to confront it or speak its name. Although she has become an advocate for women’s rights in the aftermath of the September 11th terrorist attacks, and although she espouses pro-choice views that differ from her husband’s, Bush consistently avoids the feminist label by reminding voters of her traditional roles. At the same time, she pacifies feminist organizations like the Feminist Majority Foundation with her nod to global women’s rights and her consistent references to her pre-marriage career (Wildman, 2001, “Fair-Weather Feminists,” 2001). However, as Kati Marton (2001) holds, from the moment Laura Bush took up residence in the East Wing, “precedent-shattering, controversial activities by the first lady were over” (p.351). Promising to be even less controversial than her staid mother-in-law, Bush is nonetheless aware that “in the modern age a first lady cannot be ‘just a housewife’” (Marton, 2001, p.353). As she reconciles her private image with her public one, Bush becomes both a political figure and a symbol of national womanhood.

Overview of Thesis

The goal of this analysis is to discover if the rhetoric of first ladies Hillary Rodham Clinton and Laura Welch Bush, when studied through the lens of political feminine style, helps to create a feminist, counter-public sphere. The first lady is an interesting and conflicted symbol of womanhood. A public spokesperson for private interests, she is both traditional and unusual; to maintain her popularity, she must observe both time honored customs and cutting-edge trends. The first lady walks a fine line, between public and private interests, between historical and modern roles, and between popularity and condemnation.
Chapter two will present a careful review of existing literature about first ladies, our expectations for them, and their changing roles, as well as literature pertaining to notions of the public and private spheres of our society. Additionally, the literature review will discuss the evolution of feminine style, tracing its development from a necessity to a political tool and laying out the criteria for feminine style within a speech. Chapter three will contain an analysis of the selected artifacts, Hillary Clinton’s “Women’s Rights Are Human Rights,” and Laura Bush’s address to the UN on International Women’s Day, March 8, 2002. I will utilize Bonnie J. Dow and Mari Boor Tonn’s (1993) model of political feminine style to analyze the speeches. Finally, chapter four will develop both methodological and rhetorical conclusions based on this analysis. Dow and Tonn argue that rhetors who use political feminine style have the potential to empower their audiences; studying first ladies in terms of their ability to give power, not just inhabit it, will allow us to better understand the president’s spouse and her political significance.
Eksterowicz and Paynter (2000) contend “The study of first ladies is a new field. Historians have pioneered the field, but in recent years, the disciplines of political science, psychology, and sociology have contributed to this emerging field” (p.548). While little scholarship exists detailing the rhetoric of first ladies as a category, a smattering of communication articles seeks to investigate media coverage of first ladies and the mediated image of the president’s spouse. This paper is not an attempt to analyze media coverage of Hillary Clinton or Laura Bush. However, I have relied on media accounts of rhetorical situation and exigence. Additionally, I am interested in public opinion of the two first ladies and their words. However, I am conducting a feminist rhetorical analysis of first lady rhetoric through the lens of political feminine style. First, this literature review will examine the evolution of the role of first lady, from a social science and a communication perspective. Second, I will review feminist theory that examines the notion of public and private spheres. Third, I will detail rhetorical literature explaining the concept of feminine style, looking at Karlyn Kohrs Campbell’s work in this area and focusing on Foss and Foss’ notion of invitational rhetoric. Finally, I will synthesize feminist theories and rhetorical theories by examining Dow and Tonn’s concept of political feminine style, as it relates to Clinton’s “Women’s Rights Are Human Rights” speech and Bush’s 2002 International Women’s Day Speech.

First Ladies and Their Changing Roles

Watson (2000) maintains that first ladies are partners in their marriages; as such, they are partners in their husband’s administration. Watson argues that first ladies should
be studied and evaluated in terms of their partnership. To advance this type of scholarship, he offers a typology of first ladies, assigning each of our forty-three presidents’ wives to one of five categories. First, he recognizes Full Partners, like Eleanor Roosevelt and Hillary Clinton, women who are “[v]ery active in politics” (p. 140), often act as their husbands’ closest advisors, and who champion pet causes, as well as shoulder responsibility for the president’s social obligations. Watson holds that the Full Partner first lady is “[a]ctive and influential both publicly and privately” (p. 140). The Partial Partner is interested in the political and presidential activities of her husband, she assists him a little in his public duties. However, her main responsibilities are social functions, although she might support a favorite cause or two, like Dolley Madison, Lady Bird Johnson, and Betty Ford. The Behind-the-Scenes Partner exerts untold influence on her husband, because her role “is personal and private” (p. 141), and she is seldom seen in public. Famous Behind-the-Scenes first ladies include Jackie Kennedy, Nancy Reagan, and Barbara Bush. While the Behind-the-Scenes partner is purported to have an unknown influence on her husband’s policy decisions, the Partner-in-Marriage, like Mamie Eisenhower and Pat Nixon, is a “traditional” wife; she does not get involved with her husband’s business of running the country, but she does play White House hostess. At the end of Watson’s active-to-inactive continuum is the Nonpartner. She “shows little interest in being a first lady, no interest in being a partner in the presidency, and no interest in politics or policy” (p. 141). Watson can find only two presidential spouses completely uninterested in a partnership, Letitia Tyler and Jane Pierce.

While Watson views his categories as distinct examples of spousal style and does not allow for any overlap between categories, Myra Gutin (2000) offers a categorization
system of presidential spouses that is a bit more flexible. Also unlike Watson, she characterizes first ladies based on their communication, not partnership, styles. Gutin identifies three main first lady types. The Social Hostess and Ceremonial Presence choose not to take full advantage of their white glove or mini-bully pulpits. Instead, they use their roles as first lady to aid the president by hosting parties and White House dinners. This type of first lady rarely communicates with the public, and while she might use “pillow talk” to influence her husband’s policy, voters never know about her private activism. The Emerging Spokeswoman “helped expand a largely ceremonial role into one of growing influence and consequence” (p.566) by choosing a pet cause and by proving herself to a “political professional” (p.568), helping with her husband’s campaign. The most active and political communicators on Gutin’s continuum are the Independent Activists and Political Surrogates. As their name suggests, these first ladies “used all available means of persuasion in order to influence, educate, and impress their concerns on the minds of the American people” (p.569), acting as both autonomous politicos and as stand-ins for their husbands, when occasion demands.

Watson (2000) contends “Clearly the first lady has been an active participant in presidential affairs, both officially and unofficially” (p.70), revealing that the first lady’s role is prescribed by history and convention. Although the first lady’s “official” duties are not spelled out in the constitution, Watson claims that most presidential spouses perform the same basic functions. Interestingly, despite Watson’s discussion of partnership styles, the first duty on his list is that of wife and mother. Including “Diplomat,” “Nation’s social hostess,” and “Social advocate and champion of social causes” (p.72), Watson’s list contains mainly public duties for the president’s wife, but he
maintains that motherhood and family nurturing is a “function of the office” that is “often overlooked by those studying first ladies” (p.73). Perhaps Watson is right; however, few presidential scholars consider being a good husband and father a “function of the office” of president.

Gary Wekkin (2000) contends that this double standard can constrain the first lady’s role. He argues, “Complicating the electorate’s perceptions of the first ladyship are significant gender differences in support for the wielding of power by the occupant of the title” (p.602). He claims that the first lady finds herself in a difficult position because she lacks a “blueprint for the first ladyship” (p.602) and must discern her duties from popular sentiment, refining her role to fit social attitudes. He offers six types of first lady: the conscript, the shield, the courtesan, the consigliore, the regent, and the co-president. These types range from least active, visible, and political, to most involved in public and political life. Wekkin argues that first ladies might exhibit communication and leadership characteristics which would place her in more than one category, and he argues that future first ladies could avoid scandal by borrowing successful strategies from their predecessors, advocating the development of a “‘primer’ . . . for first ladies to follow if they would have an effective hand in policy making” (p.609). To make policy without alienating the voting public, Wekkin suggests that presidential spouses play a behind-the-scenes, advisory role. First ladies become constrained by a public world which frowns upon their public policy speech, but speculates about their behind-the-scenes ability to manipulate presidential plans.

Eksterowicz and Paynter (2000) also mention the first lady’s “pillow influence as confidante, lover, and partner” (p.549); although, they contend that the first lady’s role is
also affected by current events, as well as her own personality, staff, and relationship with her husband. Karen O’Connor, Bernadette Nye, and Laura Van Assendelft (1996) maintain that most presidents publicly thank their wives for their private contributions. O’Connor, et al. argue that presidential spouses have always had significant, if unmeasured, influence over public policy, stating:

It is our contention that first ladies influence many of their husband’s actions along the way to the White House, as well as once in office. This proximity to power has afforded many first ladies the ability to wield direct and indirect influence, a fact that has been woefully ignored by political scientists, historians, and political commentators (p.836).

Because the first lady’s public role is often limited to hostessing and ceremonial duties, the public must guess as to her real involvement in her husband’s administration. However, while most first ladies are acknowledged to wield behind-the-scenes power, confronting voters with her policy-making savvy has traditionally seemed like risky political business.

O’Connor, et al. (1996) are quick to remind readers that the first ladyship “never was an alternative route to political influence for women” (p.849); however, they argue that first ladies should be studied as a part of the presidency, so we do not believe that the political world is solely male dominated. They hold that, while unspoken power is acceptable, overtly political presidential spouses might bring “considerable negative publicity” (p.837) to the first couple. Jeffery Cohen (2000) argues that we have been largely uninterested in the first lady’s popularity, until Hillary Clinton’s nontraditional, policy-oriented partnership with her husband. Since the Clinton years, however, scholars have displayed a renewed interest in public opinions toward the president’s wife.
Barbara Burrell (2000) claims “First ladies have tended to be popular . . . even those who have been outspoken and actively engaged in their spouse’s administration” (p.529). Citing an opinion during the Roosevelt administration that showed Eleanor Roosevelt to be well-liked by her husband’s constituents, Burrell argues “the public has accepted a public policy role in general, as long as the person performing that role appears to be successful” (p.530). Although she acknowledges that many Americans disliked Hillary Clinton’s role in health care reformation, Burrell asserts that the public might have accepted Clinton’s role, if her healthcare revamp had worked. Afraid that Clinton’s failure to achieve her policy goals would cause future first ladies to “hesitate to take on a formal position as a policy advisor” (p.544), Burrell contends that more and more first ladies will be independent, with careers of their own outside politics. This future generation of presidential spouses, she hypothesizes, will appreciate Clinton’s manipulation of the traditional role.

Barry Burden and Anthony Mughan (1999) think “the first lady has emerged as a force in her own right, so that the question of what drives her public popularity is still a puzzle to be solved” (p.238). At the same time, Burden and Mughan argue that the first lady’s mediated image plays a significant role in shaping voter perceptions of the president’s spouse. For example, they argue that, despite the demise of the Clinton’s healthcare plan and the Whitewater scandal that tainted Hillary Clinton’s reputation, a makeover designed for media consumption salvaged her image. Burden and Mughan maintain “She moved from the center of the political stage and took on a more benign public image of a spouse whose overriding concern was now the welfare of children . . . the remade Hillary Clinton eschewed controversy” (p238). Media coverage of the first
lady helps shape her image. Because she lacks an official office, and because voters are left to speculate as to the extent of her political powers, the first lady is defined by her media coverage.

Shawn Parry Giles (2000) claims that Clinton set a new media standard for first ladies. Before her eight-year stint, few public opinion polls sought to discover how much America liked its first lady. The Clinton campaign and administration often commissioned polls to answer this question, and Hillary garnered much more media attention than previous first ladies Nancy Reagan and Barbara Bush. Parry-Giles argues that the media’s obsession with the often-controversial first lady led to the creation of a hyperreal Hillary and a consumer climate that makes it “impossible to discern the real from the simulated” (p.222). This hyperreal image is especially troubling for female political rhetors, who depend on personal politics and real experience to empower audiences.

Erica Scharrer and Kim Bissel (2000) explain that the first lady’s role is governed by contradiction. She must be active, but not political, polished, but still soft, wifely, but also shrewd, public, but private, at the same time. Scharrer and Bissel contend that the first lady cannot possibly fulfill all of these contradictory definitions at once. As a result, she depends on media coverage to frame, and thus define, her role. They contend that the news media is not merely reporting the facts of the first lady’s existence. Instead, the media is selecting “certain aspects of the same event to give it either a politically active or a traditional angle” (p.60). The public’s perception of the first lady is essential to her success in “office.” How the public perceives the president’s spouse is often up to the media, who frame our perceptions of the first lady through coverage of her activities.
Discussing the popular television series *The West Wing*, Shawn and Trevor Parry-Giles (2002) contend that prime time’s take on the US presidency can help us realize some of the contradictions inherent in a political woman’s roles. While they argue that the TV show mimics the real-life presidency and current administrations by showcasing women in powerful roles, they also claim that *The West Wing* mirrors our society’s conflicting views about women’s proper place. They contend that America’s first lady, as she is fictionalized on the TV drama, must hide her public sphere prowess beneath her wifely roles and presidential nurturer and caretaker. Perhaps this romanticized view of the first spouse is not too far off the critical mark.

Hillary Clinton, who drew criticism mainly for her forceful entry into the public sphere and her eschewal of traditional first lady roles, is the antithesis of Laura Bush, who taught school before she had children, and focuses almost solely on hostess responsibility and caring for the first family (Trapper, 1999). Perhaps these two first ladies, serving back-to-back, best illustrate what Janis Edwards and Huey-Rong Cheng (2000) call “the public/private divide which has been seen as an impediment to women’s access to equality in political affairs” (p.367). They claim that the role of the first lady and the expectations we, as a culture, have for her have not changed too noticeably over the past century; our society, on the other hand, has changed. We understand that real women can have careers, but the first lady’s job is her husband and her family. A political figure and a symbol of national womanhood, the first lady often chooses a safe issue to champion. The American people seldom oppose things like literacy, children’s rights, or volunteerism.
Public/Private Tensions and the First Lady

Railing against “the fallacy of a two-dimensional office” (Watson, 2000, p.124), Watson argues that the type of questions asked by public opinion polls present an either-or approach to the first lady’s office. For example, polls commissioned to tap the voters’ impressions of Hillary Clinton often asked respondents if they would rather see the first lady in a more traditional role, or if they liked her public policy involvement. Watson claims “Such questions—which are raised by most public opinion polls about first ladies – dichotomize the nature of the office of first lady into two polar approaches: one a nonpublic, nonpolicy, traditional role and the other a public, policy-engaged activist role” (p.161). Watson claims that this dichotomization is both unrealistic and unnecessary; modern first ladies often fulfill both private and public roles. Moreover, when we criticize the president’s wife for her participation in political life, we send the message that women are not suited for public sphere involvement.

Mary Ellen Brown (2001) contends “in U.S. culture, maleness is a given” (p.257). She sees the first lady’s role as a double-bind, more than a dichotomy, blaming “one set of rules for men and another for women” for her claim “the very notion of women and power is an oxymoron” (p.263). Brown argues that because the first lady is expected to speak publicly, she finds herself in the role of a public woman. At the same time, because of the ceremonial and symbolic significance of her role, she is most successful speaking about women’s issues. The first lady, smack dab in the middle of the public/private divide, is divided against herself. While her marriage has given her access to a white glove pulpit, her forum is as limited as its nickname suggests. First ladies can
be found guilty of “neglecting their proper duties to pursue public life,” which would make them “unnatural women” (p.266).

Brown concludes that Hillary Clinton succeeded, through skillful public relations geared toward garnering flattering media framing, in becoming “both ‘us’ and ‘them’” (p.267). After the healthcare debacle, Clinton’s office started releasing more pictures of Hillary in a mothering or nurturing setting. She combated criticism of her public role by releasing proof of her private functions. Sarah Wildman (2001) contends that Laura Bush has jumped through similar image-forming hoops; her coping strategy, however, is much more vague and placating. Bush attempts to ignore the double-bind she faces, eschewing criticism of her right, as a woman, to speak in public by speaking almost exclusively about women’s issues.

