

# Midnight tips for the Clinton camp

Hillary Clinton's advisers will be racking their brains for strategies to save her campaign for the White House. They - and any aspiring female politicians in fact - would do well to look to our closest relatives for inspiration, suggests Frans de Waal

**P**UNDITS pondering Senator Hillary Clinton's election prospects seem to have in mind the *My Fair Lady* song, *Why can't a woman be more like a man?* Yet is this how most women look at it? If anything, they tend to advise Clinton to be more like a "woman". Designer Donatella Versace asked her to tap into her feminine side by wearing dresses and skirts instead of trousers, while *Vogue* editor Anna Wintour called Clinton's suspected aversion to femininity "dismaying".

As I write, the US primaries are still too close to call. But, regardless of the outcome of the race for the Democratic presidential nomination, what really interests me about Clinton is that her true dilemma - the interplay between power and sex - is quite different from that of male politicians. How the sexes differ in their relation to power is not limited to our own species, however. The term "alpha female" doesn't come from political science or psychology, but from primatology. So could Clinton's advisers learn from other primates?

In everyday usage, alpha female describes women in charge, women who flirt or date on their own terms, or, more maliciously, loud-mouthed, controlling women, even though its original meaning lacks this connotation. "Alpha", used for males and females, simply denotes the top member of one's sex in any group. All primate groups, including ones run by males, have an alpha female, and the ranks of alphas of both sexes are often linked.

For example, I knew a group of rhesus monkeys with an alpha male we named

## Profile

Frans B. M. de Waal is C. H. Candler Professor of psychology and director of the Living Links Center, at the Yerkes National Primate Research Center, at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. His latest book is *Our Inner Ape* (Riverhead).

Spickles, who was so old and arthritic that younger and healthier males could run rings round him. But they never seriously challenged the old male because the alpha female, Orange, stood firmly by his side if things got rough. Orange deferred to Spickles, apparently preferring to defer to him than to one of the snotty-nosed upstarts who would take his place if she dropped the old guy.

This is primatology basics: things are not always what they seem. We tend to think high rank means being the strongest, but often it means being the best-connected. This also applied to Orange. The reason no male risked her wrath is an alpha female often has massive support. A dozen or more females might come to her defence, and females are less reluctant to use their teeth on males than vice versa.

The most impressive alpha females I have studied were chimpanzees. Watching a colony under my window at Yerkes National Primate Research Center in Atlanta, Georgia for a year following the death of their alpha female, we had no idea who would succeed her. Normally, it would be one of the oldest females, so our bets were on three females aged 30 to 35. Unlike males, females rarely show open rivalry over the top spot, which is decided by a combination of age and personality, both of which are non-negotiable.

One day, I watched a small scuffle grow into something more serious. The chimpanzees were all screaming so loudly, and the males moving so fast, that I feared a bloody ending. Suddenly all commotion stopped. The males sat down, panting heavily, while others hung around them. The atmosphere was tense, and it was clear that nothing had been settled.

Then I spotted our new alpha female. Peony got up. Youngsters approached, and adults grunted softly the way they do to alert others, while Peony slowly walked towards the centre of the scene followed by everyone who

## "When Clinton went on to shed more tears, the headlines said: 'Again?'"

had been on the fringes. All she did was groom one of the two males central to the fight, and soon other individuals followed her example, grooming each other. Calm was restored. No one dared to start things up again after Peony had so gently put a full stop to it.

The most imposing alpha female I have known, one who I thought more powerful than the males, was a chimpanzee at Arnhem Zoo in the Netherlands. I called her "Mama" because of her matriarchal position in the group. Chimpanzee males physically dominate females, so there is just no way for a female - even several females - to stop a charging male, who is all muscles and might. Yet physical dominance is not the same as power, and Mama had all the females on her side. Some were reluctant, but she knew how to handle them. If one took sides in a major dispute before Mama had made it clear where she stood, later that day Mama would teach the disloyal female a lesson she'd never forget.

