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Political Leadership

Assessing Stress in Hillary Clinton: Indicators of Stress in Hillary Clinton During the Three 2016 Presidential Debates

I began this analysis by wanting to take a look at what types of policy and political issues cause Hillary Clinton to be more or less stressed when addressing the American public as a political leader. I therefore chose to count the stress indicators she displays while giving her answers to the policy questions given in the three presidential debates. I quickly came to find that Donald Trump's presence and comments were what was most affecting her. Because of the numerous interruptions made by Donald Trump, his sometimes outlandish answers to policy questions, and the fact that many of the questions (or at least answers) had to do with the candidates' characters' and the rivalry between them (rather than on the actual policy issues)—what seemed to affect Hillary's stress the most during the debates was being next to Donald Trump and responding to him and his answers, not the questions themselves.

I decided that measuring Donald Trump's effect of Hillary Clinton's stress and attributing that stress to the particular political topic she is addressing, would completely belie how she actually feels about the different political and policy issues being asked. Therefore, in order to determine which actual political issues impact her stress the most (rather than Donald Trump's presence), I decided to only record counts of stress indicators for her 2 minute answers to the specific policy and political questions asked in order to make that determination. However, I also chose to separately address how a few of the more colorful interruptions, character attacks and outrageous answers made by Donald Trump, caused Hillary to display far more severe stress indicators than any policy question.

There are 6 measurable variables/indicators that this analysis used to determine the severity of Hillary Clinton's stress. The variables are: pause fillers, repeats, gesticulations, blinks, negations and volume. In adding all the blinks per minute (bpm) recordings that I took in total (898) and dividing by the number of answers I recorded (21) I found that Hillary Clinton has a mean bpm rate of 43 blinks. Her average for gesticulation per minute (gpm) was 11 gestures (237 total divided by 21 cases). However, there was a vast difference between her blinks and use of gesticulations at the podium versus the town hall style, so I continued by calculating separate means for the two formats: 56.5 bpm/9.7 gpm at podium and 36.3 bpm/14.3 gpm at town hall. The other variables, pause fillers, repeats, negations and volume are far rarer occurrences when she's speaking about policy and therefore I decided to discuss them on a case-by-case basis.

During the first debate, which took place on September 26, 2016 at Hofstra University in New York state, the format of the debate was formal in that the candidates stood at podiums. The debate was moderated by Lester Holt, who did not do a particularly good job of keeping the candidates on topic. The candidates began the debate by shaking hand, a meaningful gesture that would not repeat itself from then on. Hillary chose to wear a red pant suit, the pant suit being her signature look and the red color symbolizing the first of the three colors of the American flag. The debate consisted of 4 main questions all with 2 minute answers. The questions were: how to achieve prosperity, create jobs and address income inequality; whether to increase or decrease taxes on the wealthy; how to heal the racial divide; and who is behind the cyberattacks on the US.

Hillary began very steadily and stoically on the first question, using only 1 pause filler when she chose to address Donald Trump directly. In the first question of the first debate, she

blinked 45 times per minute which is below average for the podium. I found overall that she blinks more during podium debates than she does in town hall informal debates. This may be attributed to how the light is in her eyes and/or the less relaxed stance she takes at the podium. She gesticulated very infrequently during this answer, only 3 gpm, perhaps because she was just starting out and trying to remain still, but again I found she gesticulates far less when standing at a podium than in an informal debate and less at the beginning of debates.

During the second question, she began by laughing and stating that she had a feeling she would be blamed for everything that night, to which Donald Trump replied “Why not?”. Then, in her answer to the question she had an even lower bpm than before, only 40, but gesticulated 3 times as often, 9 gpm, still slightly less than average for the podium. During this question she was interrupted by Donald 3 times making her pause fillers more frequent than usual, 4 in total, and possibly contributing to her beginning to accentuate the use of gestures and beginning to keep her eyes open wide to regain control of the conversation.

