

ETHICS AND GENDER:
ARE WOMEN BETTER THAN MEN?

By

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Good evening everyone and thank you for inviting me to deliver this lecture.

It is a great honour to be able to do so, and it is also a pleasure to be able to visit Newcastle again as I do not get the chance to come here very often. I have to confess that I was not among the hordes of tourists who came to see the *Pasha Bolker* – although I was fascinated to watch the whole spectacle, both via the media and online. I especially liked it when Greenpeace projected laser signs onto the side of the boat, warning about the contribution of coal to climate change.

Usually when I come to Newcastle it is to talk – and to talk about ideas or issues, as I am doing tonight. I do recall one time I was here, some years ago, to promote my autobiography, *Ducks on the Pond* and I stood in a bookshop in the mall for an hour or so, waiting for the masses of fans to turn up. Sadly, only one or two Novacastrians were tempted that day – so it is wonderful to see a much greater number turn out this evening.

I also remember that visit for what happened on the way home. I was driving back to Sydney along the F3 listening to the US Presidential results come in. As a political groupie, and an American elections tragic, I was listening compulsively, waiting and hoping for the outcome in the one, final state that would put Al Gore over the line. It came somewhere around the Gosford turnoff when it was announced that Gore had won the pivotal state of Florida – which gave him victory, and meant he would be the next President, succeeding Bill Clinton.

As you will be able to work out, the date of that visit to Newcastle was November 2000. That was when former US Vice-President Al Gore ran against the Governor of Texas, George W. Bush, won a majority of votes cast but was denied the Presidency after the US Supreme Court upheld the legitimacy of a recount of votes in Florida.

The rest, as they say, is history.

What, you might be wondering, has any of this to do with my subject tonight. Quite a lot, in fact, as I hope will soon become apparent.

But first, let me go to the question I posed for my topic for tonight:
Are women better than men?

I posed the question in an ethical context, drawing on the notion that perhaps women are a morally superior sex. This proposition has been around for a long time, and has often been expressed – at least within the Western intellectual tradition – by the polarity of the Madonna/whore dichotomy. Under this notion, some women are good, perhaps intrinsically so, but others are bad – usually through every fault of their own.

Under this proposition, good women are either chaste (unmarried or nuns) or are respectable mothers (madonnas), while bad women are those who have fallen from grace, usually for sexual transgressions and hence are referred to

as whores. This view of women has been around for a long time although I like to think it is not as compelling or as relevant as it once was.

But it once held great sway in this country. You might recall that I used the title of my first book - *Damned Whores and God's Police* - to give an Australian expression to this dichotomy. Our own manifestation of the good girl was Caroline Chisholm's famous (even infamous) proposition that women are "God's police". As she wrote in her 1847 pamphlet, *Emigration and Transportation Relatively Considered*:

For all the clergy you can despatch, all the schoolmasters you can appoint, all the churches you can build, and all the books you can export, will never do much good, without what a gentleman in that Colony very appropriately called 'God's police' – wives and little children – good and virtuous women.

The idea that women were both virtuous in themselves but also had responsibility for quelling bad behaviour in others has been a powerful one in our history. When I was growing up, in the 1950s, it was not just the dominant view – it was also a prescriptive one. We women were supposed to be virtuous ourselves and to be responsible for ensuring everyone else was too.

It was not a terribly attractive career prospect and, like many thousands of other women of my generation, I decided it was not for me. If I had to choose between being good and being bad, I'd opt for the bad. At least bad girls seemed to have more fun.

But as my views evolved and were shaped by the ideas of feminism, I came to understand that the good girls/bad girls idea was a repressive one, used to deny women the opportunity to participate fully in the affairs of the world. Women were "the hand that rocked the cradle" - the mothers and wives who were alleged to "rule the world" through the influence they had on their offspring (another manifestation of being God's police). But they had no power in their own right.

Or they were the "power behind the throne", the Regents or the Empress Dowagers, again using maternal power to influence the affairs of state, but they did not themselves sit on the throne unless, like Elizabeth 1, they were spinsters (and therefore of course childless) and deemed to be sexless, i.e. still "good".

In other words, exercising power – particularly the power of state – was not seen as an appropriate female vocation. Not something "nice" women did, unless occasionally it was to step into a seat made vacant by the death of a father or husband.

