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# What Traits are Learned?: Determining the Levels of Argumentativeness and Verbal Aggressiveness in Competitive Parliamentary Debate

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Which traits are learned?: Determining the levels of argumentativeness and verbal  
aggressiveness in competitive parliamentary debate

By

Lisa L. Roth

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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### **Abstract**

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Competitive parliamentary debate is a popular and important form of debate in the United States. This study surveyed individuals who competed, and individuals who have never competed, in parliamentary debate were surveyed to understand if parliamentary debate increases argumentativeness and decreases verbal aggression in students who competed in the event. When it comes to verbal aggressiveness, competitive parliamentary debate participants did score lower in verbal aggressiveness than those who have not competed in parliamentary debate. However, there was not a significant difference in verbal aggressiveness with those who have more parliamentary debate experience and those with less experience. Additionally, competitive parliamentary debate participation did not predict the level of argumentativeness because competitive debaters did not significantly score higher on the argumentativeness scale compared to those who have not competed. However, when looking at those who did compete in parliamentary debate, it was found that the longer they competed, the higher their level of argumentativeness. These results lead to implications and conclusions about teaching and competing in parliamentary debate.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Two-time Illinois parliamentary debate state champion and my former student Benjamin Donovan once told me, “Parliamentary debate changed my life. It taught me how to apply critical thinking, speaking, and argumentation skills in new and innovative ways. Basically, it changed the way I approached school, work, and day-to-day life.” This quotation begins to allude to two different aspects of parliamentary debate: the life-changing opportunity competitive debate creates, and the applicable skills that are honed in the process of learning debate. But, parliamentary debate is not the only form of competitive debate. Lincoln Douglas Debate, named after the famous debate between Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglas, is considered a value debate because it focuses on logic, ethical values, and philosophy. The National Debate Association (NDA) and Cross Examination Debate Association, or CEDA, focus on advocacy and policy changes, and Public Forum debate uses both policy and value issues to debate in a way that the general public could be involved. While parliamentary debate is not completely unique in comparison to other types of competitive debate, there are some aspects of the event that are distinctive. Parliamentary debate is important to focus on because it is a debate focused on strong argumentation and logic skills and is used extensively in intercollegiate competitive debate. Parliamentary debate is similar, yet not identical, to parliamentary procedure because both are modeled after British government legislative debate style (What is parliamentary debate?, 2016). The basic idea of parliamentary debate is that there should be an even playing field for discussion of motions, or policies,

brought before the house, or governing body. Parliamentary debate is a predominant form of competitive academic debating in most English-speaking nations, and is currently the most extensively practiced intercollegiate debate form in the United States (International Debate Education Association, 2017).

Parliamentary debate is an extemporaneous style of debate that focuses on students developing their logic and reasoning skills, along with their ability to use full arguments with pathos, ethos, and logos. This style of debate deemphasizes research in an attempt to help students develop the ability to reason and argue from their own personal ideas (A guide to parliamentary debate, 2015). Students are not allowed to use briefs, prepared speeches, or quotations, rather they must rely on their own wit and knowledge to perform (Branham & Meany, 1998). Additionally, the speakers do not know the topic, or resolution, being debated until 15 or 20 minutes before they start the debate round. There are many different leagues that have different styles of resolutions, but some examples of typical parliamentary debate resolutions are: The United States Federal Government should fully subsidize tuition at public colleges and universities in the United States, or This house believes mandatory trigger warnings threaten academic freedom. The teams use 15 or 20 minutes to prepare the speeches and arguments that will be used in the debate. There are two sides to each debate: the proposition and the opposition. The proposition team must support and uphold the motion, while the opposition team must oppose the proposition team's case. Each team consists of two students. The students on the proposition are referred to as the Prime Minister and the



Member of Government, while the students on the opposition are called the Leader of Opposition and the Member of Opposition (What is parliamentary debate?, 2016).

During the entire debate there are six speeches delivered. The first four are constructive (the speakers add new arguments and can bring more thoughts and evidence to the debate). The last two are rebuttal speeches (new arguments are not allowed, and the goal is to summarize the arguments on the table and persuade the judge your side is winning). The proposition starts the debate with a speech that does not exceed seven minutes called the Prime Minister speech. Then, the opposition's first speaker, the Leader of the Opposition, is able to give an eight-minute speech opposing the Prime Minister. Next, the Member of Government uses their 8 minutes to oppose the Leader of Opposition and reassert and extend the Prime Minister's arguments. After that speech, the Member of Opposition is able to oppose the Prime Minister and the Member of Government, and support the Leader of Opposition, by delivering the last constructive speech. Finally, the debate ends with rebuttals. The Leader of Opposition delivers the first rebuttal in a four minute speech, and the Prime Minister finishes the debate with a five minute rebuttal speech. The objective of each debate is for the judge to decide if the proposition successfully upheld their side of the debate, or if the opposition sufficiently opposed the proposition case (NPDA Rules, 2008).

The glowing testimony of former competitors regarding the benefits of participation, along with the structure of parliamentary debate, leads coaches to wonder if the skills students perceive they learn and the theoretical focus of the activity are actually measureable. Christopher Michels, a former debater on my team, who currently practices

law, explained “Competing on the debate team propelled me to success. I learned the skills I needed to be a great lawyer. Law school trained me for my practice, but debate taught me how to interact with others and create a strong argument.” Students and coaches of competitive debate teams understand the importance of participating on a debate team, and comments like Michels’ are customary. While this type of feedback from students is extremely powerful, forensic educators have not been able take this narrative feedback from individual communicators who participate in debate, and produce empirical evidence of the skills and traits learned from competitive debate. Therefore, the goal of this thesis is to show the connection between enhanced argumentation skills and parliamentary debate training and competition. Basically, the project seeks to find if the perception of the event’s academic benefits are indeed accurate.

### **Topic Justification**

While many students testify to the educational benefits of parliamentary debate, Greenstreet (1993) explained, “Little empirical evidence exists to support the notion that debating is of value to participants” (p. 13). This lack of empirical evidence is unfortunate for multiple reasons. First, coaches struggle to internally measure the individual growth of each competitor because they do not have an accurate system to prove their students’ development. It is one thing to observe that a student has developed critical thinking skills, and it is another to be able to quantitatively prove the progress. Further, as a whole, the community has difficulty justifying the success when the skill growth is not recorded and compared from year to year. Thus, at this point it is difficult

to numerically measure the impact parliamentary debate has on students' education and skill growth making it problematic to quantitatively show student success on a personal or community level.

Second, it is difficult for coaches to show administration what an influential experience debate is for their students because there is little external comparison between forensics teams. Kirch (2005) explains, "The current shape of many state budgets mandates that directors be able to clearly articulate program goals and to measure desired outcomes. These outcomes may include indicators of student growth and opportunity..." (p. 70). This need to provide indicators of student growth, coupled with the lack of empirical evidence, creates a difficult space for forensic coaches to justify the necessity of their forensic programs. Without some measure and justification for programs, many programs' budgets, financial support, and ultimately programs, will cease to exist.

Third, parliamentary debate is the area in competitive debate that has been least researched. However, there are five national organizations – National Parliamentary Debate Association, the American Parliamentary Debate Association, the National Parliamentary Tournament of Excellence, Pi Kappa Delta, and Novice Nationals that host students to compete in parliamentary debate on a national level. Additionally, there are many smaller regional leagues such as the Lincoln Parliamentary Debate League and the Parliamentary League of The Upper Midwest that host tournaments throughout the year. And, international leagues such as the Worlds University Debating Championship and the European Universities Debating Championships are very active. Thus, with hundreds of students, from across the world gathering to compete in this type of debate, it is time to

research the skills learned specifically from parliamentary debate. Sheckels and Warfield (1990) argue that parliamentary debate helps students develop skills such as logical reasoning, application of knowledge, and strong argumentation. Trapp (1996) also argues that parliamentary debate can be used as a connector between competitive debate and public debate. Thus, connecting the debate world to the real world. However, in order to truly analyze the importance of the skills learned in parliamentary debate, and the actual building of those skills, there must be a theoretical connection to argumentativeness skills.

### **The Research Focus**

One of the most frustrating parts of this problem is that while coaches and students believe competitive debate programs are developing and honing essential life skills; we do not have sound evidence to claim this outside of our circles of knowledge. I seek to start filling this void by turning to the theoretical ideas of verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness found in communication theory and applying these to parliamentary debate. Verbal aggression manifests in character attacks, competence attacks, insults, maledictions, teasing, ridicule, profanity, threats, background attacks, physical appearance attacks, and nonverbal indicators (Infante, 1987; Infante & Wigley, 1986; Colbert, 1993). These traits are seen as detrimental to creating strong arguments, and are antithetic to the skills that debate coaches hope to build in students. On the other hand, argumentativeness includes ability to argue, problem solving through argumentation, and self-perception of the benefits and drawbacks of arguing, within its branch of research. These traits are similar to those that coaches believe are found in

parliamentary debate. Both verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness are measured by a series of questions that are then measured by the researcher.