The third question was about healing the racial divide and Hillary began addressing this more social political issue by displaying an interesting gesture. Before speaking, she rubbed her eye in a way that is reminiscent of wiping a tear away which effectively denoted the solemnness of her concern for the issue. Her bpm was 50, still slightly below average, but her gpm was only 4. Her eyes were either becoming fatigued or she blinks more when she is serious. She also seems to gesture less when she is speaking very seriously, unless she is explaining a process or plan.

The final question of the night was about the culprits behind the US cyber attacks. Throughout her campaign, Clinton has been dealing with the issue of her misuse of emails and

the technology behind them. I believe the stress indicators she displayed during this question show that she is not confident about her level of knowledge of the Internet and computerized technology. She used 7 pause fillers in total as she struggled to explain how computer systems get hacked and what we can do to combat it. She also repeated herself 4 times, only once in reference to Donald Trump, but her repetitions demonstrated a lack of knowledge about some of the terminology and the process by which the internet functions. Lastly, she displayed the highest gpm of the night with 10 gesticulations per minute, above her average podium gpm, and 65 blinks per minute well above her average bpm, revealing just how uncomfortable she felt.

The second debate took place on October 9th, 2016 just two days after the infamous “Access Hollywood” video that showed Donald Trump bragging about sexually assaulting women. The debate was located at Washington University in St. Louis and it was a town hall style debate, with an open arena instead of podiums and undecided voters on stage asking the candidates questions. There were two mediators, Anderson Cooper and Martha Raddatz, they did a better job than Lester Holt at controlling the debate, but were still over run with interruptions. Hillary Clinton did not shake Trump’s hand, and she chose to wear a blue suit for the occasion.

This debate had far more questions than the other two and I recorded 11 of them for this analysis. In general, I found that Hillary blinked less and gesticulated more during this format because of her ability to move about the stage (and potentially because of the lighting). Due to this fact her gpm and bpm counts will be compared to her town hall average which is 14.3 gpm and 36.3 bpm. Before each question, Hillary made a point of walking over to the questioner to address them directly. In fact, the way she used the stage was very strategic and I will go into more detail about it when I contrast her use of the space to how Donald Trump behaved.

The first question was if the candidate believes they model appropriate behavior for our youth. Hillary displayed 2 pause fillers, a gpm of 11.5 which was a little low but she doesn't move around as much at the beginning of the debates, and a 45 bpm, which is one of the higher end of bpm's for this debate format. This question was probably more directed towards Donald Trump, considering the context of the release of the "Access Hollywood" video leading up to the debate. During the second question, about Clinton's email carelessness, she definitely displayed more stress. For starters, though she was allotted 2 minutes to respond, this was the one incident when she finished quickly and only used 1.5 minutes. During that time she used 7 pause fillers, the same number of pause fillers she used when addressing cybersecurity in the previous debate. Once again this shows that she has self-doubt in the area of cyber technology. She gesticulated 11 times per minute, which is below her average again and this time I speculate it is the uncomfortable topic that is keeping her from being less animated and dynamic with her body language. She only blinked 30 times per minute which is below average even for the town hall, denoting the seriousness and carefully executed manner in which she answered.

Then, her answer to the third question on Obamacare, showed roughly average results with only one pause filler during her explanation of how Obamacare works. She continued to display average results during the following two questions on Islamophobia and the Syrian Refugee crisis. However, when the sixth question brought up her stance on public versus private positions, her stress indicators clearly showed that she became more defensive. She used two pause fillers, and her bpm and gmp were both above average at 47.5 and 17.5 respectively, as she somewhat uncomfortably explained that her comment about public and private positions was in the context of her referring to her admiration for President Abraham Lincoln. The seventh

question was about tax provisions to make the wealthy pay more, and Hillary began by negating the validity of what Donald Trump had previously said directly. In doing so, she also uses one pause filler. Her gesticulations were again 17.5 in explanation, but her bpm dropped below average at 35.

