All Theses and Dissertations

2017-06-01

Social Aggression in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Primary and General Election Debates

Daniel John Montez
Brigham Young University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd

Part of the Communication Commons

Social Aggression in the 2016 U.S. Presidential Primary

and General Election Debates

Daniel John Montez

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Pamela Brubaker, Chair
Sarah Coyne
Christopher Wilson

School of Communications

Brigham Young University

ABSTRACT

Social Aggression in the 2016 US Presidential Primary
and General Election Debates

Daniel John Montez
School of Communications, BYU
Master of Arts

Through a content analysis, the proposed thesis examines instances of social and verbal aggression within the 2016 US presidential primary and general election debates. Previous studies regarding social aggression have shown that its primary use has been to "get ahead" in competitive and hostile environments. While acts of social and verbal aggression have been analyzed in interpersonal behavior and mediated entertainment scholarship, it has yet to be examined in the political spectrum, where candidates engage in clash to suppress their opponents. The current study argues that analyzing social and verbal aggression in televised political debates will help broaden the concept of political clash and provide foundational material to the study of this behavioral and rhetorical trend in American political communication. Additionally, examining social aggression at the political stage will encourage further research examining voters' attitudes towards similar political discourse and the cognitive effects that social aggression has on audiences.

Sampling two debates from each primary debate segment (Republican and Democratic) and general election debates, the study was able to compare results across debate segments, as well as longitudinally within debate segments. The analysis found that aggression increased longitudinally. Although the Republican primary debates featured more aggression than the Democratic debates, forms of social and verbal aggression were very similar between the two. As was expected, the general election debates included more aggression than the two primary debate segments combined. Donald Trump was the greatest perpetrator of aggression among all primary and general election candidates.

Keywords: social aggression, verbal aggression, political clash, 2016 US presidential elections

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Political debates are a fundamental means of engaging the American voter in the democratic process. Referring to the importance of U.S presidential primary debates (but perhaps could be applied to all election stages), Kendall (2000) stated that the debates "lead naturally to a focus on the personal traits of the candidates, provide irresistible dramatic conflict and negative clashes for news stories, and reward candidates who can best communicate with their audiences" (p. 216). On a larger scale, Benoit (2007) argues that the unscripted nature of political debates, relying on immediacy or spontaneity, produces authenticity for the voting audience. Under this light, the 2015–2016 U.S presidential primary and general election debates have proven to be a spectacular event for American voters, characterized by high drama and unprecedented conflict.

Although politics are usually aggressive and divisive by nature, these recent debates, particularly the Republican primary debates, have become notorious for featuring ruthless and continual jawing between candidates. In a Pew Research study published in January of 2016, results indicated that viewers who identified as Democrats were watching the Republican debates more than viewers who identified as Republicans were watching the Democratic primary debates (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). Some have cited the "Trump" factor as a plausible reason for increased viewership (Maglio, 2016). Despite mere speculation, the former reality television star, Donald Trump, had taken credit for the high viewer ratings of the Republican primary debates. After purposefully skipping the January 28, 2016 primary debate, Trump stated, "They say that if I participated in last night's Fox debate, they would have had 12 million more [viewers] and would have broken the all time record" (Rhodan, 2016, para. 3). It is obvious, nonetheless, that

the Republican primary debates garnished mass attention and attracted many neophytes to the American political process.

That is not to say that the 2016 Democratic primary debates were completely bereft of their own argumentativeness. Despite the vast attention shifted towards the Republican platform, the Democratic primary debates, although including fewer participating candidates, displayed some of the same venom and brutality as its partisan counterpart (Collinson, 2016). Consequently, both sides of the American political spectrum were exposed to higher levels of incivility. The rising tension reached a climax as Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump faced each other in the general election debates. The debates were additionally supplemented by scandals each candidate was smeared for at the time, namely the Clinton team's leaked emails and Trump's lewd hot mic (Sharockman, 2016). The current analysis argues, however, that the aggressiveness of the 2015–2016 U.S. presidential primary and general election debates reflected the rising trend of social and verbal aggression in Western societies, which have become pervasive behaviors via interpersonal and mediated communication (Willer & Cupach, 2008; Ward & Carlson, 2013; Coyne, 2016).

While not physical in nature, social aggression has been referred to as engaging in direct and indirect harmful behaviors to damage another person's reputation and self-esteem (Ward & Carlson, 2013, p. 372). Traditionally, gossiping, social exclusion, and threatening friendships have been labeled as examples of this behavior. In addition, verbal aggression (e.g. insults, sarcasm, etc.) and nonverbal aggression (rolling eyes, negative hand gestures, etc.) usually overlap with social aggression (Archer & Coyne, 2005), and each have been studied in connection social aggression (Coyne, Robinson, & Nelson, 2010; Coyne, Callister, Pruett, Nelson, Stockdale, & Wells, 2011). Social aggression shares many similarities with indirect

aggression and relational aggression (Archer & Coyne, 2005). In mediated entertainment, particularly reality television, social aggression is frequently a mechanism used by producers and contestants alike to create drama (Wilson, Robinson, & Callister, 2012). As such, the behavior has become a communicative technique to entertain mass audiences.

Although social aggression has been studied in mass media through the method of content analysis, it has rarely been associated with politics directly. Brooks (2010) referenced indirect aggression in her study of gender in political campaigns, but no analysis of indirect aggression was conducted. Hinck, Hinck, Dailey, and Hinck (2013) coded for face attacks and threats in the 2012 Republican primary debates, but measurement of overall aggression was not involved. Aggression in political debates has been identified as political clash, a deliberative strategy which engages opposing candidates in ideological argument. The present analysis argues that examining social aggression in politics, instead of clash alone, is necessary to understand changing political strategies influenced by the diversity of media. As one blog wrote after the August 6, 2015 Republican debate, "Candidates had to be savvy…and embrace the reality television format" (The American Interest, 2015, para. 3). Additionally, the current study seeks to understand what social and verbal aggression may communicate to voting American audiences.

This study analyzes the 2015–2016 Republican and Democratic primary debates and the 2016 presidential general election debates to longitudinally compare aggression throughout the entire election cycle. Like previous content analyses of social and verbal aggression, this study also analyzes potential consequences, via audience responses towards individual aggression instances, and compares aggression between earlier and later debates within each segment (Republican, Democratic, general election) to determine differences. It is hoped that this study

will be of great importance to political science and communication researchers by broadening the concept of political clash and providing foundational material to continue analysis of social aggression in American politics. Additionally, examining social aggression at the political level will encourage further examination of voters' attitudes towards socially aggressive deliberation and the cognitive effects that the communicative behavior impresses on audiences.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Clash in U.S Political Debates

It is evident that the world of politics has always attracted an aggressive if not assertive competition of words in order to win over potential supporters through logic and emotion. Indeed, the art of argumentation was covered thoroughly by the Greeks, who introduced elements of rhetoric and sophistry as part of their societal make up (Huizinga, 1970). In more modern times, Western society remains a culture of argumentativeness. But current U.S political debates did not reflect the art of clash until the year 1960, primarily enabled by the postmodern medium of television broadcast. Morello (1988) identified verbal clash as a "candidate's remarks [that] either attacked his opponent's ideas, positions, statements, proposed programs and policies, or defended against or replied to an attack expressed by the opponent" (p. 279). Carlin, Howard, Stanfield, & Reynolds (1991) sorted clash into four main categories, namely: "(1) there is inadequate time for substantive responses by the candidates; (2) the question-answer format is not conducive to substantive debate; (3) panelists play an overly intrusive role; and (4) panelists do not reflect the public's interests" (para. 1).

Within political clash, instances of aggressive behavior have usually been labeled as "attacks". Although Benoit and colleagues (2002) suggested that U.S presidential primary debates normally include fewer attacks in comparison with general election debates, past analyses of clash in both debate stages is valuable to the current study. For example, Hinck et al. (2013) observed that the 2012 Republican primary debates consisted of more intense attacks than in general campaign debates. Coding face attacks and threats using transcripts of nine primary debates, the authors were able to conclude that a majority were aimed at an opposing candidates'

leadership experiences and personal character rather than policy differences. The researchers' results indicated that the more one was attacked, the more they attacked others (p. 273). Furthermore, Hinck et al. questioned if attacks would be aimed at leadership and character for one party more than the other. This study also seeks to address this question.

Interestingly, Hinck et al. (2013) observed that Michele Bachmann was the most aggressive candidate, which they noticed negatively impacted her position in the polls. This finding is complemented by McKinney, Kaid, and Robinson's (2001) claim that front-runners usually received the brunt of attacks as a result of less prestigious candidates attempts to outdo them. According to their study, within the 2000 Republican primary debates, half of the total debate attacks were directed at George W. Bush by lesser known candidate Steve Forbes. The profuse volume of attacks resulted in unfavorable attitudes towards Forbes among participant viewers in the study, which McKinney et al. also noticed were reflected by the general American public in the concurrent primary polls. These results further coincide with Cappella and Jamieson's (1997) spiral of cynicism theory, which assumes that more public negativity at the political level would increase negative attitudes among audiences towards politics in general.

The outcomes of these two studies make a striking parallel to the aggression exhibited in the 2015–2016 primary and general election debates. However, unlike previous elections, the 2015–2016 Republican and 2016 general election debates featured a front-runner, Donald Trump, who himself claimed, "I will gladly accept the mantle of anger" (Huey-Burns, 2015, para. 31). Such an attitude reflects the characteristics of social aggression and begs the question as to how Trump's political tactics have fueled the behavior of the opposing candidates, who are forced to engage with this edgier political discourse.

Therefore, the present study does not intend to analyze political clash through traditionally coded attacks, but seeks to identify a broader range of aggressive behavior through social and verbal aggression. As will be addressed later, social aggression may bridge the gap between mediated entertainment behaviors and real-life competition, particularly via the inclusion of a former reality television star. Consequently, the current study believes that studying social and verbal aggression will provide nuanced perspectives to political communication scholarship.

Social Aggression

Social aggression has been referred to as using direct and indirect harmful behaviors to damage another's reputation and self-esteem (Ward & Carlson, 2013, p. 372). Galen and Underwood (1997) mentioned certain behaviors could include nonverbal cues such as "negative facial expressions and body movements," and indirect forms such as "slanderous rumors or social exclusion" (p. 589). Indirect forms of social aggression involve covertly bringing harm to the victim, while direct forms of social aggression are directed from perpetrator to victim firsthand (Coyne et al., 2011). Generally, social aggression overlaps with *indirect aggression* (e.g. harming another by breaking confidences) and *relational aggression* (e.g. damaging relationships; Ward & Carlson, 2013). Archer and Coyne (2005) indicated that social aggression encompassed both indirect and relational aggression, as well as nonverbal aggressive behaviors. Additionally, Coyne et al. (2010) studied relational aggression in conjunction with verbal aggression (e.g. insults, sarcasm), which the current study intends to do as well (see also Galen & Underwood, 1997).

Because indirect, relational, and social aggression share similar characteristics, several studies have used one of these terms to stand in place for all (Ward & Carlson, 2013; Wilson et

al., 2012; Coyne & Archer, 2004). Underwood Galen, and Paquette (2001) suggested that social aggression be used because it was one of the first constructs implemented to describe these types of behavior. Additionally, the authors claimed that indirect and relational aggression only considered direct and overt behaviors, and also omitted nonverbal forms of aggression. Ward and Carlson (2013) used *social aggression* to refer to the aggressions collectively, which the current analysis will also do. Furthermore, this study finds it appropriate to use the term *social aggression* due to the political focus of the study; relational aggression has been used in more interpersonal, peer-like relationships, and indirect aggression is used to highlight the covert nature of this type of aggression (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Social aggression, on the other hand, can be both direct and indirect towards the victim, which is likely to occur in a political debate.

However, within the current study, there are several obstacles in identifying social aggression as normally conceptualized. Because of the live nature of debates, no relationship manipulation (e.g. gossiping, spreading rumors, social exclusion, etc.) is definable because candidates' offstage interactions with opponents cannot be observed. This anomaly has been addressed previously by Galen and Underwood (1997), who, in their study of social aggressive behavior by adolescent girls in triadic interactions, noted that aspects related to manipulating friendship patterns could not be observable. Lagerspetz, Bjorkquvist, and Peltonen (1988), concluded, particularly to their study, that relationally aggressive behaviors could be difficult for teachers and researchers to reliably observe and evaluate in naturalistic settings, themselves being outside the peer group. Additionally, Archer and Coyne (2005) felt that social aggression would depend less on relational manipulation when utilized in a group context, and would involve more manipulation of social position and social exclusion.

