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Take My Wife, Please: Angst and Ambivalence in the Clinton-Clinton Campaign

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The people of Pennsylvania have spoken and the show goes on. Not just the political campaign, but a marital drama unlike anything in American politics.

The interplay between husband-campaigner and wife-candidate is wonderfully and uniquely personal. And on levels I don't think have been fully absorbed by voters - curious and occasionally bizarre.

Watching the Clintons campaign together, I'm reminded of long-married couples, where one starts to tell a story, but the other interrupts because the spouse isn't telling it right.

Every couple must jockey - sometimes for years - to settle into a power structure that works. It doesn't matter whether it's 50-50 or 30-70; there has to be an accommodation. Relationships hate a vacuum.

The current power reversal for this couple causes whiplash. Think about a Fortune 100 CEO being replaced by his wife, and suddenly going from boss to loyal supporter. Think about Michael Jordan, before his recent divorce, watching from the stands as his wife becomes the world's greatest basketball player

If these two were in marriage counseling, a therapist might conclude that Bill is passive-aggressively ambivalent about his wife seeking the office that was his for eight years.

Spouses stump for spouses - but usually brought on stage as character witnesses. Bill is integral to the campaign machinery. But time and again, he has thrown sand in the gears.

This man credited with flawless political instincts keeps making blunders that, for a smart politician, look like sabotage - willful or subconscious is a question for continued therapy.

There was the racial tinge - intentional or not - in his comments that [Obama's](#) position on the war is a "fairy tale." There was the comparison - clearly intentional - of Obama's South Carolina win to Jesse Jackson's.

There is Bill's \$800,000 paycheck from a group promoting a U.S.-Colombia trade agreement as his wife campaign's on the job-sucking evils of NAFTA.

Just when the press had become bored with her make-believe adventure on the Tuzla tarmac, Bill raised it again - jumping in to tell the world that she is old, tired, and forgets things when it's late. To which she replied: back off. To which he replied - in a sound bite heard round the world - "Yes ma'am."

And when the media had moved on from the Jesse Jackson comment, he raised it again yesterday by saying that the Obama Campaign had "played the race card on me" (not us, but me). And then a politician who should know that assuming a mike is off is like assuming a gun isn't loaded emphasized his point with a four letter word.

Any other campaigner would have long ago been banished to the back room. The fact that he hasn't is another indication that this campaign is and will be a package deal.

And then, of course, there is that other thing.

Somehow, the primary has become detached from the fact that the potential first-husband earnestly campaigning for his wife is the same man who had sex with a 22 year-old unpaid intern while he was on the phone with a Congressman.

Barack Obama has been admirably reluctant to drag discourse into that cesspit - but then Democrats are like that. You can already hear gears of the Republican attack machine grinding out ads from the Soiled Blue Dress Coalition for Truth.

Few couples on any public stage have - for good and ill - been so ferociously entwined. Whether that would make an effective presidency is an open question.

But there is truth in an old saying. Marriage is when a man and women become one. Trouble starts when they try to decide which one. Never in history would that decision process be more fun to watch than a Clinton-Clinton presidency.