Interestingly, Hillary uses 4 pause fillers on the eight questions when addressing the humanitarian crisis in Aleppo. I believe the issue in Aleppo and a solution to the conflict is more daunting than many people realize, something that Hillary Clinton knows all too well from her experience as Secretary of State. Her gpm and bpm were both above average at 15 gestures and 42.5 blinks per minute. The next question about being a devoted president to all Americans made Clinton gesticulate a bit less at only 11 gpm and her blinks were much lower at only 27.5 per minute. It is important to note that in this debate format there were many times when the cameras were showing Clinton's back instead of face as she spoke and it was necessary to estimate some of the blinks she made based on her pacing.

The tenth question was about the importance of the next Supreme Court justice(s) and Hillary used one pause filler, though her bpm remained the same at 27.5, her gesticulations shot up to the highest of the night, 19 per minute. I believe it was the explanatory nature of her response that caused that extent of animation on her part. The final question of the night was about energy and the environment and due to the daunting and very complicated nature of the issue—what she called, in the first debate, the United States' biggest problem moving forward—she used 4 pause fillers during her explanation. In articulating her thoughts she used 18 gestures per minute, again high, and nearly hit her average again with a bpm of 35.

The final debate was held on October 19th, 2016 at the University of Nevada, in Las Vegas. It was moderated by Chris Wallace of Fox News who did a better job facilitating the conversation between the candidates than any of the moderators at the earlier debates. As in the first debate, the format of this final debate was behind podiums. The candidates began once again without shaking hands. To round out her patriotic colors, Hillary wore a white pant suit. In this debate, Hillary uses more pause fillers and repetitions than at any other debate, but these errors of passion seemingly worked in her favor, as the media and public opinion polls both gave her her third win in a row and also stated that this night was her best performance by far. There were six main questions asked at this debate.

The first question was about what direction the candidates wish to see the Supreme Court go and how the Constitution should be interpreted. Hillary only used one pause filler in her answer and, as usual, gesticulated very infrequently when just beginning the debate only 4.5 gpm. However, her blinks were through the roof at 70 bpm, which is very high even for the podium style which already causes her to blink more. The next question was on border security and immigration and she begins her answer with a huge grin on her face. It is not, however, a smile of happiness. It is an uncomfortable, almost nervous, smile due to the way she feels about Donald Trump's answer and specifically his use of the term "bad hombres". During her address, she used 2 pause fillers, gesticulated more at 15 gpm and began to blink a bit less at 62.5 bpm. She was becoming more and more eager to really stick it to Donald Trump and drive her point home, this certainly caused her to gesticulate more. I also think this contributed to her more casual use of pause fillers, repeats, and blinks in general.

She continued this trend during her explanation of her economic plan in the next question. She used one pause filler, one repeat and her gpm and bpm remained very high at 16 and 65. However, the 4th question brought a drastic change in the way she approached the conversation. Question four was about the sexual assault allegations held against Donald Trump. Hillary solemnly explained the distress these allegations cause her, and in doing so she used 3 pause fillers and repeated herself twice due to two interruptions by Donald Trump. She only gestured 6.5 gpm exhibiting the seriousness she feels about the issue, and her blinks began to fall at only 52.5 bpm.

The fifth question was about putting US forces on the ground against ISIS, which Secretary Clinton is against doing. She responds with 3 pause fillers as she explains her foreign policy positions and uses a slightly high 15 gpm and quite low 45 bpm to do so. It may be her close experience, as Secretary of State, with the issues caused by ISIS, that make her so alert in her response and cause her to blink less. Finally, the last question is simply— why should you be President? The candidates were only given one, instead of two minutes, to respond. In that one minute that Hillary did not prepare for, because the candidates did not prepare closing statements, she used 2 pause fillers, gesticulated an average 14 times and blinked a very high 75 times.