The focus of social aggression in the following study must then center around the objective to "damage another's *reputation* and *self-esteem*" (Ward & Carlson, 2013, emphasis added). Aggression in political debates is targeted to undermining the credibility and character of opponents rather than to destroy relationships for gain. Several studies have referred to this specific type of behavior within social aggression as reputational aggression (Faris, 2012; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003). For example, incorporating reputational aggression in their conceptualization of indirect aggression, De Los Reyes and Prinstein (2004) defined reputational aggression as "attempts to damage a victim's social reputation within the peer group hierarchy" (p. 326). Faris (2012) added that integral to reputational aggression was its ability to "increase the status of perpetrators and diminish that of victims" (p. 1208). While the current study does not seek to examine reputational aggression exclusively, it intends to observe the reputational component of social aggression in the 2016 U.S presidential debates.

In order to provide special attention to these features, the current study will incorporate elements of McCroskey and Teven's (1999) source credibility (competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill) to identify social aggression. Analyzing attacks on an opposing candidate's competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill will adequately consider the reputational aspect of social aggression. Additionally, adopting source credibility measures into the current study will address Hinck et al.'s (2013) observation that a majority of attacks in the 2012 Republican primary debates were aimed at leadership experiences and personal character of victims.

To illustrate some examples of how each of these source credibility measures would be applied to social aggression in political debates, first, attacking competence would involve highlighting the lack of political experience an opponent has, perhaps even their flawed experience (e.g. Trump acknowledging Clinton's experience but calling it "bad experience"), or

their inability to serve as president. Attacks on trustworthiness would focus on an opponent's dishonesty, lack of morals, even embracing values outside the traditional party platform (e.g. Republicans accusing Trump of formerly donating to Democrat campaigns). Finally, attacks on an opponent's goodwill would aim to discredit one's disregard for others, self-centeredness, or malintent towards the general public (e.g. Clinton accusing Trump of encouraging Russian espionage).

Social Aggression in Reality Television Entertainment

At the crux of this aggressive political phenomenon lies the question as to what do actions of social aggression communicate to a large audience. As previously mentioned, social aggression has been utilized in both interpersonal behaviors and mediated contexts, to both control relationships and manipulatively "get ahead" of competition (Coyne et al., 2010; Girl Scout Research Institute, 2011; Behm-Morawitz et al., 2015). Similarly, social aggression has been effectively employed in reality television programs, as Todd Herzog, winner of the 15th season of *Survivor*, proved (Wilson et al., 2012). Herzog admitted that his strategy had formed as he watched every episode of Survivor, from the time that he was 15 years old. In order to win, Herzog knew he had to lie, backstab, and disrupt close relationships (Horiuchi, 2007, para. 3). While this strategy may be morally disturbing, it ultimately enabled his victory. Therefore, understanding the trends of these behaviors in popular media entertainment will bring greater insights to the use of social and verbal aggression in American politics as a viable method of winning.

Some examples of popular entertainment studies of social and verbal aggression highlight the pervasiveness of these behaviors in our American media. In literature, Coyne et al. (2011) found that relational and verbal aggression were portrayed more in popular teen novels than was

physical aggression. Additionally, in their content analysis of popular children television shows, Martins and Wilson (2011) observed that perpetrators of socially aggressive acts possessed both good and bad qualities. While these studies indicate that fictional media welcomes aggressive behaviors, it is the manifestations of social and verbal aggression in the hyperreal format of reality television that will help transition the current study to the more "authentic" context of American politics.

Reality television is notorious for featuring participants acting competitively or aggressively to achieve their goals. The genre has diversified intensely, beginning with reality cop shows in the '90s, booming with competition based shows such as *Survivor* and *Big Brother* in the early 2000s, and recently catering to niche groups attracted to dating competitions and entrepreneurial endeavors. As reality television tends to portray real people in unrealistic situations, social aggression is frequently a mechanism used by producers and cast members alike to create drama (Wilson et al., 2012).

Studies from the last decade revealed that one motive for viewing reality television was vengeance (Reiss & Wiltz, 2004) and morbid curiosity, or the desire to see violence and suffering (Crook, Worrell, Westerman, Davis, Moyer, & Clarke, 2004). While restraining from extreme acts of physical violence, reality television is the perfect stage for malcontent and dramatized aggression. Furthermore, the genre may contain high levels of relational aggression because of the interaction between cast members (Coyne et al., 2010). Measuring relational and verbal aggression within different types of reality television programming, Coyne et al. analyzed five non-reality and five reality programs (*The Apprentice* being one of them), with some programs containing higher character interaction. The authors found that the reality programs displayed much more relational and verbal aggression than traditional television programs.

Moreover, reality programs with high character interaction involved much more relational aggression, which study participants perceived as artificially produced. Among the five reality programs, the authors noted that relational aggression was portrayed as acceptable but not rewarded.

Other subgenres of reality programing, specifically competitive-based "gamedocs" (e.g. *Survivor, The Amazing Race, The Apprentice*, etc.) are prone to exhibiting antisocial behaviors (Wilson et al., 2012). A vital analysis in relation to the current study was performed by Wilson et al. (2012), who analyzed indirect and verbal aggression among seven seasons of *Survivor*. The authors found that indirect aggression made up 74% of all antisocial acts and verbal aggression made up 23.3 %. Higher levels of indirect and verbal aggression were exhibited in the later seasons of the program than in seasons one and two and did not need as much producer induced aggression. In other words, cast members were able to incite aggression themselves. Astoundingly, 89.6% of antisocial acts, including indirect and verbal aggression, were not rewarded nor punished throughout the seven seasons of *Survivor*.

These two studies serve as examples of how social and verbal aggression are manifest and utilized in interactive competition, and how aggression may increase longitudinally within a given program. Further understanding of audience perceptions and attitudes toward social aggression will help establish what social norms result from media exposure to the behavior, and how it may affect audiences in regard to mediated politics.

Media Effects of Social Aggression

Diverse studies have demonstrated that forms of social and verbal aggression are significantly featured in media entertainment. Interestingly, media depictions closely resemble real world social functions and perceptions of the behaviors. Studying the patterns of relational

aggression in urban young African American and Latina females, Rivera-Maestre (2015) observed that many participants reported the need to engage in relational aggression in order to damage other people's reputations, to defend themselves, and to prevent further victimization More strikingly, Goldstein and Tisak (2004) found that relationally aggressive adolescents were optimistic about the consequences of relational aggression and believed that victims of their behavior would even want to continue relationships with them. These real-life behaviors and attitudes may also be reinforced by popular media as cultivation and social cognitive theory suggest.

Cultivation theory refers to the relationship between media exposure and cognitive beliefs and attitudes about the world surrounding the viewer. The theory presumes that the more an individual is exposed to any given media form or genre, the more that individual's beliefs about the world will align with content of those specific media (Gerbner and Gross, 1976). Several studies have indicated that the presence of social aggression in reality television may especially teach viewers that in order to succeed in life, one must resort to displaying antisocial behavior. Ferguson, Salmond, and Modi (2013) found that young girls who frequently watched reality television were willing to trade their values for fame. Likewise, Behm-Morawitz, Lewallen, & Miller (2015) indicated that social aggression was believed to be a necessary tool to achieve life goals and satisfaction among female undergraduates exposed to reality programming.

Attitudes and beliefs are closely related to behaviors. Social cognitive theory infers how media affects behaviors and states that "human functioning is the product of dynamic interaction of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences" (Stefanone, Lackhaff, & Rosen 2010, p. 512). Like any other fictional programing, exposure to reality television can affect its audience.

Gibson, Thompson, Hou, & Bushman (2016) add that exposure to relational aggression in surveillance reality programming led to more aggressive behavior among viewers. Both cultivation and social cognitive theory are viable frameworks from which to study reality television's impact on its viewers.

For the purposes of this thesis, no deeper analysis of the relationship between social cognitive theory, cultivation theory and social aggression will be attempted. However, the aforementioned studies indicate that media entertainment may provide viewers with the impression that to be socially aggressive is a rewarded and natural form of behavior. If such is the case in Western popular culture, similar beliefs and attitudes may be reflected in American politics. As one blog said of the reality television-like behavior in the 2016 Republican primary debates, "This is the direction our politics [are] heading, like it or not—and it may in fact be quite successful at boosting political engagement" (The American Interest, 2016, para. 3). Consequently, this study considers Donald Trump's reality television influence in its understanding of the recent election cycle.

Donald Trump and Social Aggression

Like many competitive reality television programs, Donald Trump's *The Apprentice* featured a cut-throat environment where Trump, as host, expected aggressiveness juxtaposed with sound business reasoning from the participants in order to succeed. The competition was, however, all within the authoritative control of Trump, as each episode ended with him firing one (sometimes multiple) contestant from their apprenticeship. At times, Trumps firing could seem ruthless as he was not hesitant to terminate one contestant for defending another. On the other hand, *The Apprentice*, merely followed the hyperreal pattern of reality television, allowing ordinary businesspeople to enter the fame and fortune of Trump.

However, the communication patterns of the program may provide insights into the exuberant character of its host. Kinnick and Parton (2005) through content analysis found that *The Apprentice* neglected several important business skills, including the failure to condemn unethical behaviors and the absence of intercultural communication. The researchers indicated that "Trump's failure to condemn unethical behaviors may suggest to viewers that the mentality of 'win at all costs' is still the rule in business and is more important than ethical communication" (p. 445). Findings like these foretell Donald Trump's lack of intercultural sensitivity throughout his 2015–2016 presidential campaign trail—labeling Mexican immigrants as criminals and rapists (Gass, 2015, para. 5)—as well as hesitance to fire his first campaign manager for aggressively pulling a reporter away from Trump (Lee, Stelter, and Murray, 2016).

Because Donald Trump is the only former reality television star who campaigned in the last presidential election, it is imperative to determine to what extent he personally exhibited social and verbal aggression. According to Murray Edelman's (1988) thoughts on the political spectacle, politicians and leaders maintain their positions through emphasizing enemies "whose past and potential sins they publicize and exaggerate" (p. 121). This is precisely how Trump utilizes social and verbal aggression to mobilize his audience focus of concentration. During Trump's campaign, he sparked public controversy for his comments against minority groups, women, fellow candidates, his vulgar use of language, and even inciting violent retaliation against aggressive protesters (Politico, 2016). While on stage during the Republican debates, Trump mocked fellow candidates for their appearance, compared himself to other candidates' positions in the election polls, insulted them with names (e.g. Lyin' Ted, Little Marco, Crooked Hillary), and even refused to pledge to not run as a third party (Easley, 2015). As one journalist

put it, "[Trump's] claim to fame is not politics. It's reality television. So he's running his campaign as if it were the 15th season of 'The Apprentice'" (Bennett, 2015, para. 4).

It is these behaviors and verbal utterances, which have similarly been reciprocated by his surrounding fellow candidates in the recent debates, that stand in great need of analysis. By adequately establishing the existence of this phenomenon in the context of political debates, implications can be offered as to what social and verbal aggression have communicated to American voters and what impacts these behaviors have had on current political communication.

Study Rationale

While much attention has been given to social aggression in mass communication research, it has rarely been associated with political communication. Various empirical studies have analyzed clash among political candidates in primary and general election debates, but have stopped there. For example, Carlin et al. (2001), in measuring clash strategies, linked Al Gore's aggression in the 2000 U.S presidential debates to his possible drop in the polls, but social aggression was not specifically quantified. Brooks (2010) referred faintly to indirect aggression, arguing that men would respond with more direct aggression than women would in political campaigns. However, no analysis of indirect aggression among females was undertaken.

Arguably, traditional clash themes could share several characteristics with social aggression. However, the reason for examining political debates through the lens of social aggression is to emphasize the media entertainment link to mediated politics, which is validated by Trump's television experience, and has been studied by past scholars (Postman, 1986; West & Orman, 2003). Social aggression also addresses the manipulative purposes of aggression, and the winning mentality associated with it. The present study therefore finds it appropriate to analyze social aggression instead of political clash alone in the 2016 presidential debates.

