

HILLARY CLINTON'S 2016 DISCURSIVE BID FOR THE OVAL OFFICE

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Abstract: 2015 brought along the formal announcement of the second presidential run of the former First Lady and Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton. Active in American politics since the late '60s, Hillary Clinton has been a remarkable public figure, both as a First Lady and as a political leader, being known as the first female Senator of New York, for two consecutive terms. Also, to the present day, she has remained the only First Lady to have run for public office.

The present paper investigates the issue of gender in politics by analyzing Hillary's communication patterns during the campaign for the Democratic nomination. The analysis focuses on the campaign launch speech and the first speech delivered after, as a Keynote Speaker at the Women in the World Summit 2015. By the means of content analysis, we aim to weigh the impact of the symbolical contribution both speeches bore over the campaign and electorate overall; also, we aim to identify differences between the current campaign approach and the one held 8 years ago.

Keywords: Hillary Clinton, presidential elections, gender equality, discourse, women's political empowerment.

"It was the evening of June 5, 2008, and I was heading to a secret meeting with Barack Obama – and not the one I had hoped for and expected until just a few months earlier. I had lost and he had won" (Clinton, 2014). In the course of every American presidential election, each main political party gathers in order to set an electoral platform and officially nominate its candidates for the running ticket, the President accompanied by his Vice-President. Traditionally, these events "function as campaign events without equal" (Cera & Weinschenk, 2012), yet

nowadays the nominee is – in a more or less official manner – known beforehand. So was the case of the Obama versus Clinton primary campaign, during which the latter suspended her campaign almost three months before the convention, fully endorsing Barack Obama for the party nomination and, of course, for presidency. During the convention, Clinton delivered a powerful speech supporting the presidential candidate, and her support paid off later, when Obama pitched the Secretary of State position to her. Clinton thus became the third woman serving as Secretary of State in the history of the United States of America – after Madeleine Albright and Condoleezza Rice –, which gave her the opportunity to pave her way towards the present presidential candidacy.

Earlier in the campaign, however, Hillary Clinton had been “*a clear, early front-runner who was principally challenged by Obama, a less well-known challenger who hoped to generate momentum through success in early primary and caucus states*” (Fullmer, 2015). Research on exit-poll data from primaries shows that Clinton initially had a competitive advantage against Obama, which “*the Clinton campaign was acutely aware of*” (Fullmer, 2015). Her current advantage, for the present primaries, is even greater, after including Secretary of State to her portfolio, adding on her political capital: “*All of us face hard choices in our lives. [...] One thing that has never been a hard choice for me is serving our country. It has been the greatest honor of my life*” (Clinton, 2014).

Hillary Clinton’s political representation – an overview

In the light of past achievements and future plans, one can assess that Hillary Clinton winning the presidential race would be a groundbreaking accomplishment for women’s political representation on a global level. In order to support this statement, we must present and build on the integrated political representation model, conceptualized by Hanna Pitkin (1967).

First, the *formal representation* concept must be met, which refers to the norms and procedures governing public elections or appointments. In the present research endeavor, formal representation refers to the extent to which Hillary Clinton managed to obtain and exercise political power. Her potential has been capitalized on since college, as she became president of

the Wellesley Young Republicans (Torrent, 2012). Moreover, her activism brings her the historical opportunity of being appointed to deliver the commencement address, a performance that echoed on a national level (Torrent, 2012). Following the Yale experience, her professional evolution brought along several other significant accomplishments, which determined the most frequent statement, when talking about her, to be “the first woman to ever achieve...”. Her socio-political activity while being First Lady of Arkansas was indeed significant, yet her most significant impact on politics was marked by Bill Clinton’s presidential win. Thus, Hillary Clinton was the very first wife of an American President to give political weight to *ladyship*. Clinton marks the First Lady to have an office in the West Wing, next to the Oval Office (Torrent, 2012). Later on, she became the first and – up to this point – only First Lady to ever run for public office in popular elections, which made her the first female Senator of New York State and re-elected by 67% of the votes (Torrent, 2012). One year after, in 2007, Clinton makes her formal announcement for entering the presidential race – “*I’m in it to win it*” – (Abrams, 2009), which does not make her the first woman to run for president in the United States, but a party nomination would have made her the first woman nominated by a major political party to ever run for presidency. Even if she did not reach the nomination stage, “*her emergence as the first woman to be considered as a serious frontrunner in the U.S. presidential election illustrates how today more women are reaching higher-level leadership positions in the political sphere than ever before in U.S. history*” (Simon & Hoyt, 2008).