Thus, this project takes the foundational ideas of verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness (Infante, 1995; Infante, Horvath, & Step, 1997; Infante & Rancer, 1982; Infante & Rancer, 1993; Infante & Rancer, 1996; Infante, Rancer, & Wigley, 2011; Infante, Riddle, Horvarth, & Tumlin, 1992) and applies the theories to academic debate to see if verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness traits are influenced by competitive debate experience. This theoretical premise will create a foundation for forensic researchers to start measuring verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness traits in their debaters, thus creating empirical evidence of the skills/traits debaters are actually gaining in debate allowing coaches to see the gaps in the education of debate students, and gain a better understanding of the skill set they are helping their students create.

In the next chapters, this thesis continues the exploration of students' argumentation skills in parliamentary debate. Chapter two reviews relevant literature in the areas of forensics, debate, parliamentary debate, verbal aggression, and argumentativeness theory. Chapter three outlines the methodology used, and chapter four chapter reports the results. Finally, chapter five draws conclusions that ultimately show the impact of parliamentary debate training and competition on student's argumentative skill sets.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Literature**

Many researchers have delved into the field of argumentation and debate from various different methodological approaches, theories, and applications. One such researcher, Infante (1987), proposed a model of aggressive communication with the goal of adding clarity and meaning to the role that aggression plays in communication. Two of the traits that he analyzed were verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness. These traits have been used to study many different areas of communication phenomenon in order to better understand argumentation. The goal of this thesis is to continue applying Infante's work to the practice of parliamentary debate. Therefore, I will analyze three areas of literature to create a foundation for this study. First, I will survey the practice and value of parliamentary debate. Second, I will review the theories of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness and analyze their major research areas. Finally, I will apply the traits and skills of verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness to forensic competitors in order to develop two hypotheses.

### **Historical Origins of Academic Debate Competition**

Before delving into the specific skills gained from debate participation, this section will discuss the origins of academic debate in order to provide a historical foundation that highlights the longevity of the activity. Freeley and Steinberg (2005) explain debate is "the process of inquiry and advocacy, a way of arriving at a reasoned judgment on a proposition" (p.4). This process can be internal if an individual uses debate to draw a conclusion in their mind, or it can be a group hashing out issues to reach a

conclusion. The people of ancient Greece and Rome are known for creating the foundation of debate for individuals and society (Keefe, Harte, & Norton, 1982; Freeley & Steinberg, 2005; Bartanen & Frank, 1991; Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014). Students, who were all male aristocrats, were taught to give speeches about topics ranging from legal, to social, to political questions, in order to develop their argumentation skills (Bartanen & Frank, 1991). The ultimate goal was to create strong social leaders. Debate training continued in Western Europe during the Renaissance for male landowners, but it was less formal than the Greek and Roman training. Then, as Bartanen and Littlefield (2014) explain, “While debating unions existed for centuries in Great Britain and elsewhere, the fusion of argumentation and competition is an American innovation” (p. 1). Immigrants brought the idea of debating to America, and literary societies were created in small towns. These literary societies provided citizens with a context to debate current issues, and gave them the power to participate in public decision making (Bartanen & Frank, 1991). These literary societies made it so that a trade worker and a philosopher were both completely engaged and valued in debates about the contemporary issues.

Over the years, the literary societies flourished, and were embraced by all levels of education, including colleges and universities. Keefe, Hart, and Norton (1982) explain, students were taught about public policy issues by learning debate skills. The first recorded academic debates were in the 1870s where students from different colleges would debate each other at public events (Bartanen & Frank, 1991). In the beginning, these debates were public spectacles that drew large crowds and had little organization.

However, soon, regional and national debate organizations were created and national conventions and tournaments created more rules and structure for the academic debate competitions. This idea of academic debate is defined by Bartanen and Frank (1991) as, “A [academic] debate is a competitive speaking activity between two or more people arguing about a proposition of policy or judgment under mutually agreed-upon rules in front of a listener(s) who has the responsibility to decide who did the better job of debating using whatever criteria the listener deems important” (p.4). This definition highlights key characteristics that should be present in every competitive academic debate: equal speaking time, a resolution, an agreed upon format, specific speaker responsibilities, listener adaptation, and a commitment to fair play. These are characteristics that have stayed with academic debate until current times.

In the early 1900s, competitive debate began to embrace specific formats and contestants and national organizations started to commit to agreed upon rules (Bartanen & Frank, 1991). Additionally, debate teams shrank from four or five person teams to mostly two person teams. During this same time period, cross-examination debate and Lincoln Douglas Debate, which only had one person per team, were also developed. One of the most contentious developments that had to be reconciled within early debate tournaments was the ethicality of debating for a side in which the debater did not personally believe. Thus making the student an untruthful advocate. Those in favor of switching sides argued that debaters couldn't completely understand a topic unless they can argue for either side of an issue. This idea won out, and now students prepare both sides of resolutions regardless of their personal beliefs (Bartanen & Frank, 1991).



At a typical debate tournament, teams will debate in about six to eight debate rounds, and will be expected to be on both sides of the resolution. The team that becomes the tournament champion either wins the most preliminary rounds, or wins the most elimination rounds. This structure became popular in the 1930s and the actual debate tournament structure has not changed very much since that time (Bartanen & Frank, 1991). A few years prior, organizations united academic competitive public speaking and debate under the term forensics. This term was borrowed from the Aristotle, as it was his word for legal or judgmental speaking (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014). Many forensic tournaments have both debate and speech events hosted at the same tournament.

However, while the structure of debate tournaments remains relatively the same, Bartanen and Littlefield (2014) explain that the forensic format is not stagnant “contest structures and rules are extremely fluid” (p. 2-3). So, while the general nature of debate has stayed the same, the specifics have drastically changed. Policy proposition debate was the main format of debate until recently. However, when the format developed fast delivery and narrow resolution interpretation, Cross Examination Debate Association, or CEDA, was created (Bartanen & Frank, 1991). Today, academic debate consists of many forms including: policy debate (National Debate Tournament, or NDT style and CEDA style), parliamentary debate (National Parliamentary Debate Association, or NPDA, and American Parliamentary Association, APA), and informal audience debating. There are other variations within these major categories. The main differences come with the way that the resolutions are framed and the stock issues that are necessary for the debate. For example, a policy debate about the Electoral College could be framed as: The United

States Federal Government should significantly revamp the Electoral College. Whereas a value resolution about the same topic would be the Electoral College is desirable. Both of these resolutions are about the same thing (the Electoral College), but have very different goals. Clearly, debate has a strong foundation in the United States that is grounded in academia. With such grounding, many seek to show the value of competitive debate to those inside and outside of the activity. The next section highlights those values.

### **Value of Competitive Debate**

Colbert and Biggers (1985), Freely (1993), Greenstreet (1993), Hill (1993), Hobbs and Chandler (1991), Hunt (1994), Norton (1982), and Sheckels (1984) all argue that there is value in debating competitively. The reasons range from development of critical thinking skills, to building leadership qualities, to developing interpersonal skills. Warner and Brushke (2001) extend the value of debate to include that teaching students debate is akin to empowering students because they gain a tool of advocacy for their beliefs and ideas. These arguments are powerful. If an age-old tool like debate actually teaches students all of these life and empowerment skills, then it is a powerful educational tool. However, these arguments would be even stronger if the value of debate could be illustrated on a larger empirical level.

Additionally, because debate is a competitive activity, coaches and students often forget how it fits into the communication discipline. While argumentation practices are theoretically supported by competitive debate, there is discussion about whether or not current debating practices are grounded in theory or technique. Aden (1991) explains that instead of viewing forensics as a laboratory where skills are built in pristine conditions

that are unaffected by the “real world,” coaches need to perceive forensics as a liberal art: a place where skills can be honed in conjunction with theory and practical application. The article concludes by stating that there are many areas in forensics grounded in rhetorical and communication theory, and that as long as coaches continue to make the connection liberal arts will be the foundation of forensics (Aden, 1991). Bartanen (1994) elaborates on this idea by explaining that forensics allows a location for students to apply the ideas that they are learning in their actual classes. Thus, students are directly applying argumentation theory when they participate in competitive debate, solidifying the connection between communication theory and practice (Bartanen, 1994). Bennett (1972) articulates that debate can be used to explore communication concepts and can be used as a tool to challenge students to articulate their ideas.