Furthermore, because social aggression tends to overlap with verbal and nonverbal forms of aggression (Archer & Coyne, 2005; Coyne et al., 2010), the present study will also examine the presence of verbal and nonverbal aggression in each of the 2016 debate segments. Future studies could examine the trend of social aggression in U.S political debates more longitudinally, but for the present, an examination of both stages of the presidential debate season will offer us a more holistic understanding of social aggression as a communicative behavior.

Hypotheses and Research Questions

Republican and Democratic Primary Debates. It will be crucial to observe the main perpetrators of each form of aggression over the course of the debates, as some candidates may become more aggressive as the primary stakes rise and other candidates drop in the polls. Such events may encourage some candidates to become more aggressive when they previously did not exhibit any aggressive behavior. It is possible that McKinney et al.'s (2001) observation that front-runners were attacked the most and lesser-known candidates exhibited more face attacks may be challenged due to the presence of Donald Trump, especially in the Republican primary debates. However, it may be that as Trump gained more traction, more aggression was targeted at him during the debates. Therefore, others may have sought to utilize socially and verbally aggressive tactics to likewise control arguments in all debate segments. Because Donald Trump was the perpetrator of various controversial statements throughout his campaign trial, it will be imperative to analyze social and verbal aggression emanating from him specifically. Former presidential candidate Mitt Romney condemned Trump as "an individual who mocked a disabled reporter… [,] a brilliant rival who happened to be a woman due to her appearance…and who laces his public speeches with vulgarity" (Politico, 2016, para. 17). Due to Trump's willingness to take on the "mantle of anger" (Huey-Burns, 2015, para. 31) this study hypothesizes that:

H1: Donald Trump will be the greatest perpetrator and victim of aggression in the Republican and Democratic primary debates?

RQ1: Which candidate will be the greatest victim of aggression in a) the Republican and b) Democratic primary debates?

Additionally, while it is expected that the Democratic primary debates will contain a significant amount of social and verbal aggression, because of two specific factors, it is likely that the Republican primary debates will feature more acts of aggression. As Coyne et al. (2010) observed that reality programs with high character interactions involved more relational aggression. The shear diversity of Republican candidates in their primary debates can be assumed to intensify the levels of social and verbal aggression. Additionally, the presence of Donald Trump leads this study to believe that the Republican primary debates will be more aggressive. Therefore, this study predicts that:

H2: The Republican primary debates will include more instances of aggression than the Democratic primary debates.

Although it may be assumed that there may be an initial shock value towards social and verbal aggression as the presidential debate season begins, the norms and expectations of this behavior among candidates may change as the primary run continues. It is in this same vein that Wilson et al. (2012) found that indirect and verbal aggression in the reality program *Survivor* increased from earlier seasons to later seasons and had become an established norm for the contestants of the program. The current study likewise seeks to cross examine debates from earlier and later periods of the 2015–2016 primary debate season. Analyzing each party' debates longitudinally will help determine if social and verbal aggression became more acceptable. The following trend leads us to question:

RQ2: Is there an increase in aggression in the a) Republican and b) Democratic primary debates that are closer to each party's national convention?

Reward and punishment have been measured in social and verbal aggression studies (Coyne et al., 2010; Wilson et al., 2012). In contrast, the political realm has produced interesting findings to the effects of over-aggression. Carlin et al. (2001) linked Al Gore's aggression in the 2000 U.S general election debates to his possible drop in the polls. Additionally, Michele Bachmann's (Hinck et al., 2013) and Steve Forbes' (McKinney et al., 2001) overt and excessive attacks affected their public image and consequently their position in the concurrent primary polls. Due to the lack of condemnation of socially aggressive content in popular media, and acknowledging the detrimental effect of general aggression in the political context, the current study questions how present-day debate audiences will accept or reject candidates' aggressive behavior in a live debate format. Therefore:

RQ3: Which a) Republican and b) Democratic candidates are rewarded or punished the most for exhibiting aggression in the presidential primary debates?

Lastly, Hinck et al. (2013), who measured attacks in the 2012 Republican primary debates, questioned how attacks in primary debates would be compared across partisan lines. This will be an interesting point when analyzing the 2016 Democratic primary debates, which one journalist observed included attacks geared more towards policies than towards personal character or insulting jabs at physical appearance (Collinson, 2016). This unique quandary leads this study to ask:

RQ4: How did aggression (direct social, indirect social, verbal, and nonverbal) differ among the Republican and Democratic primary debates?

General Election Debates. At the core of this study will be the climatic clash between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in the general election debates. The general debates were projected to attract high viewership, and some estimating them to the most watched televised debates in U.S history (Pindell, 2016). Because the study has assumed that Donald Trump will exhibit more aggression than his Republican primary counterparts, it stands by this assumption for the general election debates. However, if he is to commit the most aggression, he may not be the greatest victim. Therefore, the study hypothesizes and asks:

H3: Donald Trump will exhibit more aggression than Hillary Clinton in the general election debates.

RQ5: Which candidate (Trump or Clinton) will be the greatest victim of aggression?

As established by Benoit and colleagues (2002), general election debates tend to involve more aggressive attacks than in primary debates. Assuming that prior literature proves true again, this study hypothesizes that:

H4: There will be more instances of aggression in the general election debates than either than Republican or Democratic primaries, respectively.

Because this study analyzes the general election debates in a similar way as the primary debates, in conjunction with the previous research questions, the study asks:

RQ6: Is there is an increase of aggression in the general election debate that is closer to the presidential general election?

RQ7: Which candidate (Trump or Clinton) was rewarded or punished the most for exhibiting aggression in the general election debates?

Finally, this study will analyze the differences in social aggression between the general election debates and primary debates. The factors of fewer candidates and the growing

expectation of aggression may impact the eventual outcomes of the behavior and language exhibited by Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. Therefore,

RQ8: How did aggression (direct social, indirect social, verbal, and nonverbal) differ between the general election debates and the primary debates?

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Through content analysis, the current study examined instances of social and verbal

aggression in the 2015–2016 Republican primary, Democratic primary, and general election

debates. Previous content analyses of social and verbal aggression have produced significant

results in the context of media entertainment. However, these contexts usually involve

interpersonal relationships, limiting analyses to linear or staged content (e.g., reality

programming). This study sampled coverage of recent political debates to analyze social

aggression in a live televised environment.

Sampling

This study analyzed two 2015–2016 U.S presidential primary debates from each major

political party and two of the 2016 general election debates. Primary debates for both parties

were chosen towards the beginning and end of the primary debate seasons to observe potential

change in frequency of aggression instances from the beginning of a presidential election cycle

to the end. Likewise, the first and third general election debates were chosen to observe similar

differences over time as the election got closer. Debate coverage was obtained from the highest

resolution archived videos found on YouTube in an effort to best observe candidates' non-verbal

actions. Each debate was examined in its entirety.

Republican primary debates included Fox Business News's coverage of the November

10, 2015 debate (which included Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, John Kasich, Ben

Carson, Jeb Bush, Carly Fiorina, and Rand Paul) and Fox News's coverage of the March 3, 2016

debate (which included Donald Trump, Ted Cruz, Marco Rubio, and John Kasich). The first

debate included approximately 1 hour 54 minutes of airtime and the second debate approximately 1 hour 42 minutes of airtime. The Democratic primary debates included CBS' coverage of the November 14, 2015 debate (which included Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders, and Martin O' Malley) and CNN's coverage of the March 6, 2016 debate (which included Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders). The first debate covered approximately 1 hour 24 minutes of airtime (Gibbs, 2015) and the second debate approximately 1 hour 25 minutes of airtime (Cooper, 2016).

General election debates included the first (September 26, 2016) and third (October 19, 2016) debate, both of which featured Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump as participating candidates. The first and third debates were chosen to allow the study to analyze differences of social and verbal aggression between the longest time frame possible. Although there were several occasions where NBC's coverage did not display the split screen function, videos from this network were the only available footage on YouTube. Both general election debates comprised approximately 1 hour 30 minutes of airtime each.

Unit of Analysis

In the present study, the unit of analysis consisted of each individual instance of aggression found within each debate. Aggression could consist of a verbal utterance or a nonverbal behavior. An utterance counted as an act of social or verbal aggression when it either referred to the opposing candidate, onstage or offstage, or an opposing candidates' involvement in a perceived flawed policy or vice. It did not include attacking an ideological practice not specifically connected with the opponent unless it immediately followed the initial attack on the opponent (e.g. "...the Obama administration, like a lot of folks here, want to search everyone's cell phones and emails and not focus on the bad guys. *And political correctness is killing*

people"; November 10, 2015 Republican primary debate; emphasis added). Most often, these types of continuous codes were exemplified by an attack, followed up by an argument against an opponent's idea. (e.g. "He has also supported … a budget that is called the containment budget. *And it is a budget that would radically reduce the amount of money we spend on our military*"; November 10, 2015 Republican primary debate; emphasis added).

Attacks on hypothetical situations were not coded unless the perpetrator was physically facing the victim. Usually, an utterance included mentioning another candidate by name or using a pronoun to refer to the victim. However, if an opponent verbally or physically took offense to a comment that appears neutral, the perpetrating act was also counted as an instance of aggression. Coding for each instance of aggression was mutually exclusive. Each unit of analysis could only be given one code.

To accurately account for the total number of instances as a reference point during coding, a coder first copied each debate's transcript, available through the American Presidency Project's website, and pasted it into a separate word document. Next, a coder highlighted instances of articulated social and verbal aggression, numbering them in the order they occurred. Then the coder viewed each debate on YouTube in its entirety to clarify utterances of articulated aggression, and identify nonverbal aggression and audience responses. Excel sheets with all variables were used by the coder to record each instance of aggression. The finished coding sheets were then transferred to SPSS 24 for data analysis.

Coding Categories

Forms of aggression. For this study, each aggressive instance was classified as *direct social*, *indirect social*, *verbal*, and *nonverbal* aggression. Direct social aggression was defined by attacking a candidate present on the debate stage (e.g., Trump attacking Marco Rubio's

credibility in Republican primary debate). Indirect social aggression was identified as attacking an opponent not present on the debate stage (e.g., Trump attacking Hillary Clinton's credibility in Republican primary debate; detailed examples are contained below). Verbal aggression included utterances such as insults, sarcasm, yelling or arguing, interrupting, and so on. Nonverbal aggression included behaviors such as rolling eyes, dirty looks, pointing fingers, headshake, insincere smile or laugh, and so forth. For a more complete definition of the types of each form of aggression, see Appendix D.

   Differences between direct social and verbal aggression. In Coyne et al.'s (2011) analysis of relational and verbal aggression, verbal aggression was defined as *direct* attempts to psychologically hurt, but not relationally harm. The political spectrum is less prone on destroying relationships and more prone to articulate verbal attacks that serve to harm an opponent's reputation and self-esteem. For the current study, both direct and indirect social aggression incorporated elements of source credibility (McCroskey & Teven, 1999), namely attacking an opponent's lack of competence, lack of trustworthiness, and lack of goodwill, all of which were more likely to occur in a debate context. There were times however when an instance of aggression did not serve as an attack on credibility, such as when candidates interrupted or insulted others. These instances were simply coded as verbal aggression.

   To offer some examples of what forms of social aggression looked like compared to verbal aggression for this content analysis, examine Carly Fiorina's comment to Donald Trump in the November 10, 2015 Republican primary debate, "I accept that he's done a lot of good deals, so, Mr. Trump 'ought to know that we should not speak to people from a position of weakness." This was considered direct social aggression; the emphasis of the attack centered on Trump's lack of political competence. Jeb Bush's comments towards Donald Trump, "Thank

you, Donald, for allowing me to speak at the debate…what a generous man you are," (November 10, 2015 Republican primary debate) were considered instances of verbal aggression. In this example Bush sarcastically insults Trump's behavior and does not refer specifically to his political reputation.

Indirect social aggression. Coyne et al. (2011) and other studies have also defined indirect social aggression as covert aggression towards another, such as talking behind someone's back or indirect social exclusion. In a debate environment, all speech is overt, making covert acts of gossiping, rumor spreading, and the like, impossible. This study adapted the concept of indirect social aggression to refer to attacking the credibility of a candidate or public figure not present on the debate stage.

