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## **Gender, Nonverbal Communication, and Televised Debates: A Case Study Analysis of Clinton and Trump’s Nonverbal Language During the 2016 Town Hall Debate**

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This case study analyzed nonverbal cues during the 2016 town hall debate between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Variables were facial expressions, posture, eye contact, and spatial distance. Clinton was friendlier, took more expansive postures, and maintained more eye contact. The candidates largely kept within social distance, except for an instance that created postdebate controversy. Whereas some of Clinton’s nonverbal behavior conformed to established gendered cues, her nonverbal behavior largely transcended gender norms. Also addressed are the media’s shortcomings in contextualizing debate visuals.

*Keywords: nonverbal communication, debates, visual communication, political communication, Clinton, Trump*

When Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton debate Monday night, they’ll express themselves physically as well as verbally. Their body language—movements, posture, facial expressions—may inadvertently reveal as much about them as their words. Consultants call it “leakage.” (Ruth Sherman, quoted in Hampson, 2016, para. 3)

Research is clear about the role of nonverbal communication in politics (Ahler, Citrin, Dougal, & Lenz, 2017; Bailenson, Garland, Iyengar, & Yee, 2006; Dumitrescu, 2016; Kimmelmeier & Winter, 2008), as well as its effect on audiences during televised political debates (Bucy, 2016; Druckman, 2003; Krauss, 1996). The current case study extends pertinent literature by examining the role of gender in nonverbal communication during a televised political debate.

Key to this case study is the need to examine the gendered nature of American politics and how gender dynamics play out at the highest echelon of a modern democracy, all in a penetrative medium such

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as television. As Henley (1977) discusses in her seminal book *Body Politics: Power, Sex, and Nonverbal Communication*, nonverbal communication plays a role in promoting gender-based inequalities regarding power distribution in politics and in society as a whole. Research also shows that gender-based differences exist in the transmission and decoding of nonverbal cues. In addition, there exist gender-based biases toward female leaders and politicians regarding attire (Armstrong, 2016), height (Hamstra, 2014), tone (Mooney, 2008), and looks (Franke-Ruta, 2013), as well as other nonverbal cues. The medium with which these nonverbal cues are transmitted is also important. The three Clinton–Trump debates and the lone Kaine–Pence debate collectively drew a historically high 259 million television viewers, surpassing the previous record of 250 million viewers of the 1992 Bush–Clinton–Ross and the Quayle–Gore–Stockdale debates. Social media amplify these numbers. For instance, a record 17 million viewers tweeted about the 2016 town hall debate (Rosenbaum, 2016), and the third debate elicited more than 53 million social media interactions (Nielsen, 2016a), which are defined as “original social media posts related to a linear TV episode and the engagement with that original content” (Nielsen, 2016b, para. 5).

The uniqueness of the 2016 race also allows for the case study approach. It is inarguable that this race was historical, with a woman for the first time leading a major party bid for U.S. president. Also, Trump was an upstart and political novice with quirks and oddities never seen before in American politics (Von Drehle, 2016). These two factors make Clinton and Trump unlike any other pair of opponents to face off in a U.S. presidential election. These factors also qualify the two as significant samples, or “those persons who have attained an unusually pervasive and lasting reputation, regardless of whether that reputation be great or small, positive or negative” (Simonton, 1999, pp. 426–427). Significant samples include eminent people who have achieved unique prominence because they possess certain intrinsic or innate qualities that do not abound within the general population. The top candidates for the U.S. presidency fall under this category, and scholars study such subjects because of this uniqueness. Methodologically, such subjects provide scholars with narrow opportunities to perform in-depth, albeit nongeneralizable case study analyses. In communication research alone, this approach has been used to study such eminent figures as U.S. presidents (Coe, 2011; Daniels, Fears, & Tait, 2014), Pope John Paul II (Brown, 2009), music and film stars (Arakaki & Cassidy, 2014; Jang & Lee, 2014), sports stars (de B’béri & Hogarth, 2009), as well as serial killer Jeffery Dahmer (Gibson & Chavez, 2004). Even though the current case study’s results are not readily generalizable, they could be interpreted within the broader perspective of similar studies discussed in later sections.

Given the aforementioned uniqueness and atypicality of the two candidates, the case study approach is appropriate for this study. Therefore, this study used content analysis to examine how Clinton and Trump transmitted nonverbal cues when debating on television, and whether these cues conformed to gendered norms. Specifically, the study examined nonverbal communication regarding emotion and facial expressions (friendliness/affinity vs. anger/hostility), posture (contractive/expansive), eye contact, and spatial distance between the candidates (intimate, personal, social, or public distance). The study focused on the second debate, which was a town hall format that allows for movement and mobility. This format affords candidates more chances to send nonverbal cues, such as spatial distance, which are not possible with the traditional debate format where candidates are mostly immobile and stay at a fixed distance.

## Literature Review

### *The Role of Nonverbal Communication in Politics*

Nonverbal communication refers to messages transmitted and decoded regarding such nonlinguistic displays as gestures, facial expressions, body movements, and so on, whether consciously or not (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1998; Mehrabian, 1972; Ting-Toomey, 1999). As the literature discussed here indicates, these nonverbal cues play a crucial role within and outside politics and they merit an in-depth discussion.

