Political Speech: The Influence of Speaker Sex and Verbal Aggression on Message Perception

Amanda Magusiak

University of Arkansas-Fayetteville

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Political Speech: The Influence of Speaker Sex and Verbal Aggression on Message Perception

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Communication

by

Amanda Magusiak
University of Arkansas
Bachelor of Arts in Communication, 2020

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University of Arkansas

This thesis is approved for recommendation to the Graduate Council.

___________________________________
Lindsey Aloia, Ph.D.
Thesis Director

___________________________________
Matthew Spialek, Ph.D.
Committee Member

___________________________________
Robert Wicks, Ph.D.
Committee Member
Abstract

This study examined political messaging. More specifically, I considered the influence of the sex of the speaker and the use of verbal aggression on overall message perception. One hundred and six college-aged students read eight excerpts of political speech where sex of the speaker (male; female) and level of aggression (aggressive; nonaggressive) were manipulated. Participants then completed measures assessing their agreement with the political message, the speaker’s credibility, the speaker’s communicative appropriateness, and the speaker’s level of verbal aggressiveness. Results indicated that male and female political speakers were evaluated similarly on measures of agreeableness, credibility, and appropriateness. In addition, aggressive messages were evaluated as less agreeable, less credible, and less appropriate than nonaggressive messages. Finally, results identified a significant interaction between the sex of the speaker and level of aggression when predicting agreement with message, speaker credibility, and communicative appropriateness.

Keywords: political communication, speaker sex, verbal aggression
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Political Speech: The Influence of Sex and Verbal Aggression on Message Perception

Kamala Harris is remembered for her statement “I’m speaking, Mr. Vice President” directed at Mike Pence during the 2020 Vice Presidential debate. Critics claimed her remark was aggressive; supporters applauded her assertive statement (Zillman & Hinchliffe, 2020). Scholars attributed the discrepant evaluations of Kamala Harris’ comment to speaker sex (Parry-Giles, 2021). In 2020, more women ran for office and were elected than ever before (Bleiweis & Phadke, 2021). Furthermore, women achieved higher governmental status with the election of Kamala Harris as Vice President of the United States of America (Bleiweis & Phadke, 2021). As more women enter the political sphere, questions arise regarding how a politician’s sex might influence a voter’s perception of messaging and ultimate voting decision.

Politics describes the activities through which people make, preserve, and amend the governing rules (Heywood, 2013). Effective communication is a necessary component of politics given that political communication is employed to influence policymakers, the media, and citizens (Kaid, 2004). More specifically, Graber and Smith (2005) argued that message construction, dispersion, receipt, and processing directly and indirectly impact the political system primarily through persuasive decision-making processes. Persuasion is the symbolic process through which communicators change others’ attitudes and/or behaviors (Perloff, 2003). Beyond altered beliefs, persuasive political communication garners the necessary support to be elected and stimulate change (Cialdini, 2007).

Previous research identified that evaluations of persuasive political communication are influenced by both speaker sex and the presence of verbal aggression (Carli, 2001; Nau & Stewart, 2018). For example, Koenig and colleagues (2011) found that individuals rated men as more persuasive and more credible than women. Furthermore, identifying as male is associated
with agentic qualities, such as assertiveness and competence. In addition to speaker sex, verbal aggression impacts message persuasiveness. More specifically, Infante and Rancer (1996) discovered that verbal aggression decreased message credibility – the quality of being convincing or believable.

Taken together, the goal of this study is to investigate the impact of speaker sex and verbal aggression on message agreement, speaker credibility, and communicative appropriateness. In the sections below, I first explain persuasion in the context of politics. Second, I define persuasive communication as agreeable, credible, and appropriate. Third, I use social role theory and role congruity theory to explain differential expectations for male and female politicians. Finally, I define verbal aggression and position the nine types of verbally aggressive messages in the context of politics.

**Persuasion and Politics**

Politics construct social life. Citizens learn about the distribution of resources, the allocation of values, and institutional procedures through political communication. Political communication is defined as messaging from political speakers, the media, and citizens that shapes social climate (Holbert, 2005). Messages are also distributed by policy advocates, campaign executives, political consultants, political marketers, elected officials, or other political professionals (Blumler, 2015). This communication subsequently influences the political beliefs and attitudes of the governed individuals (Quintelier & Van Deth, 2014). To achieve influence, the communication must be persuasive.