These ideas might seem rather quaint in 2007 but what I would like to do this evening is to examine whether this idea of women's alleged moral superiority still lingers. I want to do so by looking at the role of women in politics, to see what is expected of women in the political arena and whether it is different

from what is expected of men. If there *are* differences, are women expected to be better?

This issue was thrown into light relief this past week when it was revealed that Opposition Leader Kevin Rudd had visited a strip club in New York four years ago. The immediate response from some callers to the radio station I was listening to was: If Julia Gillard was leader, this would never have happened! *She* would never have been enticed to a strip club, the caller implied.

What this caller was doing was assuming a different moral standard, based on gender, between the Leader and his Deputy. While she did not spell it out, I imagine she meant that either women are not titillated by the sight of other women in various states of undress and therefore would not want to watch them, OR that a woman would not be comfortable watching other women demeaning themselves for the gratification of men.

Either way, I am not sure that this is a very helpful way to look at the question of whether women are better than men. I think we have already established that women's supposed moral superiority is in fact learned behaviour; it is something we were exhorted to do, not something we were necessarily born with. Plenty of men would balk at attending a strip club, while I know women who would have no qualms about going. I've been myself – out of curiosity. I am not sure if that makes me a bad person.

IT IS NOW MORE THAN fifteen years since Australia's first two women premiers, Carmen Lawrence and Joan Kirner, were installed. They were widely seen as having been put in the jobs because of the parlous state of politics due to the performance of their predecessors. This gave birth to the notion of "political housewives", women put into the top jobs to clean up the mess left by the men. Talk about stereotyping – and setting women up to fail! Both women did their best but the chalices they had been handed were poisoned ones and there was nothing they could do about this.

We have moved on since then. The next woman premier is likely to be Anna Bligh in Queensland who has spent some years being publicly groomed for the job. The succession has been carefully planned and no one is suggesting that Bligh will need to clean up after Peter Beattie.

Nor was this said about Clare Martin when she became Chief Minister of the Northern Territory; Martin has since been re-elected to office – something that neither Kirner nor Lawrence managed to do – which indicates that she has acquired control over her political domain. She is seen as being there in her own right. She is indisputably in charge. She is a popular leader in the Territory and has developed her own political style, one that is authoritative but does not imitate the way men so often do things.

Is this generally true of women in Australian politics today?

Women today make up 28.3 per cent of federal parliament (there are 37 women in the House of Representatives and 27 in the Senate). This is quite

an improvement on the numbers twelve years ago when only 15 per cent of the parliament was female - but how good actually is it?

It is worth noting that ALL the states and territories have a higher proportion of women, with some such as Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory having a significantly higher proportion. But what is alarming is to look at the percentage of women who are in leadership positions in our federal government.

With just 4 - or 13 per cent - of the Howard ministry being female, we are in the company of countries such as Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo – all of whom have less than 20 per cent women in ministerial positions.

The United States is also down there with the male-dominated ministries, with only 15 per cent of the Bush cabinet being women. But in the case of the US this represents a significant decline from the Clinton era when 26 per cent of appointments to the Administration were women, whereas Australia has never had a greater representation of women in the ministry than it does today.

It is worth making the point that only Australia, Israel and the US among the developed democracies have such small numbers of women political leaders.

Some countries can claim parity or close to it. Chile, for instance, has a government where 50 per cent of the ministers are women – and of course there is also a female president. South Africa has 47 per cent women ministers, Nicaragua 45 per cent and Bolivia 29 per cent.¹

In stodgy, sexist old Europe women make up 47 per cent of the government of Spain, 45 per cent in Norway, 42 per cent in Finland, 40 per cent in Sweden and 31 per cent in both Netherlands and Denmark. Italy (23%), Ireland (20%) and Belgium (19%) – all supposedly socially conservative countries – all have far more women in their governments than the country that pioneered giving women the vote.

When I first compiled these figures earlier this year, France had 20 per cent of women in its cabinet. Since then there has been an election and the conservative candidate Nicholas Sarkozy came to power as President – and immediately insisted that 50 per cent of his cabinet be women.

There are seven women in Kevin Rudd's 30-person shadow ministry. This means women are 23 per cent of his leadership team; much better than the government's record but far short of what other democracies are managing to do.