In terms of how Hillary displays the stress caused by Donald Trump's interruptions, false accusations or strong political rhetoric, there is a clear change in her demeanor. In contrast to how she speaks about policy issues, when speaking to or about Donald, she responds with more intensity in her voice than usual, she speaks louder (sometimes to be heard and sometimes out of passion) and she will explicitly negate false allegations made by Donald Trump by beginning

responses with words like “No” and phrases like “That’s just not true”. Her facial expressions range from smiling nervously, to defensive anger and out and out laughter at her opponent, in contrast to her normally stoic manner. His interruptions cause her to respond with many more pause fillers and repetition of words as she tries to regain her speaking ground and clarify her points.

A few additional specific examples of Donald’s ability to influence Hillary’s stress (discluding his frequent interruptions) are: his attack on her temperament, his attack on her stamina, his lurking behind her, his graphic inaccurate detailing of abortion, his “nasty woman” comment, and his assertion that he will not accept the results of the election. All of these instances made Hillary’s demeanor change drastically from her normally composed and practiced stoicism to being louder, more aggressive, more combative and in some cases, more nervous.

In the first debate, Donald Trump went on the offensive and attacked Hillary’s temperament and her stamina. Hillary responded with some very interesting indicators of stress and perhaps even something more— contempt. First, there was the famous “shimmy”. Trump was acting very defensively and attacking Hillary about her unstable temperament in a totally belligerent manner — the irony was lost on few. When he finished by saying in her direction: “There’s a person with a temperament thats got a problem”, Hillary responded in an interesting manner. She let out a deep breath and said “okay”, then smiled, closed her eyes and shimmied her shoulders twice. This was a rare relaxed and unplanned moment for Hillary and it was well received by the viewers and supporters. Later, while Trump attacks her stamina, she responds by

smiling, swaying back and forth, licks her lips, rolling her eyes, and staring dead center at camera a few times.

In the second debate, very interestingly, Donald Trump hardly attacked and did not interrupt Hillary Clinton whatsoever. It has to do with the format of the debate, town hall style, and how Hillary strategically used the space to her advantage. To interpret, what appeared to be on face value, Donald Trump lurking around Hillary in an almost incessant need to be on camera and in her space— I turned to analysis of body language expert Janine Driver who explained that just the opposite was going on. She explained that Hillary used the format to her advantage by purposefully crossing onto Donald Trump side in an intentional and very successful attempt to make him uncomfortable and unsure of where and how to sit and move in the space. The stress that Donald Trump was caused by having Hillary Clinton standing in front of him, motivated him to alleviate that stress in the form of moving around. Driver says, "He's like a dog who's starting to get anxious and being backed into a corner." This is what caused Trump to appear as though he was lurking behind Clinton and amplified her presence and performance.

The third debate was full of very unsettling comments and explanations made by Donald Trump. When speaking on the topic of abortion, Trump very graphically explained the process (inaccurately) which motivated Hillary to explicitly negate him and respond with “that’s not what happens.” Later, while she was speaking about social security and made a quick jab at Trump, he interrupted with “such a nasty woman” and though her eyes flew open for an instant, she neither paused nor responded and continued on the topic of social security. Finally, the entire time Trump is explaining that he will wait to see the results of the elections and keep the American people in suspense about whether he would accept the results, Hillary is smiling

widely and swaying back and forth, visibly in total disbelief. As soon as she is able to speak she says "let me respond because that is horrifying."

All in all, Hillary has a practiced composure that keeps her from displaying too much stress when addressing policy. She is more comfortable, blinks less, and gestures more when she is using a stage to command presence and speaking on a topic she is confident about. She rarely changes the level of her volume to make a point and usually does not begin addressing a policy or political issue with a negation. However, the podium-setting, the character attacks against her, her own insecurities, and most noticeably, Donald Trump's behavior, cause her to display far more stress. I think moving forward as President of the United States, the American people can continue to expect Hillary Clinton to address policy in a calm, collected and well-prepared manner, but when attacked by members of the opposition, it will be far more based on the circumstances and behavior of the individual attacker, that will ultimately determine how Hillary will react.

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