The effectiveness of persuasive messages in politics is determined by how receivers evaluate message agreement, speaker credibility, and communicative appropriateness. Message agreement is defined as consistency or compatibility with a position or opinion (Lilleker, 2006).
Message agreement occurs in politics when a political message aligns with an individual’s existing opinion on that topic (Dillard & Pfau, 2002). Upon receipt of a persuasive message, an individual experiences three possible outcomes, namely shaping, reinforcing, or changing. Shaping influences an individual’s attitudes, reinforcing strengthens an individual’s existing beliefs, and changing alters an individual’s existing values (Perloff, 2003). When message agreement occurs, an individual’s existing belief or attitude is strengthened and reflected in voting behavior (West, 2005). According to Dillard and Pfau (2002), reinforcing is the easiest to achieve because it does not require a complete shift in beliefs and strengthens their existing attitudes.

In addition to message agreement, message persuasiveness is influenced by the credibility of the source (O’Keefe, 2002). Following message exposure, an individual must evaluate the quality, believability, and trustworthiness of the message content (Infante, 1987). In addition, credibility describes the source’s expertise and goodwill (Twenge et al., 2016). Politicians who are evaluated as knowledgeable and trustworthy are more likely to be perceived as credible. Speaker credibility is also positively associated with the assumed ability to guide and govern others (Petricone, 2020). Furthermore, when a credible source makes a statement that aligns with an individual’s existing beliefs or attitudes, she/he/they is more likely to achieve persuasion (Twenge et al., 2016). As such, persuasion occurs because both agreement with message and source credibility exists. Given the links between message persuasiveness and both message agreement and speaker credibility, I argue that agreement with the message and speaker credibility are correlated. Accordingly, I posit the following hypothesis:

**H1:** Agreement with message is positively associated with speaker credibility.
Message persuasiveness is also affected by communicative appropriateness. Communicative appropriateness describes messaging that is suitable for a specific audience in a particular situation (Müller, 2004). Communicative appropriateness is dependent on pragmatics. Pragmatics is defined as the impact of context on meaning, relevance, and social implication (Mey, 2006). For example, an effective politician uses different language and discusses different content when speaking to older potential voters compared to younger potential voters. Messages that achieve communicative appropriateness are most persuasive when they align with an individual’s motivational orientation (Hirsh et al., 2012). Accordingly, persuasion is increasingly more likely when communicative appropriateness and message agreement are achieved concurrently. Akin to H1, I argue that agreement with the message and communicative appropriateness are related given their respective associations with message persuasiveness. Formally stated:

**H2:** Agreement with message is positively associated with communicative appropriateness.

Similarly, messages that are designed for a specific audience, in a particular context, delivered by an expert are evaluated as persuasive (Twenge et al., 2016). Petricone (2020) argued that thoughtful message construction that considers contemporaneous circumstances increases a speaker’s perceived credibility. Conversely, the improper use of language for an audience leads listeners to evaluate the politician as unfit for office (Smith et al., 2013). Using this as a foundation, I posit that speaker credibility and communicative appropriateness are connected.

**H3:** Speaker credibility is positively associated with communicative appropriateness.
Sex and Politics

In addition to the influence of agreeable, credible, and appropriate message evaluation, a speaker’s sex impacts the speaker’s effectiveness in the political sphere. Social role theory and role congruity theory create a foundation for examining why a political speaker’s sex influences the evaluation of their communication. Social role theory (SRT) argues that sex stereotypes influence an individual’s perception of a political speaker. Sex stereotypes result from current and traditional social and occupational roles (Eagly, 1987). According to these stereotypes, men work and women provide care (Eagly, 1987). Furthermore, men are aggressive, independent, and ambitious; women are affectionate, helpful, and kind (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Drawing from SRT, role congruity theory (RCT) argues that female leaders are penalized when they fail to conform to traditional sex roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). More specifically, Harp and colleagues (2016) argued that women are bound by the femininity/competency and womb/brain binds. The femininity/competency bind suggests that a woman’s feminine self-presentation determines how competent she is considered. The womb/brain bind proposes that a woman’s intelligence is evaluated alongside her child rearing (Harp et al., 2016). Accordingly, women who do not present femininely or who do not have children are judged unfairly and evaluated poorly (Miller et al., 2010). In addition, when women display traits associated with male sex stereotypes, they are punished (Conroy et al., 2020). Together, SRT and RCT demonstrate why men are advantaged over women when running for political office (Miller et al., 2010).

In support of SRT and RCT, empirical research indicated that women are disadvantaged in their ability to persuade compared to men because individuals are considered most persuasive when the context aligns with their gender identities (Heilman, 2012). Given that the political
context supports male identities, it is easier for male political speakers to enact persuasion than female political speakers. According to Mendelberg and colleagues (2014), women are perceived as less influential and less competent than men even when they hold objectively similar positions or obtain higher qualifications. Female speakers also have a more difficult time establishing credibility as political experts compared to male speakers (Ditonto et al., 2014). The congruity between political roles and masculinity leads men to appear as more credible and persuasive than women (Anderson-Nilsson & Clayton, 2021). Accordingly, I posit the following hypothesis.

