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HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON AND SHIFTS IN GENDERED RHETORICAL STYLE

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Abstract

Hillary Rodham Clinton is arguably the most visible and controversial female political figure of our time. As First Lady, the Senator from New York, the Secretary of State, and a two-time Presidential candidate, the rhetorical space around Clinton is saturated with cultural assumptions of gender, power, and politics. In many ways Clinton is emblematic of the infamous “double bind” that all women who seek to challenge normative gendered roles must inevitably face. Much academic and cultural focus has been centered on the ways in which Hillary Rodham Clinton is a subject of gendered rhetoric. This paper, instead, builds on the vein of scholarship that examines the ways in which Clinton herself has used gendered rhetoric across her career as a candidate for public office. By examining the public addresses that Clinton has given at the beginning and end of each of her four campaigns for office, I examine how she embraces and rejects a traditionally feminine rhetorical style over time. This analysis provides insight into the ways that Clinton has adapted her rhetoric across almost two decades as a political candidate and provides clues as to the cultural tone set by Clinton for other women seeking public office. Taken holistically, shifts in Hillary Rodham Clinton’s gendered rhetorical style are illustrative of both her personal struggle with the double bind, and the larger cultural understanding of women in politics.

Methods

For the purposes of a general overview of Clinton’s rhetorical styles across time, I chose to look at the announcement and victory/concession speeches of each of her four campaigns for office: 2000 and 2006 for the Senate and 2008 and 2016 for the Presidency. It does not appear that Clinton gave a 2006 announcement address, most likely because she was merely running for

re-election. Therefore my sample only includes seven speeches. It is also worth noting that in 2008, Clinton did not have an announcement address, but instead published a video announcing her candidacy. Although this is a shorter text, the language used mirrors her overall style in 2008, and so I deemed it acceptable for analysis. In 2016 she published both a video and gave a formal address, and so I chose the longer in-person speech to analyze.

I began by searching for appropriate criteria to identify feminine and masculine rhetorical styles. It is worth noting here that the field of rhetorical theory is increasingly moving away from a binary rhetorical style model and recognize that many orators exist outside of “masculine” or “feminine.” However, given the unique gendered constraints on Hillary Clinton, and the frequency with which her femininity, or lack thereof, is noted in public, the two-gender model here is more appropriate. I am not claiming that Clinton fits perfectly into one of these gendered styles, indeed, as I explore, her style is exceedingly mixed. However, Clinton is also responding to an environment that assumes a gender binary and expects her to perform gender appropriately. For this reason, I am basing my criteria for masculine and feminine styles on the work of Karlyn Khors Campbell, specifically her article “The rhetoric of women’s liberation: An oxymoron.”¹

Campbell lays out six characteristics of feminine style: a personal tone, disclosing personal experiences, inductive reasoning, using anecdotes or examples as evidence, inviting audience participation, and creating speaker/audience identification. While Campbell does not explicitly describe masculine style, it can be inferred by what feminine style is not: using an impersonal, professional tone, using general or common knowledge, deductive reasoning, using statistics or experts as evidence, and a more formal speaker/audience relationship.

¹ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "The Rhetoric Of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron", *Communication Studies* 50, no. 2 (1999): 125-137.

It is important to note that rather than viewing these as categories in which we can place rhetors, they are strategic choices that orators use to perform gender on the public stage. The goal of this paper is not to pigeonhole Clinton into one of these styles, but rather to examine when she chooses to enact a feminine style, and when she finds a masculine style more appropriate. In this way, we can consider not only how Clinton's rhetoric has changed over her nearly two decades of running for office, but also how she may be rejecting and reinforcing the gender binary.

2000 Announcement²

On February 7, 2000, then First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton announced her candidacy for the U.S. Senate representing the State of New York. Choosing to run while Bill Clinton was still in office was an unprecedented move, and her campaign would be covered nationally. Overall, this address used an incredible amount of feminine style, including the use of a maternal persona to justify her candidacy. She begins with five paragraphs of thank yous, ending with thanking her family. As she begins to discuss her qualifications for office she sets up a familial theme that she will return to again and again: "I've raised a child and I've spent 30 years trying to better the lives of children and families."³ In the next paragraph she enumerates the "challenges that lie ahead," which include "strengthen[ing] our families" "protect[ing] our children" and "improv[ing] our schools."⁴ Here, in addition to using feminine style, Clinton is also addressing feminine content. These can all be described as maternal goals and have long been areas of policy in which women are more accepted. The two policy goals that are not explicitly feminine are, health care and jobs. These are briefly mentioned after the string of more

² Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Announcement," (Speech, February 7, 2000), The New York Times, <https://partners.nytimes.com/library/politics/camp/020700sen-ny-dem-text.html>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

feminine policies, which establishes a pattern throughout many of Clinton's speeches where she uses feminine content to mask or temper more masculine content.