In the political arena in general, research indicates that people evaluate politicians based on nonverbal cues ranging from facial appearance to the presence of patriotic symbols. For one, voters relate better to candidates whose faces resemble theirs (Bailenson, Iyengar, Yee, & Collins, 2008), with men as well as low-information voters showing more of this reaction (Ahler et al., 2017; Bailenson et al., 2006). Research also shows that physical attractiveness increases a candidate's chances of electoral success (Mattes & Milazzo, 2014), with an advantage for female candidates (Berggren, Jordahl, & Poutvaara, 2010; Poutvaara, Jordahl, & Berggren, 2009). Voters need not see a candidate's face for the nonverbal cues to play a role in their decisions. Spezio, Loesch, Gosselin, Mattes, and Alvarez (2012) found that factors such as hairstyle and clothing influenced people's likelihood to vote for a candidate, as did perceptions of the candidate's competency, a factor also shown to influence voting decisions (Atkinson, Enos, & Hill, 2009). In addition, wearing such patriotic symbols as flags increases feelings of nationalism among audiences (Kemmelmeyer & Winter, 2008). Lastly, smiling candidates also improve their electoral chances (Horiuchi, Komatsu, & Nakaya, 2012).

The smile has been shown to be a powerful nonverbal cue even in nonpolitical situations, alongside posture, eye contact, and spatial distance; hence, the current study examined how both candidates displayed these cues during the debate. People who smile elicit from audiences, perceptions of competency, friendliness, approachability, and altruism, among others (Mehu, Little, & Dunbar, 2007; Miles, 2009), with women eliciting more of these responses than men (Krys et al., 2016). In addition, people are more persuasive when they smile (Gunnery & Hall, 2014). Images of smiling individuals also elicit higher parasocial interaction effects. This means that when people see smiling characters in media outlets such as television, magazines, or film, they are likely to want to read more about those people, find them attractive, are likely to purchase a product they pitch, and may even want to meet them in person (Wasike, 2018). Other facial cues that elicit positivity include raised eyebrows, raised heads, and relaxed rather than tightened or pursed lips. These facial markers, when combined with smiles, engender feelings of happiness and reassurance, among others (Stewart, Salter, & Mehu, 2009). The current study specifically examined these expressions under the umbrella term *affinity*.

Posture is impressionable to audiences as well, and is uniquely important in a competitive situation such as a political debate. In Western cultures, for instance, expansive body postures have been shown to elicit feelings of submissiveness from others because these stances denote power and dominance (Park, Streamer, Huang, & Galinsky, 2013; Vacharkulksemsuk et al., 2016). Expansive postures, unlike contractive postures, involve space-taking stances such as standing or seating with arms and legs spread. Contractive postures take less space and involve stances such as folding arms and crossing legs (Holland, Wolf, Looser, & Cuddy, 2017). Other research has tied expansive postures to advantages during negotiations (Semnani-Azad & Adair, 2011), likelihood to take action, feelings of empowerment (Carney, Cuddy, & Yap, 2010;

Huang, Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Guillory, 2011) and self-esteem (de Zavala, Lantos, & Bowden, 2017). How a speaker holds his/her head can also denote dominance. Raised heads denote pride, self-assuredness, and disdain, whereas lowered heads denote submission, guilt, and humiliation, as well as sadness (Coulson, 2004; Mignault & Chaudhuri, 2003).

Posture and smiles do not work in a vacuum, because other nonverbal cues such as gazes and eye contact amplify them (Kleinke, 1986; Shotland & Johnson, 1978). For one, eye contact elicits trust from others (Hillen et al., 2015). Eye contact also improves engagement with audiences (Shams, Khan, Zainab, Shah, & Farid, 2016), as well as a being marker of confidence and sincerity because gaze avoidance sometimes denotes guilt (Knapp, Hall, & Horgan, 2014). Maintaining eye contact is also a sign of respect as it may be a way of showing interest or attraction to another person (Burgoon, Guerrero, & Floyd, 2010). Just like expansive postures, eye contact can also elicit submissiveness in others. For instance, Drummond and Bailey (2013) found that eye contact increased blushing and anxiety among recipients. Likewise, direct gazes are more likely to draw other people's attention and hold their attention longer than averted gazes, meaning that eye contact is a powerful attention getter (Palanica & Itier, 2012). Eye contact can also be an indicator of bold and dominant behavior. This much Tang and Schmeichel (2015) found in an experimental study, where subjects who maintained eye contact were more likely to make bold decisions than subjects who averted their gaze. Given the competitive nature of a presidential debate, it is important to examine how the two candidates displayed these cues.

### ***Spatial Distance***

Spatial distance, or the space between speakers, has also been shown to evoke emotion. This particular nonverbal cue is pertinent to this study for two reasons. First, during a town hall debate, candidates are in motion and are likely to come within close distance of each other. The debate analyzed in this study was a town hall. Second, spatial distance made headlines after the 2016 town hall debate. Here, Trump was reported to have stood very close to Clinton to the extent that some called his spatial distance menacingly close (Diaz, 2016). This reflects research indicating that at close proximity, men elicit more negative emotions than women do (Hertenstein & Keltner, 2011). At intimate distances of six to 18 inches, the other person's facial features and expressions are more pronounced and more impactful, as well as his/her body odors, body heat, breath, and so on (Hall, 1982). Depending on the social context and acceptability rules, such physical nearness can be threatening, as is the case in most Western cultures. However, the effect abates with increased spatial distance between communicators, namely, the personal distance (1.5–4 feet), the social distance (4–12 feet,) or the public distance of 12 or more feet (Hall, 1982).