The Deputy Leader of the ALP is Julia Gillard, which means we could have a female Deputy Prime Minister later this year if Labor wins the election. This

¹ These figures all come from an excellent Danish website that tracks women's leadership currently and across history. See www.guide2womenleaders.com

would be the first time in our history that a woman occupied a leadership position in government.

Yet we were one of the first countries in the world (the second in fact) to award women the vote. Why has it been so difficult for women to achieve political leadership in this country?

Germany is led by a woman. So is Jamaica, New Zealand, Mozambique, South Korea and The Netherlands Antilles. New Zealand's past two prime ministers have been women and when Helen Clark first assumed office, the leader of the opposition was also female. (As was the governor general and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court!)

There are currently women presidents: in Chile, Finland, Latvia, Liberia, the Philippines and Switzerland. And, come next November, there could be a woman President of the United States.

We are conspicuous in our region for being the only democracy not to have produced a woman leader. Look at India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Korea, and of course, New Zealand. What is wrong with Australia?

Part of the reason lies in the fact that we still cling to the idea that women are different. Women are held to a different standard. Because of this, it has taken some time for women parliamentarians to learn how to reconcile their gender with their political roles.

There is not time this evening to recount the history of the movement of women into federal parliament (although if you are interested I would refer you to the chapter "Political Eunuchs" in my most recent book *The End of Equality*.) All I can say here is that, at least until the recent past, women MPs have often felt conflicted and confused as to what their roles are - or should be.

Are they there first and foremost as party members – or as women? Can the two be separated? Should they? While women in Canberra sought to untangle these confusions, they tended – during the 1990s at least – to play it safe. They set aside their female representation role and became, for the most part, good party girls. They sat on their hands in 2002 while legislation that would hurt women was passed, for instance the banning of the abortion drug RU486 (done at the behest of Tasmanian Senator Brian Harradine as were a number of other measures that prevented women recipients of Australian overseas aid from having access to abortion services.)

Similarly there was not a peep of protest when the government took the axe to the powers of the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, making it less likely that complaints would be made or would succeed, or when the government made huge cuts to childcare and other women's services, including grants to women's organisations.

It was if the women in Canberra had decided to forget about the fact that they were women, and just concentrate on being politicians. But, as we have seen, that strategy, if it was a conscious one, was not especially effective since so few women have been promoted in Australian politics.

In the midst of such role confusion, it was perhaps tempting to pose for a women's magazine wearing a red frock and feather boa, or in footy shorts kicking a ball – both acts that earned derision for the women who did them.

As a society, we still trivialise women in the public eye, obsessing about their clothes and their hair. I had thought this tendency might decrease as more and more women came into public life – but it has yet to happen. It is a constant irritant for women in politics – the men don't have to worry about their hairdos or their clothes – and it is distraction from assessing their performance in a realistic way.

Any woman in politics who can string a sentence together is branded – and cursed? – with the prediction that she is likely to be Australia's first prime minister. (The political byways are littered with such women.) At the same time, few high profile women in politics – at federal level at least – have escaped vilification for any number of apparent or imagined transgressions. Carmen Lawrence, Natasha Stott Despoja, Cheryl Kernot, Amanda Vanstone, Bronwyn Bishop all spring to mind.

Women are still too often measured by their maternal and domestic prowess. Julia Gillard was famously criticised for not having children and for having a kitchen that was too clean.

But the demographics of women entering parliament are now changing. In the 1970s and 80s the female parliamentarians tended to be older, often grandmothers, whose direct family responsibilities were behind them.

During the 1990s and since, however, the average age of women politicians has declined markedly and more and more women federal MPs are having babies while in parliament. This raises all sorts of issues, including breastfeeding in the chamber, provision of childcare in parliament houses, hours of work and whether MPs really need to live in their constituencies. These issues were scarcely seen as relevant when all MPs were men and all the messy stuff of looking after children was safely out of sight – and mind.

Now if Labor wins we face the prospect of at least two Cabinet ministers (Tanya Plibersek and Nicola Roxon) with toddlers. We have never had this before. The learning curve continues.

I also think we can see that as the number of women in politics increases, and these women increasingly represent a wide range of areas of the country (not just the inner-city ghettos) and are themselves representative of a wide range of women's life experiences, that we will see other changes.

