Speech Supremacy:

A Statistical Investigation into the Interconnectivity of Gender Roles, Speech Dominance, and

Political Representation

4,680 words

Introduction

I was inspired to research gendered politics after watching the series of three presidential debates between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Wild and unpredictable, the 2016 presidential campaign offered a comical, horrifying view into the political exchanges between a man and a woman broadcasted on the national stage. A historic election in its own right, Clinton became America's first female presidential candidate for a major party after winning the Democratic nomination in October. Although Clinton lost the presidential election in November, four female Senators were elected, bringing the total number of women in the Senate to the record number of twenty. America's political climate is, and has always been, characterized by an extreme lack of diversity. Since the days of the Founding Fathers, America's political machine has been overwhelmingly white and male. Only in the last few decades have women and people of color begun to infiltrate the ranks of these political representatives. As just over one-fifth of the Senators are female, women in these legislative branch are still relatively rare.

This paper is an investigative report on the correlation between two complex fields of study, politics and gender. I chose to research one aspect of the inherent gender bias that inhibits women from joining the ranks of equally qualified men: speech dominance. Speech dominance is a measure of who controls a conversation. Why is this important in relation to politics? Subconsciously, as humans, we associate the loudest or most frequent voice with authority and leadership, just as we associate size with success (Pinkser). If this speech bias can be correlated with a particular gender, a specific subset of people are inherently predisposed to a more favorable reaction from viewers- therefore, a greater likelihood of being elected to serve in a

governing assembly. My research integrates the murky waters of speech psychology with the specific political climate of the Senate. Many facets of gendered political communication have not been investigated yet because the sample size of women in political office is too small to fully draw conclusions about the implications of femininity on bureaucratic opinion. However, equal political representation could be a reality in my lifetime. This research will shine light on societal stereotypes that complicate a female politician's journey into a position of power and answer a pivotal question in American political life: is there a relationship between gender and speech dominance in Senate debates?

Literature Review

Communication is an incredibly complex field because the brain makes involuntary judgments about appearance and body language in as little as 30 milliseconds (Holmes). Scientists have devoted years of research to develop extensive theories about the internal and external factors that affect the ways in which people interact. A plethora of studies reveals men tend to dominate conversations, in a phenomenon recently dubbed "mansplaining" (Rothman). Also, previous research evidences that in any social setting, women support each other more openly, and men interrupt women far more often than they are interrupted by women. The basis of my paper is rooted in the studies of many influential political scientists who have researched the effects and implications of gender on speech.

A 1998 study from Laura R. Winsky Mattei "Gender and Power in American Legislative Discourse" discusses the complex relationship between gender and communication styles. Mattei

attempts to quantify the difference in the ability of men and women to effectively communicate their ideas in political discourse. She undermines the metaphor of a legislative "melting pot" by refuting the idea that commensurate participation allows both sexes equal speaking representation (Mattei). Her research revealed that men have proportionally more speaking time in Senate hearings, and male Senators interrupted women far more often. Therefore, in 1998, women were inherently disadvantaged in legislative bodies. Mattei's paper provides the framework for my paper, as I analyze the relationship between gender and speech as of 2016.

A focal essay in the field of political speech dominance, Joanna Richards's "Let Her Finish: Gender, Sexism, and Deliberative Participation In Australian Senate Estimates Hearings (2006-2015)" provides pertinent information about the communicational differences between men and women. Although both Australia and the United States are large, relatively wealthy countries, the political and social climates of Australia vary dramatically from those of the United States. Women compose nearly 40 percent of the Australian Senate, in contrast to the United States's 21 percent. Richards analyzed transcripts from Senate hearings over a nine year period and categorized interruptions into three groups: defensive, negative, and positive. She discovered that women interrupted more often than men, but primarily interjected positively or defensively. Conversely, nearly 75 percent of male interruptions were used negatively to attack or belittle a fellow speaker. She attributes the "internalized misogyny" and hyper-masculine environment of a legislative assembly as inhibitors to the women's ability "to stay in [their] own gendered communication style and succeed" (Richards). I relied heavily on Richards's paper as a reference in my own research as I investigated how a woman's communication style differs from that of an equally qualified man.