Nonverbal aggression. Instances where a candidate smiled or laughed were counted as nonverbal aggression. Although they may not seem overly aggressive, a smile may communicate, especially in a competitive environment, that one feels the opposing argument to be laughable or even ridiculous.

Perpetrators and Victims. Within a single unit of analysis, the candidate that exhibited the act of aggression was coded as the perpetrator and the candidate who received the aggression, or to whom that aggression was targeted, was coded as the victim. Perpetrators could also include moderators who aggressively exposed candidates' flaws or dishonesty. Each instance of aggression had a perpetrator and a victim. Most candidates were coded as a perpetrators or victims at some time during the debates.

Victims incorporated a larger spectrum of political players than candidates who participated in the debate(s). In addition to the candidates on stage and presidential candidates of the opposing party offstage, victims could include other political and public figures, such as Mitt

Romney or George W. Bush. In these instances, victims were coded as "other public figure."

Additionally, if multiple candidates were attacked in the same utterance, each name was counted

as a different instance of aggression. However, if the perpetrator referred to multiple victims in a

single instance as "they", then the victims were coded as "multiple". This was done to remain

consistent to the total number of aggression instances. At various times, the debate moderators

and audience were victims. Departments of government outside the executive, legislative, and

judiciary branches (e.g., IRS, Federal Reserve, FBI) were not coded as victims because these

were considered too broad to be valid recipients of aggression. If aggression was targeted at a

certain individual from a government department, that victim was coded as "other public figure."

Furthermore, foreign enemies of the United States (e.g., Putin, Assad) were not coded as victims

because this study was specifically interested in measuring aggression among those in the US

domestic political deliberation.

Reward and Punishment. Reward and punishment was measured by the immediate

response of the audience. Acts of social and verbal aggression that elicited audience approval

(e.g., cheering, laughing, clapping) were coded as rewarded and acts that elicited audience

disapproval (e.g. booing) were coded as punished. If, however, the audience exhibited

disapproval to a victim's political transgression mentioned in a perpetrator's attack, the instance

was coded as rewarded to the perpetrator. Acts that did not initiate an audience reaction were

coded as "none". Acts that initiated both audience approval and audience disapproval were coded

as "both".

Reliability

To ensure reliability, a time category was included on the practice session coding sheets

as a reference for coders when discussing specific instances of aggression. In multiple practice

sessions, two coders were trained how to identify the following variables in the debate coverage: (1) form of aggression, (2) perpetrator, (3) victim, and (4) reward or punishment. Codes were adapted from Coyne et al. (2011) to provide coders an accurate guide for analyzing the appropriate data. Multiple practice sessions used CNN's coverage of the December 15, 2015 Republican primary debate, which was not included in the final study sample. Instances of social and verbal aggression were highlighted in advance by one coder and numbered for convenience. Coders were then provided with a highlighted debate transcripts. Coders also had access to both the coding sheet and coding book in interpreting each instance of aggression. During practice sessions, coders were permitted to openly discuss how codes should be applied to units of analysis in real time if necessary. Through discussion and reference to the coding book, coders then came to agreement as to how a particular variable would be identified for future coding.

After practice sessions, coders coded the entire November 10, 2015 Republican primary debate without open discussion in order to obtain intercoder reliability. After completion, coded data was entered into Excel sheets and analyzed using ReCal 3, reaching a reliability of Cohen's Kappa for all variables: Forms, .84; Perpetrator, .98; Victim, .88; Reward/Punishment, .87. Once intercoder reliability was established, a single coder commenced coding the rest of the primary and general election debates.

CHAPTER 4

Results

The total number of instances of aggression coded for in this study totaled 2,441. Within each debate segment there were 901 instances in the Republican primary debates, 265 in the Democratic primary debates, and 1,275 in the general election debates. To answer hypotheses 1–4 and research questions 1–7, SPSS 24 was utilized to run chi-squared tests between the respective variables.

Presidential Primary Debates

H1. Hypothesis 1 predicted that Donald Trump would exhibit more total aggression than all other candidates in the Republican and Democratic primary debates. As shown in Table 1 there was a significant difference in the amount of aggression shown by the presidential candidates, χ^2 (33, N=1166) = 336.81, p <.001. Consistent with the hypothesis, Trump displayed more aggression, 296 (25.4%), than the other primary candidates, (See Table 1). Marco Rubio committed the second most instances of aggression, 251 (21.5%), and Ted Cruz followed, 195 (16.7%).

Republican primary debates. Among the different forms of aggression exhibited in the Republican debates, Marco Rubio displayed the most direct social, 137 (26.3%), and nonverbal aggression 64 (27.5%), Jeb Bush exhibited the most indirect social aggression, 34 (16.8%), and Donald Trump displayed the most verbal aggression, 106 (50.5%).

Democratic primary debates. Among the different forms of aggression exhibited in the Democratic debates, Bernie Sanders committed the most direct social, 60 (11.5%), verbal, 30 (14.3%), and nonverbal aggression, 31 (13.3%), while Hillary Clinton committed the most indirect social aggression, 24 (10.3%).

RQ1. Research question one assessed which candidate would be the greatest victim of aggression in the Republican and Democratic primary debates.

Republican primary debates. As Table 2 demonstrates, a chi-square analysis revealed significant differences among the different forms of aggression received by the candidates in the Republican primary debates, χ^2 (42, N=901) = 983.88, $p < .001$. Overall Donald Trump (R) was the greatest victim of aggression (45.1%) in the Republican debates. For each form of aggression, Donald Trump (R) was the recipient of the most direct social (64.6%) and nonverbal aggression (62.1%), Hillary Clinton (D) received the most indirect social aggression (41.6%), and Marco Rubio (R) received both the most verbal aggression (31.8%) and the most nonverbal aggression (26.7%). Comparing total forms of aggression in both Republican primary debates, direct social aggression was displayed the most (44.0%) by all candidates and indirect social aggression was the least (17.9%).

Democratic primary debates. As shown in Table 2, a chi-square analysis manifested significant differences among the forms of aggression received by the candidates in the Democratic primary debates, χ^2 (21, N=265) = 238.79, $p < .001$. Overall, for both Democratic primary debates, Bernie Sanders committed the most aggression (51.3%) and Hillary Clinton was the greatest victim (51.7%). For each form of aggression, Hillary Clinton (D) received the most direct social (61.3%), verbal (72.5%), and nonverbal aggression (54.2%), and Republicans or political right received the most indirect social aggression (64.3%). Comparing social and verbal aggression in both Democratic primary debates, direct social aggression was the most displayed (46.8%) by all candidates and verbal aggression was the least (15.1%).

H2. Hypothesis 2 predicted the Republican primary debates would feature more instances of aggression than the Democratic primary debates. The hypothesis was supported. A single

sample chi-square test revealed that the Republican (901) primary debates contained substantially more instances of aggression compared to the Democratic (265) primary debates, which had substantially less than expected, χ^2 (1, N=1166) = 346.91, p <.001.

RQ2. Research question 2 assessed whether there was an increase in the total amount of aggression in the Republican and Democratic primary debates that were closer to each party's national convention (e.g., the second debate analyzed for each party). When comparing total aggression between the two Republican primary debates, a single sample chi-square test revealed that there was a significant difference, χ^2 (1, N=901) = 246.22, p < .001 (see Table 5), with more aggression in the second debate and less aggression than the first debate. Additional analyses were run to see if there was a significant difference in the forms of aggression used between the Republican primary debates. A bivariate chi-square analysis was significant, χ^2 (3, N=901) = 232.89, p < .001. The data show that direct social, verbal, and nonverbal aggression each increased whereas indirect social aggression decreased.

Likewise, a single-sample chi-square revealed a significant increase in aggression within the second Democratic primary debates, χ^2 (1, N=265) = 11.42, p < .01, going from 105 instances of aggression to 160 (see Table 5). Additional analyses showed a significant difference among the forms of aggression exhibited between the two debates, χ^2 (3, N=265) = 22.00, p < .001. Much like the Republican debates, the Democratic debates saw increases in verbal and nonverbal aggression, but were different in that direct social aggression actually decreased and indirect social aggression increased.

RQ3. Research question 3 asked which Republican and Democratic candidate would be rewarded or punished the most by the debate audience for instances of aggression in the primary debates. As shown in Table 4, a chi-square analysis showed that Donald Trump's instances of

aggression were punished the most (68.4%), while Ted Cruz was the most rewarded (33.6%), χ^2 (24, N=901) = 46.19, p < .01. No significant differences were found among the reward and punishment of the Democratic candidates, χ^2 (2, N=265) = 4.88, p > .05.

RQ4. Research question 4 considered the differences in forms of aggression (direct social, indirect social, verbal, and nonverbal) between the Republican and Democratic primary debates. A bivariate chi-square test did not reveal a significant difference, χ^2 (3, N=1166) = 3.29, p > .05 because the proportion of direct social, indirect social, verbal and nonverbal aggression utilized by Democratic and Republican candidates was similar, with both parties utilizing direct social aggression more than any other form (see Table 3).

General Election Debates

H3 & RQ5. Hypothesis 3 predicted Donald Trump would exhibit more aggression in the general election debates than Hillary Clinton. A chi square analysis revealed a significant difference in aggression committed by the candidates, χ^2 (3, N=1275) = 67.39, p <.001. The hypothesis was supported, with Trump, 761 (59.7%), displaying more aggression than Clinton, 514 (40.3%), As Table 6 shows, Donald Trump committed the most direct social, 484 (56.3%), indirect social, 50 (100.0%), verbal, 110 (79.7%), and nonverbal aggression, 117 (51.3%), in the general election debates. Consequently, Hillary Clinton was the greatest victim of direct social (54.1%), and verbal aggression (58.0%). Donald Trump was the greatest recipient of nonverbal aggression (48.7%), and Obama received the most indirect social aggression (60.0%).

H4. Hypothesis 4 predicted there would be more instances of aggression in the general election debates than either the Republican or Democratic primary debates, which was validated. A single sample chi-square test revealed that the general election debates (1265) contained substantially more instances of aggression than expected, χ^2 (1, N=2441) = 640.91, p <.001. The

Democratic primary debates included significantly fewer instances (265) than expected whereas the Republican debates had more aggression than expected, but not nearly as much as the general election debates (901).

RQ6. Research question 6 asked if more aggression would be included in the second general election debate. A single sample chi-square test revealed a significant difference, χ^2 (1, N=1275) = 4.65, $p < .05$. Debate 1 included 599 instances of aggression and debate 2 included 676 instances. Additional analysis (e.g., bivariate chi-square; see Table 5) revealed a significant difference between the forms of aggression committed in each debate, χ^2 (3, N=1275) = 42.60, $p < .001$. The form of aggression that saw the biggest decrease was verbal (first debate, 16.7%; second debate, 5.6%). Direct aggression was used the most in both debates, with a slight increase in the second debate. Indirect aggression was least used. Nonverbal aggression increased over this time as well.

RQ7. Research question 7 assessed which candidate (Trump or Clinton) would be rewarded or punished the most by the debate audiences for exhibiting aggression. A chi-square test revealed a significant difference for the Republican primary debates, χ^2 (24, N=901) = 46.19, $p < .01$, but not the Democratic debates, χ^2 (2, N=265) = 4.88, $p > .05$, or the general election debates, χ^2 (1, N=1275) = .10, $p > .05$ (see Table 4). In the Republican primary debates, Ted Cruz was the most rewarded, 51 (33.6%), and Donald Trump was the most punished, 13 (68.4%).

RQ8. Lastly, research question 8 explored how aggression (direct social, indirect social, verbal, and nonverbal) differed between the general election debates and the primary debates. Once again, a bivariate chi square test revealed a significant difference among each debate segment, χ^2 (6, N=2441) =188.90, $p < .001$. As shown in Table 3, the general election debates

involved much more direct social aggression (67.4%) compared to direct social aggression in the Republican (44.1%) and Democratic (46.8%) primary debates. Additionally, the general election debates featured less indirect social aggression (3.9%) compared to the Republican (17.8%) and Democratic (15.8%) primary debates. Likewise, the general election debates featured a smaller percentage of verbal (10.8%) and nonverbal (17.9%) aggression compared to the Republican (18.9%; 19.3%) and Democratic (15.1%; 22.3%) primary debates, although the general election debates did include more raw counts of each form of aggression.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

Social aggression has become a pervasive behavior among interpersonal relationships, media entertainment, and as this study shows, political debates. The results of this study indicate that the 2016 Republican primary debates included more than three times the aggression featured in the Democratic primary debates. Additionally, the general election debates featured more aggression than each primary debate segment, corresponding with Benoit et al.'s (2002) and Hinck et al.'s (2013) observation that general election debates normally include more attacks than primary debates. Among all candidates of the primary debates, Republican and Democrat, Donald Trump committed the most aggression, 296 (25.4%), followed closely by Marco Rubio, 251 (21.5%). Ultimately, Donald Trump was the clear winner of this aggressive competition, committing more aggression than all other candidates in each debate stage. Trump was also the greatest victim of aggression in the Republican primary debates, supporting past research (McKinney et al., 2001; Hinck et al., 2013).

