



Was Brett Kavanaugh's interview with his wife persuasive? Body language experts weigh in



THE BOSTON GLOBE

Brett Kavanaugh and his wife, Ashley, appeared on Fox News for an interview as sexual assault accusations cloud his possible Supreme Court confirmation.

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

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Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh, who is facing a pair of sexual misconduct allegations, [repeatedly denied](#) having ever sexually assaulted anyone during an interview that aired on Fox News on Monday night.

But what about his demeanor and mannerisms? Did he come across as believable? Will the interview

help persuade the American public to support him?

Body language experts weighed in Tuesday on those questions based on cues they picked up while watching the taped [interview](#) of Kavanaugh, who was questioned by Fox News' Martha MacCallum as he sat beside his wife, Ashley.

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The specialists offered a wide range of thoughts.

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Mary Civiello, who studies non-verbal communications, said she thinks Kavanaugh, in agreeing to do the interview, was trying to do more than just deny specific allegations against him.

“The larger goal is to send a message on how does he feels about women?” said Civiello, a New York-based executive communications coach. If he is ultimately appointed to the Supreme Court, “How is he going to treat women’s issues?”

“So the question is: Did he achieve his objective, which is assuring the American public he respects women?” she added.

Civiello said she did not feel he was particularly persuasive in that regard, citing, for example, how Kavanaugh barely looked at his wife during the interview, even as she spoke about how the public allegations had affected their family.

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Instead, she said, Kavanaugh looked down or at the interviewer.

"I would think when the spotlight is on my partner and the difficult situation she is in, almost your gut would say yeah, turn toward them," to show that "you're feeling for them in this situation," said Civiello. "Most of us would look and give that kind of, 'I'm with you.' You'd want to look over at them and commiserate."

Specialists said Kavanaugh kept himself well-composed as he gave responses they said were clearly something he'd rehearsed ahead of time.

Patti Wood, who wrote the book "Snap: Making the Most of First Impressions, Body Language, and Charisma," said that preparation made Kavanaugh appear too-robotic and inauthentic for the vast majority of the interview.

"The absence of emotion, that's not necessarily normal," said Wood, calling his denials of the specific allegations against him "short and unemotional."

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"The innocent person wants to convince you of their innocence," Wood said.

She said Kavanaugh only showed emotion in the interview's final moments, but Wood said that was directed not at trying to convince the public he's not guilty, but instead displayed how he appeared to feel "victimized" for being put under a harsh microscope.

However, Lillian Glass, a Los Angeles-based body-language expert, saw Kavanaugh's emotion at the end of interview totally differently.

"I think he's shown a genuine behavior," said Glass. "We saw a very human side of him, a very emotional side. There was no defensiveness, there was no arrogance, there was no hostility."

“I did not see one single sign of deception,” she added. “He was very forthright and did his job. I think he couldn’t have handled it better.”

Then again, for many viewers, whether or not Kavanaugh carried himself well during the interview may well depend on what they thought of him and his nomination beforehand.

“In this heated political climate, you’re going to interpret it any way you want,” said Glass. “Even if you see something, someone else won’t see it.”

Case in point, Kavanaugh’s wife appeared “completely uncomfortable” and “extremely nervous, as you can imagine,” said Civiello. But Glass said that while she could tell Ashley was angry over the accusations against her husband, “she was very measured and very much in control.”

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