Clinton uses "we" rather than "I" consistently throughout the address, encouraging audience participation and identification. Early on she states, "We can do what seems impossible if we have the vision, the passion and the will to do it together. We've seen what's possible and the progress we've made over the last seven years and I am proud and grateful to have been a part of it."⁵ It's important to note here that rather than indicating that she has been a leader in the progress made in the past, Clinton merely portrays herself as a participant who has "been a part of it." In fact, she officially announces her candidacy based not on her own leadership or accomplishments, but on this collective identity: "Because I believe we can meet these challenges together, I am honored today to announce my candidacy for the United States Senate from New York."⁶ Clinton is not running for the Senate based on her own qualifications or vision, she's running to be a cog in a collective machine.

Another pattern in this speech is the pairing of more masculine or professional policy goals with qualifying or unifying language in order to temper these claims with femininity. Ten paragraphs which line out more specific policy goals begin with the phrase "I'll be on your side in the fight..."⁷ Clinton isn't promising to be any kind of champion but rather to work with or on the side of her supporters. Even the word "fight" here misleadingly masculine as in the previous paragraph she clearly defined that she intended to "fight my heart out for you..."⁸ Clinton is indeed going to "fight," which can be seen as masculine, but she won't be relying on her physical or mental strength. She'll be relying on her emotional strength and her "heart." This is

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

another example of pairing strong feminine style with more masculine statements in order to temper them.

The theme of the entire address is one of Clinton “earning” votes and working “for” people. She repeats several times that she’s asking voters to “put me to work *for* you” and stating that “all of you will decide whether I’ve earned the privilege of serving you” [emphasis added].⁹ She’s not running to achieve something for herself, or even women, she’s running to serve people. Overall, the style of this address is extremely feminine, and includes feminine content. Clinton is introducing herself as a political candidate in a manner which mirrors her performance of First Lady and takes full advantage of feminine style.

2000 Victory¹⁰

Clinton’s victory speech at the end of 2000 in many ways continues the themes that were present in her announcement. Her tone is distinctly emotional, and she is focused on expressing gratitude and thanking others. In addition to the typical political thank yous, Clinton also spends much of the speech thanking “the people,” stating that “because of you, here we are.”¹¹ Consistent with a feminine persona, there is no acknowledgement of Clinton’s own efforts or work, she instead focuses on collective accomplishment and being “worthy of your faith and trust.”¹²

Clinton also avoids making any distinct “I” policy promises. Instead she talks in broad strokes of what “we” can accomplish. She establishes the “we” tone after her thank yous by stating, “Today we voted as Democrats and Republicans; tomorrow we begin again as New

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Victory Speech,” (speech, November 7, 2000), ABC News, <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/story?id=122567&page=1>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

Yorkers.”¹³ This is a distinctly unifying statement and encourages voters to discard their partisan identities to come together in almost a familial-like way. Clinton also uses lots of stories of New Yorkers that she’s met to inductively support her victory. She says of the “people whose faces and stories I will never forget,” “you have taught me.”¹⁴ After someone in the audience shouts out about Long Island, Clinton responds by thanking voters from Long Island, a showing both a personal tone and a willingness to invite audience participation, reinforcing the idea of “we.”

Overall, in 2000 Hillary Clinton used a feminine rhetorical style almost exclusively. Even in the moments where she employed a masculine style, it was always followed up with feminine statements or style in order to soften it. Clinton’s use of feminine style makes sense, given that to most people she was the first lady, an extremely feminine role.