Political scientists disagree about the various conclusions proposed by studies that investigate the role of women in legislature. Sarah Childs and Mona Lena Krook offer a thorough explanation of the critical mass theory, a term adapted from nuclear physics, in "Critical Mass Theory and Women's Political Representation." They propose that the "critical mass" is an actual, quantifiable percentage of women in governmental assemblies in relation to the total number of legislators at which these women can effectively influence the development of policy in the way that men can (Childs and Krook). Childs and Krook do not offer their own critical mass but merely define the term and identify its limitations.

However, Mendelberg, Karpowitz, and Oliphant analyze and challenge a study performed by Rosabeth Moss Kanter that predicts that male culture dominates when women do not compose at least 15 percent of a group. In other terms, Kanter's paper asserts that the minimum critical mass of a group is 15 percent. Kanter proposes that once the critical mass has been reached and women compose 35 percent of a group, they are able to effectively change the culture of a group. Mendelberg, Karpowitz, and Oliphant suggest that not only the percentage of women in the legislative body affects the women's authoritative status, but also that the existence of "institutional rules," the societal result of generations of traditional gender roles, contributes. Therefore, these researchers agree with Kanter that a critical value exists, but they acknowledge the complexity of quantifying an exact percentage by refraining from doing so.

Likewise, Karen Beckwith and Kimberly Cowell-Meyers describe the critical mass theory as "problematic and undertheorized in political science research" because numerous researchers dispute the critical mass threshold and conditions of the legislative assembly (Beckwith and Cowell-Meyers). They question the impact of a sheer number of women in a

legislative body because the critical mass theory is only a theory. Beckwith and Myers criticize the theory because there is no undeniable proof that any relationship (proportional, curvilinear, or absolute numbers) exists between the number of women and the legislative impact. They chose to ignore a critical mass and instead to examine governmental and civil societal contexts that enable women to contribute in the development of policy.

The purpose of this review is to illuminate prior research that highlights the significant connection between gender and political power. Through this investigation, the obvious inconsistencies in the conclusions of these researchers emerge. Whether the topic is the size, geographic location, or female representation of the congressional body, political scientists disagree over the evidence and implications that characterize their research. More analysis is necessary in order to illustrate the true ramifications of campaigning for legislative power as an American woman.

Methodology

I chose the broad topics of gender and leadership as a baseline for my research. After following the historic 2016 presidential election that included the first female candidate for a major party, I narrowed my focus to gendered politics. I attempt to analyze the difference in communication between men and women as they campaign for political office. To do so, I watched numerous hours of Senate debates from a wide variety of qualified candidates and geographic regions. I chose the Senate rather than the House of Representatives because the Senate has structured guidelines mandating that every state has two senators while the number of

congressmen depends on the population of the respective state. Although this paper briefly mentions the correlation between speech dominance and electoral victory, the focus of this research is to generalize whether men inherently dominate political conversations in these debate environments.

My research consisted of two phases: the gathering and analysis of information. To gather the data, I chose ten videos of debates between candidates for the Senate. Five debates feature both a male and female candidate. The other five are of two female candidates. I chose these two categories to discover if a discrepancy between the comparative speaking time of the candidates in relation to their gender exists. I used two stopwatches to time each candidate's speaking time over the course of the recorded debate and later recorded this information in the simplified chart shown below. Although I watched a total of twelve hours, six minutes, and fifty seconds, the total debate time included in the analysis section is nine hours, twenty-four minutes, and twenty seconds of airtime. I noted the variance ways in which the candidates addressed each other and their positions as they answered questions and defended their positions on different issues.

Woman- Republican		Woman - Democrat		Difference	% Difference
Linda Lingle	22:33	Mazie Hirono	23:36	1:03	5%
Wendy Long	23:39	Kirsten Gillibrand	22:16	1:23	6%
Susan Collins	28.33	Shenna Bellows	28.26	0:07	0%
Shelley Moore Capito	22:02	Natalie Tennant	22:28	0:26	2%
Kelly Ayotte	22:55	Maggie Hassan	22:00	0:55	4%
				Average	**3%**

Five debates between two female candidates

Man - Republican		Woman - Democrat		Difference	% Difference
Pat Toomey	22:46	Katie McGinty	20:38	2:08	10%
Richard Burr	22:51	Deborah Ross	18:58	3:53	20%
Chris Vance	22:42	Patty Murray	20:52	1:50	9%
Chuck Grassley	22:37	Patty Judge	21:18	1:19	6%
Joe Heck	16:53	Catherine Cortez Masto	19:14	2:21	-14%
				Average	6%
				Average - adjusted	**11%**