This is already starting.

I was very heartened last year to see a cross party group of women decide to take on the RU486 ban and get it overturned. In doing so they had the support of virtually every woman in the parliament – and a great many men. What a contrast from ten years earlier when all sides allowed the pill to be banned.

Women members and senators are these days far more willing to stand up for their sex and to fight for issues that are important to women. This is a big change – and a welcome one.

It also indicates that women are more comfortable *as women* and can begin to develop a political style that suits them and is not just a carbon copy of that of their male mentors or colleagues.

For instance, just this past week Clare Martin released the response of the Northern Territory Government to the *Children are Sacred Report*. You may recall that Martin was attacked by the federal government for being tardy in responding to the report that documented wide-spread sexual abuse of children in communities in the Northern Territory.

The federal government had declared an emergency, sent in troops and generally treated the Territory like a war zone: act now, work out later what to actually do. Martin's response, eight weeks later, was calm and measured and lays out a blueprint for achieving long-term improvement in the health and well-being of indigenous people, including children, who live in the North Territory. It was a very different way of doing things.

Women will sometimes bring a different style to politics and to political leadership: they may be more consensus oriented, more interested in issues to be do with women and children, to be against war and for saving the planet.

Such views could be seen as natural extensions of the nurturing roles some women adopt, but not all woman are mothers and nurturers so we should not make the mistake of arguing that there is “a women's approach” to politics.

Nevertheless women running for, and achieving, high political office, still have to deal with the myriad of expectations, both positive and negative, and many of them contradictory, that swirl around the fact they are women.

TO LOOK AT THESE CONDUNDRUMS in more details, I want to move now to the United States where, for the first time, we have two elected women going where women have never gone before.

We have seen American women occupy high office in the past. Both Madeleine Albright and Condoleez²za Rice have been US Secretary of State,

one of the biggest jobs in the world. And each has broken barriers for women in a myriad of ways as they have done this sensitive and high-level job.

Madelaine Albright provides an interesting insight into how she coped with some of these barriers. “Once in government,” she wrote in her autobiography³:

I had to deal with the problem of operating in a predominantly man’s world. The challenge was not new to me, but the level was higher and the pressure more intense. I am often asked whether I was condescended to by men as I travelled around the world to Arab countries and other places with highly traditional cultures. I replied, ‘No, because when I arrived somewhere, it was in a large plane with “United States of America” emblazoned on the side.’ Foreign officials respected that. I had more problems with some of the men in my own government.”

Following the Democratic takeover of Congress after the elections last November, Nancy Pelosi became Speaker of the US House of Representatives, the first woman to occupy that position. She is now third in line from the Presidency.

I am sure you will have seen Pelosi on television, and observed how seamlessly the transition occurred – but also what a striking difference she has brought to the role of Speaker, a position previously occupied by a grey man whose name, for the moment, I can’t even remember!

Pelosi has been a strong and articulate opponent of many of President Bush’s policies. We have seen her at the podium, attending meetings at the White House, talking to the media – always presenting her with authority and confidence. At the same time, she has brought a certain sartorial style to the job and she has not shied away from being a woman.

Pelosi is a smart dresser and her wardrobe has been the talk of Washington because she has brought a new level of style to the mostly dowdy dressers of both sexes in the US capital. Her clothes are now copied across America, but no one is thinking Nancy as a fashion icon. She has simply set a style that others want to follow because she *is* being herself, and that is a powerful statement.

In another first, Pelosi also had a bunch of children around her desk on the floor of the chamber for her first day on the job. The children were those of congressional colleagues and her own grandchildren. It was a gesture that instantly differentiated her from her male predecessors: look at me, she seemed to be saying, I am a mother and a grandmother as well as the Speaker of the House. Yet it was not corny or grating.

And anyone who thought that having children around her meant that Pelosi was a soft touch when it came to issues and policy was sadly mistaken.

³ Madeleine Albright, *Madam Secretary. A Memoir*. MacMillan, 2003 p. xii

There might be some lessons for Australia's women politicians in studying Nancy Pelosi and how she's doing it, but there is an even bigger lesson to be learned from observing the main story in the US at present and that is Hillary Clinton and her historic bid to become the first woman President of the United States.