2006 Victory¹⁵

Clinton’s victory speech on November 7, 2008 after winning re-election to the Senate is strikingly different from her addresses in 2000. Perhaps due to her experiences in the United States Senate Clinton seems much more confident and willing to speak in a masculine style. To start, the policies she addresses are much broader than children and family. Although she begins her first policy paragraph with “Together, we have chosen a new course,” she continues by addressing the economy first and foremost and does not address children until she mentions the

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Hillary Clinton Reelected Senator,” (Speech, New York City, NY, November 7, 2006), Iowa State University: Archives of Women’s Political Communication, <http://www.womenspeecharchive.org/women/profile/speech/index.cfm?ProfileID=65&SpeechID=5659>.

federal deficit.¹⁶ In fact this is the only time which she mentions children in the speech, and she never mentions family as a broad concept.

There are moments in the 2006 address when Clinton might be read as using a feminine style. However, by looking deeper, and comparing it to her 2000 rhetoric, it becomes clear that comparatively, it's quite different than the style she used in 2000. She repeats the unifying "we" stating, "we will together have a New York team that will get things done for the people of our state."¹⁷ Despite a similar unifying message, however, her rhetoric is much more action-oriented and direct than in 2000. The phrase "get things done" indicates a willingness to take unilateral action, as opposed to her earlier emphasis on listening and collaboration. The structure of her speech is also much more deductive. She makes broad statements like "New Yorkers and Americans want an end to the culture of corruption and dominance of special interest."¹⁸ This kind of overarching declaration suggest that not only does Clinton have the authority to make these observations, she also has the authority to "roll up [her] sleeves and get to work."¹⁹

The statement that I think exemplifies the shift in Clinton's 2000 and 2006 rhetoric reads, "I have to say that whenever I go to the floor of the Senate, to speak on your behalf, and the presiding officer calls on me, and says the senator from New York, it is the greatest privilege that I could have, to be your senator."²⁰ Here there are definite notes of deference, of Clinton being grateful for the "privilege" of being a senator, rather than acknowledging her own qualifications to do so. However, the above statement also accentuates the power that Clinton has as a member of the Senate, and as someone who speaks for the entire State of New York. This embracing of her own authority is new to Clinton's rhetoric in 2006.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

Overall, Clinton's 2006 speech sounded much more like the Hillary Clinton I've grown up knowing. I'm not sure that if I heard her 2000 addresses I would have distinctly known it was her. However, as we'll see in 2008 and 2016, Clinton blends the feminine style exhibited in 2000 and the masculine style of 2006 as she moves forward in her political career.

2008 Announcement²¹

Hillary Clinton's 2008 announcement video for her presidential run is almost a perfect blend of her 2000 and 2006 styles. It's definitely more masculine than her 2000 speeches, but also more feminine than the style she used in 2006. The setting of the video is worth noting; Clinton is wearing a bold, red masculine blazer, but sitting in a femininely decorated living room, as if inviting company to join her on the couch. This in itself illustrates the way Clinton begins to blend masculinity and femininity in 2008. Clinton continues to avoid her previous emphasis on children and family, but also is less hesitant to use personal experiences and inductive structure. The first half of the video emphasizes collective action, "we all need to be part of the discussion if we're all going to be part of the solution -- and all of us have to be a part of the solution."²² This emphasis on collectivism is feminine as it invites many voices to the table, but it also is much more action-driven than parts of her 2000 speeches.

The first policy she mentions is the war in Iraq, and she's not necessarily advocating for peace, but "how to bring about the right end."²³ She goes on to mention energy independence, Social Security and Medicare, and healthcare. Although in the past she had positioned some of these issues in terms of supporting families and children, she does not do so now. Instead she

²¹ Hillary Rodham Clinton, "2008 Presidential Announcement," (Speech, January 20, 2007), Iowa State University: Archives of Women's Political Communication, <http://www.womenspeecharchive.org/women/profile/speech/index.cfm?ProfileID=65&SpeechID=3373>.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

positions herself rather aggressively against George Bush and states that after his administration, “it is time to renew the promise of America.”²⁴ This is more forceful and deductive than 2000.

However, in the next segment of the speech, she talks about her personal story, and discusses her journey from a “middle-class family in the middle of America” to “trying to make good on” the promise of America.²⁵ She does mention her experience working on women’s and children’s issues: “Whether it was fighting for women’s basic rights or children’s basic health care, protecting our social security or protecting our soldiers...”²⁶ However, she ends the phrase with an emphasis on soldiers rather than just focusing on more feminine issues. She ends the short video by inviting her supports to “chat” and lamenting that she “can’t visit everyone’s living room.”²⁷ This invitation to participate is a characteristic of feminine style, and ends the video on a softer note than it began.