Public opinion “constituted through discourse” (Fraser, 1997, p.101) can impact government policy; just as publicity helps define and introduce the members of our discourse community. The private sphere also is essential to the formation of the public sphere. Public and private worlds stand in stark contrast to each other; each can be defined as what the other is not. Lisa McLaughlin (1998) explains Jurgen Habermas’s notions of the private and public spheres: “the intimate (family) and economic spheres are private, while the official political (state) and public spheres are public” (p.75). That these two spheres exist separately is vital in the preservation of both of them. This public/private dichotomy, while an obvious oversimplification, is significant here because first ladies are often portrayed as either public or private. We demand that they choose between the two spheres and are suspicious of any attempt to combine their duties.
Gardeto (2001) maintains that the term “public man,” used to describe a man acting as a businessman, elected representative, or simply, a member of the culture consuming public sphere, has no feminine equivalent. Gardeto notes that the term “public woman” can mean prostitute, not a civic and commercial leader. While (white, heterosexual) men are the natural inhabitants of the public sphere, they are also the acknowledged heads of the private sphere; as a result, men can move between the public and the private realms with ease. Women, who are subordinate at home, are also out-of-place in the public world; consequently, women cannot move seamlessly from the private world to the public one. Julia T. Wood (1998) argues that the public sphere could not function without the private sphere; as women care for the workforce and nurture future generations of workers, the “elite minority” (p.134) can keep the public world functioning. Wood explains “someone has to cook the meals and clean the toilets” (p134).

Ellen Reid Gold and Renee Speicher (1995) contend that political spouses face difficulties “as they attempt to break through an established paradigm in which women belong in the private sphere while men are placed in the public sphere” (p.93). Gold and Speicher point out that because second lady Marilyn Quayle “plainly insisted on her authority and her autonomous status, she violated the social expectation for women and particularly for political wives” (p.96). Gold and Speicher reveal that public opinion of Marilyn Quayle was more favorable if the second lady was shown at home “where Quayle could be confined by her biology and thus declawed” (p.99). Political women in the public eye are forced to showcase their private duties publicly, in order to avoid criticisms that they are “unnatural” women.
Cindy Griffin (1996) maintains that this dichotomized public/private split is the result of essentialist views of men and women. Claiming “Topics that enter into the public realm are those framed in terms of alienation and mystery, rather than connection (p.34), Griffin argues that public sphere ideology has been used to maintain systems of oppression based on gender. For women to have fluid movement between public and private worlds, the same kind of fluidity between spheres that men have always enjoyed, we must reshape the public sphere to value contributions of the private world.

Susan Huxman (2000) argues that women’s rights advocates and first wave feminist pioneers paved the way for women’s entry into the public sphere by couching their public sphere participation in private terms. Women were legitimate authorities on matters of the home and heart; suffragists argued that women who had the opportunity to vote would perform “civic housekeeping” (p.320). Feminism’s first wave, which helped end slavery, inspired prohibition, pioneered women’s reproductive and property rights, and gained women the right to vote justified itself by stressing the differences between public and private roles and duties. First wavers argued “that women were, above all, nurturers who kept ‘the haven in a heartless world’ (the home) separate from what many experienced as a dangerously competitive and divisive public sphere” (Gardeto, 2001, p.227)

Early feminism focused on the differences between men and women, arguing that despite fundamental dissimilarities, both sexes should have equal opportunity and access. Today, this kind of essentialist feminism continues to argue along the “separate but equal” lines. However, the fact remains that participation in the private sphere does not have the same prestige, respect, or value as public sphere participation. Work performed
in the home, mostly by women, is both unpaid and unpraised. While women are allowed
to be authorities on women’s issues, these issues are seldom seen as impacting the world
of public policy or commerce.

Common families help America function; the first family helps America function
in the world. The first lady, theorizes Suzanne M. Daughton (1994) “is praised for being
an appropriate (which means silent) appendage to he husband’s campaign. The political
wife’s job is to serve as public proof that the politician maintains control within his own
family” (p.112). When a first lady crosses the line, becoming so public that she neglects
her private role, her perceived power can have negative ramifications for her husband’s
administration.

In her book Public Opinion, the First Ladyship, and Hillary Rodham Clinton,
Barbara Burrell (2001) argues that Clinton’s policy-making role in her husband’s
administration might benefit future first ladies, even though Hillary suffered the
consequences of her nontraditional choice. However, even Mrs. Clinton’s most staunch
supporters are forced to acknowledge that she won her initial government job through
marriage, not merit. Burrell asserts that, while voters acknowledge Hillary’s abilities to
make policy decisions as a senator from New York, few wanted to accept policy from the
president’s girl – maybe not even his favorite girl. Burrell acknowledges that many of
Hillary’s image problems concerned the public/private dichotomy. Although she was a
Yale-educated lawyer and a partner at a prestigious and controversial law firm, her role
as first lady required more than a nod to traditional family values and a half-hearted
adherence to acceptable women’s issues.
Burrell (2001) wonders if the first spouse should become an unpaid staffer, who would act as a presidential adviser. Although anti nepotism laws prevent the president’s spouse from receiving an official government paycheck, s/he could benefit from a clarification of official duties. Giving the first spouse a more official, better-defined office would help shape the role and its responsibilities. While Burrell seeks to free the first lady “from the cultural constraints that have been imposed on this role” (p.153), the taboos toward the president’s wife “acting in the public sphere” (p.153) are many. Burrell claims that these constraints “contradict the liberal tradition of individualism that has characterized American social and political culture. The individual is at the center of liberal democracy, but patriarchy has limited women’s opportunities” (p.153). While liberal individualism might help the public, political sphere function, the family – at least the patriarchal conjugal family – has always been a kingdom. The first lady “acts out” the role of the average woman on a much larger scale.

At the same time, she is privy to a pretty big soapbox. Since the media is infatuated with her anyway (Burrell, 2001, Kelley, 2001), the first lady’s mini-bully pulpit can garner lots of attention in the press, making the issues she chooses to champion significant by association. Colleen Kelley (2001) contends that the first lady’s public/private struggles are partially created and enthusiastically reinforced by media coverage of her. Kelley argues that press coverage of the first lady robs her of a private life, even as it chastises her for her public one. The sanctity of her privacy violated, the first lady takes refuge in a public sphere that works to deny her entrance. For the first lady, the boundaries between the personal and the political start to blur, until the personal really is political – but still very personal. Women’s issues become woman’s issues; each
woman is alone in her struggle. Although we count for a little more than half of the population, our interests are special interests, our issues are not the issues of humanity (Faludi, 1991, Daughton, 1994). The first lady, despite the limitations of her role, can be a public voice for private concerns that might otherwise go unnoticed. Although she might lack the prestige of an elected official, she is typically a media darling, and her voice, however frivolous, has an audience. Even Laura Bush, who was reluctant to enter the public life and is quick to emphasize her traditional duties, admits, “I have a forum. I won’t always have it” (in Marton, 2001, p.259).

Lest the boundaries between the public sphere and the private sphere seem insurmountable, it is important to note that women’s issues have been slowly initiated into the public world. Conway, Ahern, and Steuernagel (1999) argue that women have made inroads into the world of public policy, and we are continuing to do so. Conway, et al, claim that, as women enter the business world and the world of politics in greater and greater numbers, women’s issues slowly become people’s issues. As Nancy Fraser (1997) contends, “Getting an issue in the public sphere agenda, however, does not guarantee success in controlling the discussion of it” (p.104). As women’s issues find their way into the public eye, they face the threat of cooption, which might prove more detrimental than private sphere relegation.

The first lady embodies the conflict between the two spheres. Although she plays no official legislative or executive role in America’s government, she is married to the leader of the free world. Perhaps it is the media’s mistake to glorify her role. After all, wives are not unusual in our heterosexist, compulsively nuptial culture. That the first lady married her power is clear; that she is powerful by association and through publicity
is also clear. One could argue that elected female politicians are more worthy of our study because they play a more significant role in the construction of public policies and because they, themselves, are the reason for their power. However, the first lady’s impotence, and our fascination with her helplessness, is also worthy of analysis. A woman who cannot win if she retreats to the private world and who is scorned for her foray into the public, the first lady helps shape public opinion of her husband’s administration, and she fights the contradictions of her role to make the most out of her modest platform.

**First Ladies and the Emergence of Feminine Style**

Not only do first ladies, as public women, walk a fine line between public and private worlds, they also find themselves caught between femininity and feminism, advocacy and aggression, patriarchy and patriotism. From these unwieldy contradictions, the first lady can become a symbolic, ceremonial, and sometimes civic icon; similarly, from a patriarchal rhetorical tradition, she can fashion a form of discourse that can become both a site of resistance and a new public sphere – one that is woman-centered, but inclusive, interconnected – a “feminist counter-public sphere” (Dow and Tonn, 1993, p. 287). Hegemonic masculinity, invisible, impervious, inescapable, permeates mass culture, infiltrating and guiding both private and public realms. A feminist counter-public sphere would have room for opposition and for feminine style, which privileges traditionally feminine ways of seeing and knowing.

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (1991) maintains “Men can be expert about all manner of things; women are expert only about being women. Male speech declares war or peace, raises others to power, and bestows praise; female speech does not” (p.35). Because the
unspoken standard – in rhetoric, in politics, in business – is maleness and masculine style, women who try to conform to the male norm cannot help but come up short. No matter how well a woman upholds and fulfills traditional rhetorical styles, political roles, and business duties, she is still the other, not yet a natural inhabitant of the public sphere. Campbell (1983) contends:

Women’s concerns lie outside the public sphere and public communication. Women’s subculture relies on private, intimate communication based on personal experience. It is both the mode through which women communicate and the means by which change can be affected (p.104).

Feminine style, unlike its traditional, masculine counterpart relies on personal experience, narrative, and anecdotal evidence to support claims and prove arguments.

Daughton (1994) claims that the nonfeminist speaker will reject the idea of a feminine style; if that speaker is female, her haste to conform to the male political and rhetorical norm might make her “downplay her own importance, denying her right to speak even as she speaks” (p.113). The nonfeminist speaker can also “imply or even assert that her identity as a woman is not relevant,” or “most insidiously, she may imply or assert that that other women’s complaints are unfounded, and their goals are not worthwhile” (p.113). The feminist speaker, by contrast, uses a rhetoric founded on principles of inherent worth and interconnectedness. While the second-wave feminist slogan “The personal is political” is an integral part of feminine style, women – people—are more than just individuals.

It is important to note that “feminine” and “feminist” are two very different terms. However, feminine style, with its potential for empowerment, is feminist speech, rejecting the nonfeminist strategies mentioned by Daughton, as well as masculine notions of competition and hierarchy, and the patriarchal rhetorical tradition. Sonja Foss and
Cindy Griffin (1992) argue “Women simply have not had the opportunities to speak and write that men have had. In addition, the ideas of women have not been treated with the same degree of seriousness as the ideas of men” (p.332). They argue that traditional rhetoric is a rhetoric of domination; conversely, a rhetoric of inherent value produces empowered action, not domination. While such a rhetoric violates traditional principles, Foss and Griffin, drawing on the Wiccan theories of Starhawk, argue that empowered action is a form of resistance. This action helps affirm the rhetoric of inherent value by recognizing the importance of oppositional ways of seeing and knowing, rejecting hegemony.

Griffin (1996) contends that female rhetors have relied on a distinct style of oratory for centuries. She claims that Mary Wollstonecraft’s “A Vindication of the Rights of Women” was more than a feminist declaration of independence from social order; it was also an assertion of freedom from masculine rhetorical styles. She argues that Wollstonecraft challenged both society and rhetoric with her web-style reasoning; Wollstonecraft also used personal forms of reasoning, encouraging her audience to become part of the argumentation process. Campbell (1995) contends that early female rhetors had no choice but to utilize a form of feminine style because they faced a distinct rhetorical double bind. Not only did early female speakers have to fulfill stylistic and substantive requirements supplied by their rhetorical situations, they also had to justify their right, as women, to speak publicly. As a result, early speeches given by women were generic hybrids, simultaneously fulfilling situational conventions and providing a justification of female speech.
Campbell (1995) contends that early female speakers adapted their private roles for public consumption by alluding to taboos that would keep them silent and stressing their private sphere functions from their public platforms. She also claims that women speaking in the public sphere utilize a kind of feminine style that allows them to reason from lived and anecdotal experience. Dow (1997) introduces the idea of social location, explaining “When we speak of certain voices having more power, or privilege, we are usually speaking in terms of what can be termed ‘social location,’ most commonly defined by discourses of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and class” (p.247). Women are located outside of the realm of power and authority; we have the power to speak from personal experience because we lack the authority to reason from generalization.

Carol Blair, Julie Brown, and Leslie Baxter (1994) notice a disciplining of feminine style in the public sphere, arguing that “the male paradigm” asserts its dominance by discrediting feminine style. Blair, et al., offer four characteristics of this male paradigm: impersonal abstraction, disciplinary territoriality, individuation, and hierarchy. Blair, Brown, and Baxter argue that these standards are not the universals they appear to be. Instead, the characteristics of a male paradigm are just as “gendered” as the characteristics of feminine style. Because maleness is the unspoken standard, we accept these traits as the natural standards of discourse.

Foss and Griffin (1995) agree, noting that the male paradigm has influenced our perceptions of rhetoric, which they contend does not have to be defined as persuasion. Rejecting traditional notions of persuasion, Foss and Griffin, instead, offer a model of invitational rhetoric. Based on inherent value and interconnectedness, invitational rhetoric does not attempt to change the minds of audience members; instead, it asks
speakers and audience members alike to share their opinions in a nonthreatening manner. They argue, “invitational rhetoric constitutes an invitation to the audience to enter the rhetor’s world and to see it as the rhetor does” (p.5). If change does occur as a result of this shared understanding, it “occurs in the audience or rhetor, or both, as a result of new understanding and insights gained in the exchange of ideas” (p.6). Different than traditional notions of rhetoric as persuasion, invitational rhetoric is characterized by its openness and its appreciation of diverse perspectives and opinions. Foss and Griffin offer this type of rhetoric as a feminist perspective because of its reliance on interconnectedness and inherent worth.

**Political Feminine Style as a Tool to Analyze First Lady Rhetoric**

Feminine style, while also based on principles of openness and respect for lived experience, differs from invitational rhetoric, especially in the political world, because its goal can be persuasion. While change might happen once the rhetor sends an invitation to his or her audience, this behavioral or attitudinal modification is not the declared goal of invitational rhetoric. Political speech, even the kind spoken by the president’s wife, is most often intended to persuade. While the ideas behind invitational rhetoric and feminine style are similar, political feminine style has its own set of criteria. Janis King (1991) argues that political feminine style, which can be considered a genre in and of itself, also has implications for other generic categories. For example, King traces the influence of feminine style on apologetic rhetoric. She argues that different rhetorical expectations for men and women influence the facets of feminine style. She claims that because aggressiveness, a desired trait in a male leader, can be harmful to a female leader’s reputation, women must rely on a rhetorical style that is more educational than
confrontational. However, lest women be branded weaker and less argumentative than their male counterparts, their style must be both conciliatory and contentious.

Jane Blankenship and Deborah Robson (1995) contend that political feminine style has gained popularity with both male and female political rhetors. Claiming “all political discourse contains characteristics which situate it at some point on a continuum between usage of feminine and masculine styles” (p.355), Blankenship and Robson identify five characteristics of political feminine style: basing political judgments on concrete, lived experience, valuing inclusivity and the relational nature of being, conceptualizing the power of public office as a capacity to “get things done and empower others, approaching policy formation holistically, and moving women’s issues to the forefront of the public arena. They conclude that feminine style works well on television and appeals to voters because of it is usually conversational and invitational.

While Blankenship and Robson highlight the discussion of women’s issues as a key aspect of political feminine style, Shawn and Trevor Parry-Giles (1996) argue:

instead of resulting in a feminized public sphere, contemporary campaign rhetorics reflect the continual marginalization of women in the political process and the general exclusion of women from political office and political power . . . The mere presence of a ‘feminine style in political discourse, therefore, does not necessarily represent the increased feminization of the political process (p.338).

They acknowledge that feminine style uses personal experience to support arguments, and they contend that it seeks to empower both rhetors and audience members by acknowledging the inherent worth of the individual and validating personal opinions. Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles also argue that feminine style stands in opposition to hegemonic masculinity, which defines itself as superior to femininity. However, they contend that feminine style might be a more advantageous tool for a male rhetor, who can
use it to soften his image for televised consumption. Shane Miller (1997) agrees, noting the existence of a “woven gender” (p.217), which he calls “made for a woman but stronger for a man” (p.217).

While male rhetors increasingly capitalize on a feminine political style, they have an advantage over female rhetors, who most often use that style. Just as men can move effortlessly from the public sphere to the private sphere and back again, so, too, can male rhetors shift from a hegemonic masculine style to an invitational feminine style, incorporating advantageous aspects of both paradigms. Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles argue that women who talk like men face negative sanctions for encroaching on masculine rhetorical territory, and may be branded aggressive, competitive, or ruthless. Conversely, male political rhetors who use feminine style to appear sensitive and inclusive garner praise, not criticism.