As articulated before, there are a few different studies that show an empirical connection between debate and the skills that can be learned from debate. These two main studies show connections to professionals. Hobbs and Chandler (1990) surveyed professionals (lawyers, managers, teachers, and ministers) about their perception of the skills they learned in competitive debate. They asked about skills such as leadership, argumentation, critical thought, research, speech writing, reasoning, listening, persuasion, ethics, and knowledge of current issues. The conclusion was that their survey “overwhelmingly supports the idea that participation in intercollegiate policy debate provides significant benefits for those entering the professions of law, management, ministry, and teaching” (p. 6). Additionally, Hughs (1994) concluded that students who

participate in forensics become more effective teachers because of the skills they learned in forensics. Thus, forensics does teach applicable and important skills to students.

Finally, debate can be used as a tool for teaching. Dimock (2006) explains, that while some studies have justified debating in terms of its ability to develop critical thinking skills, no serious effort has been engaged which would assess debate in terms of its ability to improve argumentation. However, there has been much anecdotal evidence – like the quotations from my former team members – that debate is an effective tool to teach argumentation. Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt, and Loudon (1999) conducted a meta-analysis on learning debate skills from debate. They found that forensic participation is uniquely beneficial in improving critical thinking skills. However, while this is a strong pedagogical reason to continue teaching debate, it does not prove that debate, and specifically parliamentary debate, develops argumentation skills. Rancer, Whitecap, Kosberg, and Avtgis (1997) explain, “Since antiquity, the communication discipline has advanced the notion that individuals can enhance their ability to argue” (p. 274). But, as Dimock (2006) argues, until this point, it seems that the communication discipline is content with proving students are better critical thinkers and have a tendency to argue. And, while critical thinking is essential for good decision making (Inch & Warnick, 1998), argumentation is necessary for making good decisions in the public sphere (Dimock, 2006). While there is overlap between these two ideas, the differentiation is in the context in which individuals argue. The goal would be to bring good decision making out of the academic context into real world issues. This project hopes to start closing the gap of research about argumentation. Hill (1993) said that forensic programs need to be

accountable to their educational goals. Thus, if argumentation skills are a goal or skill said to be learned in parliamentary debate, we must prove this is true. Therefore, the next part of this review will explore argumentativeness theory.

### **Verbal Aggression and Argumentativeness**

In a review of the theory and research, Infante and Rancer (1996) concluded that argumentative communication is important, and that research should continue in the area of studying how argumentativeness impacts more areas of the communication field. However, before studying the applied areas, it is key to explore the definitions of verbal aggression and argumentativeness.

Outside of research, verbal aggression and argumentativeness are thought to be the same thing. However, it is important that the two terms are differentiated because the traits are problematically conflated when discussed in day-to-day life. Infante and Rancer (1982) clarify the definitions of these two terms, “argument involves presenting and defending positions on controversial issues while attacking the position taken by others on issues” (p.62). Conversely, verbal aggression “... denotes attacking the self-concept of another person, or in addition to, the person’s position on a topic of communication” (p. 62). Basically, the actual topic of the attack is the distinguishing factor between argumentativeness and verbal aggression. This means that verbal aggression manifests in character attacks, competence attacks, insults, maledictions, teasing, ridicule, profanity, threats, background attacks, physical appearance attacks, and nonverbal indicators (Infante, 1987; Infante & Wigley, 1986; Colbert, 1993). All of these are characteristics of attacking the self-concept rather than the position of the arguer. Additionally, Edwards,

Bello, Brandau-Brown, and Hollems (2001) discovered that when people with high verbal aggression are given ambiguous messages they will most likely perceive them as negative. They found that the less verbally aggressive individuals know about a topic, the more uncomfortable they are to discuss the topic, and out of frustration or lack of coping mechanism they will attack the other person or their position.

On the other hand, Infante and Rancer (1982) defined argumentativeness “as a generally stable trait which predisposes the individual to advocate positions on controversial issues and to attack verbally the positions which other people take on such issues” (p. 72). Thus, the individual is actually evaluating the position on the issue, rather than focusing on the individual who has the position. However, not all individuals will respond with verbal aggression or argumentation, some people will just avoid an argument altogether. Erwin (1989) created a typology of argumentativeness, and found that there are avoiders and arguers. Avoiders have low argumentativeness scores, avoid confrontation, and were not in favor of argumentativeness or verbal aggression. However, when avoiders did argue they tended to use verbally aggressiveness. Erwin (1989) concluded this was a result of not honing their argumentation skills. Conversely, arguers scored higher on the argumentativeness scale, were in favor of argumentativeness, and opposed to verbal aggression. Thus, when argumentativeness is embraced and practiced it can be used to create stronger argumentation contexts.

Because of the nature of each of the terms, verbal aggressiveness, as Martin and Anderson (1997) explain, is destructive while argumentativeness is constructive. They explain that verbal aggressiveness stops the discussion, while argumentativeness flushes

out the issue. Infante (1982) explains, “While argumentativeness involves the tendency to advocate and refute positions on controversial issues, verbal aggressiveness is the tendency to attack verbally people who are disdained, to provoke another person, to humiliate the other, to damage the other’s self image (p. 142). Thus, verbal aggression stops the discussion because a person is humiliated and often unwilling to continue engaging. Relationships are often damaged when the conversation becomes verbally aggressive.

However, verbal aggression and argumentativeness are not stagnant states of being. This means that people can be verbally aggressive and become argumentative. Schullery and Schullery (2003) explain that the more education in argument training one has, the more likely a person is to be argumentative rather than verbally aggressive. This means that if a verbally aggressive individual is trained in argumentation, they can become more argumentative. Additionally, Infante, Trebing, Shepherd, and Seeds (1984) noted highly argumentative individuals are less likely to use verbal aggressiveness when encountering an inflexible receiver than people with a low level of argumentative skill. This shows the adaptability of individuals with high levels of argumentativeness, and is supported by Neer (1994) who explained high argumentation leads to higher levels of flexibility when sending and receiving arguments. The study explained that people who scored high in argumentativeness and flexibility avoided punishing responses, had a tendency to continue an argument, and had the desire to accept the strategy of others. Basically, high argumentativeness creates an arguer who is flexible and adaptable to the receiver. Dimock (2006) explains that adaptation to different types of arguments is a skill

that individuals should learn in parliamentary debate. Therefore, theoretically, students who compete in parliamentary debate should also be able to adapt and respond to others' arguments.

### **Traits of Verbal Aggression and Argumentativeness**

The past section explored the definitions of verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness, the following section will explain the traits associated with verbal aggressive and argumentative individuals. The traits of individuals with high verbal aggression are explained by Infante, Riddle, Horvath, and Tumlin (1992)

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)

These three areas highlight the difficult nature of highly verbally aggressive traits. The conclusion of this article explains that verbally aggressive individuals often grossly underestimate the harm they cause by attacking a person and not the issues being discussed. Additionally, people with high levels of verbal aggression use high level of non-evidentiary appeals because they are driven from aggression rather than argumentativeness (Ifert & Bearden, 1998). Ifert and Bearden (1998) explain that this means there is little logic or evidence used in verbally aggressive arguments. Instead,



extreme emotions become the primary mode of argument. This means that verbally aggressive individuals rarely seem rational or logical when they are arguing.

While verbal aggressive traits seem completely unreasonable, there are reasons that people use verbal aggression. Verbally aggressive individuals explain they have this trait because of the need for reciprocity, wanting to appear tough, starting a rational conversation that turns into a verbal fight, wanting to show the receiver they do not like them, and being socialized to be aggressive (Infante, et al., 1992). The article argues that verbal aggression is not always the intention when an argument begins, but regardless of intentions, those who are verbally aggressive often articulate that they are just standing their ground. Many use it to show that they have strong opinions and cannot be swayed. Thus, people who have high levels of verbal aggression often blame others and society for their aggression. Basically, when others try to persuade them they believe they have no option but to verbally aggressively hold their ground. Infante (1989) also explains, that the reasons for verbal aggression usually come down to: psychopathology, disdain, social learning, and lack of argumentative skill. Based off of this list, it seems that if students learned argumentative skills in a social situation, like a debate team, they would be able to overcome some of their verbally aggressive tendencies. As Dimock (2006) argues, parliamentary debate experience helps people develop argumentation skills and collaboration.

