

**Argumentativeness, Verbal Aggressiveness, and Relational Satisfaction  
in the Parliamentary Debate Dyad**

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Abstract

*This study explores the interconnectedness between argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness and relational satisfaction in the intercollegiate parliamentary debate dyad. The method used to conduct this research includes an adapted version of Infante & Rancer's Argumentativeness Scale, Infante & Wigley's Verbal Aggressiveness Scale, and Wheelless's Interpersonal Solidarity Scale. Some of the more noteworthy results are as follows: Self-report survey data from 89 intercollegiate parliamentary debaters indicate that debaters with similar levels of argumentativeness have high levels of relational satisfaction. Competitors in our study who chose their debate partner reported lower levels of verbal aggressiveness and higher levels of perceived partner argumentativeness than those who did not choose their partner. This research can be used by coaches and instructors alike when assigning debate partnerships on their forensics teams or in their classrooms.*

Forensics competition is a rhetorical institution in which students are trained to argue effectively. School participation in intercollegiate parliamentary debate has been on the rapid rise for some time now (Bingle, 1978; Crossman, 1996), and schools are continuously looking to expand their parliamentary debate programs (Dittus, 1998; Kuster, Olson & Loging, 2001). One of the primary goals of communication education is to equip students with the ability to communicate and to argue effectively (Dannels, 2001). Research shows that one of the most positive traits of an effective communicator is argumentativeness, whereas one of the most negative traits is verbal aggressiveness (Anderson & Martin, 1999; Beatty, Zelle, Dobos, & Rudd, 1994; Infante, Riddle Horvath, & Tumlin 1992; & Martin & Anderson, 1997). For instance, communication research has indicated a link between high levels of verbal aggressiveness and low levels of relational satisfaction (Anderson & Martin, 1999). Specifically, Teven, Martin, and Neupauer (1998) concluded that verbal aggressiveness makes a significant, detrimental impact on sibling relationships and how siblings communicate. In this study, we are interested in discovering the associations between argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness and relational satisfaction in parliamentary debaters.

Distinctions between Argumentativeness and Verbal Aggressiveness

It is important to understand how argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness affect debaters. We can start by making the distinction between these two concepts that people tend to mistakenly conflate. Martin

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& Anderson (1997) explained that verbal aggressiveness is destructive, whereas argumentativeness is constructive. Moreover, “verbally aggressive individuals attack the self concepts of others, attempting to cause psychological pain” (Infante and Wigley, 1986 as cited in Daly, 2002 p. 150). This idea is supported by Infante, Trebing, Shepherd, & Seeds (1984) when they explained that “Infante and Rancer...conceptualized argumentativeness as a personality trait which predisposes an individual to recognize controversial issues, to advocate positions on them, and to refute other positions. In contrast, in their model, verbal aggressiveness is a personality trait which leads one to attack the self-concept of others instead of, or in addition to, refuting their positions on issues” (P.68). Daly (2002) explained that a vast amount of scholarship has been conducted on argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. Since verbal aggressiveness has been determined to be such an undesirable trait, it is imperative to explore some of the reasons highly verbally aggressive people behave in this manner.

### *Verbal Aggressiveness*

The reasons that verbally aggressive people give for being verbally aggressive seem to put the blame on others for their behavior. While these can be valid reasons, they are not always the root of verbal aggressiveness. “Reasons people give for being verbally aggressive include reciprocity and socialization- being taught to be verbally aggressive” (Infante, et al., 1992; Martin, Anderson, & Horvath, 1996, as cited in Martin & Anderson, 1997 p. 303). The most commonly given reasons by people who are high in trait verbal aggressiveness were wanting to appear tough, being in rational discussions that degenerate into verbal fights, wanting to be mean to the message receiver and wanting to express disdain for the message receiver (Infante, et al, 1992).

People who are verbally aggressive tend to blame society or say that they were countering the attack of someone else. Alternatively, Infante (1989) explained that the four feasible reasons for verbal aggressiveness—psychopathology, disdain, social learning, and argumentative skill deficiency—may or may not be inherently linked. Looking at these possible reasons can help us better understand the verbal aggressiveness that is encountered in debaters’ relationships with their partners.

Infante (1987) helped to categorize verbal aggressiveness by explaining that it comes about as a part of hostility, which is an intrinsic aspect of personality. Infante’s categorization is supported by the findings of McCroskey, Heisel, & Richmond (2001), who assert that both neurotic introverts and psychotics tend to report high levels of verbal aggressiveness. It has been explained that “there are numerous types of verbally aggressive messages...: character attacks, competence attacks, insults, maledictions, teasing, ridicule, profanity, and nonverbal emblems” (Infante & Wigley, 1986, p. 61). Additionally, Infante et al. (1992) explained that:

High verbal aggressives can be distinguished: (1) by their more frequent use of competent attacks, teasing, swearing, and nonverbal emblems; (2) by their beliefs in the less hurtful nature of competence attacks, physical appearance attacks, and threats; (3) by their reasons for being verbally aggressive which include wanting to appear tough, wanting to be mean to the message target, having disdain for the receiver, and being unable to keep a rational discussion from degenerating into a verbal fight (p. 125).