While this double bind is hardly surprising, it can also be beneficial to the female political rhetor. As political feminine style gains acceptance, women’s form of reasoning invades the public sphere and our political consciousness. I think that Dow and Tonn’s (1993) conception of political feminine style is especially well suited for an analysis of Bush and Clinton’s rhetoric. While political feminine style is based on Campbell’s well-known principles of feminine style, Dow and Tonn’s methodology also recognizes the need to reshape the public sphere. Beyond the liberal feminist idea of equality is the notion that women must work to reshape traditional institutions and ideologies formed and perpetuated by hegemonic masculinity. In this way, Dow and Tonn’s notion of political feminine style marries feminism and rhetoric, giving us a union of feminist ideology and rhetorical analysis.
Specifically, Dow and Tonn (1993) claim that female political rhetors can capitalize on private sphere experience; by politicizing and publicizing the personal and the private, women rhetors can empower their audiences and bring feminine style to the political arena. As political feminine style gains popularity and credence, women-centered reasoning can help debunk the male paradigm, changing our notions of rhetoric, persuasion, and political speech, perhaps even widening the canon of great speeches to include the words of more women orators and paving the way for women to enter the Whitehouse with the first gentleman in tow.

Focusing on the liberal, feminist, and often-humorous rhetoric of then Texas Governor Ann Richards, Dow and Tonn claim that Richards is able to judge political claims by personal experience. They maintain that Richards privileges a feminine style with her reliance on anecdotes, inductive reasoning, personal politics, and compassion. Dow and Tonn argue “because of the paradox facing female politicians and the general devaluing of women’s experiences and modes of talk, women in the public life are not likely to admit reasoning from feminine experience” (p.292). Dow and Tonn assert that Richards directly addresses her defiance of this constraint by focusing much of her public talk on women’s issues and declaring her gender to be a point in her favor because of her privileged “feminine eye” (p.295).

Similarly, Laura Bush and Hillary Clinton are free to reason like women, but for very different reasons. Feminine style is expected from the first lady, as is proper attention to women’s issues. While Richards is a liberal Democrat protecting her own interests, Bush is a Republican serving her conservative husband’s interests, and Clinton is a first lady enigma, more interested in personal power than reflected glory. All three
women rhetors use political feminine style to appeal to their audiences and to balance private sphere shackles with their public sphere freedom. Political feminine style lets women rhetors nurture empowerment – for themselves, their audiences, and women’s issues in general. Dow and Tonn claim that this style can help create a feminist counter-public sphere, which is at once public and private. This sphere could function as a discourse community based on women’s commonalities and work as a public forum for private issues. At the same time, by testing the public/private dichotomy, this sphere could function “to provide potential for oppositional ideology that counters hegemonic ideas of universality” (p.287). As more political women rhetors attempt to inhabit this sphere, the more respect female speakers and politicians can acquire and the more clout women’s issues can command.

Dow and Tonn argue that political rhetors exhibiting feminine style must do three things: use personal experience to back claims, politicize the personal, and exhibit the feminine ethic of care. These three aspects of feminine style function together to create what Dow and Tonn term a political philosophy, and they respect women’s ways of seeing and knowing. It is also important to note that the criteria for a rhetoric of inherent value, as well and Blankenship and Robson’s feminine style criteria, and the criteria provided by Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles are contained within Dow and Tonn’s three categories; Dow and Tonn supply the most parsimonious and appropriate model for analysis.

To evaluate Clinton’s and Bush’s use of political feminine style, we can use Dow and Tonn’s methodology to conduct a careful analysis of their first lady rhetoric. Feminine style is especially useful for a first lady, who, by virtue of her unelected
position, is expected to confine herself to nonthreatening pet projects and causes. She is, therefore, not criticized for using feminine logic, and she does not have to push the aggressive/competitive envelope. Feminine style could allow the first lady to become a stealthy women’s rights advocate, helping to incorporate feminine style and a counter-public sphere into our national consciousness. This form of style also allows her to confront more serious issues, as she balances her private role against her public platform. To evaluate their use of feminine style and the success of their nurturing of empowerment, we must examine Clinton’s “Women’s Rights Are Human Rights” and Bush’s 2002 International Women’s Day Speech by applying Dow and Tonn’s criteria. Chapter three will undertake this analysis, investigating the first ladies’ rhetoric for the use of personal experience to back claims, the politicizing of the personal, and the exhibition of a feminine ethic of care.
Chapter Three: Rhetorical Analysis

*We have too many high sounding words and too few actions that correspond with them.*
--Abigail Adams

Dow and Tonn (1993) argue that political feminine style will lead to the creation of a counter-public feminist sphere, a place where women’s issues become public issues and women’s rights become the rights of human kind. While Blankenship and Robson (1995), Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles (1996), and Miller (1997) contend that feminine style might be more successful when used by male political rhetors, the first lady is a unique political speaker. Her words, while undeniably partisan, are also relatively apolitical. Although the first lady represents the interests of her husband’s party and administration, she is also the public voice for private concerns, an unofficial official. Using political feminine style, the first lady can validate and reaffirm the everyday, lived experience of real women while she simultaneously carves space for that experience in the public sphere. Political feminine style is a mix of personal and traditional argumentation styles that allows the rhetor who uses it to travel between public and private worlds – empowering herself and her audience.

To analyze Hilary Clinton’s and Laura Bush’s words with Dow and Tonn’s methodology, it is necessary to focus on one criteria at a time, applying that criteria first, to Clinton’s speech and second, to Bush’s speech. This analysis will pay special attention to issues of power and empowerment. At the same time, it will seek to highlight the public portrayal of private issues, recognizing the first ladies’ juggling of personal and professional roles. However, before a criterion-by-criterion analysis can be accomplished, it is necessary to briefly discuss the rhetorical situation of both speeches.
Clinton and Bush’s Rhetorical Situations

At first glance, these two speeches seem remarkably similar. For example, both first ladies’ speeches are delivered to United Nations audiences, and both orations grapple with issues of global women’s rights. Upon closer inspection, the speeches are as different as the speakers themselves. Clinton’s speech is quite long—65 paragraphs to be exact; Laura’s is a mere 26 paragraphs. While Hillary spoke on foreign soil to an audience of thousands of women representing NGOs from across the globe, Laura addressed hundreds of United Nations cabinet members in New York City. Both speeches marked specially designated women’s events, and both speakers had their own set of women’s-related issues to overcome. Traditionally bashed by the right for her perceived anti-family, anti-children stance, Clinton often garnered criticism for her feminist views. In contrast, Bush is maligned by the left for being too traditional, too anti-feminist, despite her pro-choice viewpoint.

While Bush has managed, for the most part, to eschew controversy as first lady, Clinton’s comings and goings often turned heads, and her voyage to Beijing, China, to lead a coalition of US delegates to the UN’s Fourth World Conference on Women was no exception. For weeks before her September 5, 1995, speech, newspapers from across the country—and even a few papers from overseas—reported on her trip and the heated debate that surrounded it. Objections to Clinton’s conference attendance fell into two distinct camps. On one hand, critics objected to Clinton’s attendance on the grounds that China was one of the worst perpetrators of human rights abuses in the world; a pro-woman conference on Chinese soil was sheer lunacy (Feder, 1995; Harris, 1995; MacDonald, 1995). On the other hand, Republican dissidents claimed that the UN
supported a radical anti-family, pro-abortion agenda; Clinton’s attendance would be proof that she agreed with “the assembled crazies” (Feder, 1995, p.21) representing global feminism.

While Bill Clinton drew criticism for vehemently supporting his wife’s decision to travel to Beijing, the Clinton administration did not fully back Hillary’s visit until human rights activist Harry Wu was released from Chinese prison on August 25, 1995 (Harris, 1995). Most vocal in their beliefs that Hillary Clinton should avoid the Beijing conference were Republican Senators and Presidential hopefuls Phil Gramm and Bob Dole, neither of whom considered Wu’s release to merit a visit from the first lady. Chicago Sun-Times reporter John Harris quotes Gramm as saying ”The only proper American response to the release of Harry Wu is ‘It’s about time,’ not ‘Take my wife – please.’” (p.28). Bob Dole told the Sun-Times “This misguided conference and its leftwing ideological agenda remains a genuine waste of the taxpayers’ money” (p.28).

Touchy relations with the Chinese government and spirited UN Conference bashing provided a kind of anti-exigence for Clinton’s Beijing speech; her own political aspirations seemed to have supplied the exigence for her words. Defending herself against allegations that her conference appearance would be a mistake, Clinton wrote a column that appeared in the September 3, 1995, issue of the Denver Post. In her essay, Clinton argued that she wanted to travel to Beijing in order to celebrate women and families, “helping women live up to their God-given potential at home, in school, on the job, in their communities, and as mother, wives, learners, and citizens.” (p.D4). Demanding that her readers take the conference seriously, Clinton wrote:

Concerns about education, health care, the minimum wage, and domestic violence often are written off as ‘women’s issues’ unrelated to pressing economic and
political challenges. In fact, these ‘women’s issues’ are crucial to the progress of families everywhere… For that reason, the voices of American women must be hard. And they will be heard (p. D4).

In her book *Hilary’s Choice*, biographer Gail Sheehy (1999) argues that attending the Beijing conference was extremely important to the first lady, despite China’s human rights abuses, the Clinton administration’s diplomatic difficulties with China, the imprisonment of Harry Wu, and Republican opposition to the UN agenda. Perhaps she was looking ahead to a 2000 Senate bid; perhaps Clinton’s focus was even further down the road, staring down a 2008 attempt at the Whitehouse, or perhaps her reasons for attending the UN conference were as altruistic as she claimed. Sheehy quotes Clinton’s chief of staff Melanne Verveer as claiming, “This was one of those foundational events that Hillary felt strongly she should do.” (p.275).

Sheehy contends that the women who attended Clinton’s speech treated the first lady like a rock star, like the “First Woman of the World” (p. 278), greeting her words with cheers, tears, and “rapturous applause” (p.277). Sheehy argues that Clinton’s conference appearance served as a political reawakening, drawing Clinton’s attention away from the scandals of her husband’s administration and helping her refocus her energy on the 1996 campaign.

Like Clinton, Bush’s speech probably also came about due to political motives. Her November 17, 2001 radio address to the nation an uncontroversial success, Bush abandoned her pre September 11th low profile to take a more active role in promoting her husband’s administration. *Chicago Sun-Times* reporter Bonnie Erbe(2001) argues that Bush’s “advocacy for Afghan women looks like a strategy to improve husband’s 2004 chances” (p. 55), claiming that most working women voted for Gore, not Bush, in the
2000 election. It is hardly surprising that the first lady might have political reasons for delivering speeches on behalf of women’s rights; after all, Clinton’s Beijing speech helped boost her popularity and her philandering husband’s. The exigence for Bush’s speech is more straightforward than the urgency behind Clinton’s words. The US-led war on Afghanistan drew national attention to the Taliban’s treatment of women; Bush was able to parlay this international spotlight into a platform to speak on behalf of global women’s rights. Like her predecessor, Bush delivered her speech to a very specific UN audience. While International Women’s Day was not the media circus that the Fourth Conference on Women became, Bush’s speech did garner a smattering of praise.

While Hillary Clinton almost surely had her own political aspirations in mind when delivering her UN speech, Laura Bush has time and time again denied any desires to hold political office, or even serve in the public eye. Perhaps because of her self-proclaimed political reticence, Bush rarely draws criticism when mounting a public platform. Shawn Parry-Giles and Diane Blair (2003) argue that most first ladies have been unfavorably reviewed after testifying before congress. After she became the first Republican first lady to testify before the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, Bush’s popularity increased – as did sales of magazines with her face on the cover. Blair and Parry-Giles speculate that America may love the first lady because she seems so apolitical; or, they argue, we may tolerate her rare political outbursts because of “social activist traditions established by her predecessors” (p.581), which have normalized ”the involvement of first ladies in legislative deliberations” (p. 581).

Indeed, while Clinton’s speech is deliberative, focusing on future policy concerning global women’s rights, Bush’s words are more epideictic, turning the
attention of her audience toward specific actions the government has taken to improve the lives of women in Afghanistan. Sue Curry Jansen (2002) argues “First Lady Laura Bush, who had a low profile before September 11th, became highly visible in the archetypal role of nurturer, compassionately tending to the nation’s emotional neediness” (p.140). In her speech to the UN on International Women’s Day, Bush continues to fulfill this nurturing role, assuring her audience that her husband’s administration is protecting the interests of Afghan women and children through justified military violence.

Although the two women’s speeches do share a few commonalities, Laura Bush and Hillary Clinton deliver fairly different words to radically different audiences for very different, albeit political, reasons. While it is important to consider the rhetorical situations of their addresses, it is also vital to analyze their speeches, using political feminine style as a lens through which to interpret their work, discussing how both first ladies use personal experience to back their claims, politicize the personal, and exhibit the feminine ethic of care.

**Using Personal Experience to Back Claims**

First, Dow and Tonn claim that rhetors who utilize political feminine style will support their claims with personal experience. This type of reasoning is a departure from traditional forms of reasoning showcased under a masculine paradigm. The masculine paradigm favors impersonal, objective or authoritative types of backing like statistical evidence or expert testimony. However, because women lack the authority to speak in sweeping pseudo-objective generalizations, we reason from what we have come to know through our lived experience.
This form of reasoning is significant to the formation of a counter-public feminist sphere in several ways. First, using personal experiences to back claims allows the rhetor to create a common identity that she and her audience can share; they are united by their own, mundane experiences. This common identity is essential to the idea of inherent worth; valuing lived experience not only draws speaker and audience closer together, it also iterates the belief that every person’s experience is valid. Second, using personal experiences to back claims redefines traditional, patriarchal definitions of truth. Truth becomes “consistency between what is said and what is experienced” (Dow & Tonn, 1993, p.291). Valuing experience over recorded, pseudo-objective “facts” places an emphasis on theory over praxis, empowering the speaker, who uses her own experience to lend credence to her arguments, and her audience, who can test the rhetor’s words against their own lives, finding truth in consistency. Third, using personal experience to test claims allows the rhetor to blur the lines between the public and the private spheres. Bringing private experiences to a public audience allows the rhetor to transform individual insight into collective wisdom and widens the canon of acceptable public testimony.

For these three reasons, using personal experiences to test claims helps to empower both rhetor and receiver, transforming our perceptions of the public and private worlds. Both Clinton and Bush exhibit this form of reasoning; this analysis will first, investigate Clinton’s use of personal experience to test claims and second, examine Bush’s use of argument from personal experience.
Clinton’s Use of Personal Experience To Back Claims

A fairly liberal democrat and a self-proclaimed feminist, Hillary Clinton makes use of political feminine style throughout her speech. Her speech, “Women’s Rights are Human Rights” argues that the concerns of women are the concerns of humanity. She highlights human rights violations endured by women across the globe, claiming that women need to unite to fight abuse and to elevate the status of women’s issues to people’s issues. In this case, Clinton does not use her own personal experience to back her arguments. Instead, she incorporates the real experiences of other women to best showcase her central argument – women’s rights are human rights.

Near the beginning of the speech, Clinton attempts to include the members of her audience in her argument by alluding to the daily experiences of women across the world. She says “Whether it is while playing with our children in the park, or washing clothes in the river, or taking a break at the office water cooler, we come together and talk about our aspirations and concerns” (paragraph 5). By highlighting specific, daily activities of women, Clinton turns the mundane into the collective, and she argues that everyday women are concerned with human rights, transforming the private talk of women into a public agenda. She asks “Wasn’t it after the women’s conference in Nairobi ten years ago that the world focused for the first time on the crisis of domestic violence?” (paragraph 12). By reminding the conference goers of their public policy influence, Clinton argues that women can find their strength in numbers. She uses the experience of her audience to justify both the Fourth World Conference on Women and the condemnation of global human rights abuses.
Next, Clinton devotes a section of her speech to detailing her own contributions to the global fight for human rights. She says:

Earlier today, I participated in a World Health Organization forum, where government officials, NGOs, and individual citizens are working on ways to address the health problems of women and girls. Tomorrow, I will attend a gathering of the United Nations Development Fund for Women. There, the discussion will focus on local – and highly successful – programs that give hard-working women access to credit so they can improve their own lives and the lives of their families (paragraphs 13-14).

By focusing her audience’s attention on her own recent policy forays, Clinton demonstrates her concern for human rights and her advocate status. Moreover, she assures women that their situations will improve, as other concerned women join together to make public policy decisions that can affect the everyday lives of real working women.