### ***The Role of Nonverbal Communication in Political Debates***

Political debates give candidates a unique platform to reach the electorate. For one, the viewership numbers mentioned earlier give candidates a onetime shot to reach millions of potential voters. Research indicates that politicians are well aware of this when engaging in debates, and they might even change their nonverbal behavior to suit the situation (Gregory & Webster, 1996). However, this high reward opportunity comes with the downside of the high scrutiny of verbal and nonverbal behavior and the accompanying risk of failure. For instance, the effect of the visual cues in the first ever

televised presidential debate—Nixon–Kennedy in 1960—has drawn plenty of scrutiny. Although earlier research suggested a strong nonverbal effect on audiences during this inaugural television debate (Druckman, 2003; Johnson, 2005; Kraus, 1996), some of these early assumptions have come under question (Bruschke & Divine, 2017; Hillier, 2015; Kraus, 2000). However, a large body of extant and emerging research still indicates that nonverbal communication affects audiences during debates. Some scholars have attributed this effect to the *nonverbal expectancy violations* process, in which people expect debaters to act in a certain manner nonverbally (Burgoon & Hale, 1988). Depending on how they act, people then rate the debaters positively or negatively depending on whether or not they violated or met those expectations. Such evaluations of nonverbal behavior are mostly based on socially accepted norms of nonverbal behavior such as the avoidance of erratic movements, emotional control, proper spatial distance, and so forth (Burgoon & Hale, 1988).

Two such violations, also pertinent to this study, relate to how candidates express friendly or hostile countenances when engaging an opponent during a debate. In both the first Nixon–Kennedy and the Obama–Romney debates, Bucy (2016) found such nonverbal expectancy violations. Among the four debaters, Kennedy’s facial displays were the most neutral when speaking (93%), whereas a majority of Romney’s displays either denoted anger or were threatening (81%), that is, lowered eyes, frowning, exposed lower teeth, hostile stares, and so forth. Obama’s displays were mostly neutral (49%) or denoted happiness/reassurance (21%), that is, smiling, exposed upper teeth, welcoming gazes, and so on. Regarding gestures, both Romney and Obama were more likely to display defiance (finger pointing, glaring, head shaking, etc.) when speaking rather than affinity (thumbs-up, winking, nodding, finger wagging, etc.). In addition, Nixon displayed more nonverbal tics (lip licking/lip compression) than Kennedy, as did Romney more than Obama when speaking, who in turn displayed more facial tics when Romney was speaking.

The current study also examined how Clinton and Trump transmitted nonverbal cues as the debate wore on. This approach is uniquely important to the debate analyzed for two reasons. First, much was made of the candidates’ age, health, and stamina. Trump was the oldest candidate to be elected president, and Clinton would have been the second oldest to take office if she had been successful (McGregor, 2016). Also, Trump famously questioned Clinton’s stamina during the first debate (Tatum, 2016). Second, research indicates that audiences are cognizant of how soon or late nonverbal cues are transmitted during debates. Some research indicates that the nonverbal cues transmitted early in the debate are more effective, with verbal communication being more effective during later parts of a debate. An explanation of this dynamic could be the immediate impact of nonverbal cues on audiences, who may need more time to absorb the accompanying verbal message (Maurer, 2016). This contention is supported by prior research that shows that people make voting decisions based on rapid judgments on such superficialities as facial expressions and attractiveness (Olivola & Todorov, 2010; Verhulst, Lodge, & Lavine, 2010). The current study expands this literature by examining how the two candidates changed the transmission of nonverbal cues over time, specifically between the first and second halves of the debate.

### ***Gender and Nonverbal Communication***

Clinton's historical debut as the first woman to lead a major party ticket makes gender central to this study. In addition, research has long shown that gender plays an important role in nonverbal interactions between communicators in general. As Pearson (1987) states, "Gender also relates to communication because it influences the specific use of verbal and nonverbal cues, languages of the masculine and feminine subcultures" (p. 1). Scholars from as far back as the 1960s to contemporary times have found gender-based differences regarding how people transmit nonverbal cues. An early study by Exline, Gray, and Schuette (1965) found that women maintain more eye contact when interacting with people of both genders than men do. Baird (1976) confirmed these findings, in addition to reporting that women do more mutual glancing than men, a nonverbal cue more pronounced when women are speaking, unlike men who glance more when they are listening. Past research also shows that women are likelier than men to smile (Gallois et al., 1979), as well as to communicate fear and sadness via facial expressions, whereas men are better at facially expressing anger (Wallbott, 1988).

Contemporary scholars have examined gender-based nonverbal communication patterns regarding such cues as posture, gesticulation, smiling, emotional expression, and so forth (Allen, Gervais, & Smith, 2013; Hall et al., 2001; Hall & Xing, 2015; Henley, 1977; Semnani-Azad & Adair, 2011; Vacharkulksemsuk, et al., 2016). These studies found that women deployed gendered cues such as smiles, but other studies found gender-neutral patterns regarding cues such as expansive postures and facial expressions. The same dynamics have been reported during political debates. For instance, Nagel, Maurer, and Reinemann (2012) found that Angela Merkel displayed more direct gazes than Gerhard Schroeder during the lone televised debate in the 2005 German National Election, even though neither candidate smiled much. Likewise, François Hollande displayed more smiles than Martine Aubry in a debate toward the end of the Socialist Party primaries in France. However, Aubry took more authoritative postures than Hollande (Baider & Kafetzi, 2017). Last, in an analysis of a series Israeli debates, Grebelsky-Lichtman (2016) found that the lone female candidate, Tzipi Livni, used a combination of masculine and feminine cues in her debate win.