Generally, scholars agree that verbal aggressiveness is a negative trait. There is a vast body of literature about this trait (e.g., Infante et al, 1992, Anderson & Martin, 1999, and Beatty, Zelle, Dobos, & Rudd, 1994). For instance, Edwards, Bello, Brandau-Brown, and Hollems (2001) found that when presented with ambiguous messages, people high in verbal aggressiveness are more likely to perceive them as negative messages, and are more likely to have difficulty communicating. The authors also noted that it is possible that people high in verbal aggressiveness may not perceive difficulty in communication. They may achieve their communicative goals while it is the partner in the interaction who feels the difficulty. Levels of verbal aggressiveness strongly influence interpersonal interaction.

Verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness differ in a number of ways. For example, Ifert and Bearden (1998) concluded that verbally aggressive individuals reported a greater number of non-evidentiary appeals than evidentiary appeals, meaning that they were more likely to make a statement or a claim and not back it up with any support. They also concluded that argumentative individuals were more likely to use evidentiary appeals, meaning that they were more likely to back up a claim they made with some type of support.

In further support of this conceptual distinction, Infante et al. (1984) found that people who are highly argumentative are less likely to use verbal aggressiveness when confronting an obstinate opponent than are people who are moderate and low in argumentative skill. The research also showed that when an opponent was adaptable, males were more likely than females to use verbal aggressiveness; however, when the opponent was obstinate, males and females were about equally as likely to use verbally aggressive messages. In addition, Infante (1989) built upon this idea by conducting a study which yielded four different findings. First, it suggested that people who are highly argumentative may be able to influence whether people are the recipient of argumentativeness or verbal aggressiveness. Second, the female subjects in this study preferred to use argumentativeness, whereas men more often used verbal aggressiveness. Third, this study resulted in the idea that a highly argumentative female and a highly argumentative male are both as likely to be the target of verbal aggressiveness. Finally, overall, the subjects preferred argumentative strategies over verbally aggressive strategies. Moreover, Infante et al. (1992) indicated that people high in trait verbal aggressiveness are more likely to use competence attacks, teasing, nonverbal emblems, and

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swearing. They also indicated that people high in verbal aggressiveness perceive some verbally aggressive messages as less hurtful than do those who are low in verbal aggressiveness.

Infante, Myers, and Burkel (1994) found that more argumentative behavior and less verbally aggressive behavior are perceived in situations where the outcome is constructive. They also concluded that the observers perceived more verbal aggressiveness in family situations than in organizational settings. Additionally, Infante, Rancer, and Jordan (1996) found that when a legitimate argument is accompanied by nonaffirming messages, it is perceived as less argumentative. They also noted that although male and female dyads were equal in their levels of argumentativeness, male dyads were identified as being more argumentative.

Anderson and Martin (1999) found that people who are more argumentative perceive receivers of their messages as more satisfied with their communication. They also suggest that people with higher levels of argumentativeness may feel a need to argue freely. If they are allowed to do this, they will develop more positive perceptions of communicative outcomes. Finally, it was found that participants who were higher in verbally aggressive behavior reported that their groups were lower in satisfaction.

Finally, Beatty, et al. (1994) concluded that fathers' verbal aggressiveness contributed significantly to the prediction of their sons' evaluations about their communication. The researchers identified two major implications for the study of father-son relationships. First, this study provided evidence for the validity of sons' reports. Second, these findings indicated that a man's perception of his father's verbal aggressiveness may be an intervening variable in his social development. The authors also suggested that men are conscious of their fathers' verbal behaviors, and that their conclusions about their fathers' attitudes toward them may be based on their fathers' messages. Overall, the authors concluded that verbal aggressiveness is considered a destructive personality trait. Infante (1989) argued that a lack of argumentation training can lead to higher levels of verbal aggressiveness.

#### **Argumentativeness**

Whereas verbal aggressiveness is considered to be destructive, argumentativeness is considered to be constructive. Erwin (1989) developed a typology of argumentativeness. There were two types that were developed; avoiders and arguers. Avoiders were people who disliked confrontation and arguers were people who liked argumentativeness and disliked verbal aggressiveness. Avoiders tested low on the Argumentativeness Scale and disliked using or being subjected to argumentativeness or verbal aggressiveness. Arguers agreed with

argumentative behavior and disagreed with or disliked verbally aggressive behavior.

Furthermore, Schullery and Schullery (2003) suggested that the older a person is, the less argumentative, and the more educated one is, the more argumentative. In men, the decrease in argumentativeness began in the mid-twenties and stabilized near forty-five. For women, argumentativeness slowly decreased around thirty and the decrease accelerated into the fifties. The effect of education is more significant in men than in women, and there is very little effect from age or education on high-argumentatives.

In terms of flexibility, Neer (1994) indicated that argumentative flexibility, which is the willingness to participate in an argument, did not correlate with intention to select argumentative responses. Females and high trait arguers both tended to have strong intentions to respond argumentatively. High flexibility arguers tended to have stronger intentions to avoid aggressive responses than high trait arguers and males had strong intentions to choose aggressive responses. High trait arguers, female arguers and high flexibility arguers all avoided punishing responses. Males, high trait arguers and high flexibility arguers all tended to avoid rewarding responses. High trait arguers and high flexibility arguers seemed to have a bit stronger tendency than others to continue an argument, and high flexibility arguers seemed to have a bit more tendency than others to discontinue an argument over relational conflict. Finally, high flexibility arguers had a stronger desire to accept a strategy than others. Overall, flexibility in argument seemed to be a positive trait.