Five debates between male and female candidates

The debates follow a variation of a similar structure. Moderators alternate asking the candidates questions, and the candidate is allotted either sixty or ninety seconds to respond. The other candidate is given thirty or sixty seconds for a rebuttal. Although this format for Senate debates is designed to give each candidate the same amount of speaking time, I discovered early on that the candidates very frequently interrupted each other as well as the moderators. I recorded the number of interruptions in each debate but did not include this information in the analysis because the results were too dependent on the character of the individual candidates. The candidates often spoke for longer than their allotted response time, so I chose to investigate how much this additional time amounted to over the course of an hour long debate. In the early

months of this class, I considered documenting the 2016 presidential debates. After consideration, I decided this contentious election season did not meet the conditions of my methodology because the behavior of the candidates during their three televised meetings was too aggressive and polarized to draw an appropriate conclusion. However, these Senate debates were far more regulated by the moderators than the 2016 presidential debates were, so the candidates' conduct was far more reflective of traditional interaction between political opponents.

I analyzed the difference in the communication style of men and women as they campaign for political positions in the Senate. My first step in the investigative process after choosing a methodology was to formulate a hypothesis about what I expected from the results before I watched the debates and collected data. After I completed the research, I was able to compare the conclusions with my original beliefs about the topic. To arrive at a viable conclusion, I developed two hypotheses early in the research process: a null hypothesis and an alternative hypothesis.

A null hypothesis theorizes that there is no significant relationship between two variables; in this investigation, the null hypothesis is that there is no statistical connection between a candidate's gender and the likelihood that he or she will dominate the interaction. Contrastingly, the alternative hypothesis proposes that there is a statistically-significant relationship between the two variables. My alternative hypothesis is that in most cases, male candidates speak more over the course of a debate than female candidates do. After completing a literature review of the existing research in the field of gendered communication, I chose not to postulate that female candidates speak more in Senate debates than men do because the United States certainly has not

reached any sort of critical mass threshold researched by numerous political scientists as discussed in the literature review.

In experiments such as these, we focus on the null hypothesis to discover if the outcome is an effect of the independent variable or due to chance. The null hypothesis hinges on the two assumptions that any observed differences in the results are either to a sampling error, colloquially known as chance, or to the possibility that the independent variable has no impact on the results. In my research, as the structure, time period, and length of the ten debates are the same and therefore not extraneous variables, the gender of the candidates is the independent variable. I cannot truly prove that gender is the underlying reason that certain candidates speak more than others. However, if the evidence supports this conclusion, I can rule out the possibility that gender plays no role in the communicative process during Senate debates. Therefore, my goal in this research process was to either reject or fail to reject the null hypothesis. To reject the null hypothesis would be to conclude that the independent variable could indeed be the reason for the effect shown in the results. To fail to reject the null hypothesis would be to postulate that the independent variable has no effect on the conclusions.

Once I had watched the debates and recorded the speaking duration differences, I calculated the standard deviation with a TI-84 calculator. Standard deviation is a mathematical concept that tracks the distribution of numbers in relation to the mean, or average, of the data. In the field of statistics, mathematicians use standard deviation to compute how tightly the various examples cluster around the average of a set of data. The standard deviation is then organized into a bell curve in which the highest point is the average of the data. The parameters for the left and right boundaries of the graph are calculated by subtracting each data point from the average

and squaring the results. These numbers are then averaged to find how far the graph will deviate three times from the center point. In this format, the individual points can be plotted to measure how much each example deviates from the mean. I chose this method because the bell curve, known as a normal distribution to statisticians, allows me to examine the spread of the data in a visual example. The average includes all debates. In the beginning of the research process, I predicted that most of the debates between two women will fall to the left of the average, and the majority of debates between a man and a woman will be clustered to the right of the average.