Descriptive representation is tightly connected to formal representation; it consists in the consistency between the gender and ethnical structure of political institutions and that of the represented, of the population. Currently, the United States of America only ranks 72nd on a worldwide scale regarding women’s representation in Congress, in which there are less than 20% women¹, while the gender distribution of the country shows a slight imbalance, with 50.4% women². Thus, women’s under-representation in the U.S. Congress speaks for the under-representation of gender issues; the executive power could contribute to gender balance, if a

¹ According to the “Women in national parliaments” database, compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, retrieved from <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>

² Data provided by the World Bank for 2014, retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS>

woman were to be elected President for the first time in the country's history. Moreover, it refers to the quality and quantity of representation of such interests among the Legislative organism, thus linking to the area of *substantive representation*. To this end, gender issues addressed by Hillary Clinton while – but not exclusively – in Congress and while acting as First Lady are of high relevance. One of the most remarkable aspects of her legacy to women's rights movement is the speech delivered as First Lady in 1995, at the U.N. Fourth World Conference on Women, in Beijing: “*If there is one message that echoes forth from this conference, let it be that human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights once and for all*”³. Her efforts to understand her public have been theorized under the label of a *listening tour* (Cos & Snee, 2001), which speaks of her engagement and perspective of further acting, whereas using it as a discursive mechanism. Among her initiatives and projects regarding gender issues, some subjects on her political agenda were parental leave, support for working women, social protection, children's health and welfare, safe adoptions, gender equality on economy and educational attainment, while placing women's rights on the international political agenda, as well: “*Hillary Clinton has enhanced the First Lady position to the highest possible, she contributed to developing women's status, improving the children's [n.a. status], she ensured progress in medical research, to only mention the highest achievements of her ladyship*”⁴ (Torrent, 2012). Her professional achievements of gender interest for 2016 – 2020 are to be presented in the discourse analysis, in the following section of the present paper.

The last dimension of the theoretical model refers to *symbolic representation*, which reflects the public's feeling of being effectively represented by their elected official; Hillary Clinton's previous electoral wins and public appointments impacted on the mindsets and realities of her supporters. Latest developments in women's political empowerment have made it possible that “*the metaphor of the glass ceiling no longer serves as an appropriate metaphor for women because it implies and impenetrable barrier*” (Simon & Hoyt, 2008), yet the path to achieving

³ Transcript of Hillary Clinton's speech delivered in 1995, at the U.N. 4th Conference on Women, retrieved from <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/hillaryclintonbeijingspeech.htm>

⁴ „Hillary Clinton a înălțat rolul de First Lady la nivelul cel mai înalt cu putință, a contribuit la îmbunătățirea statutului femeii, l-a ameliorat pe cel al copilului, a asigurat progresul în cercetarea medicală, pentru a nu cita decât marile realizări ale ladyship-ului său.”