#### Verbal Aggressiveness and Argumentativeness in the Communication Classroom

The conceptual distinction between verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness is important to understand. These concepts have been studied frequently, generally and less frequently in relation to students of communication. Friedley (1972) used the Watson-Glaser scale to survey students in a speech 210 course. The Watson-Glaser scale measures inference, recognition of assumptions, deduction, interpretation and evaluation of arguments. Parliamentary debate is primarily concerned with critical thinking skills because of the lack of research used, as opposed to traditional forms of academic debate (Crossman, 1996; Galizio & Chuen, 1995; Kuster, 2002; O'Niell, 1986; Puchot, 2002; Stris, 1996; Theodore, Sheckels, & Warfield, 1990; Williams, & Guajardo, 1998).

Additionally, Infante (1982) conducted a study on traits of the communication student. The variable that most distinctly differentiated between high and low argumentativeness was time of argument training in high school. Students with higher levels of argumentativeness were born earlier in their family birth order and had higher GPAs. Males tended to be more argumentative than females. Moreover, Myers and Knox (2000) studied perceived instructor argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness and found that argumentativeness did seem to increase students' satisfaction

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with their course as well as the instructor. Additionally, perceived instructor verbal aggressiveness tended to decrease students' satisfaction with their course as well as the instructor.

### Forensics: A Culture of Argumentativeness

Although our study deals specifically with debaters, it may be useful to have an understanding of forensic competitors in general. Colbert (1993) studied the effects of debate participation on argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. The study found that more forensics training yielded higher levels of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. Additionally, the results suggested that some forms of debate may be better for reducing verbal aggressiveness than other forms. Value debate tended to reduce verbal aggressiveness without affecting argumentativeness, while policy debate tended to increase argumentativeness without affecting verbal aggressiveness. Individual Event-only competitors scored the lowest of all groups on the Argumentativeness Scale. The author suggested that in order to document long-term effects of forensics, this study needs to be replicated for college competitors.

Stamm (1975) indicated that all forensics students score differently than non-forensics students in: neuroticism, order, autonomy, affiliation, and succorance. Oral interpreters fell below the norm while all other forensics competitors scored above the general population in the aforementioned characteristics. Public address participants fell below the norm in their need for affiliation and debaters were above the general population in every characteristic that differed from the norm. Varsity students scored higher in their need for autonomy and aggression than novice students. Otherwise, there were no differences in the personality characteristics of novice and varsity competitors. With an understanding of forensics competitors in general, we must more specifically look toward debaters.

Ifert and Bearden (1998) suggested that a lack of evidentiary appeals indicate high levels of verbal aggressiveness. In terms of argumentation experience, Smither (1970) found that inexperienced debaters were more likely than experienced debaters to rate non-evidence statements as relevant and experienced debaters were more consistent than inexperienced debaters in evaluating relevance. Hence, it seems that as Infante (1989) suggested, higher levels of argumentation training could lead to lower levels of verbal aggressiveness.

### Practical Justification

Debate is an activity supported by many communication scholars. Bellon (2000) argued that more research needs to be done to make a stronger case for adopting debate in more fields. There has been a recent trend to incorporate communication across the curriculum, so the author conjectures that debate will be soon to follow. Debate is an excellent forum for argument training—in any classroom. He suggested that the most

effective way for students to learn is through immersion, personally meaningful challenges and intensive analysis. Students are also more likely to connect theory to practice when debating.

Furthermore, Mitchell (1998) wrote a critical analysis of the way debate educators teach academic debate. The author argued that there is a need for more agency in argumentation because argumentative agency fuels academia through the pursuit of democracy. It enables students to apply the argumentation skills in academic debate to real-world situations. Argumentation agency links skills together and provides understandable contexts in which these skills can be employed by making use of pragmatic action. As Mitchell suggested, debaters need to be more involved in the world around them. Therefore, our survey is solely for competitive debaters. Additionally, most studies with reports of perception report on the perception students have of instructors or superiors. Weaver (1977) discovered that there is a great disparity between perceptions that coaches have and those of debaters. Hence, our study addresses student perceptions of each other. This study could increase awareness of the needs and opinions of debaters.

#### Rationale

The literature leads us to conclude that debaters will have high levels of argumentativeness because of their training. Argumentation training also seems to decrease verbal aggressiveness. We would expect that debaters would score low in verbal aggressiveness. The literature also supports a strong connection between high levels of verbal aggressiveness and low levels of relational satisfaction. This link leads us to expect that if there are high levels of verbal aggressiveness reported within the dyad, the level of reported relational satisfaction will be low. While there have been studies on debaters versus the general population, there is no current research on debaters perceptions of each other or debaters versus other debaters. Within debate, students frequently encounter argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. These concepts, along with relational satisfaction, are well established. Hence, we pose the following hypotheses and research questions:

#### Hypotheses and Research Questions

H1: Debate dyads with similar levels of self-report and perceived partner argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness will have higher levels of relational satisfaction than dyads with incongruent levels of self-report and perceived partner argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness.