Primary Debates

Republican primary debates. Donald Trump clearly committed more aggression in the Republican primary debates, but Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz both exhibited high levels of aggression as well. Rubio's increasing volume of aggression was most likely the result of his performance in the March 3, 2016 debate in which he seemed determined to personally take a stand against Trump (Healy & Martin, 2016). What is more provoking about Rubio's heightened aggression is his campaign suspension that occurred the following week (Stokols, 2016). Although Rubio may not have been considered a lesser-known candidate, this event echoes

Hinck et al.'s (2013) observation of the decline in poll positions that Michele Bachmann suffered after her aggressive debate performances in the 2012 Republican primary debates and McKinney et al.'s (2001) observation of the same for Steve Forbes in the 2000 Republican primary debates. Increased negativity, as Cappella and Jamieson (1997) pointed out, may not sit well with the voting audiences. This observation was further confirmed as Rubio was the second most punished by the debate audience, following Trump.

However, Cappella and Jamieson's (1997) claim cannot explain the anomaly of Donald Trump's total aggression. Although Trump's anti-establishment persona may have complimented his presidential election victory, it did not deter Trump from being the most punished by the debate audience for aggression in the current analysis. Nevertheless, his behavior must have been appreciated by his supporters, perhaps enabling his eventual victory. That said, Trump was also the greatest victim of aggression in the Republican primary debates, following suite with McKinney et al.'s (2001) observation that front-runners received the most attacks in primary debates. It is possible that the perception of Trump as victim could have counterbalanced his own aggression, and elicited sympathy from his supporters and animosity towards establishment conservatives. This potential occurrence would bear resemblance to Levine and McCornack's (2001) probing effect, which states that observing another individual undergoing intense questioning would enhance truth-bias, or the belief that the individual must be telling the truth, despite the potential dishonesty of that person. As Trump's credibility and persona were intensely attacked, many observing aggressive behavior towards him, especially those who agreed with his political stances, may have perceived Trump as more honorable and the conservative establishment as more hostile. It is important here to remember that Trump did not start out as the Republican front-runner but gained more traction as time went on. Perhaps his

credibility increased partially as the result of being routinely attacked and discredited more than others in the primary debates.

Donald Trump committed more verbal aggression than all other primary candidates. Trump's instances of verbal aggression were diverse, and involved many short outbursts of negations and insults including, "Wrong!", "Excuse me!", and, "Lyin' Ted!". Interestingly, Marco Rubio slightly displayed more nonverbal aggression than Donald Trump. However, Rubio's nonverbal aggression mainly consisted of gestures and finger pointing towards Trump, while Trump displayed a myriad of facial expressions, headshakes, and pointing.

Differences between Republican debates. Indirect social aggression made up a majority of total aggression in the first Republican primary debate, but decreased significantly in the second. On the other hand, direct social aggression increased significantly in the second Republican primary debate. In other words, Republican candidates in the first debate targeted Democrats, particularly Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, but attacked each other much more in the second debate.

Democratic primary debates. Like the Republican primary debates, the front-runner in the Democratic primary debates, Hillary Clinton, was the greatest victim of the total aggression. It was Bernie Sanders, the former independent-turned-Democrat, who displayed the most aggression with comments like, "Excuse me!", "You'll get your turn!", "Can I finish?" However, unlike the negative audience response Donald Trump generated, Sanders was the most rewarded candidate in the Democratic segment. This finding could also correspond with the high level of dislike that Clinton received from those of the political left, who considered her "a neoconservative or a tool of Wall Street" (Scher, 2016, para. 27).

Differences between Democratic debates. The second Democratic primary debate included much more verbal and nonverbal aggression while direct social aggression decreased. This finding goes against CNN's report that the Democratic primary debates involved attacks that were much more policy based (Collinson, 2016); it was quite the opposite. In other words, if the current conceptualization of direct social aggression properly addressed policy concerns and political experience, the second Democratic debate was much more verbally abusive than anticipated. It seemed that the second Democratic debate increased constant bickering to mimic the constant drama of the Republican debates.

Difference between primary debates. Not surprisingly, the Democratic primary debates featured significantly less aggression than did the Republican debates. However, the study found no significant difference between the Republican and Democratic primary debates concerning forms of aggression. In other words, while the Republican debates featured much more aggression, the proportion of each form of aggression (direct social, indirect social, verbal, and nonverbal) displayed in the two debate segments were similar. For example, direct social aggression consisted of 44.1% of all Republican aggression and 46.8% of all Democratic aggression. This discovery implies that while various factors, like number of debate participants, may have led to more overall aggression in the Republican primary debates, social and verbal aggression may serve the same function across the partisan divide. Similarly, it is apparent that high levels of aggression were a constant in all debate segments, which leads this study to expect that the American public has not seen the end of this trend within political debates.

Most of the total aggression in both the Republican and Democratic primary debates elicited no audience response. This could have been the result of increased expectations, among the debate audiences, of aggressive behavior performed by the candidates. Audience reactions

could also have been limited by norms of respect and refrain, which are usually called for prior to commencement by the moderators. This was especially true for the general election debates, in which the audiences were reminded at the beginning and during the debate by Lester Holt and Chris Wallace, the respective moderators, to refrain from noise. Despite this request, the audience still positively reacted to 35 instances of aggression in the general election debates.

General Election Debates

The general election debates included 1,275 instances of aggression, more than the two previous debate segments combined. This finding coincides with Benoit et al.'s (2002) claim that general election debates feature more attacks than primary debates. Overall, Donald Trump clearly committed more instances of aggression than Hillary Clinton in both debates. Additionally, Trump was the only candidate to commit indirect social aggression, particularly towards Barack Obama and "other public figures" (e.g., Rosie O'Donnell, Clinton's financial supporters). The attacks on Rosie O'Donnell were unprecedented because compared to all other victims, she had the least stake in the political deliberation. The only form of aggression that Clinton sparred closely with Trump was nonverbal. In contrast to Trump's nonverbal behaviors, Hillary Clinton's nonverbal aggression included many smiles and laughs. While these cues may not seem overly aggressive, they were not discounted. A smile sends the message that one feels the opposing argument to be inferior. This was seemingly conspicuous when Clinton performed her laughing "shimmy" in the first general election debate following hostile comments by Trump.

In comparison with the primary debates, the general election debates featured a smaller percentage of verbal aggression. This may have been a result of the direct interaction the two presidential nominees had with each other, leading them to focus more on attacking each other's

character and competence. Obviously, this factor in the general election debates would have decreased the need for indirect social aggression.

Aggression increase. This study assessed if aggression would increase in the debates closer to each party's national convention or the general election. This was proven true for both primary debate segments and for the general election debates. This finding is of great value in relation to Wilson et al.'s (2012) observation that indirect and verbal aggression within the reality program *Survivor* increased longitudinally from season to season. Although the current study only measured for social and verbal aggression within the short time period of the 2015–2016 presidential debates, it is astonishing that aggression increased in only a matter of months. Additional research should be conducted examining aggression levels in past or even future political debates, as part of a more longitudinal approach. Such analysis would also be more comparable to the span of seasons examined in *Survivor*. The finding of aggression increase is especially crucial to this study for other reasons. It is possible that with the advancement in visual and computer technology, debate aggression is only reflective of the increasing amount of incivility both offline and online (Stryker, Conway, & Danielson, 2016; Vargo & Hopp, 2015).

Reality television impact. Another significant finding of this study included the sheer number of instances of aggression committed by Donald Trump. Many have questioned how Trump could have engaged in such behavior and managed to win the general election. While this study does not intend to delve deeper into the philosophical and psychological aspects of Trump's victory, it is worth noting how his use of social and verbal aggression may have been familiar to audiences. Many supported Trump during the elections because they felt he was more authentic and real than other candidates (High Existence, 2016), as he seemed to play the part of the boss from *The Apprentice*. Past research has shown that exposure to social aggression

featured in reality television has led to more normalized attitudes toward the behavior and engagement in socially aggressive actions among adolescent samples (Ferguson et al., 2013; Behm-Morawitz et al., 2015; Gibson et al., 2016). Cultivation theory and social cognitive theory would both suggest that increased exposure towards any type of mediated behavior would ultimately result in normalization. But to go even further, it is possible that in this context, media has become reality for American voters. In studying reality television, Rose and Wood (2005) qualitatively found an audience desire for stimulation in the paradox of common people in uncommon environments. So it may be with American voters. Trump's "hyper-aggression" has become an authenticated replacement, or simulacra, as Jean Baudrillard (1994) would express, for real political clash, and much more enjoyable to viewer-voters.

Political negativity. Although more research is needed to compare social and verbal aggression in the current debates with past presidential debates, it goes without saying that both primary and general election debates included a significant amount of social and verbal aggression. Despite this, the debates, especially the Republican primary debates, garnered remarkably high ratings. The August 6, 2015 Republican debate drew 24 million viewers alone (Rhodan, 2016). If that wasn't enough, the September 26, 2016 general election debate became the most watched in history with 84 million viewers (Stelter, 2016). This phenomenon greatly contrasts with Cappella and Jamieson's (1997) assumption that negativity, particularly in political news, was as an initiator of the spiral of cynicism. Cynicism was a product of what they considered game-framed news, or framing news from a competitive perspective. Instead of focusing merely on policy differences, game-framing news presents political information in the "horse-race" format or associating upcoming political events as if they were the sports match of the week. While this may make politics a form of entertainment, Cappella and Jamieson

contended that such framing increases audience cynicism about politics, an effect referred to as the spiral of cynicism. Negative media information thus has the ability to disengage citizens from politics; however, as this study shows it has the ability to engage audiences. However, Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs (2001) indicated that negative information did have an edge compared to positive information in attracting attention, which in turn encouraged viewers to more careful processing and evaluation. Such skills are more definitive of skepticism, a more information-seeking attribute than cynicism. It is highly possible that although viewers may have been turned off by the socially aggressive discourse of the debates they were more motivated to evaluate the information presented via a nuanced form of behavioral communication. It is in this vein that social and verbal aggression, as the American Interest (2016) expressed, may be successful at "boosting political engagement" (para. 3) in the United States.

Lastly, this study demonstrated that using elements of source credibility can be a reliable means of examining the reputational aspect of social aggression. Analyzing candidate's attacks on other's lack of competence, trustworthiness, and goodwill adequately addressed the manner in which social aggression could be exhibited in a political environment. Furthermore, extending political clash to more a more interpersonal and mediated form of communication, social aggression, provides a behavioral link from everyday life to politics, and vice versa. This study alludes to Mitt Romney's rhetorical question on Trump's behavior (and applying this to all 2016 presidential candidates), "Now imagine your children and your grandchildren acting the way he does. Will you welcome that?" (Politico, 2016, para. 23). Future studies can only determine the impact and receptibility of social aggression from the political sphere.

Limitations and Future Research

One of the biggest limitations of the current study is that it was unable to measure social aggression as traditionally defined. However, the current concept of indirect social aggression, indicating attacks towards offstage opponents, somewhat correlated with gossiping, spreading rumors, and backbiting of more traditional social aggression. Moreover, attacking the incompetence of opposing candidates was similar to socially excluding them as viable presidential candidates from the rest of the group. Another limitation is that only two debates from each primary debate segment and general election debates were sampled for the study. Although the inclusion of more debates would have provided more exhaustive data for analysis, it was felt that each debate chosen fairly represented the number of participating candidates and expected behavior for the concurring time periods throughout the debate season.