the top leadership position in the U.S.A. still presents challenges, a great one potentially being overcome on the Democratic Convention 2016. Regarding the psychological empowerment effects Clinton's presidential victory would have on women's mindsets, one relevant study assessing Hillary Clinton's effects on improving performance under the threat of being stereotyped provided empirical evidence that *"what an individual believes about a successful role model might moderate the effectiveness of that role model in overcoming stereotype threat"* (Taylor et. al., 2011). One goal of the experiment was to identify women whom the participants deemed as successful or unsuccessful and the perceived causes; study participants who accounted Clinton as successful declared that *"they would want her on their team, and thought their worry would be reduced by knowing she was"* (Taylor et. al., 2011). Moreover, those who considered her having deserved her success invoked internal aspects, such as her ability, performance and sustained efforts, while the others cited external factors, associating her with Bill Clinton. The experiment assessed the participants' performance on a mathematics test after reading the biography of Hillary Clinton, a non-domain role model, the positive results being consistent with *"a mechanism in which effective role models undo stereotype threat effects merely by showing that the group can «take care of itself»"* (Taylor et. al., 2011). Thus, beyond the policies, bills and laws a female political representative might promote in order to effectively represent gender interests in elected office, effects can be seen on a psychological level as well, as political women serve as role models; also, the debate created around a new woman's election or appointment equally contributes to the cause.

Methodology

The present paper aims to weigh the issue of gender in contemporary politics, by analyzing Hillary Clinton's communication patterns during the 2015 primaries, for the Democratic nomination. By the content analysis method, we aim to investigate the symbolical contribution her communicational efforts bore over the campaign and electorate overall, marking a different approach from the one used in her first presidential campaign.

The analysis covered by the present paper focuses on two different speeches, analyzed in parallel: the 2015 one delivered on the campaign launch, and the first speech delivered after, as a

Keynote Speaker at the Women in the World Summit 2015. The reason behind the choice of the campaign launch speech is easy to understand, as it is a rhetorical mechanism used in order to present the themes on her political agenda, to be built on during the campaign. Moreover, the second speech was chosen for its symbolical bearing on the campaign, as it was delivered 20 years after the “Women’s rights are human rights speech”, on a similar occasion, aimed at improving women’s status on a global scale.

In order to carry out the content analysis, we will use two discourse analysis tools: *Textalyser*, an online instrument which aims to weigh the content of a speech, and *NVivo 11 Starter*, software meant for qualitative data, which one can use in order to structure and manage different sets of texts. Thus, we aim to measure the complexity of the two speeches, the logical structure and key-words used for idea enforcement. Moreover, we further analyze the two discourses in order to identify the main themes and the rhetorical mechanisms used in order to convey the desired meaning to the open public.

Hillary Clinton’s 2016 discursive bid for the Oval Office

Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaign – an overview

In order to assess the weight of the two oratorical performances, one must present the overall context of the campaign and the contexts generating or surrounding the two speeches. The 2016 competition is the second presidential contest in which Hillary Clinton engages, yet the two contexts are slightly different. The 2008 campaign was launched while in Congress office, and with a relatively high popular favorability – according to Gallup, her approval rate scored 58% the month after her announcement⁵ -, while the current campaign was formally announced after serving as Secretary of State for 4 years, maintaining an over 60% approval rate; however, her popular favorability dropped a few points during her first campaign steps, reaching 50% in May 2015⁶. *“Clinton’s deflated favorable rating reflects the challenging political environment*

⁵ Favorability: People in the News, article by Gallup, retrieved online from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1618/favorability-people-news.aspx>

⁶ *Ibidem*

she has faced recently”⁷, Gallup invoking the email controversy to account for this approval drop. Basically, both campaigns for primaries started off against main lesser-known opponents, Obama and Sanders, benefitting from steady support of the Democrats. It yet remains to see who will win the Democratic nomination, but Hillary’s campaign performances during debates and speeches have increased her odds against her opponent, as “*one of the best-known politicians in America*”⁸.

The first discursive performance included in the present analysis is the campaign launch speech, delivered on June 13th, on a campaign rally held on Roosevelt Island, in Four Freedoms Park, supported by the presence of her husband and daughter on stage, by the end of the speech. The chosen spot for the speech delivery has a symbolical resonance, as one will observe later in the analysis.

The second object of the present research endeavor is the keynote address given by Hillary Clinton at the World in the World Summit, in New York City, on April 23rd; it marks the first public rhetorical performance of the candidate after launching the announcement video. The discourse bears a strong gender resonance and it reminds the public of her 1995 famous speech in Beijing, in an attempt to point out that she has not forgotten her ongoing women’s rights project.