Specifying the need to improve health care for women, Clinton also argues that women must become involved in their own betterment; they must be “hard-working,” and they must work to improve their situations.

Drawing on her own experience as a human rights advocate and politician’s wife, Clinton mentions her travels as first lady, sharing her personal glimpses of women struggling to carve public niches for themselves:

I have met mothers in Jojakarta, Indonesia, who come together regularly in their village to discuss nutrition, family planning, and baby care.
I have met working parents in Denmark who talk about the comfort they feel in knowing that their children can be cared for in creative, safe, and nurturing after-school centers.
I have met women in South Africa who helped lead the struggle to end apartheid and are now helping build a new democracy.
I have met with the leading women of the Western hemisphere who are working everyday to promote literacy and better health care for the children of their countries.
I have met women in Bangladesh who are taking out small loans to buy milk cows, rickshaws, thread, and other materials to create a livelihood for themselves and their families.
I have met doctors and nurses in Belarus and Ukraine who are trying to keep children alive in the aftermath of Chernobyl (paragraphs 19-24).

Not only does Clinton build on her own personal experience, she also uses the lived experience of hypothetical women to make her case for global human rights. She argues that the individual efforts of women can lead to collective change; each unique contribution is inherently valuable to the advancement of all. At the same time, she claims that all women are united in their struggle for self-improvement.

Encouraging her audience to recognize themselves as part of the global struggle, Clinton explains “At this very moment, as we sit here, women around the world are giving birth, raising children, cooking meals, washing clothes, cleaning houses, planting crops, working on assembly lines, running companies, and running countries” (paragraph 28). Clinton uses the accomplishments of women across the globe to remind her audience of women’s power and the inherent value of women’s lived experiences. Highlighting traditional women’s work, like caring for children, families, and homes, Clinton also discusses more contemporary, public roles for women. Blending the private with the public, she reminds women that they can inhabit both spheres, encouraging us to fight for the freedom to negotiate the realms at will.

Claiming to speak for American women, Clinton maintains that conference representatives have a responsibility to speak on behalf of all women. She says:

I want to speak up for mothers who are fighting for good schools, safe neighborhoods, clean air and clean airwaves; for older women, some of them widows, who have raised their families and now find that their skills and life experiences are not valued in the workplace; for women who are working all night as nurses, hotel clerks, and fast food cooks so they can be home during the day with their kids; and for women everywhere who simply don’t have time to do everything they are called upon to do each day (paragraph 32).
Clinton argues that women are often rendered voiceless by their circumstances, powerless by their ever-shifting roles and responsibilities. By showcasing the lived experience of some groups of American women, she allows overtaxed women to take refuge in the knowledge that their struggles are not forgotten. She uses personal experience to support her argument that even Western women, who have made strides toward equality and endure less human rights abuses than women in most developing countries, still face discrimination and role strain. Arguing that the workforce may not appreciate women’s skills and abilities, most of which are the result of their lived experience, Clinton simultaneously acknowledges the importance of women’s acquired wisdom. She continues, “We need to understand that there is no formula for how women should lead their lives” (paragraph 34), claiming that women have the knowledge to choose their own destinies. Each has the ability to make her own life decisions, and together, women can assure they have the freedom to do so.

Clinton uses the story of early US women’s rights advocates to support her argument for global change:

In my country, we recently celebrated the 75th anniversary of women’s suffrage. It took 150 years after the signing of our Declaration of Independence for women to win the right to vote. It took 72 years of organized struggle on the part of many courageous women and men. It was one of America’s most divisive philosophical wars. But it was also a bloodless war. Suffrage was achieved without a shot being fired (paragraph 54-55).

Relying on the experience of early American feminists to support her claim, Clinton argues that women across the globe can band together to eliminate human rights abuses. She maintains that if US women could achieve a peaceful revolution, then the world’s women could also accomplish a nonviolent transformation of the public sphere to include
women’s voices and concerns. Using the US suffrage movement as an example of the change that women can enact, Clinton seeks to empower her audience, encouraging women across the globe to take matters into their own hands and protest human rights abuses.

Although she does not use her own experience exclusively, Clinton uses the lived experience of real women to support her speech’s central argument. Claiming that women’s rights and human rights are one and the same, Clinton highlights specific examples of women across the globe who are attempting to better their lives and the lives of their families. By rejecting traditional forms of backing, Clinton uses women’s lives to provide support for her arguments. This strategy helps to empower her audience because it encourages them to value their own practical wisdom, and it allows them to appreciate the inherent worth of women everywhere.

**Bush’s Use of Personal Experience to Back Claims**

Like Clinton, Laura Bush also uses real women’s experiences to support her speech’s central arguments. While Bush is also speaking to a United Nations audience, and while she is also addressing the issue of global women’s rights, her speech is less overtly feminist than Clinton’s. While she does not explicitly encourage women to unite and transform the public sphere, Bush does encourage citizens of the world to protest human rights abuses inflicted on women. While Clinton relies almost exclusively on personal experience to support her claims, Bush uses some forms of backing that are traditionally masculine.

For example, she argues that the United States is a strong supporter of global women’s rights, claiming “We have committed at least $1.5 million to help Afghan
women work and support their families” (paragraph 7) and “Today, the United States has helped some 150,000 people return [to Afghanistan, from refugee camps], and we have pledged about $50.2 million dollars in support for community-based health, education, shelter, water, and sanitation projects” (paragraph 8). She also reveals that “American children have sent more than $4 million dollars for food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, and toys for Afghan children” (paragraph 9). Later in her speech, Bush adds that “mothers with a secondary education have children with mortality rates nearly 36 percent lower than mothers with only a primary school education” (paragraph 12).

Bush’s use of numbers to support her argument falls under the masculine paradigm; she argues that the US is a strong supporter of women’s rights in Afghanistan because we have donated lots of money, and we have relocated lots of people. This form of support runs counter to feminine style, which finds support in individual, lived experience, not impersonal statistical evidence. Additionally, her early reliance on traditional reasoning lends credence to the claim that women rhetors are reluctant to acknowledge personal ways of seeing and knowing because hegemony privileges traditionally masculine speech. Bush relies on support provided under the masculine paradigm to help establish her credibility, giving her the freedom to reason like a woman.

However, she uses more masculine style backing for her arguments when she relies on expert testimony to support her claims. Bush relates the words of an Afghan school principal, the leader of Afghanistan’s Women’s Association, and her husband to lend credence to her claims that education is essential to improving the lives of Afghan women. Her use of personal testimony to support her argument is decidedly unfeminine.
Instead of relating the stories of real-life women in Afghanistan working to better themselves and their communities, Bush relies on the statements of so-called experts. Only one of the three experts tapped by Bush is a woman, Farahnaz Nazir, founder of Afghanistan’s Women’s Association. All three, Nazir, principal Diwana Qol, and George W. Bush, state that education is essential for both men and women in Afghanistan. While these statements provide support for Bush’s argument, they do nothing to empower rhetor or audience.

The first lady also relies on feminine style to support her push for global women’s rights. As further evidence of US – read Bush administration – support for global women’s rights, Bush states “In Kabul and Mazar-E-Sharif, the U.S. is sending wheat to 21 bakeries run by widows who earn a living and feed their own families” (paragraph 7). Although she quantifies the goodwill gesture, Bush attempts to show consistency between what is said and what is experienced. She argues that the US does more than pay lip service to the women’s rights; our government helps women develop a livelihood, helping women better themselves, their families, and their communities. This example, as well as the examples provided by her masculine backing, highlight the central theme of Bush’s argument: that Afghan women should work hard to improve their own lots in life, making use of the freedoms granted by the US war and the resources provided by the Bush administration.

Drawing on her own experience as an educator and an advocate for literacy and educational programs, Bush explains “A major focus is education. Recently, I met with Chairman Karzai, and I presented him with a children’s dictionary, which symbolized the importance the United States places on education” (paragraph 10). Bush offers her
audience a consistency between rhetoric and experience; not only has she related her interest in education, but she has followed through with this interest, using education to improve the lives of Afghan children. Choosing simple imagery – a children’s dictionary – Bush uses her own experience as a mother and a teacher to convey her argument that education is essential to the improvement of the lives of Afghan women and children.

**Politcizing the Personal**

Second, Dow and Tonn argue that a rhetor who utilizes political feminine style will work to politicize the personal. This strategy, while similar to using personal experience to back claims, encourages audience identification and empathy on the part of the rhetor and the receiver. Crucial to the development of a feminist counter-public sphere, politicizing the personal lays a groundwork of feminine values, including interconnectedness and the relational nature of being. Dow and Tonn argue that a rhetor who politicizes the personal allows private talk and experiences to become grounds for political judgment. Dow and Tonn explain “Traditionally, women’s primary roles are their private and relational ones (wife, mother, daughter) and not their professional or public ones” (1993, p.293). Political feminine style brings private roles to public attention, both publicizing and critiquing traditional sex roles.

When the personal becomes political, the difference between public and private spheres lessens, as private ways of seeing and knowing gain widespread public acceptance. Political feminine style operates under the assumption that the female experience is distinctive, hinging on relationships and interconnectedness, as well as “strength and self-awareness gained from mature introspection” (Dow and Tonn, 1993, p.294). This personal awareness allows women to examine their connections to each
other and to their multiple roles; bringing women’s private roles to public attention politicizes what was previously only personal. With an emphasis on individual experience as well as the collective, distinct female experience, rhetors utilizing political feminine style use interconnectedness, coupled with the inherent worth of the individual, to lay the foundation for a counter-public sphere grounded in feminine values.

Blankenship and Robson (1995) claim that transforming the personal into the political moves women’s issues to the forefront of the public sphere. As the personal, lived experience of women becomes significant, socially and politically, rhetors using political feminine style encourage audience members to identify with each other. A public space founded on principles of inclusion and acceptance allows its inhabitants to practice power-to, instead of wielding power-over. Blankenship and Robson contend that this kind of counter-public sphere could function as a place of empowerment, “conceptualizing the power of public office fundamentally as the capacity to ‘get things done’” (p.361). Both Clinton and Bush politicize the personal in their UN addresses. Both first ladies pay special attention to the multiple roles women play; inherent in their description and mention of multiple roles is a critique of these socially prescribed positions.

**Hillary Clinton Gets Personally Political**

From the beginning of her speech, Clinton not only defines women in terms of their multiple roles, she mentions both private and public obligations. For example, she classifies the conferences as a “celebration of the contributions women make in every aspect of life; in the home, on the job, in their communities, as mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, learners, workers, citizens, and leaders” (paragraph 2). Clinton also
specifically references the interconnectedness of women’s roles, saying “We come
together in fields and factories. In village markets and supermarkets. In living rooms and
board rooms” (paragraph 4). Paying attention to the connections between women’s
multiple roles allows Clinton to be inclusive; she tries her hand at empowerment, too,
claiming:

> By gathering in Beijing, we are focusing world attention on issues that matter
most in the lives of women and their families: access to education, healthcare,
jobs, and credit, the chance to enjoy basic legal and human rights and participate
fully in the political life of their countries (paragraph 6).

Clinton politicizes the personal, emphasizing family ties at the same time she accentuates
civic duties. Pointing out the fact that women’s roles are not static, Clinton helps lessen
the gap between private and public worlds, acknowledging both realms as women’s
territory. Women can help raise their families and participate in civic and political duties.

Clinton hears women’s voices resonating “in their homes, neighborhoods, and
workplaces” (paragraph 8), and she labels conference-goers as “homemakers, nurses,
teachers, lawyers, policymakers, and women who run their own businesses” (paragraph
10). Working to dispel the myth that women’s true place is in the home, Clinton argues
“The truth is that most women around the world work inside and outside the home,
usually by necessity” (paragraph 33). She encourages the women in her audience to
appreciate their civic and family responsibilities, and she marks the female experience as
distinct, distinguished by the plethora of roles women must fulfill simultaneously. She
claims “Women are the primary caretakers for most of the world’s children and elderly.
Yet much of the work we do is not valued – not by economists, not by historians, not by
popular culture, not by government leaders” (paragraph 27). Critiquing women’s roles
allows Clinton to move women’s issues to the forefront of her agenda. However, she politicizes the personal, lived experience of women across the globe, demanding that women’s issues become the issues of humanity.

The first lady describes the conference’s aspirations and potential stumbling blocks to their fulfillment:

Our goals for this Conference, to strengthen families and societies by empowering women to take greater control over their own destinies, cannot be fully achieved unless all governments – here and around the world – accept their responsibility to protect and promote internationally recognized human rights (paragraph 36).

Here, she makes the personal political by acknowledging that women’s contributions to their individual families will, in turn, contribute to the betterment of society as a whole. Demonstrating interconnectedness, Clinton argues that women can seek empowerment because they have the power to change their individual situations. She also takes a jab at the Chinese government, long criticized for human rights abuses toward women. Because she uses political feminine style, Clinton is able to lessen the sting of her verbal attack, couching it in terms of empowerment, not accusation.

Arguing “for too long, the history of women has been a history of silence” (paragraph 42), Clinton laments the “women around the world who are denied the chance to go to school or see a doctor, or own property, or have a say about the direction of their lives, simply because they are women” (paragraph 33). Her critique of traditional sex roles obvious, Clinton demands that feminine principles become the grounds for political judgment, and she urges her audience to exercise their power to change women’s status. Reminding her audience to cherish the “right to speak freely – and the right to be heard” (paragraph 50), Clinton entreats conference-goers to “act on behalf of women
everywhere. If we take bold steps to better the lives of women, we will be taking bold steps to better the lives of children and families too” (paragraph 59). Asserting that women can and should be in control of their destinies, Clinton appeals to women across the world to change their situations. Grounding her entreaty in the context of interconnectedness and family relationships, she shows women that they do not have to step outside their traditional roles to make a difference. Instead, she argues that traditional women’s roles can also be empowering.

Arguing, “Families rely on mothers and wives for emotional support and care; families rely on women for labor in the home; and increasingly, families rely on women for income needed to raise healthy children and care for relatives,” (paragraph 60), Clinton contends that private roles are as important as civic roles. Attempting to create a public space that privileges traditional women’s roles, Clinton stops short of challenging hegemonic femininity; instead, she offers empowerment, reminding women of their important societal contributions. She continues:

As long as discrimination and inequalities remain so commonplace around the world – as long as girls and women are valued less, fed less, fed last, overworked, underpaid, not schooled and subjected to violence in and out of their homes – the potential of the human family to create a peaceful, prosperous world will not be realized.

Let this conference be our – and the world’s – call to action (paragraph 61-62).

Encouraging women to mobilize and vocalize, Clinton seeks to endow their personal, lived experience with political significance. Easing women into her call to action, Clinton reaffirms and reiterates the importance of the private world. By politicizing the personal and personalizing the political, Clinton attempts to create a counter-public sphere grounded in interconnectedness and the distinct female experience.

Laura Bush Gets Politically Personal
While Clinton argues that women’s rights are human rights, Bush contends that education and perseverance can improve the lives of Afghan women. Like Clinton, Bush politicizes the personal, stressing the interconnectedness of women’s roles and moving women’s issues to the forefront of the public world. Like Clinton, Bush acknowledges both private and public roles, highlighting women’s civic and familial responsibilities. While she does not mention the formation of a counter-public sphere as specifically as Clinton does, Bush’s speech can be read as an example of this sphere in action.

Unselfconscious about her promotion of women’s interests, Bush frames those interests as the concerns of humanity, not just women. Unlike Clinton, she places responsibility for improving the lives of women in the hands of both men and women, not just women.

In fact, although she speaks on International Women’s Day, Bush states her purpose as follows: “I am here to voice my strong support for the courageous people of Afghanistan – women and men who have suffered for years under the Taliban regime” (paragraph 2). Although she strays from her usual focus on women alone, Bush makes the personal experience of Afghan citizens political, tying their daily lives to the infamous – an certainly political – Taliban. Understanding the multiple societal obligations and family responsibilities that face women across the globe, Bush contends, “People around the world are looking closely at the roles women play in their societies. Afghanistan under the Taliban gave the world a sobering example of a country where women were denied their rights and their place in society ” (paragraph 3). She argues that women must be allowed to occupy both private and public worlds, fulfilling both personal and community-based roles.
Bush elaborates on women’s possible roles, as she praises the US-led war on terrorism:

Today, the world is helping Afghan women return to the lives they once knew. Women were once important contributors to Afghan society, and they had the right to vote as early as the 1920s. Many women were professions [sic] – they were teachers, doctors, and lawyers. And today, many will be returning to those professions (paragraph 4).