**H4:** Messages from male political speakers are evaluated as more agreeable, more credible, and more appropriate than messages from female political speakers.

**Aggression and Politics**

In addition to speaker sex, verbal aggression impacts message persuasiveness. Human aggression is defined as any behavior directed toward another with the intent to harm that individual (Bushman & Anderson, 2001; Felson, 1997). Aggression can be physical or verbal. Physical aggression is behavior that involves bodily harm (Archer & Coyne, 2005). Verbal aggression is a communicative behavior in which a person purposefully uses language to attack the self-concept of another person (Infante, 1987). Verbal aggression is more common and expected in political contexts than physical aggression; verbal aggression is often strategically used in political campaigns and debates (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011).

There are nine types of verbally aggressive messages, namely (a) character attacks, (b) competence attacks, (c) background attacks, (d) physical appearance attacks, (e) maledictions, (f) teasing, (g) ridicule, (h) threats, and (i) swearing (Infante et al., 1990). Character attacks damage an individual’s social reputation. Competence attacks criticize an individual’s abilities to complete a task. Background attacks assault an individual’s personal history. Physical
appearance attacks combat an individual’s self-presentation. Maledictions curse an individual. Teasing statements poke fun at an individual in a playful way. Ridicules use dismissive language toward an individual. Threats warn an individual of intended pain or damage. Swearing uses vulgar language toward an individual (Infante et al., 1990).

According to Infante and Rancer (1996), the use of verbally aggressive messages in politics inhibits persuasive effectiveness. Political speakers who engage in aggressive communication are evaluated negatively by voters (Riet et al., 2019). According to Riet and colleagues (2019) “angry expressions reduce persuasiveness and hurt perceptions of candidate likability and competence” (p. 838). When political speakers use aggression, the subsequent negative evaluations hinder their abilities to persuade voters (Riet et al., 2019). Furthermore, aggressive messages are considered less fair, less informative, and less important than nonaggressive messages (Brooks & Greer, 2007). Aggressive speakers are evaluated as "unfriendly” and “cold” (Kim & Niederdeppe, 2014, p. 695).

Moreover, verbal aggression can hinder message agreement, speaker credibility, communicative appropriateness. According to Kim and Niederdeppe (2014), voters do not desire aggressive political candidates. This disdain makes it more difficult for political candidates to achieve message agreement. In addition, political speakers engaging in aggressive messaging are evaluated as less credible, less competent, and messaging evaluated as less informative (Riet et al., 2019). Lastly, aggressive political speakers are considered inappropriate because they do not conform to existing social norms (Szczurek et al., 2012). Given this lack of conformity, communicative appropriateness is expected to be low. Formally stated:

H5: Nonaggressive messages are evaluated as more agreeable, more credible, and more appropriate than aggressive messages.
Eagly and Karau (2002) expanded RCT to address prejudice toward female leaders related to the cultural mismatch between the perceived demands of leadership and the stereotypes associated with women as the “weaker sex.” More specifically, women were evaluated as less persuasive than men when using aggressive persuasive language strategies (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Similarly, Knight and colleagues (2002) argued that verbal aggression is not viewed as a gender-appropriate behavior for female candidates. Following from these findings, I hypothesize an interaction between the sex of the speaker and level of aggression.

**H6:** There is an interaction between the sex of the speaker and level aggression, such that the association between sex of the speaker and agreement with the message, speaker credibility, and communicative appropriateness is stronger when the messages are nonaggressive, rather than aggressive.

Anderson and Sheeler (2005) found that men and women form different expectations regarding what strategies are appropriate for political candidates. Women are more likely to accept women who “represent them” versus women who “take charge on their own”. This finding invites questions regarding how the sex of the speaker and sex of the participant together influence agreement with message, speaker credibility, and communicative appropriateness. Given the limited current research on the topic, I postulate a research question addressing the interaction between the sex of the speaker and the sex of the participant.

**RQ1:** Is there an interaction between the sex of the speaker and the sex of the participant predicting agreement with the message, speaker credibility, and communicative appropriateness?
Method

The hypotheses and research question were tested in an online experiment using self-report data collected from college students. A pre-test was first administered to test the validity of the scales (see Appendix A). Participants were emailed a URL that directed them to an online survey hosted by Qualtrics. After consenting to participation (see Appendix B), individuals reported demographic information (i.e., sex, age). Participants then read a series of excerpts of political speech where sex of the speaker and level of aggression were manipulated (see Appendix C). Participants were then exposed to 2 aggressive and 2 non-aggressive messages (see Appendix D). Variables of interest were operationalized using close-ended self-report scales.