Because this study is a content analysis, it did not directly seek to measure attitudes and perceptions among U.S. voters. Cognitive effects could not be fully understood from this study alone. We can only speculate that high levels of consumed social aggression could have normalized the behavior among viewers, as other studies have shown. Rather this study provides a foundation for further research using the frameworks of social cognitive and cultivation theory to understand how general populations respond towards a culture of social aggression in the U.S. political deliberation. Future studies could analyze cognitive effects of social aggression within political debates empirically, as many studies have done within media entertainment (Coyne, Archer, & Eslea, 2004; Ward & Carlson, 2013; Riddle & De Simone, 2013). Additional research should be conducted examining aggression levels in past or even future political debates as part of a more longitudinal approach. Such analysis would also be more comparable to the span of seasons examined in *Survivor* (Wilson et al., 2012).

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

Social aggression has been used as a method of getting ahead in competitive social groups. The following study has suggested that political debates are also a venue for this communicative behavior. By sampling two debates from each segment of the 2016 U.S. primary and general election debates, this study found that total aggression did increase as the debate seasons advanced and that although the Republican primary debates featured astronomically more aggression than the Democratic debates, the forms of aggression were very similar between the two. As was expected, the general election debates included much more aggression than the two primary debate segments combined.

Perhaps the biggest contribution of this study is that findings indicated that Donald Trump was able to engage in more aggression than any other candidate and still win the presidency of the United States. It is hoped that the present analysis will further help scholars to better identify harmful characteristics of political rhetoric and behavior that may influence the outcome of elections, and what that means for political communication trends going forward.

REFERENCES

The American Interest. (2015, August 8). Why did so many people watch the GOP debate? [web blog post]. Retrieved from http://www.the-american-interest.com/2015/08/08/why-did-so-manypeople-watch-the-gop-debate/

The American Presidency Project. (2016). *Presidential Debates. 1960-2016*. Retrieved from http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/debates.php

Anderson Cooper (2016, March 7). If you think your candidate got cheated on talk time at last night's debate. Clinton spoke for 42:11. Sanders spoke for 42:41. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/andersoncooper/status/707002910215970816

Archer, J., & Coyne, S. M. (2005). An integrated review of indirect, relational, and social aggression. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *9*(3), 212-230. doi:10.1207/s15327957pspr0903_2

Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Baumeister, R. F., Bratslavsky, E., Finkenauer, C., & Vohs, K. D. (2001). Bad is stronger than good. *Review of General Psychology*, *5*(4), 323-370. doi:10.1037/1089-2680.5.4.323

Behm-Morawitz, E., Lewallen, J., & Miller, B. (2015). Real mean girls? Reality television viewing, social aggression, and gender-related beliefs among female emerging adults. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture, 5*(4), 1-16. doi:10.1037/ppm0000074

Bennett, J. (2015, August 13). Donald Trump's campaign is terrific reality television. *Deseret News.* Retrieved from http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865634461/Donald-Trumps campaign-is-terrific-reality-television.html?pg=all

Benoit, W. L. (2007). Determinants of defense in presidential debates. *Communication Research Reports*, *24*(4), 319-325. doi:10.1080/08824090701624221

Benoit, W. L., Pier, P. M., Brazeal, L. M., McHale, J. P., Klyukovksi, A., & Airne, D. (2002). *The primary decision: A functional analysis of debates in presidential primaries* (Vol. 1062, No. 5623). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Brooks, D. J. (2010). A negativity gap? Voter gender, attack politics, and participation in American elections. *Politics & Gender*, *6*(03), 319-341. doi: 10.1017/S1743923X10000218

Cairns, R. B., Cairns, B. D., Neckerman, H. J., Ferguson, L. L., & Gariepy, J. L. (1989). Growth and aggression: I. Childhood to early adolescence. *Developmental psychology*, *25*(2), 320-330. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.25.2.320

Carlin, D. P., Howard, C., Stanfield, S., & Reynolds, L. (1991). The effects of presidential debate formats on clash: A comparative analysis. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, *27*(3), 126-136.

Carlin, D. B., Morris, E., & Smith, S. (2001). The influence of format and questions on candidates' strategic argument choices in the 2000 presidential debates. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *44*(12), 2196-2218.

CBSN. (2015, November 14). *Dem Debate Part 1: Candidates address Paris attacks, ISIS* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FQFjTJW7NCM&index=2&list=PLM1D6slKCD1x DHFcGMu0smnviaQSQe7OX&t=73s

Collinson, S. (2016, March 10). Hillary Clinton, Bernie Sanders clash in wide-ranging debate. *CNN*. Retrieved from http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/09/politics/slug-democratic-debate highlights/

Coyne, S. M. (2016). Effects of viewing relational aggression on television on aggressive behavior in adolescents: A three-year longitudinal study. *Developmental Psychology*, *52*(2), 284-295. doi: 10.1037/dev0000068

Coyne, S. M., & Archer, J. (2004). Indirect aggression in the media: A content analysis of British television programs. *Aggressive Behavior*, *30*(3), 254-271. doi: 10.1002/ab.20022

Coyne, S. M., Archer, J., & Eslea, M. (2004). Cruel intentions on television and in real life: Can viewing indirect aggression increase viewers' subsequent indirect aggression? *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, *88*(3), 234-253. doi:10.1016/j.jecp.2004.03.001

Coyne, S. M., Robinson, S. L., & Nelson, D. A. (2010). Does reality backbite? Physical, verbal, and relational aggression in reality television programs. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *54*(2), 282-298. doi:10.1080/08838151003737931

Coyne, S. M., Callister, M., Pruett, T., Nelson, D. A., Stockdale, L., & Wells, B. M. (2011). A mean read. *Journal of Children & Media*, *5*(4), 411-425. doi:10.1080/17482798.2011.587148

Crook, S., Worrell, T., Westerman, D., Davis, J., Moyer, E., & Clarke, S. (2004). Personality characteristics associated with watching reality programming. *Conference Papers-- International Communication Association*, 1.

De Los Reyes, A., & Prinstein, M. J. (2004). Applying depression-distortion hypotheses to the assessment of peer victimization in adolescents. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, *33*(2), 325-335. doi: 10.1207/s15374424jccp3302_14

Easley, J. (2015, August 6). At GOP debate, Trump refuses to rule out third-party run. *The Hill*. Retrieved from http://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/presidential-races/250502-trump-wont-rule-out-third-party-run

Edelman, M. J. (1988). *Constructing the political spectacle*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Faris, R. (2012). Aggression, exclusivity, and status attainment in interpersonal networks. *Social Forces, 90*(4), 1207-1235. doi: 10.1093/sf/sos074

Ferguson, C. J., Salmond, K., & Modi, K. (2013). Reality television predicts both positive and negative outcomes for adolescent girls. *The Journal of Pediatrics*, *162*(6), 1175-1180. doi: 10.1016/j.jpeds.2012.11.067

Galen, B. R., & Underwood, M. K. (1997). A developmental investigation of social aggression among children. *Developmental psychology*, *33*(4), 589-600. doi:10.1037/0012-1649.33.4.589

Gass, N. (2015, December 7). The 7 craziest things Trump has said. *Politico*. Retrieved from http://www.politico.com/story/2015/12/donald-trump-ban-muslims-216513

Gerbner, G., & Gross, L. (1976). Living with television: The violence profile. *Journal of Communication, 26(2),* 172-194. doi: 10.1111/j.1460-2466.1976.tb01397.x

Gibbs, P. (2015, November 14). Democratic debate by the numbers: Twitter, Talk Time, and Google trends. *InsideGov*. Retrieved from http://presidential candidates.insidegov.com/stories/7712/democratic-debate-twitter-talk-time-google-trends

Gibson, B., Thompson, J., Hou, B., & Bushman, B. J. (2016). Just 'harmless entertainment'? effects of surveillance reality TV on physical aggression. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, *5*(1), 66-73. doi:10.1037/ppm0000040

Girl Scout Research Institute. (2011). *Real to Me: Girls and Reality TV*. Retrieved from http://www.girlscouts.org/research/publications/girlsandmedia/real__to__me.asp

Goldstein, S. E., & Tisak, M. S. (2004). Adolescents' outcome expectancies about relational

    aggression within acquaintanceships, friendships, and dating relationships. *Journal of*

    Adolescence, *27*(3), 283-302. doi: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2003.11.007

Gottfried, J., & Shearer, E. (2016, January 28). Contentious Republican debates lure many

    Democrats to tune in. *Pew Research Center*. Retrieved from

    http://www.pewresearch.org/fact tank/2016/01/28/contentious-republican-debates-lure

    many democrats-to-tune-in/

Healy, P. & Martin, J. (2016, March 3). In Republican debate, Ted Cruz and Marco Rubio wage

    urgent attacks on Donald Trump. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from

    https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/04/us/politics/republican-debate.html?_r=0

High Existence. (2016). 12 Psychological tactics Donald Trump uses to manipulate the masses.

    Retrieved from http://highexistence.com/12-psychological-tactics-donald-trump-uses-to-

    manipulate-the-masses/

Hinck, S. S., Hinck, R. S., Dailey, W. O., & Hinck, E. A. (2013). Thou shalt not speak ill of any

    fellow Republicans? Politeness theory in the 2012 Republican primary debates.

    Argumentation and Advocacy, *49*(4), 259-275. doi: 10.1080/00028533.2013.11821801

Horiuchi, V. (2007). Utahn Todd Herzog's ''Survivor'' gamesmanship wins him $1

    million prize. *Salt Lake Tribune*. Retrieved from http://www.sltrib.com/

Huey-Burns, C. (2016, January 15). GOP race takes tough tone in contentious debate.

    RealClear Politics. Retrieved from

    http://www.realclearpolitics.com/articles/2016/01/15/gop_race_takes_tough_tone_in_co

    tentious_debate_129333.html

Huizinga, J. (1970). *Homo Ludens: A study of the play element in culture*. London: Maurice
Temple Smith Ltd.

Kendall, K. E. (2000). *Communication in the presidential primaries: Candidates and the media,
1912-2000*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Kinnick, K. N., & Parton, S. R. (2005). Workplace communication: What The Apprentice
teaches about communication skills. *Business Communication Quarterly*, *68*(4), 429-456.
doi: 10.1177/1080569905282099

Lagerspetz, K. M., Björkqvist, K., & Peltonen, T. (1988). Is indirect aggression typical of
females? Gender differences in aggressiveness in 11-to 12-year-old children. *Aggressive
behavior*, *14*(6), 403-414. doi: 10.1002/1098-2337

Lee, M.J., Stelter, B., Murray, S. (2016, March 30). Trump campaign manager charged with
simple battery. *CNN Politics*. Retrieved from
http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/29/politics/trump-campaign-manager-charged-with-simple
battery/

Levine, T. R., & McCornack, S. A. (2001). Behavioral adaption, confidence, and heuristic-based
explanations of the probing effect. *Human Communication Research*, *27*, 471-502. doi:
10.1111/j.1468-2958.2001.tb00790.x

Maglio, T. (2016, January 28). Donald Trump's 'yuge' impact on debate ratings. *The Wrap*.
Retrieved from http://www.thewrap.com/donald-trumps-yuge-impact-on-debates-ratingsq
by-the-numbers/

Martins, N., & Wilson, B. J. (2011). Genre differences in the portrayal of social aggression in
programs popular with children. *Communication Research Reports*, *28*(2), 130-140.
doi:10.1080/08824096.2011.565272

McCroskey, J. C., & Teven, J. J. (1999). Goodwill: A reexamination of the construct and its measurement. *Communications Monographs*, *66*(1), 90-103.

