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GENDER DIFFERENCES IN VERBAL AND NONVERBAL AGGRESSION

Anna Knyazyan*

Yerevan State University

Liza Marabyan**

European University of Armenia

Gender differences permeate every aspect of human personality and appearance, and dictate how men and women should act, think and behave. Gender embodies a pattern of relations that evolves over time to define male and female, masculinity and femininity, concurrently structuring and regulating people's relation to society. Gender decides what is expected, permitted and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. This paper discusses male and female aggression in political debates with a special focus on the recent debate held on 9th September 2021 in Canada. The analyses carried out through the methods of content, discourse and pragmalinguistic analyses, show that aggression is frequently categorized as a social behavior, and thus falls within a set of criteria depending on the roles that people occupy. In the world today, there is an increase in the use of communicative aggression, both verbal and non-verbal in the political arena. Aggression is widely applied in political communication where the main purpose is to fight the opponent and get the attention of the audience and voters. Male politicians are expected to be verbally and non-verbally more aggressive than women while female politicians perceived as less aggressive and considered to be better performers. However, this assumption remains an area of contention.

Keywords: communicative aggression, verbal and non-verbal aggression, political debate, political leaders.

Introduction

Gender roles and expectations are socially constructed and learned. They are likely to change over time and they differ within and between cultures. Some stereotypes about gender differences are common to all cultures such as ideas

* annaknyazyan@ysu.am

** marabyanliza@gmail.com

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about aggression and force which are considered as a distinguishing feature of males, and weakness, obedience, and sensuality as characteristic feature of females (Knyazyan, 2016).

According to West and Zimmerman (1987) gender is not something we are born with, and not something we have, but something we do, something we perform (Butler, 1990). We are surrounded by gender myth since early childhood. It is present in conversation, humor, and conflict, and it is the key to explain everything from driving styles to food preferences. Gender is rooted so deeply in every aspect of society that it seems to us to be completely natural. The world is filled with ideas about gender – and these ideas are so usual that we assume that they are true. Gender is central to our understanding and seems natural, and beliefs about gender seem to be evident truths. It goes without saying that gender issues are opposed with the problem of gender stereotypes and clichés in society (Knyazyan, 2016).

In the world today, there is an increase in the use of communicative aggression, both verbal and non-verbal. This phenomenon often takes place in political communication. The main purpose of this type of communication is to fight the opponent and get the attention of the audience and voters (Wasike, 2019). The aim is achieved by painting a positive image of oneself and opponent negatively. Verbal aggression agrees with aggressive language and it is important to note that aggressiveness in the language is a type of communication in which leaders express their needs and feelings with little or no regard to the feelings and needs of other people. Aggressive language may be polite or rude or somewhere in between (Nau & Stewart, 2019). Aggression from men and women is triggered by different factors. Within the political context, it is expected that the political communication of women should be competitive and very assertive so that people can take it seriously but it should also be feminine enough so that it does not violate the stereotypes of the nurturing and cooperative female (Grebelsky-Lichtman, 2015). On the contrary, it may be more acceptable for men to be verbally aggressive with no stereotypes expected of them.

The phenomenon of aggression as a socio-cultural problem

The present civilization has become the civilization of violence. Violence shows itself in many branches of life: the family environment, schools, work places, various institutions, everyday interpersonal contacts. It seems that it has replaced other forms of usual communication. Shouts have replaced the talk.

For many people it seems, that showing aggression will help them in obtaining the purpose. Therefore, it is visible in all social circles.

Aggression is defined by social psychologists as behavior that is meant to harm another person who does not wish to be harmed (Baron & Richardson, 1994). Because it involves the perception of intent, what looks like aggression from one point of view may not look that way from another, and the same harmful behavior may or may not be considered aggressive depending on its intent. Intentional harm is, however, perceived as worse than unintentional harm, even when the harms are identical (Ames & Fiske, 2013). The type or level of intent that underpins violent conduct distinguishes two basic categories of aggression, each of which is driven by quite different psychological processes. *Emotional or impulsive aggression* refers to hostility that is motivated primarily by impulsive emotions and occurs with little deliberation or intent. Emotional aggression is the result of the severe negative feelings we are experiencing at the time we aggress, and it is not meant to have any positive consequences. *Instrumental or cognitive aggression*, on the other hand, is deliberate and planned aggressiveness. Instrumental aggression is a type of violence that is more cognitive than affective, and it can be absolutely cold and calculated. Instrumental aggression is aimed to harm in order to acquire something, such as attention, money, or political influence (Bushman & Anderson, 2001, p. 29).