Participants

One hundred and six students were recruited from general education communication courses to participate in the study as part of a class assignment. The sample was composed of 42 men (39.62%), 63 women (59.43%), and 1 non-binary/third gender participant (0.94%). Ages ranged from 18 to 36 years old ($M = 19.47, SD = 2.00$). Students were primarily freshmen ($n = 78, 73.58$%), but also included sophomores ($n = 17, 16.03$%), juniors ($n = 5, 4.72$%), seniors ($n = 4, 3.77$%), a 5th year senior ($n = 1, 0.94$%), and a non-traditional student ($n = 1, 0.94$%). The majority of the sample identified as White ($n = 95, 89.62$%); students also identified as Latinx ($n = 5, 4.72$%), Asian ($n = 3, 2.83$%), multi-racial ($n = 2, 1.89$%), and Black ($n = 1, 0.94$%). The sample was composed of 23 Democrats (21.70%), 46 Republicans (43.40%), 27 Independent (25.47%), and 10 Other (9.43%).

Procedure

Brief introductions previewed the 8 excerpts of political speech. The introductions attributed the speech to U.S. Representatives during committee meetings. Sex of the speaker was
specified through a fictitious name and a reference to congressman or congresswoman. Party affiliation was not specified (see Appendix C). Nonaggressive excerpts of political speech discussed issues related to policy and legislative processes (Library of Congress, 2022). The verbally aggressive excerpts reflected the nine types of verbally aggressive messages specified by Infante and colleagues (1990), namely character attacks, competence attacks, background attacks, physical appearance attacks, maledictions, teasing, ridicule, threats, and swearing (see Appendix D). Two verbally aggressive remarks were added to the nonaggressive excerpts to create the verbally aggressive excerpts. This led to a 2 (aggressive; nonaggressive) x 2 (male; female) repeated measures design with four message conditions: female/aggressive, female/nonaggressive, male/aggressive, male/nonaggressive.

To ensure that level of aggression was accurately manipulated, a pre-test was administered (see Appendix A). After consenting to participation (see Appendix B), individuals reported demographic information (i.e., sex, age). Fifty-three participants were exposed to a series of aggressive and nonaggressive messages. Using Nau and Stewart’s (2018) perception of verbal aggressiveness scale participants responded to 2 semantic differentials on a 5-point scale where higher numbers reflected more favorable evaluations. The first item asked participants to rate the speaker (1 = Very aggressive, 5 = Not at all aggressive). The second item asked to what extent to the speaker had attacked the person he or she was addressing (1 = To a great extent, 5 = Not at all; see Appendix A). Using a repeated measures t-test, participants’ perceptions of verbal aggressiveness were compared for nonaggressive and aggressive messages. Perceptions of verbal aggressiveness were significantly lower for nonaggressive messages (M = 1.50) than aggressive messages (M = 3.18) as indicated by a significant t-test, t (424) = 29.53, p < .001.
Measures

Each participant responded to a total of 8 messages: 2 nonaggressive messages from female political speakers, 2 nonaggressive messages from male political speakers, 2 aggressive messages from female political speakers, and 2 aggressive messages from male political speakers. The messages were randomized for participants. Following each message, participants self-reported agreement with message, speaker credibility, communicative appropriateness, and verbal aggressiveness.

**Agreement with Message.** Nau and Stewart’s (2018) agreement with message item was used to assess participants’ acceptance of the message displayed. Participants responded to this item using a 6-point Likert scale where higher numbers reflected more agreement with the message (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 2 = *Disagree*, 3 = *Neither disagree nor agree*, 4 = *Agree*, 5 = *Strongly agree*; $M = 3.42$, $SD = 1.17$).

**Speaker Credibility.** Nau and Stewart’s (2018) perception of speaker credibility scale was used to assess participants’ evaluation of the speaker’s trustworthiness. Participants responded to 4 semantic differentials on a 5-point scale where higher numbers reflected more favorable evaluations of the speaker (1 = *Not trustworthy*, 5 = *Trustworthy*; 1 = *Not knowledgeable*, 5 = *Knowledgeable*; 1 = *Incompetent*, 5 = *Competent*; 1 = *Not likable*, 5 = *Likable*; $M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.20$, $\alpha = .92$).

**Communicative Appropriateness.** Jordan-Jackson, Lin, Rancer, and Infante’s (2008) perception of communicative appropriateness scale was used to assess the suitability of the speaker’s communicative behavior. Participants responded to 6 semantic differentials on a 5-point scale where higher numbers reflected more appropriate communication (1 = *Rude*, 5 = *Tactful*; 1 = *Inappropriate*, 5 = *Appropriate*; 1 = *Improper*, 5 = *Proper*; 1 = *Unsuitable*, 5 = *Suitable*).
Suitable; 1 = Uncomfortable, 5 = Comfortable; 1 = Incorrect, 5 = Correct; $M = 3.19, SD = 1.37 \alpha = .97$).

