

# **Love Her, or Love to Hate Her? Understanding the Public's Relationship with Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin**

**Melody Rose – Political Science**

## Abstract:

*Love Her, Or Love to Hate Her?* is a ground-breaking study in the public opinion of Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Governor Sarah Palin. Public opinion poll data reveal that both women have the unique ability to inspire equal levels of adoration and vitriol. But those same polls cannot explain the reasons behind such intense public expressions. Through the use of focus group methods, this study probes deeper into the formation of these polarized opinions to understand what makes these figures resonate in such intense ways. By assembling diverse groups of Americans and engaging them in guided conversation, this study exposes some of the roots behind these opinions, and advances our scholarly understanding of public opinion and offering insight into the characters and qualities that Americans expect of national female political candidates.

## Proposal:

The 2008 American election was historic in many ways. One noteworthy achievement was that two women, one Republican and one Democrat, came remarkably close to serving in the White House. And though neither Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton nor Governor Sarah Palin succeeded in their campaigns, there is much that political science can learn from their experiences.

I have recently completed a book on the candidacy of Hillary Clinton (with Regina Lawrence), due to be published in mid-2009. Entitled *Playing the Gender Card? Media, Strategy, and Hillary Clinton's Race for the White House* (Lynne Rienner Publishers), the book assesses how then-Senator Clinton framed her candidacy and how the media covered her race. Through working on that book, my co-author and I have developed a new research agenda: to understand why people love – and love to hate – both (now) Secretary of State Clinton and Governor Palin.

In writing this book, we looked at dozens of polls assessing public opinion of Hillary Clinton: her likeability scores, questions of her integrity and competence, and her ability to lead are reflected in many data sets. Though she was on the national stage only briefly, there are some equivalent data sets assessing Palin's likeability and leadership potential as well.

Still, through all of these data sets, my co-author and I never quite understood the visceral reactions that these national public leaders consistently evoke. Anecdotal evidence from the campaign trail confirms our impression that these two women