On the other hand, the traits of argumentativeness are comparable to ideas and conversations seen in forensic research. Infante and Rancer (1982) explain that people with argumentativeness traits talk about topics that are intellectually challenging, defend

points of view, and improve intelligence. These individuals are interested in progressing debate by understanding topics and challenging preconceptions. The goal is to debate the topic not attack the person they are debating. Additionally, Infante, Horvath, and Step (1997) explain that when individuals have higher levels of argumentativeness, they are able to persuade others more easily. Because they often have higher levels of argumentation skills and use logic and evidence in their reasoning they seem reasonable as persuaders. They explain that individuals with high argumentativeness skills are often strong advocates for causes in which they believe. Additionally, those with high levels of argumentativeness do not shy away from controversial topics. Infante and Rancer (1993) conclude, when individuals are more motivated to use argumentativeness they are able to advocate and refute ideas and topics that are controversial. So, unlike verbal aggressive individuals who get frustrated with controversial and unfamiliar topics, individuals with high levels of argumentativeness embrace them. Finally, just like verbal aggressive traits are not stagnant, neither are argumentative traits. This means that argumentativeness traits can be developed and strengthened. Infante (1995) discusses how students can be taught to control and understand their verbal aggression, and also develop argumentativeness skills. Basically, the more formal training and education a student has in argumentation, the more likely they are to embrace argumentativeness. Thus, it is important to now discuss the different contexts in which verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness have been studied to see how these different traits play out in different contexts.

## **Contexts of Argumentativeness Research**

With a better understanding of the definitions of verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness and their corresponding traits, it is necessary to delve into the different contexts in which these theories have been applied. Hamilton and Mineo (2002) conducted a meta analysis of research conducted about argumentativeness and verbal aggression and found that these traits are influenced by type of argument, sex, education level, conflict management style, religion, emotion, ethnicity. Thus, it is not a singular trait that influences a person's level of argumentativeness, but rather there are multiple traits. With these many diverse applications, there are three main areas where argumentativeness and verbal aggression have been studied: cultural differences, religion, and education level in conjunction with age. This review explores the other variables that might impact these traits and creates a foundation to move the research into the area of parliamentary debate.

**Cultural differences.** When it comes to cultural differences, many researchers have explored the different traits and levels of verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness across cultures. Researchers have compared different cultures to study the similarities and differences noted when using the Argumentativeness Scale (Infante & Rancer, 1982) and the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (Infante & Wigley, 1986). Much of the research compares individuals in the United States to people in India, Japan, Korea, Thailand, Romania, and China (Avtgis, Rancer, Kajeva, & Chory, 2008; Chionea, Hample, & Paglieri, 2011; Croucher, 2013; Hample & Anagondahalli, 2015; Xie, Hample, & Wang, 2015; Croucher et. al., 2010; Croucher et. al., 2013). As this research

continues, researchers seek to determine if the study of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness is United States centered, and therefore makes assumptions and generalizations about argumentation in other parts of the world. Hample and Anagondahalli (2015) argue for the need to broaden our cultural understanding of these concepts explaining, “given the growing diversity within the US and the extent to which Americans engage in economic, political, and social dialog with people from other nations, investigating the argumentation orientations of other cultures would serve a practical purpose as well” (p. 2). Whatever the reason, this growing focus on cultural differences related to verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness adds valuable perspectives to our increasingly globalized world.

There are many different demographic variables that researchers are analyzing in order to understand the cultural differences in argumentation. One of those variables is age. It seems that how old the individual is, and their conjunctive experience, impacts their argumentativeness and verbal aggression. Hample (2003) explains that in a person’s lifetime, their understanding of argumentation can change. Thus, the argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness scales only measure their argumentativeness traits at the time. Hample and Anagondahalli (2015) reported in their cross cultural analysis of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness traits in United States and Indian populations that there were some different levels of argumentativeness when it came to the age of the subject. However, they found that when all of the ages were combined, there was not a statistically significant difference in people of different ages. Therefore, they concluded that age was not a huge measure of the level of argumentativeness or

verbal aggression for a person. However, Hample and Anagondahalli (2015) did report that there was a significant difference when it came to the gender of the individual. Men would argue for fun more than women, and women were more likely to be stressed as a result of arguments than men (Hample and Anagondahalli, 2015). Thus, while age is not a significant factor, gender does play a role when it comes to argumentativeness.

**Religion.** Landau, Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, Ossterman, and Gideon (2002), explain that cultural and behavioral norms are often determined and enforced by religion. Because religion is such a strong force, another area where argumentativeness and verbal aggression is extensively studied is religion. Argumentation about religion and religious topics is taken very seriously. Specifically because, in such a contentious area as religion, “argument is generally seen as a more acceptable way of approaching a disagreement, as opposed to aggressiveness” (Croucher et. Al., 2012, p. 117). Landau et. al. (2002) explain that most religions promote interpersonal conversation that is not oppositional, therefore they will mostly see argument as negative. Additionally, people who are religious often use their religion to make their decisions, react to arguments, and impact their choices (Stewart & Roach, 1993).

Thus, Croucher et. al. (2012) created the first research study that linked verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness to religion and religiosity. Their research dealt with how religion, sex, education, and religiosity influence the argumentative and verbal aggression of individuals when discussing sex and education. The study found that when approaching disagreements, argumentativeness is more acceptable than verbal aggression, and that “male participants were significantly more verbally aggressive,

individuals with higher education were less verbally aggressive, and religiosity decreased verbal aggressiveness” (Croucher et. al., 2012, 116). This research opened the door to continuing research on argumentativeness and verbal aggression in the area of religion and religiosity (Croucher et. al., 2012). This branch out into a new area of research shows how argumentativeness and verbal aggression can be applied to any new area where individuals communicate and argue.

**Education level.** Education level has also been determined as a predictor of verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness. At this point, the majority of the research in the area of verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness in classroom and instructional situations has looked at the impacts of perceived instructor verbal aggression and argumentativeness in the college or university classroom. Researchers who have studied how perceived instructor argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness effects student perceptions (Myers & Rocca, 2001), have looked at the impacts of instructor argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness in the college classroom (Myers, 1998), how instructors react to students’ verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness (Goodboy & Myers, 2012), and the effects of perceived instructor argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness on student outcomes (Myers & Knox, 2000). Each of these studies is important for understanding how argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness play a role in the classroom, but their focus is mostly on students’ reactions to instructors. The research questions are asking students about instructor traits, rather than the other way around.

However, there is research available about students' use of argumentativeness and verbal aggression. Research from Roberto and Finucane (1997) pointed out that past research has not necessarily taken into consideration the different levels of education and intellectual abilities that adults have and how that could affect research outcomes. Thus, their research took these factors into account and they concluded that people with a higher level of education would most likely be able to tell the difference between someone who is verbally attacking them, and someone who is arguing with them (Roberto & Finucane, 1997). This means that education does play a role in perceptions and recognition of argumentativeness and verbal aggression. Additionally, Schullery (1998) drew the conclusion that argumentativeness is linked to the level of education an individual has. They concluded that as a person's education level increases so does their level of argumentativeness. Thus, this finding builds upon Roberto and Finucane (1997), meaning that education levels affect the recognition and perception of and delivery of argumentation and verbal aggression.

Schullery & Schullery (2003) explore why students are verbally aggressive and how students form those messages. Their research uses Infante (1995) as a foundation. Infante (1995) discusses how students can be taught to control and understand their verbal aggression. He explains that the "continuation of verbal aggression after it is initiated, largely due to reciprocity" (p. 54). In debate, reciprocity is often necessary as the speaker is debating the other team, however, strong debaters should develop argumentation strategies rather than verbal aggression. Infante (1995) continues the article by explaining that there are strategies to prevent verbal aggression. One of the

main strategies that he offers is incorporating communication skills training. Basically, the individual must be trained to attack an opponent's position during an argument, rather than the opponent. Colbert (1993) concluded that extensive argumentation training may decrease a person's perception that they need reciprocity and use their argumentation training to respond to arguments. Thus, verbal aggressiveness would decrease and argumentativeness would increase. Colbert (1993) suggests that argumentation should be a central part of the communication curriculum, and that extensive training could reduce verbal aggression. However, simultaneously he acknowledges that argumentation is not often a central part of the curriculum, it is usually one course that a student takes.