2008 Concession²⁸

Clinton’s use of feminine style in 2008 would come roaring back in her concession speech to Barack Obama. Although parts of her masculine style developed in 2006 are present, this speech is much closer to the 2000 speeches than anything else. The structure is almost entirely inductive, and Clinton spends a lot of time not just discussing her experiences and the stories of her supporters, but also addressing her gender head-on for the first time in these speeches.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Hillary Rodham Clinton, “Concession Speech,” (Speech, Washington, DC, June 7, 2008), Iowa State University: Archives of Women’s Political Communication, <http://www.womenspeecharchive.org/women/profile/speech/index.cfm?ProfileID=65&SpeechID=643>.

Clinton's opening line sets the tone for the rest of the speech: "Well, this isn't exactly the party I'd planned, but I sure like the company."²⁹ This is an incredibly personal tone, acknowledges her failure to win, and puts the focus on her supporters, her "company" rather than herself. She goes on to list the multitude of ways that people have helped her, focusing on the specific, touching stories of a young girl and an 88-year-old woman who supported her. Clinton does reintroduce the "fighting for you" rhetoric, but in an extremely nurturing and inductive way: "Remember -- we fought for the single mom...the woman who grabbed my hand...the young man in the Marine Corps t-shirt who waited months for medical care and said, 'Take care of my buddies over there and then, will you please help take care of me?'"³⁰ This story of the Marine is notable; although she's talking about "fighting" for him, by positioning his story in terms of caretaking, Clinton is fighting as a mother or a nurturer. She takes a phrase that she has used in a masculine style in the past – fighting -- and reframes it to emphasize her femininity.

As Clinton moves into her endorsement of Barack Obama, she continues her inductive, personal structure. She begins by discussing her own personal experiences with Obama: "I have had a front row seat to his candidacy, and I have seen his strength and determination, his grace and his grit."³¹ She also describes his story, how he grew up and how that has informed his campaign as a foundation for making a full-throated endorsement of his candidacy. These parts of concession speeches can be a bit awkward and disingenuous, since the candidate has spent months criticizing and attacking the person they must now endorse. Clinton's however, rings true, partially because she uses a feminine style in this section in particular. She brags about Obama as one might a relative, or even a child, positioning herself as the benevolent mother of the party, encouraging the younger generation to succeed.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

Returning to the theme of unity, Clinton states, “The Democratic Party is a family, and its now time to restore the ties that bind us together...”³² Again, she is playing the graceful matriarch, and the familial metaphor that she’s only alluded to in the past is now stated explicitly. She uses this talk of unity to bind her policy agenda to Obama’s, in the end claiming that the government’s role is to provide “help for the most important job there is: caring for our families.”³³

Perhaps the most interesting part of Clinton’s speech comes when she addresses her gender directly: “Could a woman really serve as a Commander-in-Chief? Well, I think we answered that one.”³⁴ This statement fascinating, because Clinton is claiming to have broken a gender barrier despite losing to a man. However, she refuses to explicitly answer her own question, dodging a controversial subject. She follows this line with “And could an African American really be our President? Senator Obama has answered that one.”³⁵ Here Clinton is inviting audience participation and asking her audience to validate the controversial pairing her experience as a woman with Obama’s experience as a black man. This serves to both call out sexism and racism and to smooth over a contentious primary in which both sides used gender/race as a weapon. In this way she is embracing bias, but doing so in an entirely feminine way, using appeals to unity and collectivism to move the party forward.

The next paragraph is perhaps the clearest statement of Clinton’s complicated relationship with femininity: “Now, on a personal note -- when I was asked what it means to be a woman running for President, I always gave the same answer: that I was proud to be running as a woman but I was running because I thought I’d be the best President. But I am a woman, and

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

like millions of women, I know there are still barriers and biases out there, often unconscious.”³⁶ Here Clinton is both embracing and rejecting her femininity as a part of her candidacy. First, she qualifies the entire statement as a “personal note” ignoring the broader social implications of her candidacy. She acknowledges that gender is a subject she’s thought about, although she is careful to say she is asked about the topic rather than bringing it up on her own. Then, she distances herself from her womanhood, stating instead that she’d be the “best.” Finally, she contradicts herself and acknowledges broader institutional sexism. The statement ends there however and it is unclear how Clinton feels that sexism has affected her race.