This is a political drama of epic proportions and one that will prove to be increasingly rivetting as Clinton advances up the ladder of history.

The transformation of Hillary Rodham Clinton from dorky college student to governor's wife to small town Arkansas corporate lawyer to America's First Lady to US Senator from New York to Democratic Party frontrunner with a real chance of becoming the 44th president of the United States is one of the most remarkable political narratives of the modern era.

It can be examined from many different perspectives, and I will canvass several of these tonight, but key among them is the fact that she is a woman running for a high office – arguably the world's highest – that has never before been occupied by a woman. How she handles the race, including how she deals with the question of her gender, will become a template for women politicians around the world to study and perhaps to emulate.

The 2008 US Presidential election is one that will be watched around the world – and of course in America – with heightened interest. The next President of the United States has a huge job to do in restoring America's reputation in the eyes of the world, and in reversing the demoralisation so many Americans feel about their own country.

A recent issue of the *New Yorker* magazine put it this way:

“George W. Bush ... came into office six years ago with an ambition to remake nearly everything about American government. In some cases, like Social Security and immigration, he hasn't been able to get the big changes he wanted. In others – Iraq, tax cuts, civil liberties, the environment, education – it seems clear that his successor, whoever it will be, will have to spend a good deal of time undoing what was supposed to have been Bush's legacy.”⁴

Hillary Clinton has already absorbed this task into her campaign plan and vocabulary. She talks constantly and in great policy detail what she will do to end the war in Iraq, address the housing foreclosure crisis, reform health insurance, take on energy independence and global warming, address the needs of veterans, reform agriculture, address the health and safety fallout in New York City from the 9/11 cleanup – and many, many more issues. She has also addressed the question of America's declining standing in the world:

⁴ Nicholas Lemann, “Reversals” *The New Yorker* 30 July, 2007 p. 27

“The next president’s most urgent task will be to restore America’s standing in the world to promote our interests, ensure our security, and advance our values. America is stronger when we lead the world through alliances and build our foreign policy on a strong foundation of bipartisan consensus. As president, Hillary will lead by the words of the Declaration of Independence, which pledged “a decent respect to the opinions of mankind.”⁵

There are two interesting aspects to the ways in which Hillary is campaigning at present, and which are unique. There have been no precedents, to my knowledge.

First, she is campaigning as if she were the Leader of the Opposition in a parliamentary system, using the power of her Senate position to hold President Bush accountable on a range of issues, to demand information on issues from the Pentagon and other agencies.

As a Senator, Clinton has enormous power – far more than Senators have in the Australian system and Senator Clinton has learned to use this power in ways that are bolstering her credentials to be president.

In a recent example, she was able to use a simple request to the Pentagon for information about contingency plans for withdrawal from Iraq as a lever to engage the Secretary of Defense, the Vice-President and the President himself. All of them at her beck and call, providing the answers she demanded. And the respect.

None of the other Democratic candidates are campaigning in this way, and nor have previous presidential contenders who have also been Senators such as John Kerry. Most other candidates run campaigns; Hillary appears to be running an alternative government, one that is across every detail of every issues, one that responds to everything, that is precise, accurate and politically honed.

When Hillary promises something, she does not say “If I win, I will...” Instead, she always says, “When I am president, I will...” She is building up an assumption that she will be president, and more and more people are beginning to believe that it will happen.

Second, the way she is handling the woman question is interesting. Last month, in Iowa, her standard line was: “I’m not running because I’m a woman; I’m running because I’m the best qualified person.”⁶ At the same time, she smiles broadly when during her stump speech she says that she may become the first female president of the United States, and applause inevitably breaks out all around her.

Clinton is cultivating women, especially Democratic women, and campaigning in a way that appeals to women’s pride while at the same time emphasizing

⁵ www.hillaryclinton.com

⁶ Patrick Healy, “For Clinton, Wooing Women Requires a Careful Balance” *The New York Times* 20 July, 2007

that her candidacy is not just about her gender. The *New York Times* describes it as needing to “strike a delicate balance”⁷ between appealing to women and not alienating men and some women.

She highlights her sex, talking about herself as “a mom”, “a wife”, a “working mother” and a daughter of a live-in elderly parent (Hillary’s mother lives with her in Washington). This past week, she spent a day working as a nurse in an aged persons facility, shadowing the work of a Registered Nurse. None of the male candidates have done anything like this.