The literature discussed above indicates that women send certain nonverbal cues more than men, but the literature is also ambiguous regarding gender and the communication of other nonverbal cues. Therefore, this study predicted the following:

*H1: Clinton was more likely to smile than Trump.*

*H2a: Clinton was more likely to maintain eye contact with Trump than him with her.*

*H2b: Clinton was more likely to maintain eye contact with other people such as moderators and guest participants than Trump did.*

*RQ1: Were there any differences regarding how the two candidates transmitted nonverbal cues denoting friendliness/affinity?*

*RQ2: Were there any differences regarding how the two candidates transmitted nonverbal cues denoting anger/hostility?*

*RQ3: Were there any differences regarding how the two candidates displayed contractive and expansive postures?*

*RQ4: How did the candidates maintain the spatial distance between each other?*

*RQ5: Did the candidates change the transmission of nonverbal cues over time?*

## **Method**

### ***Data Collection***

Data were collected via content analysis from a full-length video of the debate available on the YouTube page of *NBC News*. The unit of analysis was a single freeze frame. Frames were derived from YouTube's automatic speech recognition function, which uses the automatic caption track technique to match dialogue within a video transcript to specific frames within the video's timeline (see Appendix A for example of a freeze frame). Freeze frames typically last two to three seconds. This technique allows users to download not just the transcript, but also the accompanying timestamps for each freeze frame. This way, users get both a textual and visual representation of the action in question. These freeze frames, 2,220 in total (between introductions and conclusions), formed the sampling frame. Because this study examined changes in nonverbal behavior over time, a simple random sample of all freeze frames was not guaranteed to reflect this; therefore, stratified sampling was used, following advice by Riffe, Aust, and Lacy (1993) and Riffe, Lacy, and Fico (2005). Therefore, the video was divided into 15-minute segments, and from each segment 20% of the freeze frames were randomly selected. This method resulted in a random 435 freeze frames. Because each frame was analyzed separately for each candidate, the random sample was 870 freeze frames.

Freeze frames as used in this study or any short instances of nonverbal behavior are a valid data collection method similar to proven methods used in previous studies. For instance, it has been shown that people can interpret other's personalities from short observations of nonverbal behavior (Rule, Krendl, Ivcevic, & Ambady, 2013; Tskhay, Xu, & Rule, 2014). Research also indicates that stimuli consisting of instances of nonverbal behavior as short as five seconds can be validly used to predict judgments from audiences (Tshay, Zhu, & Rule, 2017).

Therefore, a trained independent coder analyzed the frames. Even though this study used a single coder, the coder and I first went through several rounds of independent coding of the same frames until agreement between us was reached and before data collection commenced. This type of content analysis is not new and has been used in prior studies such as those of Kamhawi and Weaver (2003) and Wasike (2017). Other single-coder studies include Pardun (2000) and Handley (2010). In addition, most variables, as discussed in the next section, were dichotomous (yes/no) in nature and required little subjective judgment on



the part of the coder. The lone ordinal variable, spatial distance, also needed a simple estimation of distance in feet. The resultant author versus coder Krippendorff's agreement coefficients were lowered eyes = 0.91, exposed lower teeth = 1.00, hostile stares = 0.92, eye contact = 0.89, smiles = 1.00, relaxed mouth/lips = 1.00, raised eyebrows = 1.00, raised head = 0.92; spatial distance = 1.00, and stance = 1.00.

### ***Variables and Measurement***

*Anger/Hostility.* This variable was measured by three facial cues discussed in prior literature: lowered eyes, exposed lower teeth, and hostile stares (Bucy, 2016). Each was measured as a dichotomous (yes/no) variable. See Appendix B for related image examples.

*Friendliness/Affinity.* Friendliness denoted facial expressions that engender happiness and reassurance. Friendliness was measured by three dichotomous (yes/no) parameters as discussed in the literature: smiles; relaxed mouth/lips; raised eyebrows; and one ordinal variable, head position, whether raised, lowered, or neutral.

*Eye Contact.* This dichotomous yes/no variable was first measured based on whether the candidate looked at someone, be it the opponent, the moderator, guest participants, or the crowd. It was also measured for instances when one candidate looked directly at the opponent.

*Spatial Distance.* This was measured as an ordinal variable estimating the distance in inches and feet between the candidates based on the aforementioned categories: intimate distance (6–18 inches), personal distance (1.5–4 feet), social distance (4–12 feet), or public distance (12 feet or more).

*Stance.* This was measured as a dichotomous (yes/no) variable depending on whether the pose the candidate took was either expansive or contractive. An expansive pose occurs when a person takes more space or has limbs extended from the body (e.g., raised arms, hands gesticulating away from the body, or legs spread when seating or standing). Contractive postures occur when someone keeps limbs close to the body.

### **Results**

Hypothesis 1 posited that Clinton would smile more than Trump, and data supported this prediction. See Table 1 for details. Clinton smiled in 12.00% of the frames, whereas Trump smiled in 1.13% of the frames. Overall, both candidates smiled in only 13.00% of the frames analyzed. This study also examined how the candidates displayed nonverbal cues over time. Here, analysis was done separately for each candidate. These intersegment results are shown in Tables 2 and 3. Data indicated that Clinton smiled more during the second half of the debate, after the 45-minute mark (first half = 8.06%, second half = 14.00%). Trump's smiling patterns did not return any significant differences between segments.