This section is made even more bewildering by the following paragraphs in which she states she was running as a daughter and a mother. Here she embraces feminine womanhood and suggests it did indeed fuel her candidacy. Then, to make things even more complex she ends the paragraph by saying “you can be so proud that from now on, it will be unremarkable for a woman to win primary state victories, unremarkable to have a woman in a close race to be our nominee, unremarkable to think that a woman can be the President of the United States.”³⁷ She goes on to make her famous “18 million cracks” in the glass ceiling remark, reference the Seneca Falls suffragists and abolitionists, and finally, “Because of them, and because of you, children today will grow up taking for granted that an African American or a woman can yes, become President of the United States.”³⁸ It is obvious here that Clinton feels an unresolvable tension between embracing feminine womanhood, embracing stereotype-challenging womanhood, and not wanting to be defined by her femininity or her womanhood. To top it off, all of this is happening in a speech in which Clinton uses unmistakable feminine style to a degree that is matched only by her rhetoric in 2000, while she was still a First Lady.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

Clinton ends her emotional address with what seems to be a summary of her theory of government:

So today, I'm going to count my blessings and keep on going. I'm going to keep doing what I was doing long before the cameras ever showed up and what I'll be doing long after they're gone: Working to give every American the same opportunities I had, and working to ensure that every child has the chance to grow up and achieve his or her God-given potential. I will do it with a heart filled with gratitude, with a deep and abiding love for our country --and with nothing but optimism and confidence for the days ahead.³⁹

It is worth noting that this is the first time Clinton has mentioned God or her faith in a substantial way in one of these speeches. Appeals to faith and piety were an extremely common rhetorical tactic of first wave American feminists. Clinton's use of scripture seems to acknowledge this history and position herself even more firmly in a traditionally feminine tone.

2016 Announcement⁴⁰

Finally, I'll look at Hillary Clinton's most recent, and possibly last campaign for public office. Clinton was the presumptive nominee since her loss in 2008, and so there was a lot of expectations going into her 2016 announcement address. This long, detailed speech was given on June 13, 2015 and is similar to her 2008 announcement in that she blends both masculine and feminine styles. However, unlike 2008, this speech was dominated by feminine style, and Clinton seemed more willing to address her gender and femininity head on, like in her 2008 concession speech.

The overall theme of the speech is economics and Clinton begins by introducing her family narrative. She talks about her grandfather who worked in a lace mill and her father who started a small business. She frames these American Dream stories in terms of these men

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Official Campaign Launch," (Speech, New York City, NY, June 13, 2015), Iowa State University: Archives of Women's Political Communication, <http://www.womenspeecharchive.org/women/profile/speech/index.cfm?ProfileID=65&SpeechID=3372>.

providing for their families. When describing the current economic situation, she frames it again in terms of individual experiences: “You worked extra shifts, took second jobs, postponed home repairs...you figured out how to make it work...America can’t succeed unless you succeed.”⁴¹

This is a continuation of Clinton’s pattern of using feminine style to address policy issues that aren’t typically considered feminine themselves.

However, this is also the section where Clinton uses the most masculine style as well. She uses more deductive structure than we’ve previously seen, making decisive statements about the cause and solution to economic recession: “Instead of an economy built by every American, for every American, we were told that if we let those at the top pay lower taxes and bend the rules, their success would trickle down to everyone else.”⁴² Even this is sprinkled with feminine style, however, as Clinton uses phrases that invite audience participation like “What happened?” and “You know where we ended up.”⁴³

The biggest difference in this 2016 speech is the reason Clinton states for running. Whereas in her 2008 concession speech, Clinton returns to children and opportunity, in this speech she does not make explicit mention to children or families: “I’m running to make our economy work for you and for every American...For the factory workers...For the nurses...For the truckers...For the veterans...For the small business owners.”⁴⁴ She offers a brief explanation of globalization and economic factors, then claiming decisively, “Our next President must work with Congress and every other willing partner across our entire country. And I will do just that -- to turn the tide so these currents start working for us more than against us.”⁴⁵ This is perhaps the

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

most stylistically masculine phrase in the speech, even though it still has themes of collaboration and unity at its core.