Recently Hillary’s campaign began testing a new theme, using a recorded message from her to call homes in New York to say that when she becomes president, the listener’s daughter or granddaughter will walk a little taller.⁸ It will be interesting to see if this test makes it way into the general, nation-wide campaign.

Women make up 54 per cent of America’s voters and will most likely determine the outcome of the election. Hillary needs to win women but she also has to avoid alienating women. It is no easy task, especially when some women believe she is too radical, while others accuse her of having sold out.

Many feminists, once her greatest fans, now accuse her of betraying them on abortion and of keeping bad company by hanging out in Congress with the likes of Newt Gingrich and Rick Santorum, both extreme right-wingers with very traditional notions about women. Some women of the left are also conflicted about Barack Obama and think it is more important for an African-American to be in the White House than a woman.

The campaign is complex and constantly changing but I get the sense that Hillary is now more comfortable running as a woman than seemed to be the case even six months ago.

Last week in Iowa each of the Democratic candidates was asked to nominate a turning point or a decisive moment in their lives. Hillary said:

"I could not be standing here without the women's movement," she said. It helped women and people of color become part of the American Dream. She paid homage to her mother, who never went to college, "but gave me the belief that I could do whatever I set my mind to."

Previously in Chicago she was asked about whether she could take on the Republicans: "For 15 years, I have stood up against the right-wing machine, and I've come out stronger," she said. "If you want a winner who knows how to take them on, I'm your girl."

Last week she gave a powerful speech to the Planned Parenthood Federation of America where she strongly reiterated her commitment to a woman’s right

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

to choose, and thereby deflected some of the criticism from those who feel she had watered down her stance on abortion.

I believe Clinton feels she can now assert herself as a woman in ways that she did not previously for one simple reason: she has won the first major battle faced by any woman who wants to be President, a job that also entails being Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

She knew when she first went to the Senate and began to plan her political trajectory that she hoped would bring her back to the White House, though this time to the Oval Office, not the East Wing, that she would have to convince voters that she could, if necessary, take America to war.

Her involvement with women and children's issues in the past had perhaps made her seem soft, and it was inevitable that she would face scepticism as to whether she could take on the military and if necessary order troops into battle.

She began to turn around this perception with characteristic planning. She joined the Senate Armed Forces Committee, being both the first woman and the first Senator from New York to do so, and has spent the past six years developing her credentials in this area.

Her position on the war in Iraq has been contentious. Some Democrats feel strongly she should apologise for her initial support of the war. She now favours a staged withdrawal of US troops but she will not apologise for her earlier support for the war. Her ability to discuss the strategy and tactics of the war and its end have helped her look like a person who knows what she's talking about – and have enhanced her credentials to be Commander in Chief.

She has been so successful that a New York Times/CBS News poll taken in late July found that a majority of both women and men thought that Clinton would be an effective commander-in-chief.⁹

With this hurdle behind her, I think Senator Clinton feels able to be more relaxed about talking about being a woman. She can hardly deny it, of course, but these days she is embracing it.

The big question of course is: can she win?

I believe she can.

I have three reasons for arguing this. First, she is not just ahead but surging in the polls.

⁹ Katherine Q. Seelye and Dalla Sussman, "Women supportive but sceptical of Clinton, polls says" *New York Times* 20 July, 2007

An average of national polls collated last week by the website [Real Clear Politics](#) put Clinton on 39 percent, Obama on 21 and Edwards on 12 percent. This is her largest lead yet over Barack Obama.

Clinton also is beating the top Republican Rudolph Giuliani by 46 percent to 43 percent in the Quinnipiac poll.

Fifty-nine percent of Democratic primary voters surveyed by CBS last week felt Clinton had the "right experience" to be president, compared to just 29 percent for Obama.

Clinton's first challenge is to win the Democratic nomination. This is going to be a long drawn out process, involving dozens of primary elections starting in early January and running through to the Democratic Party convention in Denver in August next year. I expect that other candidates will win the early primaries and caucuses in Iowa and New Hampshire, but that Clinton will sweep to an unbeatable victory in the new nationwide primary being held on February 5. She will then coast to the convention.