**Verbal Aggressiveness.** Nau and Stewart’s (2018) perception of verbal aggressiveness scale was used to assess participants’ evaluations of the speaker’s hostility. Participants responded to 2 semantic differentials on a 5-point scale where higher numbers reflected more verbal aggression. The first item asked participants to rate the speaker ($1 = Not at all aggressive, 5 = Very aggressive$). The second item asked to what extent to the speaker had attacked the person he or she was addressing ($1 = Not at all, 5 = To a great extent, M = 2.14, SD = 1.44, \alpha = .93$).

**Results**

As preliminary inquiry, I conducted correlational analyses between the variables of interest (see Table 1). Consistent with H1, message agreement was significantly and positively associated with speaker credibility. Message agreement was also significantly and positively associated with communicative appropriateness as posited in H2. Finally, speaker credibility was significantly and positively associated with communicative appropriateness as hypothesized in H3.

H4 predicted that messages from male political speakers would be evaluated as more agreeable, more credible, and more appropriate than messages from female political speakers. To evaluate H4, I conducted a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). As preliminary analysis, I evaluated assumptions of homogeneity of variances using a Levene’s Test for the variables of interest (message agreement: $F (1,846) = 5.72, p = .14$; credibility: $F (1,846) = 4.48, p = .20$; appropriateness: $F (1,846) = 8.39, p < .10$). Levene’s test indicated unequal variances. Accordingly, the F statistic may underestimate the significance and result in a false rejection of
the null hypothesis. This analysis merits caution when looking at credibility and appropriateness. Being that their F statistics were not significant, they might falsely reject the null hypothesis. Message agreement, credibility, and communicative appropriateness were entered as dependent variables. Sex of the speaker was entered as a fixed factor. Results did not demonstrate a main effect for sex of the speaker on message agreement (male: $M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.23$; female: $M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.10$), speaker credibility (male: $M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.13$; female: $M = 3.35$, $SD = 1.02$), or communicative appropriateness (male: $M = 3.12$, $SD = 1.34$; female: $M = 3.26$, $SD = 1.20$). Therefore, H4 was not supported, $F(1,846) = 2.42$, $p = .017$, partial $\eta^2 = .002$.

H5 predicted that nonaggressive messages would be evaluated as more agreeable, more credible, and more appropriate than aggressive messages. To evaluate H5, I conducted a one-way ANOVA. As preliminary analysis, I evaluated assumptions of homogeneity of variances using a Levene’s Test for the variables of interest (message agreement: $F(1,846) = 2.42$, $p = .89$; credibility: $F(1,846) = .004$, $p = .95$; and appropriateness: $F(1,846) = 4.25$, $p = .40$). Again, this analysis merits caution; the F statistic may underestimate the significance and result in a false rejection of the null hypothesis. Following this evaluation, message agreement, credibility, and communicative appropriateness were entered as dependent variables. Aggression was entered as a fixed factor. Results demonstrated a main effect for aggression on message agreement: (aggressive: $M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.04$; nonaggressive: $M = 3.99$, $SD = 1.00$); speaker credibility (aggressive: $M = 2.74$, $SD = .94$; nonaggressive: $M = 3.88$, $SD = .88$); and communicative appropriateness: (aggressive: $M = 2.32$, $SD = .97$; nonaggressive: $M = 4.06$, $SD = .90$). Therefore, H5 is supported, $F(1,847) = 265.67$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .24$.

H6 hypothesized that there would be an interaction between the sex of the speaker and message aggression predicting agreement with the message, speaker credibility, and
communicative appropriateness. To evaluate H6, I conducted a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). As preliminary analysis, I evaluated assumptions of homogeneity of variances using a Levene’s Test for the variables of interest (message agreement: $F(2,846) = 3.26, p = .90$; credibility: $F(2,846) = 2.09, p = .18$; and appropriateness: $F(2,846) = 2.06, p = .15$). The subsequent analysis merits caution; the F statistic may underestimate the significance and result in a false rejection of the null hypothesis. Following this evaluation, message agreement, credibility, and communicative appropriateness were entered as dependent variables. Sex of the speaker and aggression were entered as independent variables. Results demonstrated a significant interaction effect between sex of speaker and aggression, $F(2, 846) = 4.51, p < .001$. Therefore, H6 is supported.