Toward the middle of the speech we see a return of the personal tone Clinton has always relied on. After a tongue in cheek reference to a Beatles song, she jokes “And you’re lucky I didn’t try singing that, too, I’ll tell you.”⁴⁶ This sort of personal aside to the audience invites them to have a more informal relationship with the rhetor. Also, for the first time, Clinton acknowledges her identity as a woman with reproductive rights: “They [Republicans] shame and blame women, rather than respect *our* right to make *our* own reproductive health decisions” [emphasis added].⁴⁷ In previous speeches she’s only addressed this as an impersonal issue that isn’t necessarily attached to her.

However, later in the speech, Clinton distances herself from womanhood again after addressing paid family leave and the wage gap: “This isn’t a women’s issue. It’s a family issue.”⁴⁸ She continues by saying the minimum wage, child care, marriage rates, incarceration, addiction, and mental health are all “family issues.” It is interesting how Clinton takes a variety of issues that are often associated with separate groups in society and brings it all back to the family model. This is a more maternal tactic, but it also means that Clinton rejects the importance of “women’s issues.”

Toward the end of the speech is where we see Clinton really embrace her role as potentially the first female President. “Well, I may not be the youngest candidate in this race. But I will be the youngest woman President in the history of the United States! And the first grandmother as well. And one additional advantage: You won’t see my hair turn white in the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

White House. I've been coloring it for years!"⁴⁹ In one breath, Clinton both embraces her groundbreaking role, and reinforces her traditional femininity with her hair coloring remark. Obviously, it was meant as tongue in cheek, especially given the overwhelming attention Clinton's looks get in the media, however, it still indicates that Clinton is aware that if elected, she would have to be more cognizant of her physical appearance than her male predecessors.

Clinton ends by talking about her mother, her daughter and granddaughter, and driving home her personal narrative. She ends by envisioning "An America where a father can tell his daughter: yes, you can be anything you want to be. Even President of the United States."⁵⁰ Unlike 2008, Clinton chooses to reinforce her gender at the end of this speech, making the connection between her personal candidacy and gendered politics that she seemed so hesitant to make in her 2008 concession. Although this speech has its own contradictions about womanhood and femininity, by 2015 Clinton had seemed to come to terms with the fact that her candidacy will in some ways always be about gender.

2016 Concession⁵¹

Given the day after the election, this short speech was an extremely emotional event and followed an incredibly close and contentious night of counting and recounting votes. Much like 2008, for this speech Clinton returns to a feminine style that is reminiscent of 2000. She addresses her audience like we can imagine she addressed her staff: "I'm sorry we did not win this election for the values we share and the vision we hold for our country...You represent the

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Presidential Concession Speech," (Speech, New York City, NY, November 9, 2016), Iowa State University: Archives of Women's Political Communication, <http://www.womenspeecharchive.org/women/profile/speech/index.cfm?ProfileID=65&SpeechID=5902>

best of America, and being your candidate has been one of the greatest honors of my life.”⁵²

Clinton is apologizing to her supporters, although one may claim that it is supporters or, more broadly, voters, who need to apologize to Clinton. The claiming of responsibility for a result that may or may not have been in her control is undoubtedly feminine. Aside from apologizing and thanking her supporters, she also tries to connect with them on an emotional level, “I know how disappointed you feel, because I feel it too.”⁵³

Her treatment of Donald Trump is also in a very feminine style. She “offered to work with him on behalf of our country,” and told her supporters, “we owe him an open mind and the chance to lead.”⁵⁴ This is incredibly different than her rhetoric during the campaign, obviously, but it is also more graceful than is perhaps expected. In particular, her focus on wanting to work with Trump and collaborate follows her pattern as using unity as an underlying topic.