Bush argues that women’s forced inhabitance of the private sphere is unjust, and she claims that women have a right to lead professional, as well as private, lives. Unlike Clinton, who celebrates the domestic responsibilities of women, Bush argues that a woman’s natural place is in the home and the world of work. Here, she marks the female experience as distinctive, recognizing the women’s struggle to occupy both spheres simultaneously.

Bush also lays a framework of feminine values throughout her speech, focusing on the inherent worth of the individual, the value of interconnectedness, and empowerment through nurturance. Choosing education as the key to women’s salvation, Bush is quick to point out that both girls and boys in Afghanistan deserve educational opportunities. Focusing on the development of Afghan children, Bush not only argues that each child is an important ingredient to a successful future, she also highlights the interrelated nature of society. The improvement of the lives of women and children improve, in turn, the society as a whole. She argues “When you give children books and an education, you give them the ability to imagine a future of opportunity, equality and justice. Education is the single most important long-term investment we can make in the future” (paragraph 18).
Because she values education, Bush demonstrates her belief in women’s power to change their own living situations for the better. While she believes in the nurturance of the mind provided by books and educational opportunities, Bush also applauds women’s abilities to change their own lives. She offers women and children empowerment through education and understanding. Bush politicizes the personal by bringing women’s issues to the forefront of the public agenda. While she does not extend her argument for women’s rights to the extent that Clinton does, Bush, like Clinton, critiques traditional sex roles that limit women to the private sphere, and she stresses the interconnectedness of being.

**Exhibiting the Feminine Ethic of Care**

Finally, Dow and Tonn (1993) argue that rhetors utilizing political feminine style will exhibit the feminine ethic of care. Basing their arguments, in part, on the work of Nancy Chodorow, Dow and Tonn explain “As females mature, they attach value to connections with others in a way that male children, whose learning privileges differentiation from others in a process stressing abstract and categorical dimensions of the masculine role, do not” (p.294). They argue that women learn to demonstrate care for others, as result of their socialization. Just as politicizing the personal allows women to appreciate the interconnectedness of their multiple roles, exhibiting the feminine ethic of care shows appreciation for the interconnectedness of all people. Dow and Tonn note “the value of inclusion versus separation and categorization (p.294) and “connection, empathy, and familial concerns” (p.294) as characteristic of this ethic of care.

They argue that interconnectedness goes far beyond the inherent worth of the individual; the feminine care ethic expresses a concern for all beings, recognizing the
intertwined nature of society and humanity. Stressing communal interests and the value of connectedness, rhetors exhibiting the feminine care ethic display female nurturance born of private sphere relegation and domestic responsibilities. Dow and Tonn claim that women learn to define themselves in terms of their relationships; as a result, claim Blankenship and Robson (1995), rhetors exhibiting political feminine style demonstrate “an appreciation for multiple perspectives” (p.360). The political platform, then, becomes a public service opportunity, not just a career opportunity. Not only do women’s issues reach the forefront of public consciousness, but the exhibition of the feminine care ethic allows rhetors to demonstrate their appreciation for “inclusivity and the relational nature of being” (p.360).

Both first ladies exhibit the feminine care ethic in their speeches. This form of nurturance, as Dow and Tonn suggest, helps rhetors empower their audiences, encouraging action through cultivation of individuals’ sense of self. By demonstrating care for audience members, and all of humanity, rhetors exhibiting the feminine care ethic can help put their audiences at ease, couching even revolutionary ideas in friendly, nonthreatening terms and delivery. Exhibition of the feminine care ethic shows a concern for both individuals and a collective body of people that is not always found within the masculine paradigm. This departure from traditional public speaking style, along with the use of personal experience to back claims and the politicizing of the personal, helps rhetors using political feminine style lay the foundation for a counter-public feminist sphere.
Hillary Clinton’s Exhibition of the Feminine Care Ethic

Clinton exhibits the feminine care ethic, using concern and nurturance to soften the sting of her overtly feminist message. Not willing to hinder her husband’s administration’s already troubled diplomatic ties with China, Clinton takes care to veil references to the host country’s human rights abuses. While Democrat and Republican critics bashed Clinton for sounding too soft on Chinese policy, her exhibition of a feminine care ethic allows her to deliver a hard-hitting argument, while still demonstrating concern for her audience and women across the globe. Clinton consistently draws her audience’s attention to the similar, shared experience of women everywhere.

Early in her speech, Clinton says:

However different we may be, there is far more that unites us than divides us. We share a common future. And we are here to find common ground so that we may help bring new dignity and respect to women and girls all over the world – and in so doing, bring new strength and stability to families as well (paragraph 5).

Explicitly demonstrating a care ethic, Clinton not only argues that women and girls deserve basic human rights, she contends that improving the lives of women and girls will improve society as a whole. Demonstrating the relational nature of being, Clinton reaffirms women’s worth, as she ties the success of women to the success of families and, thus, society. Clinton frames the Fourth World Conference itself in terms of nurturance, arguing that the goals of the conference entail “issues that matter most in the lives of women and their families” (paragraph 6). She argues:

What we are learning around the world is that if women are healthy and educated, their families will flourish. If women are free from violence, their families will flourish. If women have a chance to work and earn as full and equal partners in society, their families will flourish.
And when families flourish, communities and nations will flourish (paragraph 15-16).

Again tying women’s success to the success of the family, Clinton nonetheless exhibits the feminine care ethic to argue for women’s equality and access to equal rights.

She explains, “That is why every woman, every man, every child, every family, and every nation on our planet has a stake in the discussion that takes place here” (paragraph 17). Using the success of the family to support her argument for women’s rights allows Clinton to couch a hard-hitting argument in traditional terms. She demonstrates concern for women whose voices are not heard in Beijing, claiming “The great challenge of this Conference is to give voice to women everywhere, whose experiences go unnoticed, whose words go unheard” (paragraph 25) and “Those of us who have the opportunity to be here have a responsibility to speak for those who could not” (paragraph 30). While some critics might cry ventriloquism, we can also read Clinton’s words as an exhibition of concern for women everywhere. She argues that, while the female experience is distinct, women can help each other, collectively, to overcome obstacles. This perception of humans as interconnected, relational beings is decidedly feminine.

Although she lumps together the suffering of all women, despite their unique circumstances, Clinton broadens her care ethic to show concern and respect for women’s differences, as well. She argues that “we must respect the choices that each woman makes for herself and her family. Every woman deserves the chance to realize her God-given potential” (paragraph 34). Not only does Clinton explicitly argue for respect for women, she takes care to couch her pro-woman argument in pro-family terms. At its
core, Clinton’s message is one of inclusiveness and interconnectedness, as she argues that women’s issues are the issues of all people. She asserts, “It is time for us to say here in Beijing, and the world to hear, that it is no longer acceptable to discuss women’s rights as separate from human rights” (paragraph 41). By demanding that women’s rights be considered human rights, Clinton argues for inclusion as she reinforces the value of connectedness.

Mentioning specific instances of human rights abuses, Clinton elaborates on her argument that women’s rights are human rights; even as her speech works itself into a crescendo of anger and outrage, Clinton demonstrates care for the feelings of the Conference’s host country and for the struggles of women worldwide. She explains:

It is a violation of human rights when babies are denied food, or drowned, or suffocated, or their spines broken, simply because they are born girls.

It is a violation of human rights when women and girls are sold into the slavery of the prostitution.

It is a violation of human rights when women are doused with gasoline, set on fire, and burned to death because their marriage dowries are deemed to be small.

It is a violation of human rights when individual women are raped in their own communities and when thousands of women are subjected to rape as a tactic or prize of war.

It is a violation of human rights when a leading cause of death worldwide among women ages 14 to 44 is the violence they are subjected to in their own homes.

It is a violation of human rights when young girls are brutalized by the painful and degrading practice of female genital mutilation.

It is a violation of human rights when women are denied the right to plan their own families, and that includes being forced to have abortions or being sterilized against their will.

If there is one message that echoes forth from this Conference, it is that human rights are women’s rights—and women’s rights are human rights (emphasis hers, paragraph 43-50).

This passage, arguably the most famous section of Clinton’s Beijing speech, not only summarizes her central argument. It also exemplifies the feminine care ethic. Clinton is using her public platform not for personal advancement, but for action. Working to
empower her audience, Clinton not only reminds them of hardships aced by women across the globe, she also reaffirms women’s sisterhood of suffering, encouraging her audience to accept the problems of abused women as their own problems. Although she mentions specific human rights abuses leveled at women, Clinton takes care avoid offending the countries that practice those abuses. By refusing to name any countries specifically, Clinton walks a fine line between accusing those states who abuse their women and appeasing them by guaranteeing anonymity. Her references, however veiled, are also easily deciphered; her exhibition of the feminine care ethic allows her to express concern for victim and victimizer simultaneously.

Arguing “Women must enjoy the right to participate fully in the social and political lives of their countries if we want freedom and democracy to thrive and endure” (paragraph 51), Clinton takes care to make women’s rights seem nonthreatening. She argues that women’s rights will not disturb the status quo; instead, guaranteed rights for women will merely help societies continue to function smoothly. Clinton envisions “a world in which every woman is treated with respect and dignity, every boy and girl is loved and cared for equally, and every family has the hope of a strong and stable future” (paragraph 63). Consistent with the feminine care ethic, Clinton sees a world that values the inherent worth of every individual and respects the interconnected nature of humanity. Throughout her speech, Clinton exhibits an ethic of care that allows her to make hard-hitting arguments that avoid polarization, nurturing her audience toward empowerment.
Laura Bush’s Exhibition of the Feminine Care Ethic

Like Clinton, Bush also utilizes the feminine care ethic to solidify her push for women’s rights. While the ethic of care underlies Bush’s words, her message is less polarizing than Clinton’s because it’s even less radical than Clinton’s family-friendly words. While Clinton argued for the abolition of human rights abuses against women everywhere, Bush confines her advocacy to the lives of Afghan women in a post-Taliban world. Bush chooses to use her public platform for public service, and she tries to foster empowerment through nurturance, even as she encourages her audience to support US anti-terror efforts and admire the labors of US governmental, business, and charity organizations to improve the lives of Afghan women and children.

Assuring her audience she is “glad to be here” on a day of “pride and promise” (paragraph 1), Bush cultivates a concerned, but optimistic, tone throughout her speech. She declares, “I applaud the international community for its concern for women and families in Afghanistan around the world. And I applaud Chairman Karzai for his leadership during this important time” (paragraph 2). Bush exhibits care for the feeling of those in her audience; she recognizes the relational nature of being, praising audience members to build better rapport. Displaying nurturance, Bush hastens to comfort her audience, offering a Pollyanna interpretation of the US war on terrorism:

The terrorist attacks of September 11 galvanized the international community. Many of us have drawn valuable lessons from the tragedy. . . . Afghanistan under the Taliban gave the world a sobering example where women were denied their rights and their places in society (paragraph 3).

Transforming a national tragedy and international travesty into an opportunity to ponder human rights abuses aimed at women, Bush exhibits care for her audience, working to simplify her message and turning war into a valuable life lesson.
Striking a placating tone, Bush assures her audience that they have learned their lesson well, and she praises international efforts to right Afghanistan’s wrong, declaring, “Today, the world is helping Afghan women return to the lives they once knew” (paragraph 4). Like Clinton, she is careful to couch a pro-women’s-rights speech in status-quo-friendly terms. She argues that Afghan women should be allowed the lives they led pre-Taliban, before Afghanistan was the focus of political and military attention – when it was nonthreatening, easy to ignore. By softening her message, Bush lessens her risk of being branded a feminist.

She continues to praise both her audience and her own country, proclaiming,

This is a time of rebuilding – of unprecedented opportunity – thanks to efforts led by the United Nations, The United States, the new Afghan government, an our allies around the world. With opportunity comes an obligation. Much work remains to be done (paragraph 5).

Not only is she conciliatory, Bush demonstrates the value of connectedness, illustrating the newly forged connections between Afghanistan, the US, and the rest of the world. Drawing attention to the positive relationships that developed since the terrorist attacks of September 11 and the subsequent US and allied invasion of Afghanistan, Bush uses feminine style to highlight relational connections. She casts the US as responsible for forging these new bonds, painting the country as a peacemaker and a nurturer itself:

The United States’ current efforts reflect a long-standing commitment. The United States is the largest and one of the longest continuous supporters of UN humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan, and we will continue to be . . . American boys and girls are contributing a dollar each through America’s Fund for Afghan children. So far, American children have sent more than $4 million dollars for food, shelter, clothing, healthcare and toys for Afghan children (paragraph 6-9).
Highlighting the contributions of American children. Bush demonstrates a concern for familial relationships. Tying the interests of women closely to the issues of children, she not only draws attention to interconnectedness, she also features a traditional definition of woman as a nurturing mother figure.

Championing education as the ultimate solution to Afghanistan’s problems, Bush ignores controversy, confining herself to a “woman’s issue,” the kind of safe cause first ladies often defend and one that highlights both relationships and connectedness. She elaborates on the US-led education drive:

Through a number of projects, the United States is committed to helping the Afghan people redevelop their educational system. The US agency for International Development is sending almost 10 million Pashto and Dari language textbooks to Afghan schools. . . We are funding teams of teacher trainers and helping educators develop curricula. And the U.S. helped refurbish the women’s dormitory at the University of Kabul so women can remain on campus, in a safe environment (paragraph 14-15).

Bush exhibits the feminine care ethic, as she describes the US as a benevolent warden in charge of shaping and disciplining the distribution of knowledge in Afghanistan. Like a parent nurtures a child, the US helps Afghanistan “raise” itself. Bush uses public service imagery to describe her husband’s political operations, using the feminine care ethic to depoliticize the US led war.

Addressing the subject of international women’s rights, Bush stops short of declaring women’s struggles the endeavors of all people. Instead, she exhibits care for her audience and for women across the globe, arguing that women’s rights mean women’s lives without injustice:

Today, on International Women’s Day, we affirm our mission to protect human rights for women in Afghanistan and around the world. And we affirm our support of all Afghans as they recover from war and injustice.
Farahnaz Nazir, founder of the Afghanistan Women’s Association said, “Society is like a bird. It has two wings. A bird cannot fly if one wing is broken.” Our dedication to respecting and protecting women’s rights in all countries must continue if we are to achieve a peaceful, prosperous, and stable world (paragraph 20-22).

Here, the care ethic manifests itself in Bush’s careful phrasing with regard to women’s rights. Striving to sound egalitarian, Bush argues that human rights and women’s rights are one and the same, and she paints men and women as equal parts of society. She also claims that women’s rights can only improve the condition of countries everywhere, maintaining that rights for women will only strengthen the values we already uphold.

Throughout her speech, Bush uses the feminine care ethic to build a rapport with her audience and to soften her message, making women’s rights as uncontroversial as possible. Tying women’s issues to children’s issues, Bush is able to reinforce a nurturing, mothering kind of femininity. Demonstrating concern for women in Afghanistan as well as the feelings of her audience, Bush uses an ethic of care to strengthen her argument; her soothing words allow her to take a stronger stand for women’s rights than a more strident tone would allow. At the same time, by painting the US as a concerned, parental figure, in charge of securing women’s equality, Bush weakens her pro-woman message.

Conclusion

Both Clinton and Bush use personal experience to back claims, politicize the personal, and exhibit a feminine care ethic. However, even though both first ladies utilize political feminine style, their arguments, and individual styles, differ. Both women use political feminine style to strengthen their arguments; at times, this same style weakens their words. The following chapter will examine the implications of using
political feminine style, paying special attention to the power of the first lady role, the
strength of feminine style versus a more masculine paradigm, and the feminist
ramifications of a feminine style.
Chapter Four: Conclusions

*I had thought I would hate being a first lady . . . I loved it.
--Betty Ford*

Outspoken First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt (1932) argued:

I believe we will have better government when men and women discuss public issues together and make their decisions on the basis of their differing areas of concern for the welfare of their families and their world. Too often the great decisions are originated and given form in bodies made up wholly of men or so completely dominated by them that whatever of special value women have to offer is shunted aside without expression (p.19).

Clearly, in the years since Roosevelt served as presidential spouse, our government has made feeble steps toward gender parity. That a former first lady can call herself a Senator is evidence of our progress; that a woman has yet to claim the Oval Office for herself is evidence of our snail’s pace. The first lady remains a powerful and exalted symbol of women’s ascension through the political ranks. As her role has evolved, the first spouse has gained more access to public policy discussion, and her mini-bully pulpit seems to have gotten a little more powerful.