McKinney, M. S., Kaid, L. L., & Robertson, T. A. (2001). The front-runner, contenders, and also-rans effects of watching a 2000 Republican primary debate. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *44*(12), 2232-2251. doi: 10.1177/00027640121958294

Morello, J. T. (1988). Argument and visual structuring in the 1984 Mondale-Reagan debates: The medium's influence on the perception of clash. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, *52*(4), 277-290. doi: 10.1080/10570318809389642

NBC News. (2016, September 26). *The First Presidential Debate: Hillary Clinton And Donald Trump (Full Debate) | NBC News* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=855Am6ovK7s&index=5&list=PLM1D6slKCD1xD HFcGMu0smnviaQSQe7OX&t=1673s

NBC News. (2016, October 19). *The Third Presidential Debate: Hillary Clinton And Donald Trump (Full Debate) | NBC News* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=smkyorC5qwc&index=6&list=PLM1D6slKCD1xD HFcGMu0smnviaQSQe7OX&t=214s

News World Wide. (2016, March 24). *Full Republican Debate in Detroit, Michigan | March 3, 2016* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AzyT5fZG2D4&index=3&list=PLM1D6slKCD1xD HFcGMu0smnviaQSQe7OX&t=89s

Pindell, J. (2016, September 6). The presidential debate will make history. Here's how. *Boston Globe*. Retrieved from https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2016/09/22/the-presidential debate-will-make-history-here-how/O0qtTYCWeN2Mw7VZAoCh6O/story.html

Politico. (2016, March 3). Full transcript: Mitt Romney's remarks on Donald Trump and the

    2016 race. *Politico.* Retrieved from http://www.politico.com/story/2016/03/full

    transcript-mitt-romneys-remarks-on-donald-trump-and-the-2016-race

    220176#ixzz42NH2JWAx

Postman, N. (1986). *Amusing ourselves to death: Public discourse in the age of show business*.

    New York: Penguin Books.

Prinstein, M. J., & Cillessen, A. H. (2003). Forms and functions of adolescent peer aggression

    associated with high levels of peer status. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, *49*(3), 310-342. doi:

    10.1353/mpq.2003.0015

Rose, R. L., & Wood, S. L. (2005). Paradox and the consumption of authenticity through reality

    television. *Journal of consumer research*, *32*(2), 284-296. doi: 10.1086/432238

Rhodan, M. (2016, January 29). Republican debate beats Trump rally in ratings battle. *Time*.

    Retrieved from http://time.com/4199653/republican-debate-trump-rally-ratings/

Reiss, S., & Wiltz, J. (2004). Why people watch reality TV. *Media Psychology*, *6*(4), 363-379.

    doi: 10.1207/s1532785xmep0604_3

Riddle, K., & De Simone, J. J. (2013). A Snooki effect? An exploration of the surveillance

    subgenre of reality TV and viewers' beliefs about the 'real' real world. *Psychology of*

    Popular Media Culture, *2*(4), 237-250. doi:10.1037/ppm0000005

Rivera-Maestre, R. (2015). Relational aggression narratives of African American and Latina

    young women. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, *43*(1), 11-24. doi: 10.1007/s10615-014-

    0474-5

Scher, B. (2016, May 31). Why does the left hate Hillary? *Politico*. Retrieved from

    http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/05/hillary-clinton-2016-progressives-

213916

Sharockman, A. (2016, December 18). It's true: WikiLeaks dumped Podesta emails hour after

Trump video surfaced. *Politifact*. Retrieved from http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-

meter/statements/2016/dec/18/john-podesta/its-true-wikileaks-dumped-podesta-emails-

hour-afte/

Stefanone, M. A., Lackaff, D., Rosen, D. (2010). The relationship between traditional mass

media and "social media": Reality television as a model for social network site

behavior. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *54*(3), 508-525. doi:

10.1080/08838151.2010.498851

Stelter, B. (2016, September 27). Debate breaks record as most-watched in U.S. history. *CNN

Media*. Retrieved from http://money.cnn.com/2016/09/27/media/debate-ratings-record-

viewership/index.html

Stokols, E. (2016, March 15). Rubio suspends presidential campaign. *Politico*. Retrieved from

http://www.politico.com/story/2016/03/rubio-suspends-presidential-campaign-220827

Stryker, R., Conway, B. A., & Danielson, J. T. (2016). What is political incivility?

Communication Monographs, *83*(4), 535-556. doi: 10.1080/03637751.2016.1201207

Tau, B. (2016, February 12). GOP easily outdrawing Democrats in debate ratings. *The Wall

Street Journal*. Retrieved from http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2016/02/12/republican

debates-consistently-draw-more-viewers-than-democratic-events/

Underwood, M. K., Galen, B. R., & Paquette, J. A. (2001). Hopes rather than fears, admirations

rather than hostilities: A response to Archer and Bjorqkvist. *Social Development*, *10*(2),

275-280. doi: 10.1111/1467-9507.00165

Vargo, C. J., & Hopp, T. (2015). Socioeconomic status, social capital, and partisan polarity as

predictors of political incivility on Twitter: A congressional district-level analysis. *Social Science Computer Review*, *35*(1), 10-32. doi: 10.1177/0894439315602858

Ward, L. M., & Carlson, C. (2013). Modeling meanness: Associations between reality TV consumption, perceived realism, and adolescents' social aggression. *Media Psychology*, *16*(4), 371-389. doi:10.1080/15213269.2013.832627

West, D. M., & Orman, J. M. (2003). *Celebrity politics*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Willer, E. K., & Cupach, W. R. (2008). When "sugar and spice" turn to "fire and ice": Factors affecting the adverse consequences of relational aggression among adolescent girls. *Communication Studies*, *59*(4), 415-429. doi: 10.1080/10510970802473674

Wilson, C., Robinson, T., & Callister, M. (2012). Surviving Survivor: A content analysis of antisocial behavior and its context in a popular reality television show. *Mass Communication & Society*, *15*(2), 261-283. doi:10.1080/15205436.2011.567346

2013 Technology. (2015, November 12). *4th Republican GOP Debate Nov. 10th 2015 – FULL* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLUxXiaP6LQ&index=1&list=PLM1D6slKCD1xD HFcGMu0smnviaQSQe7OX&t=4058s

2016 US Presidential Debates. (2016, March 24). *Seventh Democratic Primary Debate - March 6 2016 on CNN* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nxa9AaCGQ4M&index=4&list=PLM1D6slKCD1x DHFcGMu0smnviaQSQe7OX&t=5987s

2016 US Presidential Debates. (2016, March 22). *Fifth Republican Primary Debate - Main Stage - December 15 2015 on CNN* [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHYk0K7iszo

APPENDIX A: TABLES

Table 1

Perpetrators of Aggression Throughout All Primary Debates

Perpetrator	Primary Debates				
	D (%)	I (%)	V (%)	N (%)	Total (%)
Trump	106 (20.3)	25 (12.4)	106 (50.5)	59 (25.3)	296 (25.4)
Cruz	100 (19.2)	29 (14.4)	19 (9.0)	47 (20.2)	195 (16.7)
Rubio	137 (26.3)	28 (13.9)	22 (10.5)	64 (27.5)	251 (21.5)
Kasich	20 (3.8)	7 (3.5)	6 (2.9)	1 (0.4)	34 (2.9)
Carson	-	7 (3.5)	-	-	7 (0.6)
Bush	10 (1.9)	34 (16.8)	7 (3.3)	2 (0.9)	53 (4.5)
Fiorina	4 (0.8)	20 (9.9)	4 (1.9)	1 (0.4)	29 (2.5)
Paul	20 (3.8)	10 (5.0)	4 (1.9)	-	34 (2.9)
Moderator	-	-	2 (0.2)	-	2 (0.2)
Clinton	39 (7.5)	25 (12.4)	8 (3.8)	24 (10.3)	96 (8.2)
Sanders	60 (11.5)	15 (7.4)	30 (14.3)	31 (13.3)	136 (11.7)
O' Malley	25 (4.8)	2 (1.0)	2 (1.0)	4 (1.7)	33 (2.8)
Primary Total	521	202	210	233	1166

Note. Primary debates: χ^2 (33, N=1166) = 336.81, *p* <.001. Numbers in parentheses indicate column percentages, with column total equaling 100.0%; Forms of social aggression are abbreviated as follows: D = Direct; I = Indirect; V = Verbal; N = Nonverbal

Table 2

Victims of Aggression Republican and Democratic Primary Debates

| Victims | Republican Primary Debates | | | | |
	D (%)	I (%)	V (%)	N (%)	Total (%)
Trump (R)	256 (64.6)	-	42 (24.7)	108 (62.1)	406 (45.1)
Cruz (R)	64 (16.2)	-	30 (17.6)	24 (13.8)	118 (13.1)
Rubio (R)	59 (14.9)	-	54 (31.8)	29 (16.7)	142 (15.8)
Kasich (R)	9 (2.3)	-	6 (3.5)	5 (2.9)	20 (2.2)
Bush (R)	-	-	2 (1.2)	2 (1.1)	4 (0.4)
Fiorina (R)	3 (0.8)	-	5 (2.9)	1 (0.6)	9 (1.0)
Paul (R)	2 (0.5)	-	4 (2.4)	2 (1.1)	8 (0.9)
Sanders (D)	-	2 (1.2)	-	-	2 (0.2)
Clinton (D)	-	67 (41.6)	5 (2.9)	3 (1.7)	75 (8.3)
Moderators	-	-	15 (8.8)	-	15 (1.7)
Audience	-	-	2 (1.2)	-	2 (0.2)
Democrats Left	-	44 (27.3)	-	-	44 (4.9)
Multiple	3 (0.8)	4 (2.5)	3 (1.8)	-	10 (1.1)
Obama	-	29 (18.0)	-	-	29 (3.2)
Other Figure	-	15 (9.3)	2 (1.2)	-	17 (1.9)
Total	396	161	170	174	901

| Victims | Democratic Primary Debates | | | | |
	D (%)	I (%)	V (%)	N (%)	Total (%)
Clinton (D)	76 (61.3)	-	29 (72.5)	32 (54.2)	137 (51.7)
Sanders (D)	43 (34.7)	-	7 (17.5)	23 (39.0)	73 (27.5)
O' Malley (D)	4 (3.2)	-	1 (2.5)	1 (1.7)	6 (2.3)
Trump (R)	-	7 (16.7)	2 (5.0)	1 (1.7)	9 (3.8)
Democrats Left	-	5 (11.9)	-	-	5 (1.9)
Republicans Right	-	27 (64.3)	1 (2.5)	2 (3.4)	30 (11.3)

	D/V	I/V	D/N	I/N	Total
Multiple	1 (0.8)	-	-	-	1 (0.4)
Other Figure	-	3 (7.1)	-	-	3 (1.1)
Total	124	42	40	59	265

Note. Republican Debates: χ^2 (42, N=901) = 983.88, *p* < .001; Democratic Debates: χ^2 (21, N=265) = 238.79, *p* < .001. Bivariate chi-squares are provided Numbers in parentheses indicate column percentages, with column total equaling 100.0%; Forms of social aggression are abbreviated as follows: D = Direct; I = Indirect; V = Verbal; N = Nonverbal

Table 3

Comparison of Total Forms of Aggression Among Each Debate Segment

Form of Aggression	Republican (%)	Democratic (%)	General Election (%)	Total (%)
Direct	397 (44.1)	124 (46.8)	859 (67.4)	1,381 (56.6)
Indirect	160 (17.8)	42 (15.8)	50 (3.9)	250 (10.3)
Verbal	170 (18.9)	40 (15.1)	138 (10.8)	348 (14.3)
Nonverbal	174 (19.3)	59 (22.3)	228 (17.9)	460 (18.9)
Total	901 (100.0)	265 (100.0)	1275 (100.0)	2,439 (100.0)

Note. Republican and Democrat: χ^2 (3, N=1166) = 3.29, $p > .05$; Republican, Democrat, and General Election: χ^2 (6, N=2441) =188.90, $p < .001$; Bivariate chi-squares are provided. Numbers in parentheses indicate column percentages, with column total equaling 100.0%.

Table 4

Reward and Punishment of Aggression in Primary and General Election Debates

Republican Debates	Punished	Rewarded	Both	No Response	Total (%)
Trump	13 (68.4)	29 (19.1)	2 (50.0)	252 (34.7)	296 (32.9)
Cruz	-	51 (33.6)	1 (25.0)	143 (19.7)	195 (21.6)
Rubio	6 (31.6)	43 (28.3)	-	202 (27.8)	251 (27.9)
Kasich	-	7 (4.6)	1 (25.0)	26 (3.6)	34 (3.8)
Carson	-	2 (1.3)	-	5 (0.7)	7 (0.8)
Bush	-	10 (6.6)	-	43 (5.9)	53 (5.9)
Fiorina	-	3 (2.0)	-	26 (3.6)	29 (3.2)
Paul	-	6 (3.9)	-	28 (3.9)	34 (3.8)
Moderator	-	1 (0.7)	-	1 (0.1)	2 (0.2)
Total	19	151	4	725	899

Democratic Debates					
Clinton	-	22 (35.5)	-	74 (36.5)	96 (36.2)
Sanders	-	37 (59.7)	-	99 (48.8)	136 (51.3)
O Malley	-	3 (4.8)	-	30 (14.8)	33 (12.5)
Total	-	62	-	203	265

General Election Debates

Trump	-	20 (57.1)	-	741 (59.8)	761
Clinton	-	15 (42.9)	-	499 (40.2)	514
Total	-	35	-	1240	1275

Note. Republican Candidates: χ^2 (24, N=901) = 46.19, $p < .01$; Democratic Candidates: χ^2 (2, N=265) = 4.88, $p > .05$; General Election Candidates: χ^2 (1, N=1275) = .10, $p > .05$; Bivariate chi-squares are provided. Numbers in parentheses indicate column percentages, with column total equaling 100.0%.