Additionally, Rancer et al.'s (2000) findings support a positive correlation between argument training programs and argumentativeness. They created a research study that looked at adolescents' levels of argumentativeness and verbal aggression 7 months and 1 year after an argument training program. Notably, these students were both in school and enrolled in the argument-training program. Not only did the students enrolled in argument training use more argumentativeness and less verbal aggression than their peers, they also kept their skills 7 months and one year past the training program. Thus, the argumentation training successfully benefited students by helping them increase their argumentativeness skills.

In summation, it is clear that cultural differences, religion, and education level all impact a person's level of argumentativeness and verbal aggression. Additionally, research shows that besides these main areas, there are other variables that may impact verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness. One such area is the primary focus of this



paper: competitive debate participation. Thus, I will explore the community of forensics in order to propose hypotheses about the impact of competitive parliamentary debate on argumentativeness and verbal aggression.

### **The Community of Forensics**

There are claims that make forensics, particularly debate, seem like a verbally aggressive community. “In its most basic form, parliamentary debate does not differ greatly from other types of intercollegiate debate” (Dimock, 2006, 5). However, like all areas of competition parliamentary debate has evolved into its own practice. When students are trained in parliamentary debate, they are trained in extemporaneous speaking. Rather than focusing on research skills, in parliamentary debate teams only have 15 or 20 minutes to prepare their speeches. This is to refocus the debate emphasis on personal knowledge, argumentation, critical thinking, and logic and reasoning skills (Dimock, 2006). These skills are all discussed when dealing with argumentativeness and verbal aggression.

Specifically, debate is criticized for focusing on competition rather than education and that competitive debate rewards verbally aggressive behavior. Horn and Underberg (1991) drew the conclusion that students and coaches feel pressure to win, and it is this misplaced priority that is hurtful to forensics education. Steinfatt (1990) stated that in the debates he watched, “a good deal of hostility was sometimes generalized, sometimes aimed specifically at an opponent, and sometimes aimed at the judge” (p. 67). Frank (1991) adds, “the virtual disappearance of civility in modern debate can be traced to the belief that debate not only shares some characteristics of a game, but that debate is a

game” (p. 6). Therefore, the competitive aspect of academic debate may lend to an impression it promotes an aggressive context.

The empirical data about argumentativeness and verbal aggression in debate comes from three different studies. Swift and Vourvoulias (2006) and Swift (2008) found that when each partner in a parliamentary debate dyad has a similar level of argumentativeness and/or similar level of verbal aggression they tend work well together. However, these studies do not actually report the levels of argumentativeness or verbal aggression in parliamentary debaters. Colbert (1993) found that when high school students had debate, policy debate, or value debate experience all have lower levels of verbal aggression and higher level of argumentativeness. However, the study utilized a sample made up of high school students, and the student participants competed in types of debate that were not parliamentary debate. Colbert (1993) suggests that the study should be used for collegiate debaters from all areas of debate in order to understand the effects of forensic competition on students in regards to argumentativeness.

Additionally, research also points towards forensics being an argumentative community. Colbert (1987) explained that when tested, students who competed in CEDA and NDT debate scored significantly higher than non-debate students in critical thinking appraisals. These appraisals include skills such as inference, recognition of assumption, deduction, and evaluation of arguments. These skills are similar to argumentative skills. Additionally, Colbert (1987) hypothesized debaters with different types of debate experience would score similarly. He concluded that if his sample size of CEDA and

NDT debaters had been the same this would be true. This conclusion leads me to believe that these skills would also be prevalent in parliamentary debaters.

Dimock (2006) explained that the parliamentary debate is often justified by maintaining it promotes democracy and argumentation. Basically, students who participate in parliamentary debate become better-informed and skilled citizens for a democratic country. Additionally, Infante (1982) argues that argumentativeness is a desirable trait, “essential to democracy and personal growth” (p. 141). Thus, if parliamentary debate is fulfilling its intended goal, students who have more experience in parliamentary debate should score higher in argumentativeness and lower in verbal aggressiveness.

Infante (1989) argued lower levels of verbal aggressiveness could be the result of more argumentation training. Additionally, Ifert and Bearden (1998) explained that when a person uses arguments that lack evidentiary appeals, this is an indicator of high verbal aggressiveness. As Smitter (1970) concluded, when a debater has more experience they are less likely to rate statements without evidence as relevant, and are more consistent in evaluating evidence, than less experienced debaters. Thus, it seems that empirical evidence would point towards more experienced debaters having built more argumentativeness skills than less experienced debaters.

### **Hypotheses**

Swift and Vourvoulis (2006) concluded that one of the next steps for researchers is that we empirically find if there are differences in argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness in debaters at different levels of competition. At this point, the literature

review points towards the idea that the argumentation training in parliamentary debate should leave more experienced debaters with higher levels of argumentativeness and lower levels of verbal aggressiveness. In contrast, it should be the opposite for debaters with less experience. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Competitive parliamentary debate participation will predict the level of verbal aggressiveness with competitive debaters scoring lower on the verbal aggressiveness scale compared to those who have not competed.

H2: Competitive parliamentary debate participation will predict the level of argumentativeness with competitive debaters scoring higher on the argumentativeness scale compared to those who have not competed.

H3: Parliamentary debate experience will predict the level of verbal aggressiveness with people who have more experience competing in competitive parliamentary debate scoring lower on the verbal aggressiveness scale compared to people who have less experience.

H4: Parliamentary debate experience will predict the level of argumentativeness with people who have more experience competing in competitive parliamentary debate scoring higher on the argumentativeness scale compared to people who have less experience.

These hypotheses will move forward research about argumentativeness and verbal aggression by using the literature review as a foundation. After surveying the practice and value of parliamentary debate, the theories of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness and analyzing their major research areas, and applying the traits and skills

of verbal and aggressiveness and argumentativeness to the forensic community, I was able to develop four hypotheses. The chapter 3 of this thesis will elaborate on the methodology used to test these hypotheses.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

The review of literature developed a foundation for this research project, and offered up questions that are grounded in argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness theory. In order to answer these questions, the following chapter will outline the procedure, the participants of the study, and the measures used to answer the research question.

#### **Procedure**

With IRB approval, I used an online data collection program (Qualtrics) to administer the survey, which took about 10 minutes to complete. During Part 1 of the survey, each participant surveyed answered demographic questions including questions about: sex and gender, the amount of years they have been in college, their current academic standing, if they had ever taken an argumentation and debate class or had formal argumentation training, if they had competed in parliamentary debate, their age, and the race(s) with which they identify. Then, in Part 2 of the survey, the participant completed the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale created by Infante and Wigley (1986). Finally, in Part 3 of the survey, the participant completed the Argumentativeness Scale developed by Infante and Rancer (1982). To view the complete survey see Appendix A.

#### **Participants**

One hundred fifty-one respondents participated in the study, however ten did not complete the survey, thus they were eliminated from the study and one hundred forty-one respondents were considered for data analysis. Research participants were gathered from

two different populations: individuals who have competed in parliamentary debate, and students who have no parliamentary debate experience. The first group included sixty-seven individuals who have competed in parliamentary debate for public and private universities and colleges in the United States. The second group included seventy-four students who had not competed in parliamentary debate. These students attend, or attended, a large Midwestern University in the United States. The data sampling procedure used for both groups was purposive sampling. The sample for the first group was obtained using a call posted online on listservs (including the ie-1 and parli listserve), Facebook pages, and emails of individuals and groups who are affiliated with or participate directly on parliamentary debate teams. Additionally, these individuals and groups were asked to share the survey with their alumni, or any parliamentary debate contacts to which they are connected. To obtain the sample for the second group, students were asked by their instructors and professors to fill out the survey.