I chose this methodology because this subject matter incorporated a large number of reference topics. I tracked the correlation between speech dominance, gender parity, and electoral success. I found a gap in the accepted body of knowledge because these three subject matters are all incredibly broad, understudied, and interconnected. The bell curve enabled me to visually see the discrepancies I previously could only predict with words. I used a calculator to generate my curve because my research focused on the application of formulas such as standard deviation, not the mathematical principle behind the generation of the graph. A statistical analysis allowed me to reject the null hypothesis and to postulate the true reasoning behind the results.

Statistical Analysis

Once I finished watching the interviews and recording the information, I organized the results into a table. I decided to use a mathematical test to discover if the pattern I observed in my results was significant enough to prove a correlation. I investigated whether the average

difference in speaking time in the two separate categories could be attributed to chance by calculating the mean difference for each. As I had expected, the average difference in speaking time for two women was far smaller. In fact, the average of the five debates between two women had a difference in speaking time of only forty-seven seconds. Contrastingly, the average of the five debates between both a man and a woman was two minutes and eighteen seconds. The average difference in speaking time of all ten debates was one minute and thirty-three seconds. This in itself evidences a notable discrepancy: in debates between two women, the average speaking time difference was a ninety seconds shorter than the average speaking time difference in debates with both a man and a woman.

I calculated the average percentage difference between the two sets of debates, as shown in the charts on page six. The five debates between two women had an average difference of only 3 percent. On the other hand, the second set of debates had double that, with an average difference of 6 percent. The difference in the last debate is recorded as a negative percentage because Cortez-Masto spoke for 14 percent more time than Heck did. Clearly, this debate is the figurative outlier in this set of data. I calculated the adjusted percentage difference in the last row as the calculation of the four debates that followed the same speech pattern- that is, every debate except that between Heck and Cortez Masto. The adjusted percentage difference is nearly *four times* larger than the average percentage difference of the debates between two women.
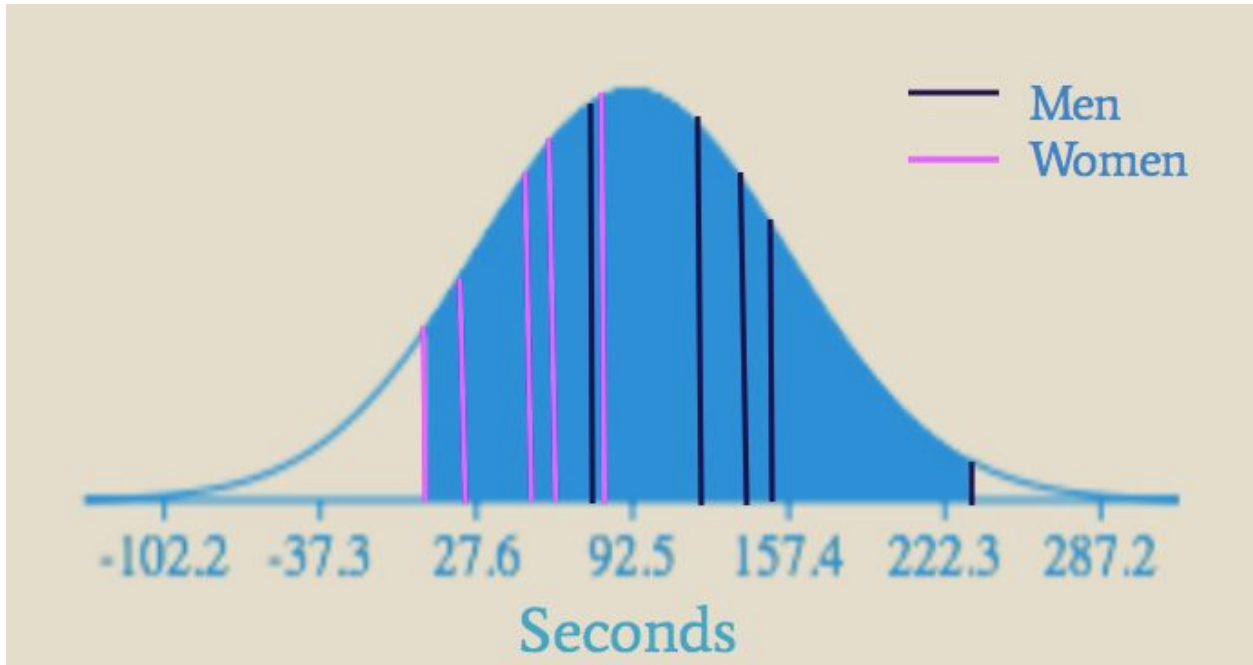
Bell curve generated: Distribution of speaking time differences