Aggression can be both physical and nonphysical. *Physical aggressiveness is defined as aggression that involves physically injuring people, such as punching, kicking, stabbing, or shooting them. Nonphysical aggression includes verbal aggression (yelling, screaming, swearing, and name calling) and relational or social aggression, which is defined as “intentionally harming another person’s social relationships”, such as gossiping, excluding others from our friendship, or giving others the “silent treatment” (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Nonverbal aggression is also designed to cause harm to individuals.*

Verbal and nonverbal aggression in Canadian leaders’ debates

The political leaders’ debate was held at the Canadian Museum of History in Gatineau, Que. In Canada, it was the first and sole English-language debate held within the election campaign of 2021 ahead of the elections in the same year (Capenter, 2021). The participants in the debate were Annamie Paul, Yves-François Blanchet, Justin Trudeau, Erin O’Toole and Jagmeet Singh (Syed, 2021). This was a typical debate displaying an example of the verbal and

non-verbal aggression often seen in political debates where both men and women were involved. The debate featured different political leaders in Canada with the Green Party leader Annamie Paul being the only woman on stage (Capenter, 2021). The debate was one of those national debates held in Canada before the 2021 elections to help the electorate hear what the leaders contesting for elections in the country had in store and probably from that, be in a position to make an informed choice on whom to vote in. The debate gave the only woman participating an opportunity to show what it means to be less aggressive and what helps to achieve in such political conversations where emotions tend to be high.

At large, the use of verbal and non-verbal aggression is a strategy employed by many politicians in communication when debating with their opponents (Dumitrescu, 2016). Politicians in Canada were not different because the mentioned one referring to the 2021 election campaign in which four men and one woman faced each other was a fierce exchange of words and ideas (Syed, 2021). Being the only woman, the first person of Jewish ancestry and also the first black person on that stage, Annami Paul was compelled to apply wit in order to shine in a debate where men were the majority and not to forget that all of them were white people.

Annamie Paul was described by most analysts as a calm and a straight shooter on the stage. These traits are in line with Carli (2001) who states that for female politicians, verbally aggressive behavior is considered gender inappropriate. These qualities can be understood as having been well calculated to present a certain image that would win the hearts of the audience and the electorate. Female politicians are deemed to be having more expressive and warmer traits such as cautiousness, compassion, gentleness and sensitivity (Nau & Stewart, 2019). Therefore, Annami Paul could have been trying to act or present the “normal” behavior for a woman politician. Such norms and perceptions tend to constrain the discourse of female politicians. Every time she spoke throughout the debate, she called for *collaboration, justice and equitable representation*. This was not a simple task for her. When speaking on leadership and accountability Paul said:

I have said before and I'll say again tonight that I do not believe that Mr. Trudeau is a real feminist. A feminist doesn't continue to push strong women out his party, when they are just trying to serve. And I will say their names

*tonight and thank them. Thank you Jane Philpott, thank you Jody Wilson-Raybould, thank you Celina Caesar-Chavannes. I'm here tonight thanks to the work that you have done. I am the **only woman** other than Elizabeth May to be on this platform in the past 18 years. The Liberal Party has never had a woman leader. I think it's time for the party to examine its priorities.* (Syed, 2021)

This was not the first time Paul had spoken out about Trudeau's position as a feminist. During a press conference in June, she told reporters that he was *no ally* and *no feminist* (Boisvert, 2021). In agreement with Nau & Stewart (2019), Grebelsky-Lichtman & Katz (2020) state that feminine communal features of political leaders principally define four dimensions which include *emotional communication, empathy, interpersonal sensitivity and kindness*. The psychologically associated nonverbal displays of emotional communication encompass a *communicative voice of affection* that reveals their emotional condition and creates sentimental communication that inspires *listening, exerts influence on perceptions of trustfulness, and increases personal links*.

Trudeau's respond to Paul was:

I think Ms. Paul, you'll perhaps understand that I won't take lessons on caucus management from you. (Syed, 2021)

To which Paul replied with a *smirk* on her face: *I will not take his lessons*. Perhaps the most iconic moment was when she invited Blanchet to get educated about systemic racism. When he interrupted her she put out her right hand and without looking at him said: *This is my time, sir*. It was a moment akin to now US vice-president Kamala Harris telling her opponent Mike Pence in the 2020 debate *I'm speaking*. Blanchet responded to Paul's polite retort: *It's a nice time to insult people*. Paul responded: *That was not an insult. It was an invitation to get educated*. In-between these memorable moments, Paul introduced herself cold and calculated.