H2: Debate dyads that do not fit the aforementioned hypothesis will have low relational satisfaction if they have high levels of verbal aggressiveness and low levels of argumentativeness.

RQ1: Will biological sex have an impact on argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness and relational satisfaction in debate dyads?

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### Methods

#### Variables, Conceptual, and Operational Definitions

In our study, we measured debate partner dyads' perceptions of argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness, and relational satisfaction. We employed an adapted version of the Argumentativeness Scale, the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale, and the Interpersonal Solidarity Scale. In our research, we collected demographic data regarding biological sex, age, and forensics experience of both partners. We asked the participant about his or her own length of time in intercollegiate forensics competition and which individual events he or she had competed in or currently competes in. We also asked the participant to report the aforementioned demographics about his or her partner. Regarding the two debaters together, we asked the participant to report the type of institution the debate team competes for (community college or four-year college or university), which national forensics organization(s) their institution is associated with, whether the partners chose to be partners or were assigned to be partners, how long the partners competed as a team together, which format of debate the partners compete in primarily, and any other format of partner debate the partners compete in together.

The three concepts we measured in our research were argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness, and relational satisfaction. We conceptually define "argumentativeness as a personality trait that predisposes an individual to recognize controversial issues, to advocate positions on them, and to refute other positions" (Infante, Trebing, Shepherd, & Seeds, 1984, p.68). Verbal aggressiveness is conceptually defined as "an exchange of messages between two people where at least one person in the dyad attacks the self-concept of the other person in order to hurt the person psychologically" (Infante & Wigley, 1986, p.67). Interpersonal satisfaction is being measured by the level of solidarity reported in the dyad. We have conceptually defined interpersonal solidarity according to Wheeless (1978) as "a global measure of closeness that captures several affective dimensions particularly relevant to friendship....solidarity provides an appropriate and 'meaningful criterion by which to assess the importance of interpersonal communication phenomena in interpersonal relationships'" (p. 154, as cited in Cupach & Messman, 1999, p. 14). Operationally, we adapted Infante & Rancer's (1982) Argumentativeness Scale, Infante & Wigley's (1986) Verbal Aggressiveness Scale and Wheeless's (1978) Interpersonal Solidarity Scale.

#### Measurement Instrument Adaptation

We began the process with three distinct scales: the Argumentativeness Scale (Infante & Rancer, 1982), the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (Infante & Wigley, 1986), and the Interpersonal Solidarity Scale (Wheeless, 1978). For each scale we adapted, the original scale was 20 questions in length, about half of which were reverse-coded.

We assessed the questions and chose what we felt were the five best straight forward prompts and the five best reverse-coded prompts from each scale. We then altered the language of the prompts so that they were congruent in weight and made the linguistic constructs of the relational scale debate-specific. Finally, we repeated the modified argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness scales so that the prompts would ask for the participant's perception of their partner. We decided to use abbreviated versions of the aforementioned scales to avoid participant exhaustion and to assure that we were asking equally weighted questions for each variable.

#### Participants

We used a convenience sample of 89 intercollegiate parliamentary debaters. Participants consisted of 75 parliamentary debaters who attended the 2004 Ball State parliamentary debate tournament and 14 parliamentary debate competitors who were previously established acquaintances of the researchers. We surveyed 48 males and 41 females who ranged in age from 17-36 years old. Of the 89 collegiate participants there were 21 freshman, 30 sophomores, 13 juniors, and 25 seniors.

#### Administration of Survey

The surveys were completed on a voluntary basis. There were 75 surveys passed out before the sixth preliminary round central topic announcement at Ball State University's parliamentary debate tournament. Debaters attending the tournament were given an informed consent form and a copy of the survey. They were told that this was a research project studying the relationship between debate partners, were told only to participate if they were willing, and were given approximately 15 minutes to finish the survey. Upon handing in the surveys and consent forms, the participants were thanked and offered candy. The remaining 14 surveys were completed through phone interviews. During the phone interviews, participants first agreed to take part in the study after being read the informed consent form. Next, the survey questions were read to the participants. They then proceeded to verbally answer the survey questions as the researchers recorded the information.

#### Results

##### Respondents

We surveyed 89 intercollegiate parliamentary debate competitors. There were 48 males and 41 females, ages 17-36 with a mean age of 19.94 years. There were 20 freshman, 31 sophomores, 13 juniors, and 25 seniors. The respondents' debate partners were 56 males and 33 females who ranged in age from 17-54 with a mean age of 20.33 years. The group of partners was comprised of 23 freshman, 28 sophomores, 16 juniors, and 22 seniors. The forensic competition experience for the participants and their partners ranged from 1 semester to 3 years. Very few respondents reported themselves or their partners competing in individual events; however, 40 of

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the respondents reported competing in impromptu, and 37 reported their partners competing in impromptu.