RQ1 queried if there would be an interaction between the sex of the speaker and sex of the participant predicting agreement with the message, speaker credibility, and communicative appropriateness. To evaluate RQ1, I conducted a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). As preliminary analysis, I evaluated assumptions of homogeneity of variances using a Levene’s Test for the variables of interest (message agreement: $F(2,846) = 4.13, p = .90$; credibility: $F(2,846) = 3.11, p = .24$; and appropriateness: $F(2,846) = 2.95, p = .19$). Again, this analysis merits caution; the F statistic may underestimate the significance and result in a false rejection of the null hypothesis. Following this evaluation, message agreement, credibility, and communicative appropriateness were entered as dependent variables. Sex of the speaker and aggression were entered as independent variables. Results failed to demonstrate a significant interaction effect between sex of speaker and sex of the participant, $F(2, 846) = 1.01, p = .24$. Therefore, RQ1 is not supported.
**Discussion**

This study aimed to understand how the persuasiveness of political messaging is influenced by sex of the speaker and the speaker’s use of verbal aggression. According to O’Keefe (2002), message persuasiveness is influenced by the credibility of the source. The first three hypotheses examined the relationship between indicators of persuasiveness, namely message agreement, speaker credibility, and communicative appropriateness. Consistent with H1, I observed a positive association between message agreement and speaker credibility. Similarly, Twenge and colleagues (2016) found that persuasion is most effective when a credible source communicates a message that is consistent with the receiver’s existing beliefs or attitudes. Furthermore, speaker credibility is associated with the perceived ability to guide and govern others (Petricone, 2020). Taken together with the support generated for H1, I argue the importance of both message agreement and speaker credibility for persuasion.

As posited in H2, message agreement was positively associated with communicative appropriateness. Hirsh and colleagues (2012) identified that successful persuasion occurs when the message is both appropriateness and consistent with an individual’s existing beliefs or attitudes. Additionally, messages that align with one’s motivational orientation are increasingly effectual (Hirsh et al., 2012). Given that communicative appropriateness is defined as messaging that is befitting for a certain audience in a specific situation (Müller, 2004), complementary position of a message is expectedly important for persuasive communication.

H3 hypothesized that speaker credibility is positively associated with communicative appropriateness. Consistent with H3, speaker credibility and communicative appropriateness were positively related. Petricone (2020) found that thoughtful message construction increases perceived speaker credibility. Consistently, Twenge and colleagues (2016) argued that
messaging is most persuasive when delivered by an expert who is perceived as a credible source. Conversely, a political speaker utilizing inappropriate language is evaluated as unfit for office (Smith et al., 2013). In sum, findings demonstrate that agreement with the message, speaker credibility, and communicative appropriateness are all operating together when evaluating the persuasiveness of communication.

Counter to H4, results demonstrated that male political speakers were not evaluated as more agreeable, credible, or appropriate than female political speakers. This challenges prior research that demonstrated message recipients perceive male speakers as more agreeable, credible, and appropriate than female speakers (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Perhaps, the contemporaneous results indicate social and political progress for women. Women narrowed the gender-pay gap and made strides in educational attainment that now surpass men (Geiger & Parker, 2020). In 2020, record-breaking women were elected, but particularly women of color and LGBTQ individuals. This suggests that previous held beliefs regarding what constitutes a politician are changing (Delmore, 2020). Taken together, individuals’ schemas for women generally and political leaders in particular were likely edited since Eagly and Karau’s work in 2002.

In support of H5, nonaggressive messages were evaluated as more agreeable, more credible, and more appropriate than aggressive messages. In interpersonal relationships, Infante and Rancer (1996) found that nonaggressive messages were more persuasive than aggressive messages. Furthermore, Kim and Niederdeppe (2014) determined that voters preferred nonaggressive political candidates compared to aggressive candidates. Although voters believe in candidates who will fight for particular causes, the public does not endorse political speech that attacks the self-concepts of other political leaders (Fridkin & Kenney, 2011). Accordingly,
advertising that assaults the character or competence of a political candidate are likely less effective (Lau & Rovner, 2009).

As posited in H6, there was a significant interaction between the sex of the speaker and aggression when predicting agreement with message, speaker credibility, and communicative appropriateness. More specifically, male politicians who are not aggressive are most persuasive, followed by female politicians who are not aggressive, male politicians who are aggressive, and female politicians who are aggressive. This further supports the findings of H5 and Kim and Niederdeppe (2014) who found that voters prefer nonaggressive political candidates. Additionally, these results also suggest that aggressive male political speakers are evaluated more positively than aggressive female political speakers. Previously, Eagly and Karau (2002) found that male political speakers benefit from biased-gender norms when running for political office. Additionally, verbally aggressive attacks may not be seen as “gender-appropriate” behavior for female political speakers (Seiter et al., 2010).

