

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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COMMENTS:

APRIL 23, 1996

FIRST HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
PATTI DAVIS QUESTIONS FOR FIRST LADIES
LADIES HOME JOURNAL

1. One of my own opinions that I've expressed in this article is that our society's conflicting views about women arise from our tendency to think in terms of "roles." Individuality is not about fitting into any kind of role. This seems particularly clear to me when I look at the criticism most First Ladies have experienced. I wonder what your opinion is on this, and if you have felt that we are projecting our confusion onto whoever is First Lady.

I think that in our society most women tend to be pigeonholed and stereotyped based on the choices they make in their lives. Sadly, we have not arrived at a point where women are credited and respected for making the decisions that are best suited to their individual and family circumstances. We don't seem entirely comfortable yet with the idea that most women, whether they work in or out of the home, are doing their best to fulfill many responsibilities. Too often, women are categorized as playing one "role" or another, when in fact they play many. The writer and anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson has a term, "composing a life," which is a perfect description of what most women are doing as they meet their obligations to themselves, their families, friends, and careers.

First Ladies are no exception. Like tens of millions of other women in America, women who find themselves in this position have obligations, interests, responsibilities, and needs. And each of us must define the role of First Lady in a way that suits our own particular situations.

One reason First Ladies evoke such strong reactions in people is that we are more visible than other women, making our choices more subject to public discussion and criticism. People have very definite expectations of First Ladies, and they project their expectations (and disappointments) onto whoever is in the role at the time. My hope is that someday we will move beyond stereotyping of women in general, and of First Ladies in particular, so that all women can be respected for -- and feel comfortable with -- the choices they make for themselves and their families.

2. If we do someday elect a woman President, do you think we will then turn the same harsh criticism on her husband? Or do you think we are still a bit more judgmental of women?

I honestly don't know whether the husband of the first woman

President will be subjected to the same treatment. My sense is that anyone who breaks convention is going to be criticized by people who are uncomfortable with change. Just as some people are uncomfortable with the way First Ladies go about their duties, I'm sure there will be a great deal of commentary about the first man who finds himself in the role of President's spouse.

3. What have been the best and the most difficult aspects of being First Lady?

The best part of being First Lady is having the opportunity to support activities and projects that I think will make a difference in the life of our country and the American people. Whether it is defending public television, or trying to raise awareness about the needs of children and families, or meeting with humanitarian relief workers who are promoting peace and reconciliation in Bosnia, I am grateful for the chance to be involved in a range of activities that help promote the common good.

I also believe very strongly that there is much that is right with our country -- and much to celebrate. Being First Lady has given me the chance to help draw attention to many things that are working in America -- from innovative child care programs, to family friendly workplaces, to public-private partnerships that are bringing new prosperity to depressed communities.

The most difficult aspect of being First Lady is giving up some of the spontaneity and freedom of life outside the White House. While it is a privilege to meet people and go places totally out of reach for most men and women, I yearn for everyday experiences like driving a car, going shopping, or browsing in a bookstore. Activities that millions of Americans take for granted have become extraordinary for me.

Still, as much as I miss ordinary life, I wouldn't trade my position for anything in the world. Every day I learn more about the talented, caring, and committed women who have occupied this position over the past two centuries and my admiration for them continues to grow. For me, it is a special privilege to serve the American people and our nation at such an exciting and challenging time in our history.

But perhaps the greatest reward of all is having the chance to help my husband accomplish his goals on behalf of our country. I'm proud of what he has achieved as President. And it is an honor to support him as he works to bring peace, prosperity, and happiness to our nation and our world.

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To: Lisa Caputo
FAX: (202) 456-7805
FROM: PATTI DAVIS

4/4/96

Dear Lisa,

Here are the questions I had in mind for Mrs. Clinton for this Ladies Home Journal piece. As I said on the phone, the focus of the article is how we as a society treat First Ladies; it's in no way an evaluation of the women themselves. Historically, almost every First Lady has experienced an onslaught of criticism at some point, which I think says more about us than about any of them.

Again, I want to extend my sympathy for what I know is a sad time. Grieving is always difficult, but more so when you have to do it in public.

Thank you again for your help. My phone number is (212) 362-1209. My FAX number is (212) 874-6018.

Thanks,

Patti Davis



QUESTIONS FOR MRS. CLINTON:

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