The descriptive statistics breakdowns for both groups are as follows. 65 (46.1%) of the respondents identified as female, and 76 (53.9%), identified as male. When asked how many years individuals had been in college, the respondents reported:

Table 1: Years in College

|                                 | Frequency | Percent |
|---------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| less than one year              | 26        | 18.4    |
| 1 years                         | 34        | 24.1    |
| 2 years                         | 17        | 12.1    |
| 3 years                         | 12        | 8.5     |
| 4 years                         | 9         | 6.4     |
| 5 years                         | 10        | 7.1     |
| 6 years or more years           | 4         | 2.8     |
| not in college/college graduate | 29        | 20.6    |
| Total                           | 141       | 100.0   |

Then, when participants were asked about their current academic standing, they reported:

**Table 2: Current Academic Standing**

|                  | Frequency | Percent |
|------------------|-----------|---------|
| Freshman         | 60        | 42.6    |
| Sophomore        | 16        | 11.3    |
| Junior           | 11        | 7.8     |
| Senior           | 16        | 11.3    |
| College graduate | 34        | 24.1    |
| Other            | 4         | 2.8     |
| Total            | 141       | 100.0   |

75(53.2%), of participants reported they were under the age of 21, 59 (41.8%), of participants stated they were between 21 and 34 years old, 4 (2.8%), participants were 35 to 44 years old, and 3, (2.1%), participants were between 45 and 54 years old. 86 (61.0%), of participants reported that they had taken an argumentation and debate class or had formal argumentation training, 6 (4.3%) of participants reported they may have had a class in argumentation, and 49 (34.8%), of participants said they had not. 67, (47.5%) of participants reported they had competed in parliamentary debate, while 73, (51.8%), of participants had not competed in parliamentary debate. If they had competed in parliamentary debate, they were asked how many years they competed. The following table shows the results:



Table 3: Years Competed in Parliamentary Debate

|  | Frequency | Percent |
|--|-----------|---------|
| less than one year                         | 8         | 5.7     |
| 1 year                                     | 7         | 5.0     |
| 2 years                                    | 19        | 13.5    |
| 3 years                                    | 15        | 10.6    |
| 4 years                                    | 17        | 12.1    |
| 5 years                                    | 1         | .7      |
| 8 years                                    | 1         | .7      |
| Have not competed in parliamentary debate? | 73        | 51.8    |
| Total                                      | 141       | 100.0   |

Finally, when participants were asked to identify the race they consider themselves to be, the following was reported:

Table 4: Race

|                                     | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| White or Caucasian                  | 97        | 68.8    |
| Black or African American           | 14        | 9.9     |
| American Indian or Alaska Native    | 2         | 1.4     |
| Asian                               | 13        | 9.2     |
| Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander | 1         | .7      |
| Latino/Latina/Hispanic              | 10        | 7.1     |
| Middle Eastern / Arabic             | 3         | 2.1     |
| Chose not to answer                 | 1         | .7      |
| Total                               | 141       | 100.0   |

## Measures

Because of the themes outlined in the literature review and the hypotheses articulated in this research, there were two variables measured for each group: verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness. The following scales and strategies were used to measure each variable.

### **Verbal Aggressiveness Scale.**

First, to measure the verbal aggressive variable, the researcher used the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale created by Infante and Wigley (1986) (See Appendix A). The Verbal Aggressiveness Scale uses a Likert Scale to ask 20 questions that are used to indicate individuals' levels of verbal aggression. Each participant was given the following instructions, "This survey is concerned with how we try to get people to comply with our wishes. Indicate how often each statement is true for you personally when you try to influence other persons" (Infante and Wigley, 1986). Then the participant was asked to use a 5-point scale ranging from 1(almost never true) to 5(almost always true). The results will range from 20 points to 100 points. If a participant scores from 20 to 46 it suggest low verbal aggressiveness, a score of 47 to 73 suggests moderate verbal aggressiveness, and scores from 74 to 100 suggest high verbal aggressiveness.

On the 20-item Verbal Aggressiveness questionnaire, Infante and Wigley (1986) found a reliability coefficient of .81. The use of the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale in this study was acceptable for the group of students who are competing or competed in parliamentary debate (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .84$ ), and the group of students who have never competed in parliamentary debate (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$ ). When the groups are tested altogether the results were also reliable (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .87$ ).

### **Argumentativeness Scale.**

Next, to measure the argumentativeness variable the researcher used the Argumentativeness Scale developed by Infante and Rancer (1982) (See Appendix A). The Argumentativeness Scale has 20 questions using a Likert Scale to indicate the

participant's level of argumentativeness. Each participant was given the following instructions, "This questionnaire contains statements about arguing controversial issues. Indicate how often each statement is true for you personally by placing the appropriate number in the blank to the left of the statement" (Infante and Rancer, 1982). The scale ranged from 1(almost never true for you) to 5 (almost always true for you). The point results can range from 20 to 100. If the participant scores from 73 to 100 they are high in argumentativeness, if their score is 56 to 72 they are moderate in argumentativeness, and a score of 20 to 55 means the participant is low in argumentativeness.

On the 20-item Argumentativeness questionnaire, Infante and Rancer (1982) found internal consistency reliability is 0.91. The use of the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale in this study was acceptable for the group of students who have competed in parliamentary debate (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .86$ ), and the group of students who have never competed in parliamentary debate (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .88$ ). When the groups are tested altogether the results were also reliable (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .91$ ).

### Means and Standard Deviations

When the means and standard deviations of the both groups were tested together, the results were:

Table 1: Means and Standard Deviation Altogether

|                | Verbal<br>Aggressiveness | Argumentativeness |
|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| N              | 141                      | 141               |
| Mean           | 46.01                    | 70.06             |
| Std. Deviation | 12.15                    | 13.57             |

When the means and standard deviations of just the participants of the group of individuals who have competed in parliamentary debate were tested, the results were:

Table 2: Means and Standard Deviation for Parliamentary Debate Experience

|                | Verbal<br>Aggressiveness | Argumentativeness |
|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| N              | 67                       | 67                |
| Mean           | 42.60                    | 78.10             |
| Std. Deviation | 10.47                    | 9.58              |

When the means and standard deviations of the group where individuals had no parliamentary debate experience were tested, the results were:

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviations for No Parliamentary Debate Competitors

|                | Verbal<br>Aggressiveness | Argumentativeness |
|----------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| N              | 73                       | 73                |
| Mean           | 48.90                    | 62.78             |
| Std. Deviation | 12.75                    | 12.61             |

### Data Analysis

I used multiple regression analysis to analyze the data. I considered two independent variables: parliamentary debate participation and parliamentary debate experience. To facilitate comparison, I dummy coded parliamentary debate with non participation as the reference or comparison group (participation in parliamentary debate =1; non participation = 0). Parliamentary debate experience was considered as a continuous variable. Age, sex, and education were used as control variables. Age and education were considered continuous variables, while sex was dummy coded with males being the reference or comparison group (females =1; males = 0). Through the analysis,

two models were created. In model 1, the control variables were entered; then, in model 2, the independent variables were added.

## Chapter Four: Results

The methodology of the study has been outlined, so now the results can be reported. To understand the results, each hypothesis will be articulated, and then the results of the research will be stated. Along with the results, each section will state if the hypothesis was supported and give a description of the measure.

**Hypothesis 1: Competitive parliamentary debate participation will predict the level of verbal aggressiveness with competitive debaters scoring lower on the verbal aggressiveness scale compared to those who have not competed.**

In Hypothesis 1, I proposed that if individuals have competed in parliamentary debate their level of verbal aggressiveness will be lower than those who have not competed in parliamentary debate. This hypothesis was supported. Participants in parliamentary debate scored lower on the verbal aggressiveness scale compared to those who have not competed when controlling for age, sex, and education, ( $\beta = -.40$ ,  $t = -2.37$ ,  $p < .05$ ). See Table 1 in Appendix B for more information.

**Hypothesis 2: Competitive parliamentary debate participation will predict the level of argumentativeness with competitive debaters scoring higher on the argumentativeness scale compared to those who have not competed.**

For Hypothesis 2, research pointed to competitive parliamentary debaters scoring higher on the argumentativeness scale than those who have not competed. However, this hypothesis was not supported. Competitive parliamentary debate participation did not predict the level of argumentativeness. When controlling for age, sex, and education,

those who competed in parliamentary debate did not indicate higher levels of argumentativeness than those who did not compete in parliamentary debate ( $\beta = .25$ ,  $t = 1.74$ ,  $p = >.05$ .) Thus, the hypothesis is not supported. See Table 2 in Appendix B for more information.

**Hypothesis 3: Parliamentary debate experience will predict the level of verbal aggressiveness with people who have more experience competing in competitive parliamentary debate scoring lower on the verbal aggressiveness scale compared to people who have less experience.**

Hypothesis 3 predicted that individuals with more competitive parliamentary debate experience would have lower verbal aggressiveness scores than those with less competitive parliamentary debate experience. This hypothesis was not supported. Controlling for age, sex, and education, experience competing in parliamentary debate did not predict the level of verbal aggressiveness ( $\beta = .09$ ,  $t = .54$ ,  $p = ns$ .) Essentially, this means that there were no significant differences between those who had more experience and those who had less experience. See Table 1 in Appendix B for more information.