Although relatively less aggressive, Annami Paul did not completely rule out aggression from her reactions to questions asked and her responses to them. Her nonverbal communication especially her facial expressions and smiles made her male opponents jittery as they felt beaten in their own game. She combined her composure, calmness and well-calculated statements with

gestures and facial expressions that as observed, were not meant to give her opponents comfort. Nau & Stewart (2019) argue that in politics verbal aggression is considered to be professionally appropriate for men and women politicians. This implies that any politician be it a man or a woman is expected to apply a certain level of aggression in their behavior and communication in order to meet the communication expectations of most people.

Not all female politicians exercise restraint in their use of aggressive language. The debate in which Annami Paul took part was a representation of what most political debates featuring men and women look like. Men prefer aggression to assert their authority, but women prefer to demonstrate their knowledge by their vocabulary choices (Knyazyan, 2016). However, there are many other debates that are different with women refusing to play along with the norms. For example, in a certain study on election coverage in Canada, the speech of female politicians was characterized as being more aggressive when compared to the speeches of male politicians (Wasike, 2019). Reporters used more negative and aggressive communicative verbs such as attack for describing the speech of female politicians.

The study from Canada is evidence that there is no clear-cut line on who should be aggressive because both female and male politicians can display aggression. This observation lends support to the statement by Nau & Stewart (2019) that both male and female politicians can use verbal and non-verbal aggression in order to tackle their opponents during debates. For example, in the course of the 2021 elections debate in Canada, Annami Paul asked Blanchet to get knowledge about systemic racism. Seemingly she needed to sound strong so that her opponents would also respect her and give her space. When Blanchet attempted to interrupt her, she stretched out her right hand and while looking away from him said, *This is my time, sir* (Capenter, 2021). This is one of the times in the debate where Annami Paul seemed to display an element of aggression because it was required to defend her position, statements and beliefs. Her statement directed at her male opponent suggested that he was ignorant, and uneducated about issues of racism. This can be termed as *negative campaigning* based on the definition of Lau & Pomper (2004) who state that negative campaigning is to talk about the opponent, criticize his or her programs, qualifications and accomplishments with the aim of exposing their lack of capability. If this definition is credible, then both Annami and the male debaters were engaged in aggression and negative campaigning. Most of the time, Annami Paul came out as a polite and cautious speaker and many people

took that for lacking aggression. However, her behavior could be challenged because politeness does not always remain within the realm of etiquette and manners, because beautiful messages used to flatter somebody may also have unrestrained, negative outcomes. This leads us to the conclusion that there are various ways of categorizing aggression.

Verbal and non-verbal aggression and effectiveness in political debates

Having examined the pattern of verbal and non-verbal aggression between men and women in politics, it is important to evaluate the benefit that aggression adds to the political debater. As already stated, Annami Paul debated with four men, all of whom displayed a high level of verbal aggression directed at fellow male debaters as well as the only lady on the stage (Syed, 2021). Compared to her, the level of verbal and nonverbal aggression displayed by her male opponents was higher than hers. This was expected because in most cases, aggressive behavior is mostly associated with males than females. Paul's rebuke of Justin Trudeau for not moving faster to address sexual harassment in the Canadian Armed Forces stands out as the most memorable moment of the debate. Trudeau argued that his government had no choice but to follow the process. The Liberal leader acknowledged that *"It's unsatisfactory to say we're relying on process in this. We just want to have easy answers but this is not an issue with easy answers. You have to fall back on process"*.

The result of the debate show that male debaters were rated lower compared to Annami Paul because their communication was not persuasive and people perceived them to be ineffective in communication.

As stated by Bandwart (2010), men are perceived to be having instrumental traits that cause them to appear more assertive, tough, aggressive and decisive. This statement was evidently noticeable in the debate because all the male debaters came out as aggressive since they displayed apparent loss of patience, sparred, made use of agitated hand gestures, spoke over each other, displayed frustration through facial expressions, and were evidently in a hurry to speak their minds (Carpenter, 2021). NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh said:

The only reason to call an election is a selfish one. To gain more power. That was not the right thing to do. (Carpenter, 2021)

Trudeau, who faced hostile protesters opposed to vaccines during campaign stops in the days leading up to Wednesday's debate, stood his ground, arguing as he had since the start of the campaign that Canadians deserved a say on how the country could get out of the pandemic. *Viewers can see how deep the differences are in our positions on how the pandemic should be dealt with*, he said. Trudeau got in one great zinger on Conservative Leader Erin O'Toole near the end:

Mr. O'Toole, who says he wants to get all of Canada vaccinated to 90 per cent in the coming two months, can't even convince his own candidates to get vaccinated to 90 per cent. (Carpenter, 2021)

When O'Toole attacked Trudeau for failing to get the two Michaels, Kovrig and Spavor, out of Chinese detention, Trudeau shot back:

If you want to get the Michaels home you do not simply lob tomatoes across the Pacific. That is what Mr. Harper tried for a number of years and didn't get anywhere. (Carpenter, 2021)

O'Toole brought up Canada's failure to get all Canadian people and allies out of Afghanistan, saying: *Canadians should never leave behind people who are at risk because they helped us*, then turned to Trudeau and scorched him:

What did Mr. Trudeau do? You called an election, sir. You put your own political interest ahead of the interest of thousands of people. Leadership is about putting others first, not yourself, Mr. Trudeau. (Carpenter, 2021)

The behavior and inability of the male politicians to impress the audience with their debating skills find support in the work of Jordan-Jackson et al., (2008) who state that using verbal aggression hinders one from being effective in persuasion because it is socially inappropriate and potentially destructive and that makes the source of the message to be perceived as lacking credibility. People who are verbally aggressive are considered to lack competence in addressing an issue that is substantive (Wasike, 2019). They are also seen to be

less trustworthy because it is assumed that they have undesirable character traits. Although this notion has been disputed, evidence from various debates shows that highly aggressive behavior dents the image of the aggressor in the eyes of the audience.

In the Canada elections debate, the woman politician (Annami Paul) was perceived to be a better performer than her male counterparts because she was less aggressive and her communication and self-expression were better. She was more effective because by reducing her aggression, she managed to organize her ideas, maintain focus and clarity of mind and listen keenly to the opponents before responding. As the male politicians bickered about Afghanistan, she refused to join them in bickering and helped them to see the bigger picture, something that helped her earn more points in the eyes of the audience (Carpenter, 2021). When the men criticized each other's proposals on climate, Annami Paul shot them down and dissuaded them from sticking to their approaches but instead required them to collaborate as they did in the first days of the pandemic.

Conclusion

Generally speaking, men and women talk differently although there are varying degrees of masculine and feminine speech characteristics in each of us. But men and women speak in particular ways mostly because those ways are associated with their gender.—Male politicians are verbally and non-verbally more aggressive than women. Society expects female politicians to be less aggressive when compared to men. However, this remains an area of contention. Although Annami Paul sounded less aggressive, she still applied verbal and non-verbal aggression, albeit at a lower level. She was rated the best performer due to her composure and little aggression which aided her ability to communicate and express herself. At large, verbal and non-verbal aggression have the effect of reducing the effectiveness of the aggressor when it comes to performance in political debates. Thus, it may be concluded that high levels of verbal and non-verbal aggression reduce the effectiveness of the speaker, whereas less aggression increases the debater's ability to communicate properly.

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Աննա Կնյազյան
Լիզա Մարաբյան

Գենդերային տարբերությունները թափանցում են մարդու անհատականության և արտաքինի բոլոր ոլորտները և թելադրում, թե ինչպես պետք է գործեն, մտածեն և վարվեն տղամարդիկ և կանայք: Գենդերային տարբերությունների մասին որոշ կարծրատիպեր ընդհանուր են բոլոր մշակույթների համար, օրինակ, ագրեսիայի և ուժի մասին պատկերացումները համարվում են տղամարդկանց տարբերակիչ հատկանիշ, իսկ թուլությունը, հնազանդությունը և զգայականությունը՝ կանանց բնորոշ հատկանիշ: Ագրեսիան հաճախ դասակարգվում է որպես սոցիալական վարքագիծ և, հետևաբար, կարևորվում են մի շարք չափանիշներ՝ կախված մարդկանց կատարած դերերից: Դժվար է համե-

մատել, թե որքան ագրեսիվ կարող է լինել ինչ-որ մեկը, քանի որ յուրաքանչյուր ոք հանդես է գալիս տարբեր միջավայրում և տարբեր հանգամանքներում: Սույն հոդվածում քննարկվում է տղամարդկանց և կանանց ագրեսիան քաղաքական բանավեճում՝ ուշադրության կենտրոնում պահելով 2021 թ. սեպտեմբերի 9-ին Կանադայում տեղի ունեցած քաղաքական բանավեճը:

***Բանայի բառեր՝** հաղորդակցական ագրեսիա, խոսքային և ոչ խոսքային ագրեսիա, քաղաքական բանավեճ, քաղաքական առաջնորդներ:*