Table 5

Comparison of Total Forms of Aggression in Primary and General Election Debate

Form of Aggression	Republican		Democratic		General Election		
	Debate 1 (%)	Debate 2 (%)	Debate 1 (%)	Debate 2 (%)	Debate 1 (%)	Debate 2 (%)	Total (%)
Direct	56 (26.0)	341 (49.7)	64 (61.0)	60 (37.5)	386 (64.4)	473 (70.0)	1,381 (56.6)
Indirect	112 (49.7)	48 (7.0)	19 (18.1)	23 (14.4)	23 (3.8)	27 (4.0)	250 (10.3)
Verbal	32 (14.9)	138 (20.1)	6 (5.7)	34 (21.3)	100 (16.7)	38 (5.6)	348 (14.3)
Nonverbal	15 (7.0)	159 (23.2)	16 (15.2)	43 (26.9)	90 (15.0)	138 (20.4)	460 (18.9)
Total	215	686	105	160	599	676	2,439

Note. Republican: χ^2 (3, N=901) = 232.89, p < .001; Democratic: χ^2 (3, N=265) = 22.00, p < .001; General Election: χ^2 (3, N=1275) = 42.60, p < .001; Bivariate chi-squares are provided. Numbers in parentheses indicate column percentages, with column total equaling 100.0%.

Table 6

Perpetrators and Victims of Aggression in General Election Debates

	General Election Debates				
Perpetrator	D (%)	I (%)	V (%)	N (%)	Total (%)
Trump	484 (56.3)	50 (100.0)	110 (79.7)	117 (51.3)	761 (59.7)
Clinton	375 (43.7)	-	28 (20.3)	111 (48.7)	514 (40.3)
Total	859	50	138	228	1,275
Victim	D (%)	I (%)	V (%)	N (%)	Total (%)
Trump	377 (43.9)	-	28 (20.3)	111 (48.7)	516 (40.5)
Clinton	465 (54.1)	-	80 (58.0)	110 (48.2)	655 (51.4)
Moderators	-	-	25 (18.1)	7 (3.1)	32 (2.5)
Democrats Left	-	3 (6.0)	-	-	3 (0.2)
Multiple	17 (2.0)				17 (1.3)
Obama	-	30 (60.0)	1 (0.7)	-	31 (2.4)
Other Figure	-	17 (34.0)	4 (2.9)	-	21 (1.6)
Total	859	50	138	228	1,275

Note. Perpetrator: χ^2 (3, N=1275) = 67.39, *p* < .001; Victim: χ^2 (18, N=1275) = 1354.30, *p* < .001. Bivariate chi-squares are provided Numbers in parentheses indicate column percentages, with column total equaling 100.0%; Forms of social aggression are abbreviated as follows: D = Direct; I = Indirect; V = Verbal; N = Nonverbal.

APPENDIX B: CODING RECORD SHEET

Debate/Notes	Utterance	Form (D I V N)	Type (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6)	Perpetrator	Victim	Rewarded (0, 1, 2, 3)
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3
		D I V N	1 2 3 4 5 6			0 1 2 3

APPENDIX C: CODING SHEET

Forms of Aggression
    D- Direct Social   V- Verbal Aggression
    I- Indirect Social   N- Nonverbal Aggression

Type of Social Aggression

D- Direct   I- Indirect
  1.Competence   1. Competence
  2.Trustworthiness   2. Trustworthiness
  3.Goodwill   3. Goodwill

V- Verbal
  - Insult (deliberately embarrassing others)   - Yell/Argue (cannot be an insult)
  - Ignore (denigrate others' ideas)   - Interrupt
  - Sarcasm

NV- Nonverbal
  - Rolling eyes   - Headshake
  - Dirty Looks   - Insincere smile/laugh
  - Gesture (brushing off)

Perpetrator
1. Donald Trump T   5. Ben Carson CA   9. Martin O' Malley M
2. Ted Cruz CR   6. Jeb Bush B   10. Bernie Sanders S
3. Marco Rubio R   7. Carly Fiorina F   11. Hillary Clinton CL
4. John Kasich K   8. Rand Paul P   12. Moderator MOD

Victim
1. Donald Trump T   7. Carly Fiorina F   13. Audience
2. Ted Cruz CR   8. Rand Paul P   14. Democrats/Left D
3. Marco Rubio R   9. Martin O' Malley M   15. Republicans/right REP
4. John Kasich K   10. Bernie Sanders S   16. Multiple candidates
5. Ben Carson CA   11. Hillary Clinton CL   17. Barack Obama O
6. Jeb Bush B   12. Moderator/s MOD   18. Other Public Figure

Rewarded
0. Punished
1. None
2. Rewarded
3. Both (booing and cheering)

APPENDIX D: CODING GUIDELINES FOR SOCIAL AND VERBAL AGGRESSION

DEBATE STUDY

Perpetrator: write down the name of the candidate that began the act of aggression

Victim: write down the name of the candidate whom the aggression was targeted at

Social Aggression
*The "key" for Social Aggression is to remember that it must aim to **harm reputation or self-esteem (social status; source credibility)***
Direct Social Aggression (overt and/or confrontational behaviors which directly harm others through damage, or threat of damage, to reputation opponent has among American public, by attacking opponent's experience, trustworthiness, and goodwill; verbal in nature, may be reactive or proactive)
Competence (Experience): Openly excluding opponent from the group of candidates as a viable electorate option; attacking opponent's experience, blunders, or failed attempts; attacking training, expertise, inexperience; attacking intelligence, incompetence, stupidity, ability
 I.e.: Using polls to compare one's higher position than another
 "[The Senate] does not prepare you for the President of the United States…"
 "We don't [you]need another 'Apprentice' in the White House…"
 "[Senator] you have not been involved in a consequential decision where you had to be
 held accountable
 "He simply does not have the experience to be President…and make these decisions…"
 Pointing out opponent's rhetorical blunder to audience (When Christie talks to the
 audience and tells them what Marco Rubio is doing)*: "There it is everybody…the*
 memorized 25 second speech!"
 "We don't need someone who has history of running credit up in their state"
Trustworthiness: Openly attacking opponent's lack of honesty, trustworthiness, honor, morality, ethicality, genuineness, phoniness, loyalty to party values; attacking their lack of a moral code, vice or iniquity; it is sometimes more about the nature of past and present actions
 i.e.: *"He turned her [piece of land] into a parking lot for [his business] is not for public*
 use…"
 The fact is you weren't even there to vote for it.
 He scammed the people of Florida
 Trump is a Kremlin puppet
 "That was a great pivot off the fact that she wants open borders. OK? How did we get on
 to Putin?"
 "I respect what Ted said but he didn't answer the question"
 Accusing Clinton of starting protests during Trump rallies
Goodwill: Confrontationally attacking opponent's caring, disregard for others, interest in American public; creating division among public; self-centeredness, lack of concern, sensitivity, understanding; attacking opponents demeaning actions towards others; it is more about intent of their past and present actions

I.e. *"Donald thinks belittling women makes him bigger...He goes after their dignity, their self-worth... That's who Donald is.*
Declaring that Clinton has "hatred in her heart".
You encouraged espionage against our people
Criticizing Trump for not accepting the outcome
He is talking down our democracy
There's no humility

Indirect Social Aggression (indirect behaviors which directly harm non-present others through damage, or threat of damage, to reputation opponent has among American public, by attacking opponent's experience, trustworthiness, and goodwill; verbal in nature; may be reactive or proactive; the key is that the victim cannot be physically present; e.g., Republicans attacking Democrats in Republican primary debate; includes attacking other political figures like Bill Clinton and Mitt Romney)
Competence: Indirectly excluding opponent from the group of candidates as a viable electorate option; attacking opponent's experience, blunders, or failed attempts; attacking **training, expertise, inexperience**, attacking intelligence, incompetence, stupidity, ability
     I.e.: When Ted Cruz said that anyone of them would be a better option than Democrat candidates
Trustworthiness: Covertly attacking opponent's lack of honesty, trustworthiness, honor, morality, ethicality, genuineness, phoniness; attacking their lack of a moral code, vice or iniquity; it is sometimes more about the nature of past and present actions
Goodwill: Covertly attacking opponent's caring, disregard for others, interest in American public; creating division among public; self-centeredness, lack of concern, sensitivity, understanding; attacking opponents demeaning (criticizing, ridiculing) actions towards others; it is more about intent of their past and present actions
     i.e.: Barack Obama has tried to change America- Marco Rubio

Verbal Aggression *a verbal expression that attempts to psychologically hurt an opponent in front of an audience (public humiliation); Victim may not be present; It is not attacking victim's reputation*
     Insult: *Insulting or deliberately embarrassing in front of others.*
     I.e.: Calling others names [Lyin' Ted, Little Marco]
     Attack their ego
     "He gets very unruly when he gets off topic"
     Put down another's physical qualities or appearance
     "Such a nasty woman!"
     Ignore/Denigrate Others' Ideas: *Openly denigrating the ideas of others. Ignoring another's comments*
     i.e.: That's one of the worst policy ideas...it's ridiculous
     "Oh please! Give me a break!"
     Sarcasm*: A cutting ironic remark intended to hurt.*
     i.e.: Hide hurtful remarks with sarcasm and jokes
     Using a snide tone of voice
     "Is now one of the skills you get ESP also??"
     Nice job Hillary! Thanks for that one

Yelling/Arguing: Speech that express conflict and/or is shouted. To be considered arguing it must have an interaction between two or more people (debate or dispute, not an insult)

Interrupt: Interrupting during another candidate's opportunity to reply or before opponent's full response to perpetrator; usually this is shorter than an act of social aggression and does not have a clear argument

When Trump says, "Excuse me"! But he is really saying that to interrupt
"Wrong."
Fiorina talking about Reagan actions while Paul was trying to make a point
When candidates are inaudible (usually this also means they can't be heard over another candidate)
Oh, here we go!
You don't know!
Excuse me judge!

Other: Any other type of Verbal Aggression not covered above
Badgering questions: "Who gave it that name? Who gave it that name?"
Complaining - "It's a minor case!" ..." This wasn't on the subject!"
Where did you find this?

Nonverbal Social Aggression*: (nonverbal and gestural behaviors intended to exclude, alienate or embarrass others)*

Rolling eyes: Rolling one's eyes in derision
Dirty Looks: Harsh or dirty looks (negative facial expressions)
Producing facial expressions of disgust or dislike
Gesture: "Brush them off" with hands [Hand gestures must be movements away from the body; not just talking with hands]
Wave opponent off
Negative hand gestures
Point at opponent
Headshake
Laughing/Insincere smile [Smiling when talking does not count]
Other:
Rolling one's head
Certain types of backchannel responses (e.g., exasperated sighs)
Refusing to greet or be cordial with opponent during beginning of debate (not shaking hands)
Mouthing words (e.g., Trump mouthing 'Wrong')

Consequences*: the audience response to an aggressive act*

Rewarded: when the aggressive action results in a positive audience reaction to the perpetrator (e.g. laughing, clapping, cheering); if the audience boos to a victim's transgression that perpetrator mentions in attack, perpetrator is rewarded

Punished: when the aggressive act results in negative audience response to the perpetrator. (e.g. booing)

No Consequences: When the perpetrator does not experience either a positive nor a negative audience response as a result of his/her aggressive action.

Both: *When the perpetrator experiences both a positive and negative audience response as a result of his/her aggressive actions (e.g. some of the audience's cheers and some boo).*