Of the participants, 18 reported competing for a community college and 71 reported competing for a university. In addition, 82 reported their school belonging to the National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA), 18 reported belonging to the National Educational Debate Association (NEDA), 17 reported belonging to Phi Rho Pi (PRP), 25 reported belonging to the American Forensic Association (AFA), 16 reported belonging to the National Forensic Association (NFA), and 26 respondents indicated that their school belonged to the American Parliamentary Debate Association (APDA), American Debate Association (ADA), National Debate Tournament (NDT), Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA), Pi Kappa Delta (PKD), Delta Sigma Rho (DSR), or the National Christian College Forensics Invitational (NCCFI).

There were 46 respondents who reported choosing to be partners with their current debate partner and 43 who reported being assigned by their coach to be partners. The time that the participants had been debating with their current partners ranged from 1 semester to 3 years. There were 76 partnerships of 1 semester, 11 of 1 year, 1 of 2 years, and 1 of 3 years. All respondents reported competing in NPDA, 83 indicated that NPDA was their primary format of debate in competition, and 6 indicated that NEDA was their primary format. Of the other formats of debate that the participants competed in with their current debate partners, 10 reported NEDA, 2 reported NDT, and 4 reported CEDA.

### Reliability

Our scales demonstrated excellent reliability: The Argumentativeness scale (ARG) had 90% internal consistency ( $\alpha=.90$ ), the Verbal Aggressiveness scale (VA) had 92% internal consistency ( $\alpha=.92$ ), the Partner Argumentativeness scale (PARG) had 92% internal consistency ( $\alpha=.92$ ), the Partner Verbal Aggressiveness scale (PVA) had 92% internal consistency ( $\alpha=.92$ ), and the Relational Satisfaction (RS) scale had 95% internal consistency ( $\alpha=.95$ ).

### Correlations and Differences

Our first hypothesis, that debate dyads with similar levels of self-report and perceived partner argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness will have higher levels of relational satisfaction than dyads with incongruent levels of self-report and perceived partner argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness, was partially supported by the data. We computed the difference between ARG and PARG to determine our Difference of Argumentativeness (DARG) scale. We did the same with VA and PVA to create our Difference of Verbal Aggressiveness scale (DVA). DVA and RS had no significant correlation. However, DARG and RS had a  $-.32$  correlation, with a  $.01$  significance level.

The second hypothesis, that debate dyads will have low relational satisfaction if they have high levels of verbal aggressiveness and low levels of argumentativeness, was also partially supported by the data. ARG and RS had no significant correlation. VA and RS had a  $-.21$  correlation with a  $.05$  significance level. PARG and RS had a  $.54$  correlation with a  $.01$  significance level. PVA and RS had a  $-.24$  correlation with a  $.05$  significance level.

In order to answer the first research question, which explored whether biological sex would have an impact on argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness and relational satisfaction in debate dyads, we ran an independent sample t-test. For males, the mean of VA was 3.36 and for females, the mean of VA was 2.30 ( $t=4.26$ ,  $p=.00$ ). For males, the mean of ARG was 5.30 and for females, the mean of ARG was 5.82 ( $t=-2.51$ ,  $p=.01$ ).

## Discussion

### Sample

Our sample consisted primarily of NPDA debaters who generally do not participate in many other forms of debate or individual events. Additionally, we only surveyed Southern Californian and Midwestern debaters and did not take regions into account as demographic factors. We speculate that these regions might discourage intercollegiate forensics competitors from competing in many genres of events (or at least not encourage variance in genre).

### Difference in VA and ARG

Interestingly enough, the results indicate that disparity between levels of participant self-report of verbal aggressiveness and report of perceived partner verbal aggressiveness has no impact on the report of relational satisfaction. However, the results indicate that disparity between levels of participant self-report of argumentativeness and report of perceived partner argumentativeness does have an impact on the report of relational satisfaction. Intercollegiate parliamentary debate is a highly competitive activity. Our study does not take in to account the importance of competitive success to debaters. If this is more important to debaters than interpersonal harmony with their partner, it is possible that debaters would forgive verbal aggressiveness more readily than the general population, because of the goal of winning. Given that argumentativeness should be an indicator of success in debate, it is also feasible that parliamentary debaters simply generally value their partner's argumentation skill over their partner's personality. The fact that ARG and PARG were significantly correlated lends support to this proposition.

Conversely, the results suggest that self-reports of argumentativeness have no impact on levels of relational satisfaction, while higher levels of verbal aggressiveness were associated with lower levels of relational satisfaction. This finding is supported by Edwards, et al. (2001),

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who found that people who are high in verbal aggressiveness have a difficult time communicating. It may be the verbally aggressive debater or their partner who suffers from this difficulty. Perhaps more verbally aggressive parliamentary debaters are not as good at debating from their partner's perspective. Bearden (1998) reported that verbally aggressive individuals are not as good at distinguishing well-formed arguments as their less verbally aggressive counterparts. It is also conceivable that highly verbally aggressive debaters may be neurotic introverts who are simply hard to please interpersonally (McCoskey, et al. 2001).

Our results support previous findings that there is a difference in levels of verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness correlated with biological sex (e.g., Infante 1989). In our sample, females scored an average of over a point lower than males in verbal aggressiveness and an average of nearly a point higher than males in argumentativeness. This finding is directly at odds with the findings of Infante, Rancer, and Jordan (1996), who reported higher levels of argumentativeness in males than females in their study. Perhaps because of patriarchal gender roles that carry over in to forensics competition, females learn that they must be more argumentatively skilled yet less aggressive than males in order to win. Future research would do well to further examine the effects of biological sex and gender on ARG and VA, especially among debaters.