Mean (Centerline)	92.5
Sample standard deviation	64.9
Left range threshold	-102.2
Right range threshold	287.2
Sample sum	925
Sample size	10

Statistical reference points shown in the graph

Using a calculator, I found the standard deviation for the set of data to be 62.9. I multiplied the standard deviation by three to find the range from each endpoint to the centerline as 194.7 in both directions, as shown in the bell curve below. I used this calculation of the mean for all ten debates as the center line in the standard deviation bell curve and subsequently plotted the ten debates on the chart to evaluate if my hypothesis that the debates with two women would fall on the left of the average and the debates with both genders would fall on the right. What I

found was rather sobering. The low range of the curve extended to -102.2. Obviously, time cannot be measured negatively. What I can deduce from this is that to account for the difference in one debate between a man and a woman, the opposing time spread had to be stretched nearly two minutes in a dimension that does not exist. In the above graph, the shaded region indicates the range of speaking differences across along all ten debates, from seven to two hundred thirty-three seconds. Furthermore, every single debate between two women fell to the left of the average, meaning that these women shared the speaking time more equally than the average of all ten debates by a margin of at least ten seconds.

Several of the substantial time differences of individual debates are somewhat deceiving. The average of all ten debates was certainly higher in part as a result of the three minute and fifty-three second difference in the Senate debate for North Carolina. Correspondingly, the seven second difference, a statistically insignificant variation, in the debate between Shenna Bellows and Susan Collins considerably lowered the average for the debates between two women. Because the outlier test proved that none of the examples needed to be excluded from the analysis, even these seemingly stark differences were included in the calculations for the averages.

In the debates between two women, four of the five had smaller speaking time differences than the smallest between a man and a woman. The smallest difference between a man and a woman was the 2016 Iowa debate between Patty Judge and Chuck Grassley, in which Grassley spoke for one minute and nineteen seconds more than Judge. The only all-female debate that surpassed this difference was the 2012 debate for the state of New York between Wendy Long and Kirsten Gillibrand. I calculated a speaking difference of one minute and

twenty-three seconds for this debate, which means that the *longest difference* in debates between two women was a mere *four seconds longer* than the *smallest difference* between both a man and a woman.

Only one man in the second set of debates spoke less than the female candidate. Catherine Cortez-Masto, a Democrat who eventually won the Senate seat for the state of Nevada, spoke for two minutes and twenty-one seconds longer than Republican Joe Heck. As a significant difference and the only outlier to the speech pattern, this debate is a reflection of a major limitation of this methodology: the confounding variables that accompany the basic psychology of human nature. To restrict this information from my analysis and conclusion would be to distort the reality of such an investigation. Cortez-Masto's extreme dominance of her debate with a man is an important reminder that not all men and women reflect the inherent speech disparity that is present in so many of these debates.

Limitations

As previously stated, ten examples simply are not enough to prove a concrete correlation between any two variables. For this reason, the goal of this research project was to either reject or fail to reject the null hypothesis. It is important to recognize that the null hypothesis is not the opposite of the alternative hypothesis because the fate of the alternative hypothesis depends on the conclusions drawn about the null hypothesis. Rather, to reject the null hypothesis is to recognize that while I cannot prove that men always dominate political conversations in the

Senate debate environment, I can prove that gender has some effect on the speech behavior of the candidates.

A larger number of women have run for office in the twenty-first century than ever before: during the 2016 election cycle, sixteen women ran for Senate positions. However, female candidates are still rare enough that few women run against fellow female candidates. I limited my search for debates to the three previous election cycles, 2012, 2014, and 2016. In these three election periods, two women have run for the same position a total of six times. I had originally planned to include the results for all six, but I excluded the Californian debate between Loretta Sanchez and Kamala Harris because both are Democrats. A smaller subset of my analysis was to note the connection between speech dominance and political affiliation, and a debate in which both candidates share a party alliance was not advantageous to my methodology. Therefore, I only analyzed the debates in which both a Republican and a Democrat campaigned.