So all the females obeyed her, and all the males saw her as the final broker in political disputes. If tensions escalated to the point where a fight became inevitable, arguing males would rush to her, sit in her arms,

screaming at each other. Sometimes she brought males together after a fight: if they were hesitant to reconcile, she'd tug at the arm of one until he sat next to the other. She seemed to care about harmony in the colony.

Here are three lessons for alpha females in human politics. First, age helps a female more than a male. Since physical strength and stamina are largely irrelevant in the female hierarchy, becoming older, experienced, and better connected offers an advantage. I have never seen a middle-aged female at the top of a hierarchy if older females were present. In human politics, too, a typical alpha female is post-reproductive, such as Indira Gandhi, Margaret Thatcher and Angela Merkel.

Second, since males respect power more than age and personality, the alpha female must head a large coalition to handle them effectively. Tight control of her political party might provide this in human politics, but it is unlikely any female could have a stable top role without huge support from her sex. This can only be secured by being sexually non-threatening and championing female causes.

And third, an alpha female needs to rise above the parties. Older female primates often head large families, and have a natural tendency to be loyal and committed to their kin. The effective alpha female needs to be able to reach beyond her inner circle, build bridges, groom rivals, all of which comes

A good tactic would be to get as many other women as possible on her side

harder to females than males, because males lead more opportunistic political lives and therefore have shorter memories for perceived slights. So impartiality may be the greatest challenge for any female politician.

That the rules of the game are different for both sexes seems "unfair", but is simply how evolution works. Male reproductive success depends on access to females, and one way to achieve this is to hold power over other males. A connection between sex and power is well-known in human politics. For females, things don't work the same for the simple reason that increased access to mates doesn't help them reproduce one bit. Instead of serving reproduction via sex, female power serves reproduction via access to resources.

This is important, too, which is why an interest in power is not limited to male primates. Yet the reasons are not the same, and the interplay with sex is so different that advising Clinton to act more "feminine" is misguided. When Clinton shed one tear during an interview, everyone was moved and the media said that we finally saw the real person behind the candidate. But when she went on to shed more tears during a second interview, the headlines read: "Again?", while her opponents countered that Barack Obama "doesn't go on television and have crying fits".

Another miscalculation, this time in her favour, came when sexist hecklers in New Hampshire shouted at Clinton: "Iron my shirt! Iron my shirt!" which galvanised the female vote in her favour. Of the three lessons, then, my money says any alpha female's ticket to success is solidarity with her own gender. ●

This essay is based on a blog that first appeared in *The Huffington Post*



## Enigma

### Almost the same digits

No. 1483 Richard England

A POUND (£), which is now divided into 100 pence (p), used to be divided into 20 shillings (s), each shilling being divided into 12 pennies (d) and each penny into 4 farthings, the latter being represented as a

fraction (1/4, 1/2 or 3/4) of a penny.

Some amounts in old money can be represented exactly in new money if one allows decimal places in the new money. For instance, 10s 11 1/4d converts exactly to 54.6875p. Each of these methods of designating that amount uses six digits, but with one exception, (4), the digits used for the amount in old money are all different from the digits used to represent it in new money.

Your task is to find an amount in old money (less than £1 and not an integral number of pennies) which has the same number of digits as its equivalent in new money and whose digits are with one exception the same as the digits used to represent it in new money.

What is the amount in old money?

£15 will be awarded to the sender of the first correct answer opened on Wednesday 2

April. The Editor's decision is final. Please send entries to Enigma 1483, New Scientist, Lacon House, 84 Theobald's Road, London WC1X 8NS, or to enigma@newscientist.com (please include your postal address). The winner of Enigma 1477 is Ivan Simmons of Edinburgh, UK.

**Answer to 1477** In transit Mr Economy, Mrs Club, Mrs Economy, Mr Apex, Mr Club, Mrs Apex