Data also supported Hypotheses 2a and 2b, in which Clinton (47.00%) was slightly likelier than Trump (43.00%) to maintain eye contact with everyone (i.e., the moderators, guest participants, the crowd, and with Trump collectively; see Table 1).

Likewise, Clinton (16.00%) was more likely to maintain eye contact with Trump than him with her (9.00%). However, on closer examination, Trump was likelier than Clinton (34.00% vs. 31.00%) to maintain eye contact with others (i.e., the moderators, the invited guests, or the crowd), thus ignoring Clinton. When examined over time, also separately for each candidate, there were no differences between the first and second segments of the debate regarding eye contact with everyone. Likewise, there were no significant differences regarding how the two candidates looked at each other between segments.

**Table 1. Chi-Square Results for Clinton and Trump's Nonverbal Cues.**

Cue	Clinton (%)	Trump (%)	$\chi^2$	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Smiles	12.00	1.13	60.87	1	<.001
Eye contact (with everyone)	47.00	43.00	14.05	1	<.001
Eye contact (with opponent)	16.00	9.22	14.05	1	<.001
Affinity 1: Relaxed mouth	20.00	24.00	11.08	1	<.001
Affinity 2: Raised head	29.00	12.00	79.62	1	<.001
Affinity 3: Raised eyebrows	21.00	7.00	52.38	1	<.001
Hostility 1: Lowered eyes	30.00	10.00	90.10	1	<.001
Hostility 2: Lower teeth	16.00	21.00	13.87	1	<.001
Hostility 3: Hostile stares	18.00	25.00	27.92	1	<.001
Expansive postures	17.00	11.00	5.65	1	<.01

Research Question 1 explored differences in how Clinton and Trump expressed friendliness or affinity nonverbally. The first affinity measure was a relaxed mouth. Data indicated that, overall, both candidates displayed this cue in 44.00% of the total frames. Also, as shown in Table 1, Trump displayed a relaxed mouth in more frames than Clinton (Trump = 24%.00, Clinton = 20.00%,  $\chi^2 = 11.08$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Regarding changes over time (see Tables 2 and 3), no significant differences manifested for Clinton, but Trump displayed a relaxed mouth more in the second half of the debate (first half = 22.00%, second half = 28.00%).

The second affinity measure was a raised head. Clinton kept her head raised more times than Trump (Clinton = 29.00%, Trump = 12.00%). There were no significant changes for either candidate between the first and second halves of the debate for this affinity cue. The third affinity measure was raised eyebrows, and here too, Clinton displayed more of it than Trump (Clinton = 21.00%, Trump = 7.00%). There were no significant differences for Clinton between segments, but Trump significantly displayed raised eyebrows more in the second half of the debate (first half = 3.72%, second half = 11.00%).

**Table 2. Chi-Square Results for Clinton's Nonverbal Cues Between Segments.**

Cue	First half (%)	Second half (%)	$\chi^2$	df	p	Change
Smiles	8.10	14.00	4.62	1	<.05	Positive
Eye contact (with everyone)	40.00	42.00	0.12	1	-	
Eye contact (with opponent)	14.00	17.00	1.50	2	-	
Affinity 1: Relaxed mouth	21.00	17.00	3.71	1	-	
Affinity 2: Raised head	27.00	28.00	0.47	2	-	
Affinity 3: Raised eyebrows	20.00	20.00	0.14	1	-	
Hostility 1: Lowered eyes	26.00	31.00	1.85	1	-	
Hostility 2: Lower teeth	16.00	13.00	2.66	1	<.001	Positive
Hostility 3: Hostile stares	20.00	14.00	8.92	1	<.001	Positive
Expansive postures	16.00	17.00	0.06	1	-	

Note. N = 435 freeze frames.

**Table 3. Chi-Square Results for Trump's Nonverbal Cues Between Segments.**

Cue	First half (%)	Second half (%)	$\chi^2$	df	p	Change
Smiles	1.50	1.00	0.55	1	-	
Eye contact (with everyone)	39.00	43.00	2.40	1	-	
Eye contact (with opponent)	10.00	9.50	0.008	2	-	
Affinity 1: Relaxed mouth	22.00	28.00	4.65	1	<.05	Positive
Affinity 2: Raised head	14.00	10.00	5.01	2	-	
Affinity 3: Raised eyebrows	3.72	11.00	12.52	1	<.001	Positive
Hostility 1: Lowered eyes	13.00	8.50	3.89	1	<.05	Positive
Hostility 2: Lower teeth	19.00	24.00	3.52	1	-	
Hostility 3: Hostile stares	28.00	27.00	0.20	1	-	
Expansive postures	6.23	18.00	23.65	1	<.001	Positive

Note. N = 435 freeze frames.

The second research question queried differences in how the candidates displayed anger or hostility. Data indicated that Clinton was significantly more likely to display lowered eyes, the first parameter measuring this cue (Clinton = 30.00%, Trump = 10.00%). Also, Trump significantly showed less of this cue in the second half of the debate (first half = 13.00%, second half = 8.50%), but Clinton did not change her patterns. Trump displayed more of the second anger/hostility parameter, exposed lower teeth (Trump = 21.00%, Clinton = 16.00%,  $\chi^2 = 13.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ), as well as the third parameter, hostile stares (Trump = 25.00%, Clinton = 18.00%,  $\chi^2 = 27.92$ ,  $p < .001$ ). There were no differences between segments for either candidate regarding exposed lower teeth, but Clinton significantly displayed fewer hostile stares in the second half of the debate (first half = 20.00%, second half = 14.00%).