Clinton also addresses the concept of womanhood, speaking to “all the women, and especially the young women” stating that “nothing has made me prouder than to be your champion.”⁵⁵ She goes on to talk about the glass ceiling that made her 2008 concession speech viral: “I know we have still not shattered that highest and hardest glass ceiling, but someday someone will--and hopefully sooner than we might think right now.”⁵⁶ This suggests a passing on of the torch. Despite her previous hesitancy to rhetorically embrace the role of the empowered woman, here Clinton encourages other women to keep the faith. She continues, “And to all the little girls who are watching this, never doubt that you are valuable and powerful and deserving of every chance and opportunity in the world to pursue and achieve your own dreams.”⁵⁷ Again,

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Clinton finds her way back to children and opportunity, but this time she does so in a way that more explicitly embraces her maternal femininity.

Clinton ends with another surprising appeal to faith: “You know scripture tells us, let us not grow weary of doing good, for in good season we shall reap. My friends, let us have faith in each other, let us not grow weary and lose heart, for there are more seasons to come and there is more work to do.”⁵⁸ In some ways this appeal to scripture and doing good is the same rhetoric used by suffragists one hundred years ago. No longer is Clinton attempting to draw her authority from her accomplishments or her experiences. Here she appeals to a higher power and to “faith in each other” and the source of collective encouragement. While in some ways her leadership is implied, we get the sense that Clinton is shedding the empowered champion image for a softer persona, more in line with what we saw in her 2000 speeches.

Discussion

Much more could be said about Clinton, and the rhetorical space she occupies in American politics. She is an incredibly complex public figure and a carrier for some of our most contested social issues. What I would like to do, however, in this discussion of the above seven speeches, is not talk about what Hillary Clinton is, but talk about what she does. The rhetorical choices when it comes to gendered style that I have outlined above, can tell us a lot about the choices Clinton had to make as one of the first significant female figures in American politics. Doing so, we can also consider what these choices tell us about gender, politics, and rhetoric.

First, these seven speeches indicate that Clinton’s preferred rhetorical style is feminine. Whether this is the style she naturally speaks in, or if it’s what she thinks is most effective for a woman on the public stage is almost impossible to tell. In any case, in times of vulnerability we

⁵⁸ Ibid.

see Clinton retreat to personal experience, inductive structure, and appeals to family, unity, and collectivism. Whether it be in 2000 as she was breaking the rigid First Lady mold, or when she lost contentious elections in 2008 and 2016, Clinton's hallmark style is mostly feminine.

It's also important to note that particularly in 2008 and 2016, Clinton started campaigns with a much more masculine style. She appealed to a broader base of policy, focused less on children and families, and was much more comfortable making broad, deductive arguments. She seems to come out swinging and embody the tough, empowered womanhood that is often projected onto her. However, by the end of these campaigns, Clinton tends to drop the toughness in favor of a more maternal, feminine kind of womanhood. In her concession speeches, particularly 2008, we see her wrestling between embracing empowered and feminine womanhood, and not wanting to be defined by gender.

Nothing could epitomize the double bind of femininity/competence more than this.⁵⁹ If I'm correct and Clinton is more comfortable using a feminine style, then she may have avoided some critiques on her gender performance early on, but was opening herself up to questions about her preparedness for the job. However, when she tried to compensate by using a more masculine tone, she was criticized for being too manly and not sensitive or feminine enough. However, Clinton also faced a triple bind. When she tried to balance feminine and masculine styles in order to seem appropriately female and competent, she also faced criticism from women who felt like she wasn't addressing gender and sexism enough. Ultimately Clinton had to choose between being the superwoman who acknowledged and celebrated womanhood but in a tough way, the manly woman who ignored her gender and tried to fit in by using a masculine style, and the appropriate woman who embraces her gender in a strictly feminine way. Any choice she

⁵⁹ Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Beyond The Double Bind*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

made, even a combination of the three as we particularly see in her 2008 concession speech, is going to be called wrong by one group of people.

This impossible choice shows just how difficult it still is to be a woman in American politics today. There is no right way to be a woman in the public sphere regardless of the rhetorical style one embodies. Even the third option, the superwoman, limits a woman's ability to communicate in a way that may feel more comfortable to her, and it requires all women in the public sphere to become tokens for what womanhood should look like. Instead of allowing the same kind of diversity of expression that we are fine within male candidates, women must play the tricky game of adjusting and readjusting their rhetoric in search of a sweet spot that just doesn't exist. Hillary Clinton's rhetorical progression shows that even sixteen years in a variety of elections with a variety of styles cannot make one immune to this ever-present bind.

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