Our most recent first ladies, Hillary Rodham Clinton and Laura Welch Bush, have both come before international audiences to speak on behalf of global women’s rights. Despite their similar speech topics, the first wives’ approach to their unofficial office could not appear to be more different. While Clinton carved out office space for herself in the President’s West Wing and found her comings and going documented on newspapers’ front pages, Bush has returned the first lady’s post to the East Wing, and reads about herself in the “Style” sections of most daily papers. Clinton took flack for her controversial healthcare policy involvement; Bush, on the other hand, garnered criticism for her eschewal of political poetry. Clinton has been compared numerous
times to mold-shattering first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, and Bush has been content to fill her mother-in-law’s sensible shoes.

Despite their dissimilar images, both first ladies have ventured into the world of foreign policy to deliver strong words about the importance of human rights for women across the globe. Hillary Clinton’s 1995 speech “Women’s Rights Are Human Rights,” which was delivered in Beijing, China, as a part of the United Nation’s Fourth World Conference on Women, and Laura Bush’s 2002 International Women’s Day address showcase the first ladies’ oratorical prowess. Conceived under very different circumstances and delivered to radically different audiences, the two addresses, nonetheless, share characteristics of what Bonnie J. Dow and Mari Boor Tonn (1993) describe as political feminine style. Adapted from Karlyn Kohrs Campbell’s extensive work in the area of feminine style, Dow and Tonn’s methodology articulates a political rhetoric based on fundamentally feminist principles of interconnectedness and inherent value. This type of speech, which privileges arguments made from personal experience and espouses the feminine ethic of care, stands in stark contrast to traditional, masculine political rhetoric, which can be called a rhetoric of hierarchy and domination.

First ladies find themselves in the constraining role of political subordinate, married to the man in charge of America and often responsible for garnering support for his political interests. As mouthpieces for their husbands’ administrations, first ladies enter the public realm to speak about partisan issues and to champion less polarizing concerns like literacy, highway beautification, and child welfare. Both Laura Bush and Hillary Clinton have brought a taste of foreign policy to the white glove pulpit, and both first ladies have couched their arguments in terms of personal ways of seeing, knowing,
and talking about the world. To better understand political feminine style as a useful analytical tool and to shed new light on the rhetoric of our most recent presidential spouses, it is useful to apply Dow and Tonn’s methodology to Clinton and Bush’s words.

**The First Lady as Rhetor With Many Roles**

Shawn Parry-Giles and Diane Blair (2003) contend, “Since the earliest days of the republic, first ladies have grappled with the proper performance of this unelected role that holds considerable celebrity status and public visibility” (p.566). Tracing what they call the rise of the “rhetorical first lady” (p.566), Parry-Giles and Blair argue that the first lady pulpit can “function as a location of feminist advancement that challenges gender stereotypes, expanding women’s public space” (p.567). Parry-Giles and Blair maintain that first ladies usually espouse the kind of benevolent discourse that tackles traditional women’s issues, like childcare, healthcare, education, and literacy. However, they argue that, as the first lady role has evolved through the years, these “soft” issues have begun to gain political clout.

Both Laura Bush and Hillary Clinton address issues pertinent to the lives of women and children; however, both first ladies attempt to give these issues political weight. Throughout her 2002 International Women’s Day speech, Bush reminds her listeners that education spells salvation for the women and children of Afghanistan. While delivering her “Women’s Rights Are Human Rights” speech, Clinton consistently maintains that women and girls deserve basic considerations as human beings. While neither of these arguments is especially radical, both first ladies’ orations argue that the treatment of women and girls should be a top priority on national and international agendas. While the first lady usually confines herself to non threatening, domestic issues,
both Clinton and Bush bring political feminine style, a form of reasoning based on private sphere experience, to the foreign policy arena, using their mini-bully pulpits to address international issues.

First Lady historians Louis Gould (1996) and Robert Watson (2000) both contend that the role of first lady presents its inhabitants with strenuous constraints and disparate audience expectations. A “lady” first and a political activist second, the first lady is usually forced to champion “safe” issues that are not likely to stir controversy. Watson offers a thorough discussion of possible roles for the presidential spouse, arguing that she can be a full partner, a partial partner, a behind-the-scenes partner, a partner-in-marriage, or a nonpartner. Clearly, Watson has devised a categorization system organized from most publicly active to least involved in public affairs. Because the first lady’s office is not officially defined, it is up to each presidential spouse, and, undoubtedly, her husband’s administration, to carve her own niche in the neglected annals of first lady history.

In her book *Public Opinion, the First Ladyship, and Hillary Rodham Clinton*, Barbara Burrell (2001) argues that first ladies are typically popular with the American public, no matter what roles they choose to perform. She claims that active first ladies like Eleanor Roosevelt have gradually shaped public opinion about wives’ involvement in their husbands’ affairs; contemporary first ladies, then, are able to take a much more active role in public policy talk and decision-making. Burrell contends that the public might have been more inclined to accept Hillary Clinton as an engineer of a new healthcare system if that system had proved successful.
Shawn Parry-Giles (2000) maintains that Clinton not only carved out new space for first ladies in the world of public policy; she also set a media standard that future first ladies – including the reticent Laura Bush – must obey. Garnering much more media coverage than her immediate predecessors, Clinton was frequently the subject of opinion polls that attempted to determine her popularity with voters. Colleen Kelley (2001) claims that the more media attention the first lady receives, the more dichotomized her role becomes. Kelly argues that enthusiastic media framing of the first lady’s daily tasks robs her of a private life, even as it seeks to relegate her to this sphere. While Watson (2000) contends that conceiving the first lady’s role as either private or public is fallacious, he concedes that the first lady straddles the public world and the private realm; she is not really at home in either sphere.

When discussing the speeches of the earliest female rhetors in the US, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (1995) argues that these women faced a unique double bind. Because women at the turn of the 19th century were not encouraged to speak publicly, women speakers had to first, justify their right to speak and second, fulfill the substantive and stylistic requirements of their speaking situations. Obviously, the public sphere has changed in the past two hundred years, accommodating – or at least tolerating – the words of women rhetors. However, political female speakers, and first ladies in particular, still face a double bind reminiscent of the one Campbell describes. Because she is expected to fulfill her ceremonial and wifely duties first, the unelected first lady is best received when she speaks about uncontroversial topics.

First lady scholar and historian Myra Gutin (2000) offers a categorization of first ladies based on their communication styles, which range from social hostess, to emerging
spokeswoman, to political professional. Not surprisingly, Gutin argues that the American public is most accepting of first ladies who avoid the role of autonomous politicos. While early first ladies answered to the term “Mrs. President” (Andersen and Baexendale, p.192), today’s first lady, argues Louis Gould (1996), must separate her private life from her public work. As America’s women come to terms with our own expanding roles, facing private/public conflicts that stem from employment expectations outside the home, so, too, does the first lady find her public image in conflict with her private duties.

Campbell (1991) contends “men can be expert about all manner of things; women are only expert about being women. Male speech declares war or peace, raises others to power, and bestows praise; female speech does not” (p.35). Women’s concerns are often perceived as separate from the concerns of humanity; as a result, women’s ways of seeing and knowing differ from the mainstream, masculine communication paradigm. Campbell (1983) maintains that women rhetors utilize a different mode through which we communicate and a different means through which we enact change. Labeling this kind of communication feminine style, Campbell argues that women speakers can communicate through an alternative argumentative paradigm, one that privileges personal experience and principles of interconnectedness and the inherent worth of the individual.

**Political Feminine Style and the Potential for Women’s Public Space**

Bonnie Dow and Mari Boor Tonn (1993) broaden Campbell’s original definition of feminine style to include the work of female political rhetors, like elected officials and first ladies. Focusing on the words of former Texas Governor Ann Richards, Dow and Tonn contend that political feminine style has three distinguishing characteristics. First, they claim that rhetors who use political feminine style will back their claims with
personal experience. This tenet of political feminine style is important because it privileges personal ways of seeing and knowing, allowing women to assert ourselves as experts about our own lived experience. Second, political rhetors who use Dow and Tonn’s conception of feminine style will politicize the personal. This criterion is also vital, in that it allows women speakers to draw connections between their personal lives and the experiences of other women, emphasizing principles of interconnectedness. Finally, Dow and Tonn argue that political speakers utilizing feminine style will exhibit the feminine ethic of care. This demonstration of compassion and concern for the well being of others shows a belief in the inherent worth of the individual.

Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin (1992) contend that traditional rhetoric, which falls under a masculine paradigm, stands in contrast to principles of feminine style. Foss and Griffin maintain that traditional public speech is a rhetoric of domination; feminine style is a rhetoric of inherent value, which can produce empowered action, as opposed to domination. Carol Blair, Julie Brown, and Leslie Baxter (1994) highlight qualities like impersonal abstraction, disciplinary territoriality, individuation, and hierarchy as characteristic of traditional, masculine speech. Jane Blankenship and Deborah Robson (1995) are quick to argue that male speakers can also use political feminine style; in fact, they contend that this form of reasoning might help men soften their images. As political feminine style and its characteristic forms of reasoning gain popularity with male and female speakers, this kind of personal way of seeing, knowing, and talking about the world can invade public discourse.

Dow and Tonn (1993) are hopeful that their brand of feminine style can help create a feminist counterpublic. They argue, “The characteristics of feminine style are
part of a synthesis of form and substance that works to promote an alternative political philosophy reflecting traditionally feminine values” (p.287). Moreover, they contend that this alternative political philosophy can give rise to “alternative communities” (p.287) that privilege feminine discourse and women’s issues. Dow and Tonn argue that this counterpublic will only be successful if it fosters community not only among women, but among society as a whole, bringing traditionally feminine – and even feminist – ideas to the mainstream public.

Robert Asen (2002) offers the following definition of counterpublics:

Counterpublics emerge as a kind of public within a public sphere conceived as a multiplicity. They illuminate the differential power relations among diverse publics of a multiple public sphere. Counterpublics signal that some publics develop not simply as one among a constellation of discursive entities, but as explicitly articulated alternatives to wider publics that exclude the interests of potential participants (p.425).

Asen contends that counterpublic theory can shed light on the otherwise hidden power relations that influence public discourse, while counterpublics themselves seek to emancipate their members and transform hegemonic power configurations.

In her essay “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” Nancy Fraser (1994) defines the concept of a feminist counterpublic, in particular. She argues that critics often misuse the term public sphere, claiming “This expression has been used by feminists to refer to everything that is outside the domestic or familial sphere” (p.75) and advocating a more precise definition. According to Fraser, the public sphere is “a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk. It is the space in which citizens deliberate about common affairs, hence, an institutionalized arena of discursive interaction” (p.75). Acknowledging, like Asen “A plurality of competing publics” (p.79), Fraser clarifies the concept of subaltern counterpublics as “parallel
discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (p.84). Fraser points to a subaltern feminist counterpublic to exemplify her definition:

Perhaps the most striking example is the late twentieth-century U.S. feminist subaltern counterpublic, with its variegated array of journals, bookstores, publishing companies, film and video distribution networks, lecture series, research centers, academic programs conferences, conventions, festivals, and local meeting places (p.84).

Dow and Tonn argue that their model of political feminine style leaves room for the creation of this counterpublic sphere, pointing to a mix of form and substance that allows political rhetors to transform public discourse by incorporating traditionally feminine values and communication styles. They contend, “We argue that the complexity of women’s social roles, and their influence on communication, may be an asset in the public sphere, rather than an obstacle. However, such an evaluation requires adjustment of conventional rhetorical, as well as political, wisdom” (p.299). Dow and Tonn maintain that political feminine style “can contribute to the articulation of a critical rhetoric” (p.299), that both critiques and helps transform acceptable political speech.

At first glance, first lady rhetoric might not seem like the ideal artifact for a method that seeks to empower both audience and rhetor. The first lady lacks the prestige of an elected official, and she lacks the pure political power that comes with holding an elected office. Constantly under public scrutiny, the first lady is undeniably constrained by her role, which requires her to attempt to please many disparate audience. The first lady’s words are also controlled by partisan political interests and the policies of her husband’s administration. All of these factors may work to prevent the first lady from
inhabiting space outside the mainstream public; simply put, the first lady might not have access to the “counter” in counterpublic because she is so wrapped up in the public sphere interests of her husband’s administration.

This analysis is especially interested in feminism’s influence on the ever-evolving role of first lady and, possibly, vice versa. The first lady is not an elected official, but she becomes a public citizen, with the power to influence public opinion regarding her pet issues and her husband’s administration. How the first lady utilizes her public platform is a matter of personal taste and politics. The political feminine style of both Clinton and Bush allows the first ladies to frame feminists arguments in traditional language. At the same time, the potential power of their messages is weakened by their first lady roles and the patriarchal values underlying their words.

While Clinton and Bush are successful at bringing women’s issues and experiences to the public arena, both of them also illustrate the traditional public/private dichotomy that American women face everyday. The lives of real women may not be divided as neatly into two sets of distinct roles, but the first lady, a model American woman, reflects these black and white divisions. Even as Hillary Clinton argues that women’s rights are human rights, she cultivates support for her argument by attempting to blend distinct public and private duties. Similarly, Laura Bush reinforces women’s traditional roles as she argues for respect for these domestic and nurturing responsibilities. Both women link the progress of the family to the progress of society, arguing that women can participate in public life, in part, through mastery of the private world.
Despite their use of political feminine style, the first ladies reaffirm traditional sex roles and responsibilities. They also support the patriarchal notion that women’s true, first, and most natural duty is to care for the family; both first ladies argue that women should be allowed to tend to their household tasks in peace, free to plan their domestic destinies and to have a public say in the negotiation of private affairs. However, this cursory comparison of Clinton and Bush’s speeches only scratches the rhetorical surface.

Effectiveness of Political Feminine Style for Clinton and Bush

Both first ladies used political feminine style to advance their pro-woman arguments, and both successfully fulfilled Dow and Tonn’s three criteria. Throughout her stint as first lady, Hillary Clinton was often criticized for her feminist affiliation, accused of promoting a feminist agenda. Laura Bush has thus far resisted charges of feminism. However, her message is strikingly similar to Clinton’s. Both presidents’ wives support traditional notions of womanhood, arguing for basic human rights, not necessarily equality. Throughout Hillary Clinton’s 1995 speech “Women’s Eights Are Human Rights” and throughout Laura Bush’s 2002 International Women’s Day address, both first ladies use political feminine style to advance their arguments.

Using Personal Experience to Back Claims

Clinton works to incorporate the lived experience of women across the globe into her rhetoric, in order to create a sense of community among women. Alluding to specific details of women’s’ lives, Clinton situates the worlds women “in the park . . . in the river . . . at the office water cooler” (paragraph 5). She speaks of women “giving birth, raising children, cooking meals, washing clothes, cleaning houses, planting crops, working on assembly lines, running companies, and running countries” (paragraph 28). Here Clinton
displays a disturbing organizational habit; throughout her speech, Clinton organizes lists of women’s activities from most private to most public, giving the impression that she values domestic life least and public life most.

Besides relying on varied descriptions of women’s work across the globe, Clinton also relies on her own experience to support her central argument – that women’s rights are human rights. In paragraphs 13-14, she details her experiences at the Fourth World Conference, mentioning her commitment to improving healthcare for women and girls. Clearly, Clinton’s own experience with US healthcare design is significant here; she uses her personal interest in the healthcare system to make global healthcare an issue for the conference. Clinton also mentions her extensive work with children, arguing that women across the world want their children to be “cared for in safe, nurturing after school centers” (paragraph 20) who are “working everyday to promote literacy and better healthcare for the children of their countries” (paragraph 22), and who “are trying to keep children alive in the aftermath of Chernobyl” (paragraph 24).

Best known in the US for her unsuccessful healthcare system re-vamp, Clinton works to connect her more popular work about children, like her bestselling book *It Takes a Village*, to her interest in healthcare. Using her personal experience, Clinton not only argues that women’s rights are human rights, she also skillfully links her work with children to her work on US healthcare, perhaps practicing some much-needed damage control, as her husband’s administration moved toward a 1996 reelection campaign. Interestingly, Dow and Tonn’s methodology leaves room for rhetors to incorporate their own individual experience, or to allude to the experience of women, in general.
practices both of these techniques, as she backs her claims with hypothetical examples of women’s work and with snippet of her own political lifework.