Regarding posture, Research Question 3 explored differences in how Clinton and Trump adopted expansive or contractive stances. Data indicated that Clinton took more expansive stances than Trump (Clinton = 17.00%, Trump = 11.00%,  $\chi^2 = 5.65$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Regardless of the differences, both candidates mostly maintained contractive poses in most frames (71.00%). This occurred mostly when they were seated, waiting

for their turn to talk. When compared between segments, only Trump showed significant differences, where he displayed more expansive stances in the second half of the debate (first half = 6.23%, second half = 18.00%).

The last variable measured was spatial distance between the candidates (RQ4). The candidates mostly stayed within social distance of each other, meaning four to 12 feet apart, in a majority of the frames analyzed (71.00%). As I elaborate on in the discussion section, this variable is important given the headlines that the spatial distance between the two candidates elicited in the aftermath of the debate. Trump was reported to have menacingly loomed close behind Clinton. A nuanced frame-by-frame analysis of the entire video indicated that the candidates came within intimate or personal distance of each other in only five of the 2,200 frames in the entire video. In fact, in the controversial frame that depicted Trump as looming menacingly behind Clinton (see Figure 1), he was almost five feet behind her, which falls within social distance. However, although it was Clinton who closed the distance by walking toward Trump in all but one instance, it was Trump who closed the distance leading to the controversial frame (at the 25.30- to 25.38-minute marks). As Figure 1 shows, the close-up angle on television misleadingly depicted the two candidates to be more intimately spaced than they really were.



**Figure 1. Depiction of social distance at the 25.48 (left) and 26.06 (right) timelines. Note that neither candidate moved between the 25.30- and 27.36-minute marks.**

### Discussion

This case study systematically examined nonverbal cues during the 2016 town hall debate and data returned several important findings. First, Clinton showed more affinity than Trump. Of the four affinity-related cues, Clinton transmitted three of them more regarding smiles, a raised head, and raised eyebrows. She also showed more eye contact overall. Trump displayed a relaxed mouth more. Inversely, Trump displayed more hostility than Clinton. He displayed more cues in two of the three hostility/anger categories: exposed lower teeth and hostile stares. Clinton was more likely to keep her eyes lowered. Some of these

patterns reflect prior literature. For instance, women have long been shown to be more likely to smile than men as well as display more eye contact (Baird, 1976; Gallois et al., 1979; Vacharkulksemsuk et al., 2016).

Another important finding is that Clinton, by far, displayed more expansive postures than Trump. Research shows this to be a powerful cue that denotes dominance (Park et al., 2013; Vacharkulksemsuk et al., 2016). Expansive postures have also been shown to be advantageous during negotiations (Semnani-Azad & Adair, 2011), as well as to denote the likelihood of being one to take action (Huang et al., 2011). Because these dominant postures have long been associated with men (Allen et al., 2013; Henley, 1977), and other literature shows that the display of such male-centric cues might be disadvantageous to women during debates (Everitt, Best, & Gaudet, 2016), it makes this finding even more noteworthy because polls showed Clinton to have won the town hall debate (Saad, 2016). Here, Clinton not only defied gendered norms as described in prior literature, but also the audience did not penalize her for this apparent nonverbal communication expectancy violation.

It is also important to reiterate that research indicates the rapidity with which audiences make judgments about candidates' nonverbal behavior. Also, as mentioned, the candidates' age, health, and stamina were uniquely important during this election (McGregor, 2016; Tatum, 2016). Hence, the timing of the cues discussed above is important (Maurer, 2016; Verhulst et al., 2010). Data showed divergent patterns regarding how the candidates displayed cues over time, with Clinton displaying more consistency than Trump. This and even her overall better performance than Trump can be explained partly by the fact that she is a more seasoned politician. Likewise, Trump's negative performance can be explained partly by the naiveté of a first-time candidate. Clinton had engaged in numerous political debates, for instance, in her successful 2000 and 2006 bids for the New York Senate seat, the 2008 debates with Obama, and the 2016 debates with Bernie Sanders. In addition, the Trump campaign missteps and reports of his not fully engaging in his debate preparation (Costa & Rucker, 2016; Levitz, 2016) might have affected his performance. This stands in contrast to Clinton, who was even reported to have overprepared for the debates (Foran, 2016).

The spatial distance between the two candidates is also noteworthy. As mentioned, it was widely reported that Trump menacingly loomed behind Clinton at one point during the town hall debate. In a postdebate interview, Clinton accused Trump of stalking her across the stage (Berenson, 2016). In her recently released memoir, Clinton describes how her skin crawled when she sensed Trump behind her, even calling him a creep for doing that. Although Clinton's reaction might have been justified given that she could not easily tell how close or far Trump was behind her while she was addressing the audience, the media reporting of the incident cannot be justified. As the data here indicate, the candidates were mostly within social distance of each other, that is, four to 12 feet apart. As Figure 1 indicates, the two were almost five feet apart during the contentious instance.