Results of RQ1 demonstrated that there was not a significant interaction between the sex of the speaker and sex of the participant when predicting agreement with the message, speaker credibility, and communicative appropriateness. O’Keefe (2002) found that perceived similarity influences the persuasiveness of a political source. This brought forth the question as to how a participant’s sex might influence how they evaluate political speakers of the opposite sex. Consistent with Geiger and Parker (2018), men and women are both becoming more supportive of women in political positions, and that sex of political speaker is less of a factor when voting. Consistent with this work, female and male political speakers were evaluated similarly by both female and male participants.
The conclusions offered are qualified by the limitations of the study and the need for future research. For example, the results are limited by the homogeneity of the convenience sample and the self-reported measures of message agreement, speaker credibility, and communicative appropriateness. I see utility in future work that examines the posited relationships across different generations of women and men at varying levels of education in distinct regions of the country. In addition, this study did not consider the influence of the speaker’s political party affiliation. Subsequent research might consider how participants’ and speakers’ party affiliations jointly impact message agreement, speaker credibility, and communicative appropriateness. Despite these limitations, this study adds to the existing literature regarding persuasive political speech and the significance of the speaker’s sex and his/her use of verbal aggression.
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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X10000036


https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2021.1985110


### Table 1

*Correlations Between Variables of Interest*

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<th>3.</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Message Agreement</td>
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<td>.76*</td>
<td>.72*</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Speaker Credibility</td>
<td>.76*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.85*</td>
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<td>3. Communicative Appropriateness</td>
<td>.76*</td>
<td>.85*</td>
<td>-</td>
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* *p < .001*
Appendix A

Implied Informed Consent

Title of Project
Political Messaging

Principal Investigators
Dr. Lindsey S. Aloia
Associate Professor
Director of Honors Studies
517 Old Main
aloia@uark.edu
(479) 575-5954

Amanda Magusiak
M.A. Communication Student
Department of Communication
apmagusi@uark.edu

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this research study is to better understand individual's evaluations of a message.

Procedures to be Followed
You will be asked to complete a series of questions about your reactions to the message.

Discomforts and Risks
There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

Duration
Participation in this study will take approximately 10 minutes.

Statement of Anonymity
Your participation will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University of Arkansas policy. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

Right to Ask Questions
Please contact Dr. Lindsey S. Aloia at (479) 575-5954 or by email at aloia@uark.edu with questions, complaints, or concerns regarding your participation in this research study. For questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Ro Windwalker, the University's IRB Coordinator at (479) 575-2208 or by email at irb@uark.edu

Voluntary Participation
You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study. Your decision to participate in this research study is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty. If you are not 18 years of age or you do not wish to take part in the research study, please contact Dr. Lindsey S. Aloia at aloia@uark.edu for an alternative assignment.
Completion and return of the survey implies that you have read the information on this screen and consent to take part in the research.
Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your sex?
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Other
2. What is your age in years?
3. What is your year in school?
   a. Freshman
   b. Sophomore
   c. Junior
   d. Senior
   e. 5th year senior
   f. Graduate student
   g. Non-traditional student
   h. Not a student
4. What is your race?
   a. White
   b. Black
   c. American Indian or Alaska Native
   d. Asian
   e. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   f. Latinx
   g. Multi-racial
   h. Other
5. What is your political party affiliation?
   a. Democrat
   b. Republican
   c. Independent
   d. Other

Items to Capture Variable of Interest

1. How aggressive was this speaker?
   1 – Very aggressive
   5 – Not at all aggressive
2. To what extent did the politician attack the person he/she was addressing?
   1 – To a great extent
   5 – Not at all
Appendix B

Implied Informed Consent

Title of Project
Political Communication

Principal Investigators
Dr. Lindsey S. Aloia  Amanda Magusiak
Associate Professor  M.A. Communication Student
Director of Honors Studies  Department of Communication
517 Old Main
aloia@uark.edu  apmagusi@uark.edu
(479) 575-5954

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of this research study is to better understand individual's reactions to political communication.

Procedures to be Followed
You will be asked to complete a series of questions about your reactions to political messages.

Discomforts and Risks
There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

Duration
Participation in this study will take approximately 30 minutes.

Statement of Anonymity
Your participation will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University of Arkansas policy. In the event of any publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.

Right to Ask Questions
Please contact Dr. Lindsey S. Aloia at (479) 575-5954 or by email at aloia@uark.edu with questions, complaints, or concerns regarding your participation in this research study. For questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Ro Windwalker, the University's IRB Coordinator at (479) 575-2208 or by email at irb@uark.edu

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Completion and return of the survey implies that you have read the information on this screen and consent to take part in the research.