Laura Bush, addressing the UN on March 8, 2002, also uses personal experience to back her claims. Throughout her speech, Bush argues that the US is helping to improve the lives of Afghan women and children and that women in Afghanistan deserve basic human rights and dignities. She contends that Afghan women must work hard to improve their own lives, and she consistently praises the US-led war on terror for offering Afghan women respite from Taliban-induced suffering. Like Clinton, Bush draws on her own political experience and pet projects. Repeatedly mentioning the importance of education, Bush uses her own life experience as an educator and a librarian to support her arguments. She specifically mentions education-related advancements in Afghanistan, noting that “a major focus in on education” (paragraph 10) and claiming in paragraphs 11 and 12 that education will lead to specific benefits for Afghan women and their children, like a decline in malnutrition and child mortality rates.

Working to achieve a consistency between what is said and what is experienced, Bush repeatedly argues that the US government is working to help Afghan women help themselves. However, throughout her speech, Bush also makes use of traditionally masculine forms of reasoning. In paragraphs 7-9, she quantifies contributions that the US government has made toward food, shelter, and education in Afghanistan. Paragraphs 14 and 16 detail the amount of books and money for books that the US has contributed toward a Taliban-free educational system. Bush also uses the expert testimony of a school principle in paragraph 19 and of her own husband in paragraph 24 to lend credence to her claims.
**Politicizing the Personal**

Not only do Clinton and Bush use personal experience to back their claims; both first ladies also attempt to make the personal political. Throughout her Beijing speech, Clinton defines women in terms of their private and public roles, stressing the connections between these two realms. Specifically addressing interconnectedness, Clinton envisions women coming together “in fields and factories. In village markets and super markets. In living rooms and board rooms” (paragraph 4). Consistently emphasizing both civic ties and family duties. She argues that women’s roles are fluid; as women move between the private world and the public world, we nurture our families and, in turn, our communities. Several times, Clinton lists women’s multiple roles and duties, and several times, she displays the same disturbing, ascending from private to public organizational pattern. For example, she claims to hear women’s voices “in their homes, neighborhoods, and workplaces” (paragraph 8), and she offers women the following labels, organized from most to least care-providing: “homemakers, nurses, teachers, lawyers, policy-makers, and women who run their own businesses” (paragraph 10).

Clinton argues that women’s work “is not valued – not by economists, not by historians, not by popular culture, not by government leaders” (paragraph 27), and she contends that women can value their own and each other’s contributions to society. Here, she makes the personal political by reminding women that their household labors are important in a global context because they are helping to raise the next generation of civic and commerce leaders and because healthy families can help create healthy communities. On one hand, Clinton’s arguments to this effect might be empowering for
her audience, which is composed mostly of women. On the other hand, Clinton’s words
serve to further devalue women’s work, arguing that this work is only important in a
global or civic context and does not stand alone as a valuable contribution to society. She
evaluates traditionally feminine work with traditionally masculine public standards,
arguing that the work women do in private is only important as it helps nurture the public
world.

Like Clinton, Bush attempts to politicize the personal throughout her speech by
stressing the interconnectedness of women’s roles and moving women’s issues to the
forefront of the public world. Bush argues that the daily experiences of Afghan women
and children are undeniably political because the citizens of Afghanistan have dealt with
the undeniably political Taliban. Framing the poor treatment of women under Taliban
rule as evidence of human rights abuses – not just abuses geared toward women—Bush
argues that Afghan women must be allowed to fulfill both private and professional roles.
She maintains that women in a post-Taliban Afghanistan are returning to their
professions as “teachers, doctors, and lawyers” (paragraph 4). Like Clinton, Bush marks
women’s experience as distinctive, mentioning that women need to occupy public roles,
in addition to their private ones.

Also like Clinton, Bush links the success of women to the success of whole
communities. She quotes the head of the Afghanistan Woman’s Association, Farahnaz
Nazir, as saying “Society is like a bird. It has two wings. A bird cannot fly if one wing is
broken” (paragraph 21). Appropriating the personal experiences of others, Bush argues
that women have an important role in helping society function. Through the freedom to
negotiate private and public roles and through increased access to education – both of
which are provided by the US-led war on terror—Afghan women can reclaim their rightful places in their society. The personal experiences and freedoms of Afghan women become symbols of the political struggle against terror.

**Exhibiting the Feminine Ethic of Care**

In addition to using personal experience to back claims and politicizing the personal, both first ladies also exhibit the feminine ethic of care. From the beginning of her speech, Clinton frames the Fourth World Conference on Women in terms of nurturance, demonstrating the relational nature of being as she ties women’s success to the success of communities. She argues that women should have basic human rights like being “free from violence,” and having “a chance to work and earn as full and equal partners in society” (paragraph 15). If women can live violence-free, equal lives, then we will contribute to the development of our families and communities. Clinton argues “every woman, every man, every child, every family, and every nation on our planet” (paragraph 17) should be interested in the events of the Beijing conference, articulating her belief in the relational nature of being. Exhibiting respect for the disparate ways women choose to live our lives, Clinton states “we must respect the choices that each woman makes for herself and her family” (paragraph 34), as she reminds her audience that improving the lives of women and girls will only improve the livelihood of our communities.

In what is probably the most famous passage from Clinton’s Beijing speech, paragraphs 43-50, she explains specific human rights abuses inflicted upon women. She mentions the murder of baby girls, the underground world of sex slaves and prostitutes, dowry killings, rape and torture of women as a tactic of war, domestic violence, female
as she chronicles worldwide abuses of women, Clinton repeats the phrase “It is a violation of human rights,” 7 times, each time emphasizing the word “human.” This passage culminates in Clinton’s battle cry: “If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, it is that human rights are women’s rights – and women’s rights are human rights” (paragraph 50). Here, Clinton succinctly demonstrates the essence of the feminine care ethic, demonstrating her appreciation for inclusivity and the relational nature of being. She reminds her audience that indignities and abuses suffered by some women are the concerns of humanity, and she attempts to use her political platform for public service, as she works to empower her audience.

Laura Bush also exhibits the feminine ethic of care in her 2002 International Women’s Day address. Throughout her speech, she defines the US-led war on terror in terms of rebuilding and humanitarian aid. Like Clinton, Bush is careful to stress that what is good for women is good for community, family, and society. She claims “the world is helping Afghan women return to the lives they once knew” (paragraph 4), and she highlights specific ways the US is working to rebuild Afghanistan, focusing on the education of women and girls, and the monetary contributions of the US government, money that should be used for “food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, and toys for Afghan children” (paragraph 9).

Bush exhibits care for her audience, as well as women around the globe, arguing that women in Afghanistan have the right to live lives free of injustice. She states, “Today, on International Women’s Day, we affirm our mission to protect human rights for women in Afghanistan and around the world” (paragraph 20), and she explains that
these rights include “human dignity, private property, free speech, equal justice, education, and health care” (paragraph 25). In these passages, Bush sounds remarkably similar to her predecessor, as she argues that basic human rights are women’s rights, and she refuses to separate the two. Perhaps these statements were what moved Newsweek reporter Martha Brant (2001) to exclaim, after hearing Bush speak out on behalf of Afghan women, “If I had closed my eyes, I could have sworn it was Hillary Clinton talking (p.2).

Admittedly, Clinton’s Beijing speech has received much more praise and attention than Bush’s International Women’s Day address. On November 17, 2001, Laura Bush became the first First Lady to deliver the President’s weekly radio address without the aid of the President. She used her two-and-a-half minutes on-air to sing the praises of the US-led war on Afghanistan, chronicling the ways that the Taliban mistreated Afghan women and the steps that the US government was taking to educate and liberate the women of Afghanistan. Since that speech, Bush has repeatedly mounted her white-glove pulpit to speak out on behalf of human rights for the women and children of Afghanistan. Her March 8, 2002, speech to the United Nations is yet another stump speech for global women’s rights, with minimal new content. However, since the terrorist attacks of September 11th, Laura Bush has found her voice “in the archetypal role of nurturer, compassionately tending to the nation’s emotional neediness” (Jansen, 2002, p.141). As she has gained exposure and confidence as a public speaker, Bush has been privy to a fairly cushy rhetorical situation; few people in the US protest the education of Afghan women and children, just as few support the oppressive Taliban regime or terrorist attacks on America.
Hillary Clinton, however, faced almost impossible exigence in Beijing in 1995. The Chinese government wanted Clinton to stay home; Republicans in the US government wanted Clinton to stay home, and some democrats, protesting Chinese human rights abuses, also wanted Clinton to remain on American soil. It seems like the only person who thought Hillary Clinton should go to China and advocate for global women’s rights was Hillary Clinton herself. While Bill Clinton expressed his support for his wife’s trip, his administration grappled with the Chinese government, just as he grappled with a reelection campaign on the home front. Following her disastrous foray into the world of healthcare policy, Hillary Clinton traveled to Beijing to deliver a speech condemning human rights abuses in a country whose oppressive government perpetrated those very cruelties against which she spoke – a sticky rhetorical situation at best. Her speech is a triumph because she achieved eloquence in the face of adversity and turned a dreaded and potentially dreadful appearance into one of her most popular and acclaimed trips to the podium.

Although Bush’s speech has not generated the amount of attention or praise that Clinton’s speech has, perhaps her words have filled a void in our recent discussions of foreign policy and our framing of the September 11th attacks. Sue Curry Jansen (2002) maintains, “September 11th was a story about men, told by men using traditional masculinist narrative frames” (p.139). However, Bush reminds audiences about the women of Afghanistan, placing them at the center of the US-led war on terror. Barbara Friedman (2002) laments that stories of Afghanistan’s women have all but disappeared from the mainstream media, as the September 11th attacks begin to fade from our national consciousness; Bush’s words remind us of their stories.
Throughout her speech, Clinton relies more heavily on political feminine style than her counterpart. Bush peppers feminine style arguments and reasoning with snippets of traditionally masculine style. However, like Clinton, she consistently uses personal experience to back claims, politicizes the personal, and exhibits the feminine ethic of care. After discussing how both first ladies make use of Dow and Tonn’s (1993) notion of political feminine style, it is necessary to examine the implications of this form of argumentation.

**Implications of Political Feminine Style**

In her book *The Rhetorical Act*, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (1996) discusses the concept of enactment, explaining, “When there is enactment, the speaker or writer is proof of the claim he or she is making. Enactment is both proof and a way to present evidence vividly” (p.309). In this way, both first ladies enact political feminine style by the simple virtue of their speeches and their act of mounting public platforms to speak on behalf of the world’s women. Feminine style has served as a way for women to bring domestic ways of seeing and knowing into the public world. It is important to note that Dow and Tonn’s conception of political feminine style reflects a white, middle-class privilege that is blind to intersections of race, class, ethnicity, and gender. However, since all of our nation’s first ladies have thus far reflected a similar privilege, Dow and Tonn’s model remains an appropriate tool for the analysis of first lady rhetoric.

Political feminine style has allowed our most recent first ladies to bring private interests into the foreign policy realm, expanding our notions of the kinds of speeches acceptable for the president’s wife to make. Moreover, the women’s speeches, as analyzed through Dow and Tonn’s model of political feminine style, speak volumes
about the success of this model, the importance of immediate audience, and the
possibility of a feminist counterpublic as articulated by the first lady.

**Political Feminine Style as an Analytical Tool**

First, and most basically, it is important to note that Dow and Tonn’s
methodology works; rhetors can use this style to craft political speeches, and critics can
rhetorically glean this style from the speeches we study. Dow and Tonn (1993) express
their desire to further Campbell’s work in the area of feminine style, arguing “feminine
style functions not only as a strategy for audience empowerment but as a critique of
traditional grounds for political judgment” (p.287). Claiming that feminine style can be
more than “another, albeit unique and innovate, strategy that serves to empower
audiences for the traditional purpose of gaining access to the existing political system”
(p.287) Dow and Tonn maintain that political feminine style can help further a feminist
agenda in rhetorical criticism, by exposing a new political philosophy based on
traditionally feminine values.

It makes sense that first ladies would use some form of political feminine style
because they are typically public spokeswomen for private ideals, both political and
apolitical, empowered by their access to a mini-bully pulpit and disempowered by their
constraining ceremonial and civic roles. Because first ladies usually champion safe, non-
threatening issues – like education, literacy, or volunteerism – their words are probably
not as political as the speeches made by elected officials. At the same time, first lady
rhetoric is politically subordinate, and their public speech functions as a vital component
of their husbands’ political machinations. Dow and Tonn first conceived of their method
to study the speeches of Ann Richards, an elected official involved in public policy
making; surely their model would be a useful tool for studying the words of other female politicians. However, political feminine style is also effective as a lens through which to view first ladies’ words. This method allows us to uncover the alternative political philosophy that underlies the seemingly apolitical messages of our presidents’ wives. Until a woman occupies the White House in her own right, it is important to realize the political implications of the words of our “Mrs. Presidents.”

**Importance of Immediate Audience**

Second, it is important to consider the role of the immediate audience when discussing political feminine style. Dow and Tonn argue that feminine style has been traditionally perceived as unsuitable for traditional public discourse. They explain that this style first arose as women – inexperienced in the art of public speaking and ignorant of the traditionally masculine principles of public speech – spoke to public audiences composed mainly of other women. In this way, feminine style was “particularly effective for powerless female audiences” (p.288). Dow and Tonn maintain that this is no longer the case, noting “Restricting examination of feminine style only to the context of social reform rhetoric aimed at disempowered female audiences is to limit its relevance and to implicitly reify the public/private distinction that devalues women’s communication” (p.298).

While some countries, like the United States, sent both male and female delegates to the Fourth World Conference, Hillary Clinton’s audience was composed, primarily, of women. Laura Bush, on the other hand, spoke to a largely male audience of UN representatives. Perhaps Clinton, writing for an audience of women, was able to draw more heavily on traditionally feminine principles, like the relational nature of being,
inclusivity, and the inherent worth of the individual. I have argued earlier in this analysis that Laura Bush used masculine style reasoning early in her speech to pave the way for a more feminine style. Perhaps political feminine style is not yet deemed appropriate for mixed audiences, which would be further evidence of the devaluation of women’s ways of seeing, knowing, and talking about the world. While Dow and Tonn are right in claiming that political feminine style is an analytical tool that can be applied to many speaking situations, not just women-only situations, it is important to consider the implications of immediate audience on the development of this style.

Political Feminine Style and the Development of a Counterpublic

Perhaps it is unreasonable to imagine that a first lady—no matter how liberal her reputation—can be a spokeswoman for a feminist counterpublic. Surely she is too entrenched in the mainstream political culture to be a symbol of “counter” anything. Dow and Tonn argue that as traditionally feminine values become increasingly integrated into politics, feminine style works to critique traditional values and help disseminate an ideology that privileges traditionally feminine ways of experiencing and discussing the world. They are quick to point out “To highlight only Richards’ use of feminine style, and to claim from that a political function, would be misguided. . . Synthesis of style and substance is vital here” (p.300).

Both Clinton and Bush explicitly confront issues of women’s rights, making both of their speeches basically feminist. However, Bush is clearly not advocating a counterpublic sphere. Speaking to a mostly male audience, she uses both masculine and feminine styles of reasoning, and though she upholds the tenets of political feminine style, she couches her pro-woman arguments in pro-status-quo terms. Acknowledging
the public and private roles that women must assume, Bush never critiques these roles. Instead, she reaffirms the way things are, arguing that Afghan women merely return to the lives they knew pre-Taliban and saying nothing about their underrepresentation in the new government of Afghanistan.

Speaking, as she does, on International Women’s Day, Laura Bush is participating in a ceremony that honors women’s contributions, and, fittingly, is delivering an epideictic speech. Celebrating a fairly obvious victory for global women’s rights, Bush’s purpose is to praise the efforts of her husband’s administration to free women from oppressive Taliban rule. Largely ceremonial, Bush’s speech does not challenge the future, and while she praises past foreign policy decisions, she is unconcerned with establishing new ones.

Clinton, however, is a trickier case. A sort of rogue first lady who mixed ceremonial and hostessing duties with her dabbling in public policy, Clinton’s speech could be seen as advancing a feminist counterpublic. Undoubtedly, participants in the Beijing conference desired to return home to their masculinist countries with new policy initiatives in tow. Certainly, the conference was a place where women’s issues received top billing and where women could plan policy initiatives without interference from their governments. However, it is easy for critics of the UN, critics of feminism, and mainstream media outlets to dismiss the Beijing Conference and the rhetoric that came out of it. If Clinton advocated a feminist counterpublic in China, this sphere did not hold up on US soil.