**Hypothesis 4: Parliamentary debate experience will predict the level of argumentativeness with people who have more experience competing in competitive parliamentary debate scoring higher on the argumentativeness scale compared to people who have less experience.**

Hypothesis 4 predicted that students who have more competitive parliamentary debate experience will score higher on the argumentativeness scale than those with no

parliamentary debate experience. This hypothesis was supported. Parliamentary debate experience predicted the level of argumentativeness. When controlling for age, sex, and education, those with more parliamentary debate experience had higher levels of argumentativeness than those competitive debaters with less experience ( $\beta = .34, t = 2.32, p < .05$ ). Thus, participants who had more experience participating in parliamentary debates had higher levels of argumentativeness compared to those who had less experience. See Table 2 in Appendix B for more information.



## **Chapter Five: Discussion and Conclusions**

In this study, I studied the levels of verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness in those who competed in parliamentary debate and those with no parliamentary debate experience. Not only did I want to see if those who competed in parliamentary debate had higher levels of argumentativeness and lower levels of verbal aggressiveness than those without experience, I also wanted to discover if those with more debate experience have lower levels of verbal aggressiveness and higher levels of argumentativeness than those with less experience. After testing my hypotheses, unfortunately not all of the predictions were correct. As reported above, competitive parliamentary debate participants did score lower in verbal aggressiveness than those who have not competed in parliamentary debate. However, there was not a significant difference in verbal aggressiveness with those who have more parliamentary debate experience and those with less experience. Additionally, Hypothesis 2 was not supported, thus competitive parliamentary debate participation did not predict the level of argumentativeness because competitive debaters did not significantly score higher on the argumentativeness scale compared to those who have not competed. However, when looking at those who did compete in parliamentary debate, it was found that the longer they competed, the higher their level of argumentativeness. These results lead to major theoretical implications, recommendations for future research, reported limitations of the study, and conclusions.

## **Theoretical Implications**

There are two major theoretical implications that can be drawn from these results. First, because it was found that there was no significant difference between the verbal aggressiveness of those with more or less parliamentary debate experience, perhaps parliamentary debate simply attracts less verbally aggressive individuals. Infante (1989) stated that increased debate training would help lower verbally aggressive tendencies, however it does not seem to have this effect. The level of verbal aggression does differ from those without competitive debate experience, thus it is possible that they come to parliamentary debate with less verbally aggressive tendency. Unfortunately, if parliamentary debate does not actually help lower student's verbally aggressive tendencies, this means that students who competed in parliamentary debate may need more training in using logic and evaluating evidence in order to lower their verbal aggression. Smitter (1970) concluded, when a debater has more debate experience, they are less likely to rate statements without evidence as relevant, and are more consistent in evaluating evidence, than less experienced debaters. However, current parliamentary debate participants' responses do not reflect this idea. Unfortunately, the link Smitter (1970) made between more debate experience and lower level of verbal aggressiveness is not reflected in the results of this study. This could be caused for a couple of different reasons. First, stylistically, speed and the introduction of quick research could cause raised levels of verbal aggression. For example, if a debater is speaking extremely quickly (speed) to get as much information on the flow, the strength of argumentation suffers. This trend of speeding, coupled with a rule that students only have a research

period that only lasts 20 minutes immediately before the debate, forces students to draw conclusions from research before they have had time to actually analyze the evidence. Basically, students focus on getting as many arguments as possible on the debate flow because of the speed trend, however they have not had time to really analyze the evidence for the arguments they are putting on the debate flow. Thus, traits of verbal aggression such as poor use of evidence and logic (Ifert and Bearden, 1998) appear to be celebrated, rather than dissuaded in parliamentary debate. Second, coaches may not view lowering verbal aggressiveness as a priority. Many forms of parliamentary debate are not focusing on being cordial, and rather rely heavily on quick witted, and often rude remarks. For these reasons, perhaps verbal aggressiveness is a trait that rather than being mitigated, is being embraced in parliamentary debate.

Second, when it comes to argumentativeness, while the hypothesis that individuals who competed in parliamentary debate would have higher levels of argumentativeness than those who have not competed in parliamentary debate was not supported, the prediction that argumentativeness would increase as parliamentary debate experience increased was supported. Thus, it seems that the skills of argumentativeness, such as talking about topics that are intellectually challenging, defending points of view, and improving intelligence (Infante and Rancer, 1982) are being honed in parliamentary debate training and competitions.

Overall, because parliamentary debate did not help participants lower their verbal aggression; there are perhaps stylistic flaws in the way that parliamentary debate is being taught. If coaches and participants want to establish the goal of lowering verbal

aggression in parliamentary debate, they will need to make changes in the process of the debate. When it comes to argumentativeness, these results show that argumentativeness increases as parliamentary debate experience increases. This is something that coaches and participants should capitalize on when they want to promote their teams. This research could help coaches prove to their administrations that parliamentary debate does help students grow the skill of argumentativeness. This will help further justify the importance of forensics programs to administrators who are looking for strong learning outcomes.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

When it comes to future research, there are different areas researchers should address. First, researchers should look at why levels of verbal aggressiveness are not decreasing in parliamentary debate. Perhaps there are some parts of the training and competition that can be looked at to discover why there is no change. Areas that should be explored are speed delivery and its effect on parliamentary debate, and the effect of 20-minute preparation time on verbal aggressiveness. Second, it is possible that the competitive aspect of parliamentary debate also influences the results. Because many traits of verbal aggression can be construed as traits of competitiveness, potentially the competitiveness of parliamentary debate influences the overall results. Thus, a study on competition's influence in parliamentary debate would be appropriate. Third, researchers should try to discover why the level of argumentativeness between those who have competed in parliamentary debate is not significantly different than those who have not competed. Potentially, they could explore the effect of debate courses and compare it to

the debate coaching in parliamentary debate, and also look further into the educational impact on higher argumentative traits. Fourth, researchers should focus on other traits that can be tested, such as critical thinking, to see if parliamentary debate has an impact on these traits. Finally, researchers should look at other variables such as regional differences, to discover if different regions of competition have an impact on the verbal aggressiveness or argumentativeness of parliamentary debate competitors. Each of these studies would progress the research on the relevancy of parliamentary debate.

### **Limitations**

Though this study yielded results that are important and significant, there were some limitations that must be addressed. First, the population sample size was small, as only 67 participants had competed in parliamentary debate. With the large population of competitors in the United States, more debaters would have led to more reliable results. Additionally, more participants could have added to the demographic diversity of the results making them even more reflective of the parliamentary debate population.

Second, this study used self reported information to measure levels of argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness. As Croucher et al. (2012) explain, when participants self report, they can subconsciously report what they believe the researcher wants to hear, rather than the correct information. Thus, individuals could feel obligated to choose a trait they believed the researcher wanted them to choose creating a limitation for the results.

Third, the characteristics of respondents could have influenced the results. For example, in the sample the majority of the individuals who identified as a college

graduate were in the group who had competed in parliamentary debate. This means that for comparing the groups of individuals that had competed in and had not competed in parliamentary debate, there were some differences in the populations. Had the populations been more similar, the results may have varied.

### **Conclusions**

Overall, the purpose of this study was to really understand the actual skills that parliamentary debate is teaching. Unfortunately, these results are not the results that many parliamentary debate coaches would perhaps be hoping for, or even expecting. Personally, as a coach, I feel as though the results point to either a huge flaw in parliamentary debate, specifically in the area of verbal aggressiveness. In a world where sources are called “fake news” and experts are deemed not credible, it is more important than ever to help students lower their verbal aggressiveness. Thus, by finding this flaw in parliamentary debate, an area for improvement has been pinpointed. Parliamentary debate coaches need to develop strategies to help our students decrease their verbal aggressiveness so they can take these skills into the real world.

Additionally, it is optimistic to see that individuals’ levels of argumentativeness increase as their parliamentary debate experience increases, however coaches must do better as the debaters’ levels of argumentativeness are on par with other students. Thus, we need to do more to continue to increase argumentativeness. If coaches continued to work towards these goals, our community’s relevancy will continue to increase because of the real world application.

Finally, coaches and competitors alike need to take a step back and really consider what parliamentary debate is teaching. Argumentativeness and low verbal aggression are just the first steps. We need to claim, teach, and measure other skills like critical thinking, logic, and strategy. Only then can we really help students create and achieve their goals while simultaneously keeping the parliamentary debate community relevant.