The discursive bid for the Oval Office

The setting of the campaign launch speech is a contextually significant one; an image association with Theodore Roosevelt underlines consistency, persistency – due to his unique historical accomplishment of being elected four times – and reform, considering his political legacy, marking the first modern presidency of the United States of America⁹. One should bear in mind that Hillary’s potential presidential win would mark a historical moment, of the first

⁷ Hillary Clinton’s Favorable Rating One of the Worst, retrieved online from <http://www.gallup.com/poll/185324/hillary-clinton-favorable-rating-one-worst.aspx>

⁸ Democrats’ Positive Views of Clinton Improve After Debate, retrieved: http://www.gallup.com/poll/186551/democrats-positive-views-clinton-improve-debate.aspx?g_source=hillary%20clinton&g_medium=search&g_campaign=tiles

⁹ Theodore Roosevelt: Impact and Legacy, retrieved online from <http://millercenter.org/president/biography/roosevelt-impact-and-legacy>

female President of the U.S. By operating the Textalyser tool, the output reveals that the speech, of 45 minutes¹⁰, comprises 2761 words, recording a number of 1253 different words. It appears to be a light discourse, of 45.4% complexity, with a readability score of 8.5, which means the public perceived it as a rather easy to digest rhetorical performance. The same idea is supported by the average sentence length, of 15.48 words, and the 20.2% amount of three-character words.

The choice of the Four Freedoms Parks in our first studied discourse also reflects on the speech delivered by Clinton, as she structures her political project on four lines of action: “[...] I’ll wage and win Four Fights for you” –, further elaborating on economy, family, America’s leadership, and refining – and redefining – democracy. These lines of action construct the main themes of the campaign, whereas expressing setbacks, a wide range of solutions, and her commitment to her vision about America. Clinton capitalizes on Roosevelt, Obama and Bill Clinton’s image, tying her own political becoming to their contribution and promising to take their legacy further. Another persuasive rhetorical mechanism consists in differentiating from Republicans, posing as a viable solution to current and future challenges, implicitly showing her stand on salient issues, like women’s reproductive rights, immigration and LGBT rights; thus, Hillary declares running for office “for everyone who’s ever been knocked down, but refused to be knocked out”. Also, a recurrent theme the speaker uses is family, and uses *storytelling* in order to emphasize her and her mother’s struggles to make several points on sustained effort and achieving prosperity. Clinton capitalizes on both her professional and personal trajectories to determine the public to resonate with her story, while making use of the “*listening tour*” strategy once again, when giving the example of a struggling single mother she had met. One can identify populist features when she talks about the rich and the poor, and when she presents herself as the solution to several salient issues. Overall, the speaker emphasizes the importance of family, as the phrase “is a family issue” appears 5 times during the discourse. Her tone is empowering, and she verbally enforces her public by repeating “I believe you should” 3 times, and states America’s leadership position and unity by uttering “no other country is better” and “what it takes to build”, each of them twice.

¹⁰ Speech transcript retrieved online from <http://time.com/3920332/transcript-full-text-hillary-clinton-campaign-launch/>

Another rhetorical mechanism of which Clinton makes use in order to imprint the ideas on the minds of the audience is the well-known *Rule of 3*, which is the most persuasive number in communication: “To meet every challenge. To be resilient, no matter what the world throws at you. To solve the toughest problems”. At times, she repeats the rule of 3 within one of such structures: “Talk to your friends, your family, your neighbors. Text ‘JOIN’ J-O-I-N to 4-7-2-4-6. Go to hillaryclinton.com and sign up to make calls and knock on doors”; “[...] we’re a tolerant country, or a generous country, or a compassionate country, [...] we’re a better, stronger, more prosperous country when we harness the talent, hard work, and ingenuity of every single American”.