Traveling to China despite objections from American and Chinese governments, Clinton’s decision to speak in Beijing remains enigmatic. Enacting a role of self-interest
against public sphere expediency, Clinton’s appearance might encourage counterpublics trying to resist dominant public messages, offering her audience an example of empowered action. Whereas Laura Bush’s speech is epideictic, praising the US-led war on terror in Afghanistan, Clinton’s Beijing speech is deliberative, oriented toward future policy, and claiming that women’s rights should be human rights. Driving home a political argument about the future of women across the globe, Clinton’s conference appearance enacts the notion of resistance necessary for the future of women’s rights struggles.

Throughout her stint as first lady, Clinton was most popular when she confined her work and her public address to stereotypically feminine issues like the welfare of children, and she was never able to endow these issues with the kind of universal importance we associate with things like tax plans, defense spending, and military maneuvers. While she attempted to critique the status quo and while her views were disseminated to a wider audience, Clinton’s speech was still a mainstream success. Even now, it is archived next to speeches like FDR’s declaration of war, Kennedy’s inaugural address, and Reagan’s Challenger eulogy.

Conclusion

This analysis has examined Hillary Clinton’s “Women’s Rights Are Human Rights speech and Laura’s Bush’s 2002 International Women’s Day Address through Bonnie J. Dow and Mari Boor Tonn’s (1993) articulation of political feminine style. Both first ladies utilized all three tenets of Dow and Tonn’s methodology, using personal experience to back claims, politicizing the personal, and exhibiting the feminine ethic of care. Perhaps it is unrealistic to think that the words of a first lady can create an
alternative political philosophy; surely she is a symbol of hegemony if ever there was one. However, we cannot overlook the significance of the first lady’s words. She is a symbol of conflicted American womanhood, and she remains a political figurehead, even though she has no officially defined office or officially sanctioned duties. One of the most constraining roles a woman can occupy, the first lady’s words speak volumes about American women’s place in society and about our potential to enact political change.

On the surface, Laura Welch Bush and Hillary Rodham Clinton have very different images. However, both of them have helped reshape our notions of the first lady’s proper role and her rhetorical territory. Bringing domestic ways of seeing and knowing to a foreign realm, Clinton and Bush have helped force the first lady even further into the public world at the same time they have privileged private forms of reasoning and argumentation. Just as Clinton and Bush presented two distinct conceptions of the same Yves Saint Laurent power suit, so, too, do they model disparate ways to wield the first lady’s rhetorical power.

While both first ladies indicate aspects of a feminine style, Clinton’s enactment of individual interests against the interests of the larger public sphere provides a more profound rhetorical motive to feminist counterpublics. Always interested in the possible intersection between feminism and the first ladies’ words, this analysis has argued that political feminine style is an effective tool for analysis, as well as a potentially useful manner in which to articulate an alternative political philosophy. Examining the pro-woman rhetoric of our country’s most recent presidential spouses has yielded a glimpse of the evolution of the first lady’s role and the development of feminine style.
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Appendix 1: Women’s Rights Are Human Rights

by Hillary Rodham Clinton

Remarks to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women Plenary Session Beijing, China September 5, 1005

(1) Mrs. Mongella, Under Secretary Kittani, distinguished delegates and guests.

(2) I would like to thank the Secretary General of the United Nations for inviting me to be a part of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. This is truly a celebration of the contributions women make in every aspect of life: in the home, on the job, in their communities, as mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, learners, workers, citizens, and leaders.

(3) It is also a coming together, much the way women come together everyday in every community.

(4) We come together in fields and in factories. In villages markets and super markets. In living rooms and board rooms.

(5) Whether it is while playing with our children in the park, or washing our clothes in a river, or taking a break at he office water cooler, we come together and talk about our aspirations and concerns. And time and time again, our talk turns to our children and our families. However different we may be, there is far more that unites us than divides us. We share a common future. And we are here to find the common ground so that we may help bring new dignity and respect to women and girls all over the world – and in so doing, bring new strength and stability to families as well.

(6) By gathering in Beijing, we are focusing world attention on issues that matter most in the lives of women and their families: access to education, health care, jobs and
credit, the chance to enjoy basic legal and human rights and participate fully in the political life of their countries.

(7) There are some who question the reason for this conference.

(8) Let them listen to the voices of women in their homes, neighborhoods, and workplaces.

(9) There are some who wonder whether the lives of women and girls matter to economic and political progress across the globe.

(10) Let them look at the women gathered here and at Huairou—the homemakers, nurses, teachers, lawyers, policymakers, and women who run their own businesses.

(11) It is conferences like this that compel governments and people everywhere to listen, look, and face the world’s most pressing problems.

(12) Wasn’t it after the women’s conference in Nairobi ten years ago that the world focused for the first time on the crisis of domestic violence?

(13) Earlier today, I participated in a World Health Organization forum, where government officials, NGOs, and individual citizens are working on ways to address the health problems of women and girls.

(14) Tomorrow, I will attend a gathering of the United Nations Development Fund for Women. There, the discussion will focus on local – and highly successful – programs that give hard-working women access to credit so they can improve their own lives and the lives of their families.

(15) What we are learning around the world is that if women are healthy and educated, their families will flourish. If women are free from violence, their families will
flourish. If women have a chance to work and earn as full and equal partners in society, their families will flourish.

(16) And when families flourish, communities and nations will flourish.

(17) That is why every woman, every man, every child, and every family has a stake in the discussion that takes place here.

(18) Over the past 25 years, I have worked persistently on issues relating to women, children, and families. Over the past two-and-a-half years, I have had the opportunity to learn more about the challenges facing the women in my own country and around the world.

(19) I have met new mothers in Jokarta, Indonesia, who come together regularly in their village to discuss nutrition, family planning, and baby care.

(20) I have met working parents in Denmark who talk about the comfort they feel in knowing that their children can be cared for in creative, safe, and nurturing after-school centers.

(21) I have met women in South Africa who have helped lead the struggle to end apartheid and are now helping build a new democracy.

(22) I have met with the leading women of the Western Hemisphere who are working everyday to promote literacy and better healthcare for the children of their countries.

(23) I have met women in India and Bangladesh who are taking out small loans to buy milk cows, rickshaws, thread, and other materials to create a livelihood for themselves and their families.
(24) I have met doctors and nurses in Belarus and Ukraine who are trying to keep children alive in the aftermath of Chernobyl.

(25) The great challenge of this conference is to give voice to women everywhere whose experiences go unnoticed, whose words go unheard.

(26) Women comprise more than half of the world’s population. Women are 70% of the world’s poor, and two-thirds of those who are not taught to read and write.

(27) Women are the primary caretakers for most of the world’s children and elderly. Yet much of the work we do is not valued—not by economists, not by historians, not by popular culture, and not by government leaders.

(28) At this very moment, as we sit here, women around the world are giving birth, raising children, cooking meals, washing clothes, cleaning houses, planting crops, working on assembly lines, running companies, and running countries.

(29) Women are also dying from diseases that should have been prevented or treated; they are watching their children succumb to malnutrition caused by poverty and economic deprivation; they are being denied the right to go to school by their own fathers and brothers; they are being forced into prostitution, and they are being barred from the bank lending office and banned from the ballot box.

(30) Those of us who have the opportunity to be here have the responsibility to speak for those who could not.

(31) As an American, I want to speak up for women in my own country—women who are raising children on the minimum wage, women who can’t afford healthcare or child care, women whose lives are threatened by violence, including violence in their own homes.
(32) I want to speak up for mothers who are fighting for good schools, safe neighborhoods, clean air, and clean airwaves; for older women, some of them widows, who have raised their families and now find that their skills and life experiences are not valued in the workplace; for women who are working all night as nurses, hotel clerks, and fast food cooks so that they can be home during the day with their kids; and for women everywhere who simply don’t have the time to do everything they are called upon to do each day.

(33) Speaking to you today, I speak for them, just as each of us speaks for women around the world who are denied the chance to go to school, or see a doctor, or own property, or have a say about the direction of their lives simply because they are women. The truth is that most women around the world work both inside and outside the home, usually by necessity.

(34) We need to understand that there is no formula for how women should lead their lives. That is why we must respect the choices that each woman makes for herself and her family. Every woman deserves the chance to realize her God-given potential.

(35) We must also recognize that women will never gain full dignity until their human rights are respected and protected.

(36) Our goals of this conference, to strengthen families and societies by empowering women to take greater control over their own destinies, cannot be fully reached unless all governments—here and around the world—accept their responsibility to protect and promote internationally recognized human rights.

(37) The international community has long acknowledged—and recently affirmed at Vienna—that both women and men are entitled to a range of protections and
personal freedoms, from the right of personal security to the right to determine freely the number and spacing of the children they bear.

(38) No one should be forced to remain silent for fear of religious or political persecution, arrest, abuse, or torture.

(39) Tragically, women are most often the ones whose human rights are violated.

(40) Even in the late 20th century, the rape of women continues to be an instrument of armed conflict. Women and children make up a large majority of the world’s refugees. When women are excluded from the political process, they become even more vulnerable to abuse.

(41) I believe that, on the eve of the new millennium, it is time to break our silence. It is time for us to say here in Beijing, and the world to hear, that it is no longer acceptable to discuss women’s rights as separate from human rights.

(42) These abuses have continued because, for too long, the history of women has been a history of silence. Even today, there are those who are trying to silence our words.

(43) It is a violation of human rights when babies are denied food, or drowned, or suffocated, or their spines broken, simply because they are girls.

(44) It is a violation of human rights when women and girls are sold into the slavery of prostitution.

(45) It is a violation of human rights when women are doused with gasoline, set on fire, and burned to death because their marriage dowries are deemed too small.
It is a violation of human rights when individual women are raped in their own communities and when thousands of women are subjected to rape as a tactic or prize of war.

It is a violation of human rights when a leading cause of death worldwide among women ages 14 to 44 is the violence they are subjected to in their own homes.

It is a violation of human rights when young girls are brutalized by the painful and degrading practice of genital mutilation.

It is a violation of human rights when women are denied the right to plan their own families, and that includes being forced to have abortions or being sterilized against their will.

If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, it is that women’s rights are human rights. . . And human rights are women’s rights.

Let us not forget that among those rights are the right to speak freely. And the right to be heard.

Women must enjoy the right to participate fully in the social and political lives of their countries if we want freedom and democracy to thrive and endure.

It is indefensible that many women in non-governmental organizations who wished to participate in this conference have not been able to attend—or have been prohibited from fully taking part.

Let me be clear. Freedom means the right of people to assemble, organize, and debate openly. It means respecting the views of those who may disagree with the views of their governments. It means not taking citizens away from their loved ones and
jailing them, mistreating them, or denying them their freedom and dignity because of the peaceful expression of their ideas and opinions.

(55) In my country, we recently celebrated the 75th anniversary of women’s suffrage. It took 105 years after the signing of our Declaration of Independence for women to win the right to vote. It took 72 years of organized struggle on the part of many courageous women and men.

(56) It was one of America’s most divisive philosophical wars. But it was also a bloodless war. Suffrage was achieved without a shot fired.

(57) We have also been reminded, in V-J Day observances last weekend, of the good that comes when men and women join together to combat the forces of tyranny and build a better world.

(58) We have seen peace prevail in most places for half century. We have avoided another world war.

(59) But we have not solved older, deeply rooted problems than continue to diminish the potential of half the world’s population.

(60) Now is the time to act on behalf of women everywhere.

(61) If we take bold steps to better the lives of women, we will be taking bold steps to better the lives of children and families, too. Families rely on mothers and wives for emotional support and care; families rely on women for labor in the home; and increasingly, families rely on women for income needed to raise healthy children and care for other relatives.

(62) As long as discrimination and inequities remain so commonplace around the world—as long as girls and women are valued less, fed less, fed last, overworked,
underpaid, not schooled, and subjected to violence in and out of their homes—the potential of the human family to create a peaceful, prosperous world will no be realized.

(63) Let this conference be our—and the world’s—call to action.

(64) And let us heed the call so that we can create a world in which every woman is treated with respect and dignity, every boy and girl is loved and cared for equally, and every family has the hope of a strong and stable future.

(65) Thank you very much. God’s blessings on you, your work, and all who benefit from it.
Appendix 2: International Women’s Day Address

by Laura Bush

Remarks to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women

New York City, NY March 8, 2002

(1) Thank you, Mister Moderator. Queen Noor; Secretary (General) and Mrs. Annan;

Ambassador Kolby, Ms. (Angela) King; distinguished guests. I’m so glad to be here at the United Nations on this International Women’s Day—a day that has been marked with pride and promise since 1975—International Women’s Year.

(2) I am here to voice my strong support for the courageous people of Afghanistan—women and men who have suffered for years under the Taliban regime. I applaud the international community for its concern for women and families in Afghanistan and around the world. And I applaud Chairman Karzai for his leadership during this important time.

(3) The terrorist attacks of September 11 galvanized the international community. Many of us have drawn valuable lessons from the tragedies. People around the world are looking closely at the roles women play in their societies. Afghanistan under the Taliban gave the world a sobering example of a country where women were denied their rights and their place in society.

(4) Today, the world is helping Afghan women return to the lives they once knew. Women were once important contributors to Afghan society, and they had the right to vote as early as the 1920s. Many women were professions—they were teachers, doctors, and lawyers. And today, many will be returning to those professions.
(5) This is a time of rebuilding—of unprecedented opportunity—thanks to the efforts led by the United Nations, the United States, the new Afghan government, and our allies around the world. With opportunity comes obligation. Much work remains to be done.

(6) The United States’ current efforts reflect a long-standing commitment. The United States is the largest and one of the longest continuous supporters of UN humanitarian efforts in Afghanistan, and we will continue to be.

(7) We have committed at least $1.5 million to help Afghan women work and support their families, some for the first time in years. Many women are now heads of households, having lost their husbands during the 23 years of war. In Kabul and Mazar-E-Sharif, the U.S. is sending wheat to 21 bakeries run by widows who earn a living and feed their own families.

(8) Women, children, and widows who were forced to flee refugee camps are now returning home to Afghanistan. Today, the United States has helped some 150,000 people return, and we have pledged about $50.2 million dollars in support for community-based health, education, shelter, and water sanitation projects.

(9) American boys and girls are contributing a dollar each through America’s Fund For Afghan Children. So far, American children have sent more than $4 million dollars for food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, and toys for Afghan children.

(10) A major focus is on education. Recently, I met with Chairman Karzai, and I presented him with a children’s dictionary which symbolized the importance the United States places on education.
(11) Prosperity cannot follow peace without educated women and children. When people are educated, all the indexes of society improve. For example:

(12) Improvements in women’s education have contributed the most by far to the total decline in child malnutrition.

(13) And mothers with a secondary education have children with mortality rates nearly 36 percent lower than mothers with a primary school education.

(14) In two weeks, Afghan boys and girls start school—many for the first time. The world will be watching on that first day of school, as teachers take their long-vacant places, and students open their books for their first lessons.

(15) Through a number of projects, the United States is committed to helping the Afghan people redevelop their educational system. The U.S. Agency for International Development is sending almost 10 million Pashto and Dari language textbooks to Afghan schools.

(16) When school starts, the primary grades will have language and math books. More books will follow for secondary education—covering all subjects. We are funding teams of teacher trainers and helping educators develop curricula. And the U.S. helped refurbish the women’s dormitory at the University of Kabul so women can remain on campus, in a safe environment.

(17) For primary schools, the Academy for Educational Development just sent 40,000 backpacks filled with slates, chalk, school supplies, and toys for refugee children. This is the backpack—hand-made in Pakistan.

(18) Children who receive these backpacks may have never owned or even seen books and toys. This great effort deserves our support.
When you give children books and an education, you give them the ability to imagine a future of opportunity, equality, and justice. Education is the single most important long-term investment we can make in the future.

At a girls’ school in Northern Afghanistan, the principal, a man named Diwana Qol said, “These girls are part of our future…We will need all of our children, boys and girls, to be educated if we are to rebuild our country from this war.”

Today, on International Women’s Day, we affirm our mission to protect human rights for women in Afghanistan and around the world. And we affirm our support of all Afghans as they recover from war and injustice.

Farahnaz Nazir, founder of the Afghanistan Women’s Association said, “Society is like a bird. It has two wings. A bird cannot fly if one wing is broken.”

Our dedication to respecting and protecting women’s rights in all countries must continue if we are to achieve a peaceful, prosperous, and stable world.

In his State of the Union address to the United States Congress, President Bush said: “All fathers and mothers, in all societies, want their children to be educated, and live free from poverty and violence…No nation owns these aspirations, and no nation is exempt from them.”

Human dignity, private property, free speech, equal justice, education, and healthcare—these rights must be guaranteed throughout the world. Together the United States, the United Nations, and our allies will prove that the forces of terror can’t stop the momentum of freedom. Thank you.