**Demographic Questionnaire**

1. What is your sex?
   a. Male
   b. Female
   c. Other
2. What is your age in years?
3. What is your year in school?
   a. Freshman
   b. Sophomore
   c. Junior
   d. Senior
   e. 5th year senior
   f. Graduate student
   g. Non-traditional student
   h. Not a student
4. What is your race?
   a. White
   b. Black
   c. American Indian or Alaska Native
   d. Asian
   e. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
   f. Latinx
   g. Multi-racial
   h. Other
5. What is your political party affiliation?
   a. Democrat
   b. Republican
   c. Independent
   d. Other

**How to Capture Variables of Interest**

1. Indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the message.
   1 – Strongly disagree
   2 – Disagree
   3 – Neither disagree nor agree
   4 – Agree
   5 – Strongly agree
2. Evaluate the speaker’s credibility.
   1 – Not trustworthy
   5 – Trustworthy
3. Evaluate the speaker’s credibility.
1 – Not knowledgeable
5 – Knowledgeable
4. Evaluate the speaker’s credibility.
   1 – Incompetent
   5 – Competent
5. Evaluate the speaker’s credibility.
   1 – Not likable
   5 – Likable
6. Evaluate the appropriateness of the speaker.
   1 – Rude
   5 – Tactful
7. Evaluate the appropriateness of the speaker.
   1 – Inappropriate
   5 – Appropriate
8. Evaluate the appropriateness of the speaker.
   1 – Improper
   5 – Proper
9. Evaluate the appropriateness of the speaker.
   1 – Unsuitable
   5 – Suitable
10. Evaluate the appropriateness of the speaker.
    1 – Uncomfortable
    5 – Comfortable
11. Evaluate the appropriateness of the speaker.
    1 – Incorrect
    5 – Correct
12. How aggressive was this speaker?
    1 – Very aggressive
    5 – Not at all aggressive
13. To what extent did the politician attack the person he/she was addressing?
    1 – To a great extent
    5 – Not at all
Appendix C

Introduction Message

1. The following comment was made by Representative Beth Fitzgerald during a meeting of the House of Rules Committee. Congresswoman Fitzgerald said to the other representative, “insert message.”

2. The following comment was made by Representative John Thomas during a meeting of the House of Rules Committee. Congressman Thomas said to the other representative, “insert message.”

3. The following comment was made by Representative Cindy Brown during a meeting of the House of Rules Committee. Congresswoman Brown said to the other representative, “insert message.”

4. The following comment was made by Representative Drew Smith during a meeting of the House of Rules Committee. Congressman Smith said to the other representative, “insert message.”
Appendix D

Nonaggressive Messages

1. “We should do hearings first to hear from each representative to decide what item to discuss next. Each representative will have the option to voice their questions and concerns. Then, we will be able to take a vote to decide what is the best course of action moving forward.”

2. “Every member of this body wants the best for the United States. This means we should all take a minute to listen to the differing views that will be shared today. Working together will ensure that we can pass bills that better our nation in a timely manner.”

3. “After listening to last night’s press conference, it seems that we have to do some work. It is important that we put more resources on the ground across America. This will be beneficial to our communities. It ensures that we continue investing in our communities.”

4. “It has been brought to my attention that the bill being discussed today is divided within both parties. I recommend that we work on altering some of the points made. This will also help ensure this essential bill will be processed as quickly as possible.”

Aggressive Messages

1. “You are incapable of getting your job done (competence attack). We should do hearings first to hear from each representative to decide what item to discuss next. Each representative will have the option to voice their questions and concerns. Then, we will be able to take a vote to decide what is the best course of action moving forward. If you really think you can do this job better than me, let’s see it (teasing).”

2. “You are selfish and have a dishonest agenda (character attack). Every other member of this body wants the best for the United States. This means we should all take a minute to listen to the differing views that will be shared today. Working together will ensure that we can pass bills that better our nation in a timely manner. If you feel that you are unable to do this, you should leave and don’t think about coming back (threat).”

3. “You made a complete fool of yourself on television (character attack). After listening to last night’s press conference, it seems that we have to do some work. It is important that we put more resources on the ground across America. This will be beneficial to our communities. It ensures that we continue investing in our communities. I cannot believe you thought anyone would agree with you (ridicule).”

4. “You are an unbelievably embarrassing politician (competence attack). It has been brought to my attention that the bill being discussed today is divided within both parties. I recommend that we work on altering some of the points made. This will also help ensure this essential bill will be processed as quickly as possible. You are being a complete ass trying to stop this from happening (swearing).”

Note: Aggressive messages are in bold.
Appendix E

To: Lindsey S Aloia
From: Douglas J Adams, Chair
IRB Expedited Review
Date: 04/25/2022
Action: Exemption Granted
Action Date: 04/25/2022
Protocol #: 2203389969
Study Title: Political Speech: The Influence of Gender and Verbal Aggression on Message Perception

The above-referenced protocol has been determined to be exempt.

If you wish to make any modifications in the approved protocol that may affect the level of risk to your participants, you must seek approval prior to implementing those changes. All modifications must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have any questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact the IRB Coordinator at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

cc: Amanda P. Magusiak, Investigator