### Support for Existing Literature

Our findings indicate that a lack of argumentative skill may, indeed, lead to higher levels of verbal aggressiveness, which is supported by many previous studies (e.g. Daly, 2002; Infante, 1987; Infante, et al., 1984; Infante, et al. 1992; Infante & Wigley, 1986; Martin & Anderson, 1997; Martin, Anderson & Horvath, 1996; & McCroskey, Heisel, & Richmond, 2001). Therefore, our study further validates research in this area, while extending the extent of knowledge to another type of interpersonal relationship.

### Unexpected Findings

Contrary to our expectations, when self-reports of verbal aggressiveness were higher, the reports of perceived partner verbal aggressiveness were higher ( $r=.24$ ,  $p=.05$ ). This may mean that debate partners closely identify with their partners or, perhaps, that debaters generally identify their partner as having similar flaws in personality (being verbally aggressive) as they perceive themselves to have.

Additionally, RS and time debate partners competed together (Time) had a .27 correlation with a .05 significance level. This finding seems to indicate that the longer debaters work together as partners, the more satisfied they are with their relationship with their partner. However, our sample was primarily comprised of debaters who had competed with their current partner as a team for only a semester. Therefore it is unclear

whether this correlation would hold up over time. However, it is possible that future research could collect longitudinal data to test this relation.

Another unexpected finding concerned differences between community college and university competitors. Community college competitors scored an average of nearly a point lower in verbal aggressiveness than their four-year institution counterparts. For community college competitors, the mean VA was 2.13 and for four-year institution competitors, the mean VA was 3.05 ( $t=-1.82$ ,  $p=.08$ ). Additionally, community college competitors had a mean ARG report of 6.50 and for four-year institution competitors, the mean ARG was 5.31 ( $t=5.00$ ,  $p=.00$ ). The results indicate that community college competitors may be more argumentative than the four-year institution competitors. This difference could indicate that community colleges tend to be more effective in teaching argumentation skill or discouraging verbal aggressiveness.

Alternatively, this correlation could simply indicate that community college students tend to naturally be more argumentative and less verbally aggressive, that community colleges attract these types of students, or that community colleges are less competitive and therefore less stressful. Lower stress situations may call for less VA. However, our sample was quite uneven in the type of institution respondents attended. Most of the competitors attended four-year institutions. Because we had so few community college participants, this conclusion should be further investigated.

Our final independent sample t-test was run between those respondents who chose to be partners with their current debate partner and those who were assigned by their coach to be partners. For competitors who chose to be partners, the mean VA was 2.61 and for competitors who were assigned by their coach to be partners, the mean VA was 3.15 ( $t=-2.00$ ,  $p=.05$ ). This finding may indicate that debaters who are assigned a partner by their coach are either more likely to engage in verbally aggressive behavior or at least more likely to report verbally aggressive behaviors. It may be the case that debaters who do not choose their debate partner are upset by this lack of choice. For competitors who chose to be partners, the mean PARG was 5.60 and for competitors who were assigned by their coach to be partners, the mean PARG was 4.70 ( $t=3.50$ ,  $p=.00$ ). This finding suggests that those debaters who chose their partner view their partner as more argumentative. It is possible that this is due to why the debater chose that person as their partner. It is reasonable to conjecture that debaters choose partners that they perceive to be argumentatively skilled. For competitors who chose to be partners, the mean RS was 5.51 and for competitors who were assigned by their coach to be partners, the mean RS was 3.82 (equal variances assumed:  $t=6.00$ ,  $p=.00$ ). This seems to be our most significant finding. Debaters who choose their partner are far more relationally satisfied with their partner than those who are assigned a partner.

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### Practical Applications

Our findings could assist coaches and argumentation instructors alike. Williams, Hagy, & McLane-Hagy (1996) argued that parliamentary debate can be and should be taught in the argumentation classroom. Instructors could administer the Argumentativeness Scale and the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale in order to determine compatibility and use this to assign partners in the classroom. This practice could be replicated by coaches. Additionally, perhaps parliamentary debaters should be given more freedom in partner selection. If relational satisfaction is highly valued to instructors or coaches, perhaps directors of forensics and instructors of argumentation should allow competitors and students alike to choose their partners. In any case, this area needs to be further studied so that coaches can help train debaters to minimize verbal aggressiveness and increase argumentation skills.

### Limitations

Our research has a number of limitations. The limitations involve inconsistency, sample size, lack of a control group, no inquiry to the value of competition, and not grouping participants' responses by biological sex. First, the chief limitation is perhaps the incongruence of administration of the survey. Some participants anonymously filled the survey out. Others, however, who were already acquainted with one of the researchers, verbally answered the survey questions over the phone. The people who knew the researcher may have felt compelled to answer one way or another due to the nature of their relationship with the researcher.

Another limitation of our study is our sample size. Parliamentary debate is a popular form of academic debate, and we only surveyed 89 debaters. If conducted at NPDA nationals, for instance, our research could have involved hundreds of debaters, making our results more reliable.