Once she is nominated, the disgruntled Democrats are likely to fall into line behind her – and presumably she will receive Barack Obama's endorsement - giving her a formidable base from which to contest the general election.

My second reason for believing that Hillary Clinton will win is that there is not a credible Republican candidate. None of those currently running have any chance of beating her. Interestingly, when Republican voters were asked recently which of the current candidates they supported, the most votes went to "None of the above".

We can therefore expect new candidates to enter the race on the Republican side, but the only Republican I can think of who could beat Hillary is Arnold Schwarzenegger and is not eligible to run because he is not an American citizen.

So while Hillary Clinton is seen as a divisive candidate, someone with high negatives who alienates as many people as she attracts, this is changing. This view was expressed recently by David Brooks, a renowned Hillary-hater who had to concede:" Six months ago many people thought she was to brittle and calculating and that voters would never really bond with her.

But now she seems to offer the perfect combination of experience and change," he wrote in the *New York Times*¹⁰. He went on: "She's demonstrating that it really helps to have lived in the White House. She can draw on a range of experiences unmatched by her rivals. She's dominated most of the debates. She's transformed her position on Iraq without a ripple. Her measured, statistic-filled speeches rarely inspire passion, but always confidence".

¹⁰ David Brooks, "The Uphill Struggle" *New York Times* 27 July, 2007

If that's what the Republicans are saying, it would seem that the case is closed!

Thirdly, Hillary's drive, dedication and discipline will get her to the White House. There has seldom been a more professional campaign than the one she has already mounted. Her fund-raising capacities are legendary, she has the help of First Lad Bill who has even more prodigious skills and whose political counsel is clearly an essential part of the package. She has learned to address her faults and weaknesses and she is gradually turning the country around.

Just as she did with New York, a state she had never lived in but whose Senator she became in 2000 after announcing her intentions just eighteen months earlier. She got 55 per cent of the vote, which was an astonishing outcome for a carpetbagger in what is a very conservative state (New York City is Not New York!) and as the first woman to run for state-wide office in New York.

Then six years later, she increased her vote to a commanding 67 per cent. What she is now doing is trying to get America to respond in the way that New York did.

Plus we must remember she has unparalleled electoral experience. She has been involved in five gubernatorial races, two presidential and two senate races. There is nothing she does not know, or has not seen, when it comes to electioneering. No other candidate comes close to having this kind of experience.

She is throwing everything she's got at it. And I think she will surprise us all by becoming America's 44th president on 20 January 2009.

You have to ask why she wanted to.

Hillary has had varied careers and many personas. She has been loyal wife, dedicated mother, Watergate prosecutor, law firm partner, advocate for women and children's rights, governor's wife, strategist in gubernatorial, presidential and senate elections, first Lady of the United States, scorned woman, health policy architect, wronged wife, widely admired role model, best-selling author, US Senator, prodigious fund-raiser, Democratic Party leader.

Had she stayed in the law, she could now be a federal judge, a potential Supreme Court appointee. She could have used her gift for policy to craft a new direction for almost any issue she turned her mind to, and no doubt raised the money to establish a foundation or think tank from which to do it. She could have carved out a prestigious political career as a great legislator, becoming one of the legendary Senators. (If she does not become president, that option will still be open to her).

Instead, she has chosen to plunge into the exhausting and relentless world of elected politics, running for the world's highest office. The campaign against her will be brutal and relentless, but she seems to thrive on it. Already we have seen a foretaste of it with the argument that she should not win because that would constitute a political dynasty. America has already had Bush/Clinton and Bush. Were Hillary to win and govern for two terms, that would mean, the detractors say, 28 years – a whole generation – of just two political families running America.

Why wasn't that said to stop George W. Bush from running?

We are in for a very interesting year, and one where I think we will see history made – and a woman in the White House for the first time. And she will have got there by huge effort. How her being a woman will effect the way she runs America is something we can all look forward to observing.

So in answer to the question are women better than men when it comes to politics, you could argue that generally speaking, yes they are – because they have to be. But I don't want to make that argument because to do so would just perpetuate the myths and the stereotypes that have held women back for so long.

Let's leave those arguments behind us. All we ever wanted was equality – not superiority.

And if you would like me to come back to Newcastle in November 2008 to talk about Hillary's victory – I'd be more than happy to do so.

Thank You.