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Hillary's Pants Suit and Lindsay's Birthday Suit

by Marleen S. Barr
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Last week the media emphasized two disparate images of women: the New York senator clad in her signature professional attire engaging in her eighteenth debate and the New York-born actress appearing sans clothes in *New York Magazine*. Hillary, not Lindsay, best exemplifies the buzz word of the moment—change. The personal is political; Hillary's pants suit signals that clothes makes the powerful woman.

We all know the iconic Marilyn Monroe. Lindsay Lohan is no Marilyn Monroe. How do we reconcile the fervent desire for change with the fact that the best way for a young actress to enhance her career is to take it off, take it all off. This is not progress. Why evoke Marilyn's last photo shoot which occurred so close to her tragic demise? Lohan's imitation of a woman who was on the brink of death in 1962 proclaims that we definitely have not come a long way baby. "I love New York" is not an umbrella term which justifies placing a naked woman on the cover of a magazine devoted to New York. What's female nudity got specifically to do with our city? When Marilyn-obsessed macho New York writer incarnate Norman Mailer passed away, *New York Magazine* did not portray him in terms of the naked and the dead. The point: instead of being the new twenty-first century Marilyn, Lohan is reduced to a sexist simulacrum—Jean Baudrillard's term for a copy without an original.

Hillary is the true female sartorial original of our time. The ascendancy of her pants suit as appropriate attire for powerful women is as important to woman's freedom of movement as the demise of the whale bone corset. Think of it: Hillary is the only woman who wears the pants on the national political stage. Women politicians such as Nancy Pelosi and Elizabeth Dole still wear the most uncomfortable contemporary attire ever invented: straight skirts, hose, and heels. Regarding Condi's stilettos, well I'm not going there. As we are all aware, the devil wears Prada. Evangelicals take note: Hillary has saved women from coping with a devil who is Prada. Hillary has made the world safe for the democracy unencumbering pants suits afford women.

Alessandra Stanley explains why: "Mrs. Clinton [during Thursday's debate] pointedly enumerated the many things she would do 'as president' and even dressed the part: the gold piping on her raised black collar and pockets gave her a martial, commander-in-chief look (the very model of a modern major general)." Pants suit piping gives a woman the aura of a commander-in-chief. Who knew? Women finally have an effective power suit. Women can now burn their restrictive skirts and take a great leap forward.

Female attire indicates exactly how "change" denotes "woman president." Notice how Hillary's attire differs from that of the male candidates' wives. The brilliant and successful Michelle Obama channels Jackie Kennedy's proper sleeveless dresses and pearls--and her "flip" hair style was already passe when *The Patty Duke Show* was cancelled. Cindy McCain appears as juxtaposed Barbie doll and Stepford wife. As for Janet Huckabee, well let's just say that she is not taking the advice Mireille Guiliano offered in *French Women Don't Get Fat*. Huckabee looks like the American Everywoman. Hillary, clad in her pants suit, the liberatory New Look for the new twenty-first century, looks like what every American girl can potentially become. Regardless

of who the Democrats eventually nominate, every American girl can now give more credence to the cliché that she, as a child born in America, can grow up to be president.

A not thin sixty-year-old woman wearing a pants suit is more exciting than a svelte twenty-something pictured in her birthday suit. And it is Chelsea—not her contemporaries Paris and Britney—who is the most appropriate female role model for her generation. Chelsea embracing her presidential candidate mother at the conclusion of last week's debate represents the change which supplants the tired image of the political wife silently standing behind her man. We all have some embracing to do: it is time to celebrate the powerful woman presidential candidate standing next to the smart successful young woman she gave birth to; it is time to jettison the pulchritude flavor of the month pictured in her birthday suite.

Change? Yes we can. Clothes—and more.

Chelsea appears on the cover of this week's New York Magazine.