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)	Similar Words
working	7	35	1.46	work, worked, working, works
americans	9	34	1.41	american, americans
america	7	30	1.25	america
family	6	27	1.12	families, family
people	6	23	0.96	people
country	7	21	0.87	countries, country
many	4	21	0.87	many
make	4	20	0.83	make, making
every	5	19	0.79	every
know	4	18	0.75	know, knows
new	3	18	0.75	new
believe	7	16	0.67	believe, believed
need	4	16	0.67	need, needed, needs
presidents	10	16	0.67	president, presidents
get	3	15	0.62	get, gets, getting
hard	4	14	0.58	hard
jobs	4	14	0.58	job, jobs
business	8	13	0.54	business, businesses
like	4	13	0.54	like
now	3	13	0.54	now
want	4	13	0.54	want

Table 1- Word Frequency of campaign launch speech

Throughout the speech, Hillary gives hints that point to the idea of gender equality, thus making gender the underlying theme of the discourse; she begins by describing the venue as “with absolutely no ceilings” and ends by expressing her wish for “an American where a father can tell his daughter: yes, you can be anything you want to be. Even President of the United States”, marking features of women’s empowerment. As for the ideas expressed and enforced by word repetition, one can observe (*see table 1*) that *work* is the main word she uses, suggesting sustained efforts that lead to prosperity; *America*, *family*, *people* and *country* weigh on the communicational effort, amounting to almost 7% of the words. Other significant words underline actions, wishes or preferences: *many*, *make*, *know*, *new*, *believe*, *need*, *get*, *hard*, *now*, *want*; they and emphasize Clinton’s knowledge of what the electorate expects and projected ways to accomplish it.

The second speech in our analysis marks a significant difference between the current campaign and the one held in 2007, as it sets the tone for the campaign under the gender dimension, highly and explicitly capitalizing on it. The location chosen for this rhetorical performance speaks for itself and sends a strong signal. The speech is shorter than the first one, lasting for 23 minutes¹¹, amounting to 1581 words, 789 different ones. It is a slightly more complex vocal performance, of 49.9% lexical density and a readability index of 8.2, which weighs the simplicity in conveying an in-depth campaign message. The average sentence comprises 16.57 words and 20.5% of the time she uses three-character words, thus facilitating the public's comprehension.

Clinton declares her intention of running a campaign centered on the gender dimension: "Well, that's the point. When women are held back, our country is held back. When women get ahead, everyone gets ahead", suggesting that women's political empowerment is a symbol of democracy, development and evolution. Once again, Hillary capitalizes on her mother's figure in order to emphasize the struggles women used to face, which are still present in some parts of the world and in the U.S., to some extent. Also, the speaker dedicates her women's empowerment achievements to her mother: "For me, the earliest inspiration, and really, still today my guiding light, was my mother". Moreover, she adds on her experience as a mother and grandmother, and as a professional and politician. The "*listening tour*"

strategy is employed through all her speech, as it represents a series of acquired experiences through interaction with remarkable women, thus empowering women by means of personal example and personally-known examples.

Hillary reiterates her historical rhetorical performance in Beijing, in 1995, emphasizing its impact on closing the gender gap on a global level and her consistency in accomplishing her

Word	Length	Count	Weighted Percentage (%)	Similar Words
women	5	54	3.92	women
just	4	21	1.52	just
work	4	16	1.16	work, worked, working
world	5	16	1.16	world
family	6	14	1.02	families, family
country	7	12	0.87	countries, country
get	3	12	0.87	get, gets, getting
one	3	12	0.87	one
far	3	11	0.80	far
mother	6	11	0.80	mother, mothers
rights	6	11	0.80	right, rights
many	4	10	0.73	many
years	5	10	0.73	year, years
back	4	9	0.65	back, backed
make	4	9	0.65	make
still	5	9	0.65	still
today	5	9	0.65	today
want	4	9	0.65	want, wanted, wants
around	6	8	0.58	around
every	5	8	0.58	every
girls	5	8	0.58	girl, girls
know	4	8	0.58	know
leaders	7	8	0.58	leaders
now	3	8	0.58	now