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**Appendix A****Part 1: Demographic Information****1. What is your sex?**

- 1-Female
- 2- Male

**2. How many years have you been in college?**

- 1 - less than one
- 2 - 1 year
- 3 – 2 years
- 4 – 3 years
- 5 – 4 years
- 6 – 5 years
- 7 – 6 or more years
- 8 – not in college/college graduate

**3. What is your current academic standing?**

- 1 – Freshman
- 2 – Sophomore
- 3 – Junior
- 4 – Senior
- 5 – College graduate
- 6 – other

**4. Have you ever taken an argumentation and debate class or had formal argumentation training?**

- 1 – yes
- 2 – maybe
- 3 – no

**5. Do you, or have you ever, competed in parliamentary debate?**

- 1 – yes
- 2 – maybe
- 3 – no

**6. If you have competed in parliamentary debate, how many years have you competed?**

- 1 - less than one year
- 2 - 1 year
- 3 – 2 years
- 4 – 3 years
- 5 – 4 years
- 6 – 5 years
- 7 – 6 years

- 8 – 7 years
- 9 – 8 years
- 10 – Have not competed in parliamentary debate

**7. What is your age?**

- 1 – Under 21 years old
- 2 – 21-34 years old
- 3 – 35-44 years old
- 4 – 45-54 years old
- 5 – 55-64 years old
- 6 – 65+ years old

**8. What is your gender?**

- 1-Female
- 2- Male

**9. Which of the following races do you consider yourself to be?**

- 1- White or Caucasian
- 2 - Black or African American
- 3 - American Indian or Alaska Native
- 4 - Asian
- 5 - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- 6 - Latino/Latina/Hispanic
- 7 - Middle Eastern / Arabic
- 8 – Chose not to answer

**Part 2: Verbal Aggressiveness Scale**

Instructions: This survey is concerned with how we try to get people to comply with our wishes. Indicate how often each statement is true for you personally when you try to influence other persons. Use the following scale:

- 1=almost never true
- 2=rarely true
- 3=occasionally true
- 4=often true
- 5=almost always true

- \_\_ 1. I am extremely careful to avoid attacking individuals' intelligence when I attack their ideas.
- \_\_ 2. When individuals are very stubborn, I use insults to soften their stubbornness.
- \_\_ 3. I try very hard to avoid having other people feel bad about themselves when I try to influence them.
- \_\_ 4. When people refuse to do a task I know is important, without good reason, I tell them they are unreasonable.
- \_\_ 5. When other do things I regard as stupid, I try to be extremely gentle with them.

- \_\_\_6. If individuals I am trying to influence really deserve it, I attack their character.
- \_\_\_7. When people behave in ways that are in very poor taste, I insult them in order to shock them into proper behavior.
- \_\_\_8. I try to make people feel good about themselves even when their ideas are stupid.
- \_\_\_9. When people simply will not budge on a matter of importance I lose my temper and say rather strong things to them.
- \_\_\_10. When people criticize my shortcomings, I take it in good humor and do not try to get back at them.
- \_\_\_11. When individuals insult me, I get a lot of pleasure out of really telling them off.
- \_\_\_12. When I dislike individuals greatly, I try not to show it in what I say or how I say it.
- \_\_\_13. I like poking fun at people who do things which are very stupid in order to stimulate their intelligence.
- \_\_\_14. When I attack a person's ideas, I try not to damage their self concepts.
- \_\_\_15. When I try to influence people, I make a great effort not to offend them.
- \_\_\_16. When people do things which are mean or cruel, I attack their character in order to help correct their behavior.
- \_\_\_17. I refuse to participate in arguments when they involve personal attacks.
- \_\_\_18. When nothing seems to work in trying to influence others, I yell and scream in order to get some movement from them.
- \_\_\_19. When I am not able to refute others' positions, I try to make them feel defensive in order to weaken their positions.
- \_\_\_20. When an argument shifts to personal attacks, I try very hard to change the subject.

Scoring instructions: Sum the scores on the 20 items after reversing the scoring for items 1,3,5,8,10,12,14,15,17,20.

Interpretation: Scores can range from 20 to 100. Scores from 20-46 suggest low verbal aggressiveness, 47-73 suggest moderate verbal aggressiveness, and 74-100 suggest high verbal aggressiveness.

Source: Infante, D. A., & Wigley, C. J., III. (1986). Verbal aggressiveness: An interpersonal model and measure. *Communication Monographs*, 53, 61-69.

### **Part 3: Argumentativeness Scale**

Instructions: This questionnaire contains statements about arguing controversial issues.

Indicate how often each statement is true for you personally by placing the appropriate number in the blank to the left of the statement.

5 = almost always true for you

4 = often true for you

3 = occasionally true for you

2 = rarely true for you

1 = almost never true for you

1. \_\_\_\_\_ While in an argument, I worry that the person I'm arguing with will form a negative impression of me.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Arguing over controversial issues improves my intelligence.

3. \_\_\_\_ I enjoy avoiding arguments.
4. \_\_\_\_ I am energetic and energetic and enthusiastic when I argue.
5. \_\_\_\_ Once I finish an argument I promise myself that I will not get into another.
6. \_\_\_\_ Arguing with a person creates more problems for me than it solves.
7. \_\_\_\_ I have a pleasant, good feeling when I win a point in an argument.
8. \_\_\_\_ When I finish arguing with someone I feel nervous and upset.
9. \_\_\_\_ I enjoy a good argument over a controversial issue.
10. \_\_\_\_ I get an unpleasant feeling when I realize I'm about to get into an argument.
11. \_\_\_\_ I enjoy defending my point of view on an issue.
12. \_\_\_\_ I am happy when I keep an argument from happening.
13. \_\_\_\_ I do not like to miss the opportunity to argue a controversial issue.
14. \_\_\_\_ I prefer being with people who rarely disagree with me.
15. \_\_\_\_ I consider an argument an exciting intellectual challenge.
16. \_\_\_\_ I find myself unable to think of effective points during an argument.
17. \_\_\_\_ I feel refreshed and satisfied after an argument on a controversial issue.
18. \_\_\_\_ I have the ability to do well in an argument.
19. \_\_\_\_ I try to avoid getting into arguments.
20. \_\_\_\_ I feel excitement when I expect that a conversation I am in is leading to an argument.

#### Scoring Instructions

Step 1: Add your scores on items 2,4,7,9,11,13,15,17,18, 20

Step 2: Add 60 to the sum obtained in Step 1

Step 3: Add you scores on items 1,3,5,6,8,10,12,14,16,19

Step 4: To compute your argumentativeness score, subtract the total obtained in Step 3 from the total obtained in Step 2.

#### Norms

73-100 = high in argumentativeness

56-72 = moderate in argumentativeness

20-55 = low in argumentativeness

Source: Infante, D.A., & Rancer, A.S. (1982). A conceptualization and measure of argumentativeness. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 46, 72-80.

### Appendix B

Table 1: Regression Model for Verbal Aggressiveness for Hypotheses 1 and 3

|                                      | Model 1 |         | Model 2 |         |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
|                                      | B       | $\beta$ | B       | $\beta$ |
| Intercept                            | 4.793   |         | 3.217   |         |
| Sex                                  | -1.653  | -.068   | -1.807  | -.075   |
| Years in College                     | -.655   | -.106   | -.551   | -.089   |
| Age                                  | -1.707  | -.093   | 1.593   | .087    |
| Years in Parliamentary Debate        |         |         | .548    | .093    |
| Participated in Parliamentary Debate |         |         | -9.649* | -.400*  |
| RSS                                  | 467.997 |         | 187.923 |         |
| MSE                                  | 155.999 |         | 379.585 |         |
| F                                    | 1.068   |         | 2.758*  |         |
| $\Delta F$                           | 1.068   |         | 5.195   |         |
| R <sup>2</sup>                       | .023    |         | .093    |         |
| R <sup>2</sup> <sub>adj</sub>        | .001    |         | .059    |         |

Notes. \* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$

Table 2: Regression Model for Argumentativeness for Hypotheses 2 and 4

|                                      | Model 1   |         | Model 2  |         |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|---------|----------|---------|
|                                      | B         | $\beta$ | B        | $\beta$ |
| Intercept                            | -12.000** |         | -7.380*  |         |
| Sex                                  | -1.638    | -.060   | 1.292    | -.048   |
| Years in College                     | .387      | .056    | .098     | .014    |
| Age                                  | 7.725**   | .376    | .515     | .025    |
| Years in Parliamentary Debate        |           |         | 2.234    | .337    |
| Participated in Parliamentary Debate |           |         | 6.723*   | .248    |
| RSS                                  | 4143.204  |         | 9063.435 |         |
| MSE                                  | 1381.068  |         | 1812.687 |         |
| F                                    | 8.711**   |         | 14.597** |         |
| $\Delta F$                           | 8.711     |         | 19.810   |         |
| R <sup>2</sup>                       | .161      |         | .353     |         |
| R <sup>2</sup> <sub>adj</sub>        | .143      |         | .328     |         |

Notes. \* $p \leq .05$ , \*\* $p \leq .01$