Another major limitation of our study is that we did not survey any non-debaters. Although it seems safe to say that respondents generally reported high levels of argumentativeness and low levels of verbal aggressiveness, with no control group, we have no point of comparison with the general population.

In addition, our survey consisted of no inquiry of value of competition in general or about the value of competitive success. Our survey also neglected to ask whether debaters find relational satisfaction, in general, to be of value. Parliamentary debate relationships differ from other interpersonal relationships. Hill (1982) found that intercollegiate debaters in general were likely to conflate argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness as positive traits as long as the partnership was competitively successful. The relational satisfaction portion of our survey may not have dealt with the relational aspects that debaters consider important.

Finally, our research did not deal with grouping partners by same sex versus mixed sex dyads. There may be differences in the perception of

a female debater reporting on a male partner versus a male debater reporting on a male partner, etc.

### **Future Research**

In the future, scholars could focus more on the importance of relational satisfaction to parliamentary debaters. Future research should explore whether any type of relational satisfaction is important to parliamentary debaters. If so, it may be compelling to discover what elements of a relationship are valued by parliamentary debaters and whether competitive success or the value of competition influence these elements. Perhaps future studies could also address possible regional differences. It would be interesting to discover whether the demographics in our study are actually an anomaly. There may be regional differences that would influence perceptions and values in parliamentary debate that are not addressed by our research.

Finally, researchers could further address the differences of any of the scales we researched between community college parliamentary debaters, between the amounts of time the debaters have competed together and whether there is a difference in novice, junior, and open competitors. In addition to possible unexplored demographics, and more specifically, regional differences in parliamentary debaters or even different types of debate competed in, and their reports, there may also be unexplored institutional differences that our study does not adequately address. With a larger and more diverse sample, perhaps, these factors could draw more certain results.

### **Conclusion**

By exploring how argumentativeness, verbal aggressiveness and relational satisfaction relate to the parliamentary debate dyad, we have found that there are many significant relationships. Our findings indicated that higher levels of verbal aggressiveness were correlated with lower levels of relational satisfaction. Higher levels of perceived partner argumentativeness and lower levels of perceived partner verbal aggressiveness both correlated with high levels of relational satisfaction. These findings support existing literature and further illustrate the detrimental effect that verbal aggressiveness can have on personal relationships. As a discipline, we can strive to promote a higher level of awareness and education in the area of argumentative skill in an attempt to lessen these negative effects. Another significant finding was that intercollegiate parliamentary debaters are most relationally satisfied when they are able to choose their own partner. Hopefully, future research will unveil whether relational satisfaction is important to debaters. If so, perhaps debaters ought to be given choice in their partnerships. This research can serve as an impetus for future studies that examine the unique relationship between debate partners as well as studies that look to improve the satisfaction in any interpersonal relationship.

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### **Appendix Informed Consent and Survey**

Title of Research Project: Argumentativeness, Verbal Aggressiveness, and Relational

Satisfaction in the Parliamentary Debate Dyad.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research project. The primary purpose of this research project is to understand student perceptions of themselves and their debate partners in intercollegiate forensics competition. This research will benefit intercollegiate forensics coaches and students, with recommendations for addressing appropriately and effectively the challenges and opportunities associated with communicating about these issues in forensics teams as well as the community as a whole.

You will be asked to complete a survey, which will take 10-15 minutes. We are most interested in getting YOUR perceptions of your debate partner and YOUR perception of that relationship, so please answer the questions honestly and openly. There are no right or wrong answers.

There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this study. The information from the survey will be analyzed through a computer program. Your name, school name, and any other identifiers will not be associated with the data in any way. Be assured that once the research team has analyzed the answers, the surveys will be destroyed.

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without prejudice from the researchers. Please feel free to ask any questions before signing this form.

For more information about this research project, please contact Crystal Lane Swift ([clswift@bsu.edu](mailto:clswift@bsu.edu)) or Christina Vourvoulias ([cmvourvouli a@bsu. edu](mailto:cmvourvouli a@bsu. edu)).

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I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to participate in this research project examining student perceptions of debate relationships. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate.

*Signature*

*date*

Please answer the following questions about yourself:

I am \_\_\_ male \_\_\_ female I am \_\_\_\_\_ years old

I am a freshman/sophomore/junior/senior

I have competed in intercollegiate forensics for \_\_\_\_\_ amount of time (please check one):

\_\_\_ one semester \_\_\_ one year \_\_\_\_\_ two years \_\_\_ three years

I have competed in/do compete in the following intercollegiate forensics events (please circle all that apply):

Impromptu/Extemporaneous/Informative/Persuasion/Readers'

Theatre/Poetry/Lincoln-Douglas debate/Faith Literature/Program Oral Interpretation/Duo/Prose/

Dramatic Interpretation/Speech to Entertain(After Dinner Speaking)/IPDA debate/ Rhetorical Criticism(Communication Analysis)

Please answer the following about your partner:

My partner is \_\_\_ male \_\_\_ female My partner is \_\_\_\_\_ years old

My partner is a freshman/sophomore/junior/senior

My partner has competed in intercollegiate forensics for \_\_\_\_\_ amount of time (please check one):