¹¹ Speech transcript retrieved online from <http://www.hillaryclinton.com/2015-keynote.html>

desideratum: “human rights are women’s rights, and women’s rights are human rights”. Thus, she declares the following: “And in the years that followed, we have seen change. [...] Women elected to lead communities and countries. [...] And last month, the Clinton Foundation and the Gates Foundation unveiled a sweeping new report that gathers twenty years of data from around the world to document how far we have come and how far we still have to go”. By this means, Clinton conveys consistency between words and actions, in an attempt to build on her public credibility. She also plays the First Lady and the Secretary of State cards, and presents achievements in women’s situation on a global scale and her worldwide networking efforts meant to bring her own contribution.

Another feature similar to the other speech consists in her expressing strong words against her opponents. In order to criticize the delay in appointing Loretta Lynch as Attorney General, she uses a five-time repetition of the phrase “those who offer themselves as leaders”, underlining the ease of leadership positions to some – she was implicitly hinting at Republicans –, as opposed to women, who are still facing obstacles. In enforcing the idea of obstacles, Clinton states that “women are held back” twice.

In building the speech, the female candidates also listed gender-specific areas which need further work and interest in order to reach gender equality, thus closing the global gender

Table 2- Word Frequency of women’s right speech

gap. Namely, she mentioned educational attainment gaps, violence, reproductive rights, safety and security, a remaining workforce gap, all aspects that still “fall disproportionately heavily on women”; Clinton confidently states that “The answer is, we can do a lot. If we do it together”.

One persuasive communication strategy that seems to be capitalized on by the female presidential candidate is the *rule of 3*, used heavily in this speech: “Who need to be surrounded by people who believe in them, that lift them up and help them find their paths as well.”, “And she believed in me, and she encouraged me, and set high standards for me.”, “[...] our mothers and sisters and daughters are on the frontlines of all these battles”, “We have seen women all over the world become agents of change, drivers of progress, makers of peace”, “Yes, we’ve nearly closed the global gender gap [...]. Yes, we’ve increased the number of countries [...]. Yes, we’ve cut the maternal mortality rate in half [...]”.

Hillary Clinton repeatedly emphasizes women's duty to contribute to women's global status, stating that "we have to" four times, and the main words she uses throughout the speech refer to *women* (amounting to 4% of the content), and the constant worldwide efforts and struggle to bring women's rights on the public agenda: *just, work, world, country, family, get, far, mother, rights, years, make, want, leaders, now, today, still*.

Conclusions

In building her way to the Oval Office, Hillary Clinton displays a high discursive bid, by presenting to two familiar crowds the achievements she has acquired since holding the *ladyship*, the contribution she has brought to society since starting her career as a lawyer, and the global progress she has made or facilitated during her activity as U.S. Secretary of State.

By rhetorical mechanisms like the force of the personal example, the "listening tour" – used since before serving in Congress in order to reach her public –, tying her image to those of leaders of the United States, criticizing – more or less explicitly – her opponents, and the Rule of 3, meant to create tension during speech delivery, Hillary Clinton builds and presents two discourses that list past achievements, works in progress, and a set of coherent solutions to salient issues within today's U.S. or global societies. Clinton chooses two contexts of high symbolical resonance in order to enhance the impact of her speeches and builds on the idea of women's representation and empowerment.

Moreover, the discourses Hillary gives might not present the same structure, themes, or line of argumentation, but we can clearly identify a communicational pattern in the way she delivers the message and conveys the meanings, which can be framed as her persuasive campaign strategy.

In the light of all presented aspects, Hillary Clinton has started a road already taken twice, expecting a different result, considering the accomplishments she has marked since her last attempt for presidency. While the email controversy apparently faded away and the Benghazi hearing did not manage to discourage her, Clinton's speeches present a clear understanding of past events, of the current situation, and express a high amount of optimism regarding women's political empowerment and America's overall progress. Her nomination in the Democratic

convention would certainly be a step towards marking contemporary history, by generating the first elected female president of the world's largest and strongest democracy, which would weigh on women's empowerment phenomenon on a global scale.

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