I had more options to choose debates with both a male and female candidate. I watched the 2016 Senate state for the state of Arizona between Ann Kilpatrick, a former congresswoman in the House of Representatives, and John McCain, a former presidential candidate for the Republican party. His experience campaigning for the presidency introduced an extraneous variable into the qualifications of the research subjects, so I excluded the results from the analysis. Likewise, I excluded the results from the Illinois debate between Tammy Duckworth and Mark Kirk. Kirk suffered a massive ischemic stroke in 2012, and as a result, he is wheelchair-bound and struggles to verbally communicate. I watched forty minutes of an eighty-one minute debate, and in that time, Duckworth spent four times as much talking as Kirk did. Halfway through the debate, it became clear Kirk's health issues have created a severe

speech impediment that would have damaged the internal validity of my conclusion had I included that particular debate's results.

In this format of analysis, numerical outliers do exist and can damage calculations for the average. To search for outliers in my data, I generated two normal probability plots first to evaluate a fit of distribution on the column for differences of speaking time of both sets of debates. I performed an outlier test in order to ensure that the statistical average was not distorted. The outlier test revealed that none of the data points were outliers, even those whose speaking difference appeared suspiciously large. For example, in the debate between incumbent North Carolinian Senator Richard Burr and lawmaker Deborah Ross, Burr spoke for nearly four minutes longer than Ross. In comparison, the second longest speaking difference was not even two and a half minutes, with a difference of more than ninety seconds between the two. Conversely, the Maine debate between incumbent Susan Collins and Shenna Bellows had the smallest margin of difference of all the examples as Collins spoke for only seven seconds longer than Bellows. However, the outlier test revealed that even a seven second or three minute and fifty-three second difference is not substantial enough to reflect an extreme disparity. Therefore, all of the examples I documented were viable for inclusion in the statistical analysis.

Conclusion

Obviously, ten interactions spanning nearly ten hours are not representative of every political interaction between men and women, but they certainly show several disturbing trends. As the male body has no anatomical or physiological speech advantage, there is no biological

foundation for this phenomenon of male-centric speech. Therefore, this pattern must be attributed to social and historical bias that have prevented women from entering political ranks with equally-qualified men. What I discovered over the course of this research study was that in debates with two female Senate candidates, speaking time is shared far more equitably as compared to debates that include both a male and female candidate. Furthermore, in the debates between a man and a woman, the man is significantly more likely to spend more time speaking than the woman does. I have rejected the null hypothesis to conclude that the genders of candidates can predict a general speech pattern in Senate debates.

In the smaller subset of my research, I documented whether the candidate who spoke more won or lost the final election in the chart below. I observed an interesting pattern: in the elections between two women, four of the five eventual winners spoke less. In the elections with both a male and female candidate, four of the five eventual winners spoke more. Perhaps this reveals the ingrained prejudice against a "loud woman." Hillary Clinton's bid for the 2016 presidential election embodied the backlash against assertiveness as she violated a deeply ingrained American gender role: the assumption that a woman cannot be president. The public reaction to her claim to such leadership is reminiscent of the sexual oppression encountered by many little girls, young women, and female adults over the course of their developmental years and professional lives.

It is important to note that to strengthen this conclusion, a far more intensive study is needed. As identified in the limitations section, the results of these elections depend heavily on the policies, personalities, and histories of the candidates. For the purpose of my investigation, I held these variables constant. To account for the variation of these factors, a statistical analysis

similar to mine would have to be conducted with hundreds of example debates. However, at this point in time, too few women have campaigned for seats in the Senate to organize the large-scale investigation needed to arrive at a true consensus. I hope that by conducting this investigation into the interconnectivity of gender roles, speech dominance, and political representation, the importance of the inclusion of women in government will be reaffirmed as the obstacles that stand in a female politician's way are revealed.

I conducted this investigation in hope that its implications become yet another catalyst to improve the representation of women in governing bodies to direct legislative action about matters that directly affect a woman's ability to make independent choices in her life. However, this research is important not only because of its political ramifications. From business meetings to legislative halls to operating rooms, the authority of women has continually been challenged by deep-rooted male dominance in spheres of influence. These conclusions embody the systematic repression of the female voice in positions of power that, despite recent decades of feminist activism, plagues every facet of political, economic, and social life of an American woman.

20 female Senators in the current 115th Congress

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