At the same time, the angle with which the debate cameras broadcast the debate to those watching on television indicates that, indeed, Trump stood very close behind Clinton. However, this angle was misleading because it juxtaposed them unfavorably. Because most major media outlets had reporters present inside the debate hall, they should have noted and reported the correct distance between the two. If not, they could have at least corrected the postdebate reports about Trump's menacing posture. It is also important to reiterate that the candidates came within intimate or personal distance of each other in only

five instances during the debate. Of these, it was Clinton who closed the distance between the two in all but one, although it was Trump who approached Clinton prior to the controversial moment. This shows that Clinton was more aggressive in minimizing the spatial distance between the two, which could as well have been a strategic debate move. If her minimizing the spatial distance with Trump was strategic, this indicates another instance when Clinton's debate cues went counter to extant literature. As mentioned, there are gender differences regarding spatial distance, with men likelier than women to elicit negative emotions when in close proximity (Hertenstein & Keltner, 2011).

Overall, it is not a stretch to speculate that Clinton's prior experience with debating adds to any gender-based advantages or disadvantages that might have arisen here or have manifested regarding women in prior literature. Participating at such a high echelon of political debate leaves no room for error, and her team might have heeded this warning during debate preparation. Also, such gendered norms may have been obfuscated by the amount of debate practice she has had over her political career. This also means that the role of such gendered cues as smiling, posture, spatial distance, or even audience expectations of her performance as a woman were mitigated by her debate experience.

In conclusion, this study makes unique methodological contributions because it deployed a variety of nonverbal cues. Most pertinent studies have examined a limited number of cues, such as facial expressions, but in the absence of spatial distance or posture. Also, this study examined how the candidates changed their display of cues over time, another seldom-examined variable. In addition, the study demonstrates that YouTube's automatic speech recognition function is a viable method with which scholars can derive appropriate sampling frames for video analysis of debates as well as for other visual presentations.

As with any other study, this study naturally comes with certain limitations. First, the case study focused on one debate, the town hall, and the results should be interpreted within this limit and are not generalizable. Second, the cues displayed during presidential debates are the result of long sessions of debate preparation and are not necessarily a reflection of natural instincts and tendencies. Candidates could be more authentic when giving stump speeches on the campaign trail, where there is less formality. Further research could compare Clinton's and Trump's nonverbal behavior in these circumstances. Future research could also examine how nonverbal behavior affects the electoral success of female candidates in the United States given the irony that Clinton performed better in the debate but lost the election. Scholars could also examine how gender affects perceptions of spatial distance, preferably by using experimental methodology. Regardless of these limitations, this study examined gendered norms, and on a micro level, regarding the first major party female presidential candidate in U.S. history. Therefore, the endeavor makes a unique contribution to political communication research in general, and more narrowly to nonverbal communication, and specifically to nonverbal communication during televised political debates.

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**Appendix A**

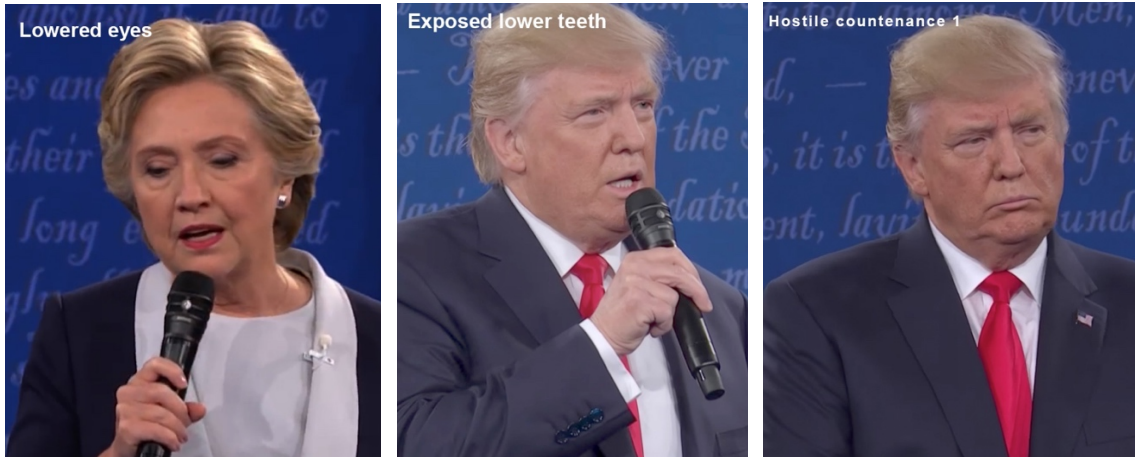
The image shows a YouTube video player interface. At the top, there is a search bar and a 'SIGN IN' button. The video content is split into two panels: the left panel shows Donald Trump speaking into a microphone, and the right panel shows Hillary Clinton. The video player includes a progress bar and a title bar that reads '★ THE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE ★'. Below the video, there is a 'Transcript' section with a list of time-stamped text. The line '18:01 devil but when you talk about apology I' is highlighted with a red border. The transcript continues with the following lines:

- 17:53 because Bernie Sanders between
- 17:55 super-delegates and Debra Wasserman
- 17:57 Schultz he never had a chance and I was
- 17:58 so surprised to see him sign on with the
- 18:01 devil but when you talk about apology I
- 18:04 think the one that you should really be
- 18:06 apologizing for and the thing that you
- 18:08 should be apologizing for are the 33,000
- 18:11 emails that you deleted and that you