\_\_\_ one semester \_\_\_ one year \_\_\_\_\_ two years \_\_\_ three years

My partner has competed in/does compete in the following intercollegiate forensics events (please circle all that apply):

Impromptu/Extemporaneous/Informative/Persuasion/Readers'

Theatre/Poetry/Lincoln-Douglas debate/Faith Literature/Program Oral Interpretation/Duo/Prose/

Dramatic Interpretation/Speech to Entertain(After Dinner Speaking)/IPDA debate/ Rhetorical Criticism(Communication Analysis)

Please answer the following questions about you and your partner:

My Partner and I compete for a \_\_\_\_\_ community college \_\_\_ four-year college/university

Our school is a member of the following national forensic organizations (please circle all that apply):

NPDA/APDA/NEDA/ADA/NDT/CEDA/Phi

Rho

Pi/AFA/NFA/PKD/DSR/NCCFI

My partner and I \_\_\_ chose to be partners \_\_\_\_\_ were assigned by our coach to be partners

My partner and I have competed in intercollegiate debate for \_\_\_\_\_ amount of time as partners (please check one):

\_\_\_ one semester \_\_\_ one year \_\_\_\_\_ two years \_\_\_ three years

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My partner and I primarily compete in the following format of debate (please circle one):

NPDA APDA NEDA ADA NDT CEDA

My partner and I compete in the following format(s) of debate (please all that apply):

NPDA APDA NEDA ADA NDT CEDA

Please answer the following items on a scale of 1-7, where 1 means "never," 2 means "almost never," 3 means "rarely," 4 means "sometimes," 5 means "often," 6 means "almost always," and 7 means "always":

I enjoy defending my point of view on an issue.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Arguing with a person creates more problems for me than it solves.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

When I finish arguing with someone, I feel nervous and upset.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I feel excitement when I expect that a conversation I am in is leading to an argument.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I prefer being with people who rarely disagree with me. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I do not like to miss the opportunity to argue a controversial issue.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I consider an argument an intellectual challenge.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I find myself unable to think of effective points during an argument.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I try to avoid getting into arguments.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Arguing over controversial issues improves my critical thinking ability.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

If individuals I am trying to influence deserve it, I attack their character.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

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I am careful to avoid attacking individuals' intelligence when I attack their ideas.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I try to avoid having other people feel bad about themselves when I attempt to influence them.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

When I am not able to refute others' positions, I try to make them feel defensive in order to weaken their positions.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I try to make people feel good about themselves even when their ideas are stupid.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

When people simply will not budge on a matter of importance, I lose my temper and say rude things to them.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

When individuals insult me, I get a lot of pleasure out of telling them off.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

When people criticize my shortcomings, I take it in good humor and do not try to get back at them.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I refuse to participate in arguments when they involve personal attacks.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

When people behave in ways that are in poor taste, I insult them in order to shock them into proper behavior.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

My partner enjoys defending his/her point of view on an issue.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

My partner thinks that arguing with a person creates more problems for my partner than it solves.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

When my partner finishes arguing with someone, he/she feels nervous and upset.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

My partner feels excitement when he/she expects that a conversation he/she is in is leading to an argument.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

My partner prefers being with people who rarely disagree with him/her.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

My partner does not like to miss the opportunity to argue a controversial issue.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

My partner considers an argument an intellectual challenge.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

My partner finds himself/herself unable to think of effective points during an argument.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

My partner tries to avoid getting into arguments.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

My partner thinks that arguing over controversial issues improves his/her critical thinking ability.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

If individuals my partner is trying to influence deserve it, he/she attacks their character.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

My partner is careful to avoid attacking individuals' intelligence when he/she attacks their ideas.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

My partner tries to avoid having other people feel bad about themselves when he/she attempts to influence them.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

When my partner is not able to refute others' positions, he/she tries to make them feel defensive in order to weaken their positions.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

My partner tries to make people feel good about themselves even when their ideas are stupid.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

When people simply will not budge on a matter of importance, my partner loses his/her temper and says rude things to them.  
1 2 3 4 5 6 7

When individuals insult my partner, he/she gets a lot of pleasure out of telling them off.

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7

When people criticize my partner's shortcomings, he/she takes it in good humor and does not try to get back at them.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

My partner refuses to participate in arguments when they involve personal attacks.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

When people behave in ways that are in poor taste, my partner insults them in order to shock them into proper behavior.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I willingly and honestly disclose positive and negative things about myself to my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

My partner does not really understand me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

My partner willingly and honestly discloses positive and negative things about him/herself to me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I know that I can count on my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I like my partner more than most people I know.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Sometimes, I feel like I don't really understand my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

There are some things I dislike about my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

My partner and I are not very close at all.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I have little in common with my partner outside of debate.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

I feel very close to my partner.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

*Parliamentary Debate 25*

Thank you very much for participating in our study. If you are interested in the results, please email Christina Vourvoulias ([cmvourvoulia@bsu.edu](mailto:cmvourvoulia@bsu.edu)) or Crystal Lane Swift ([clswift@bsu.edu](mailto:clswift@bsu.edu)), and we will be happy to send you a copy of our final paper.