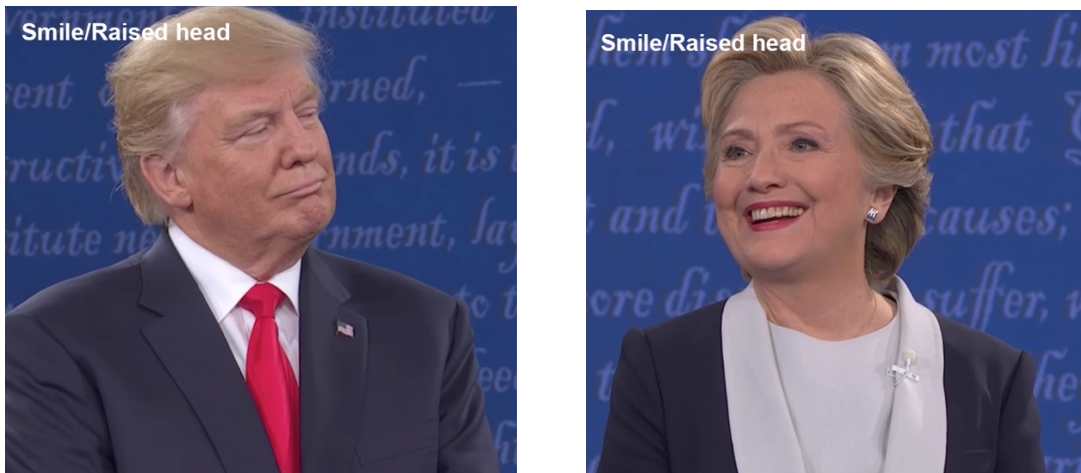
**Figure A1. Example of YouTube's Automatic Speech Recognition. Transcript highlighted with the accompanying freeze frame at the 18.01-minute mark.**



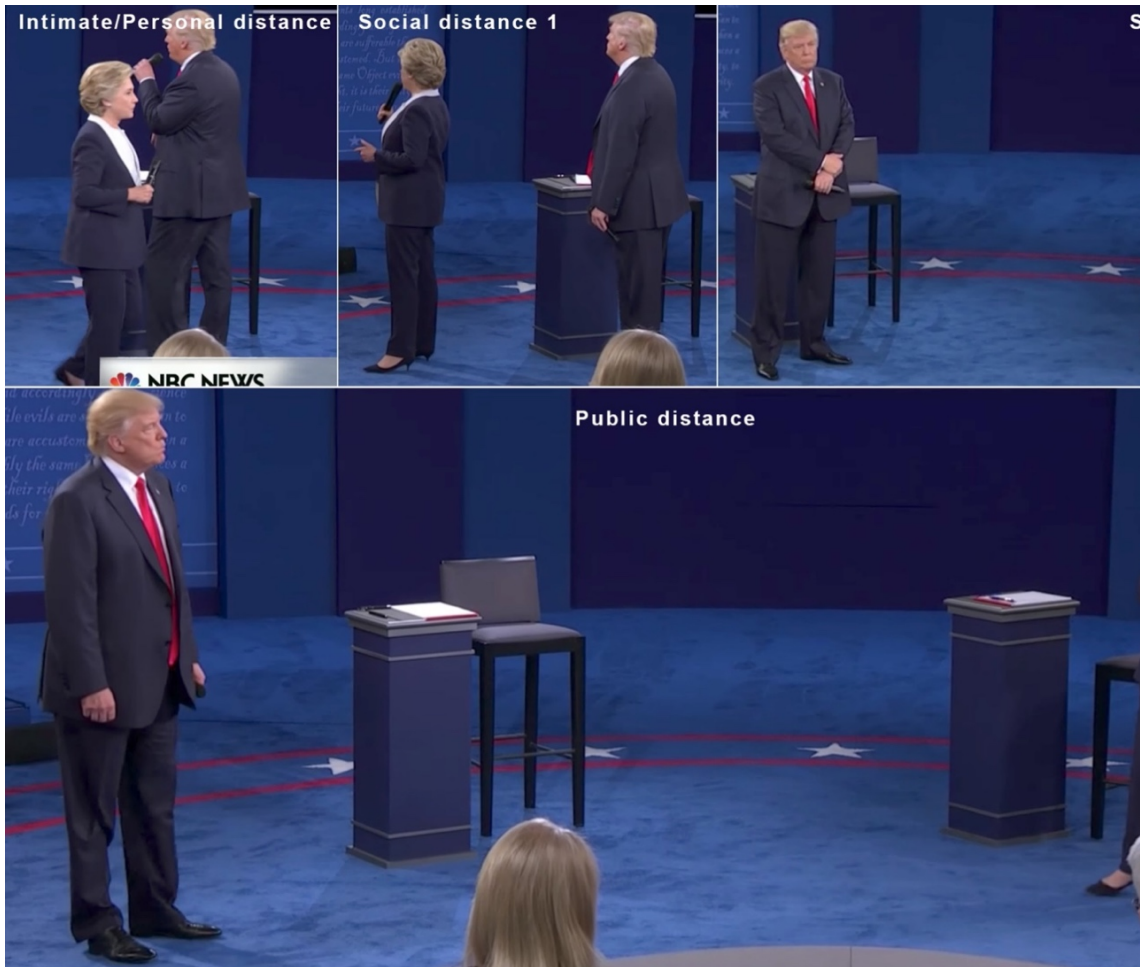
**Appendix B. Code Book Images.**



**Figure B1. Anger/hostility**



**Figure B2. Friendliness/affinity**



**Figure B3. Spatial distance. Clinton and Trump in expansive and contractive postures.**



**Figure B4. Eye contact**



**Figure B5. Stance. Postures in image pairs 1 and 2 appeared in their respective frames.**