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The Influence of Verbal Aggressiveness and Verbal Argumentativeness on College Student Leadership Styles

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THE INFLUENCE OF VERBAL AGGRESSIVENESS AND VERBAL

ARGUMENTATIVENESS ON COLLEGE STUDENT LEADERSHIP STYLES

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Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
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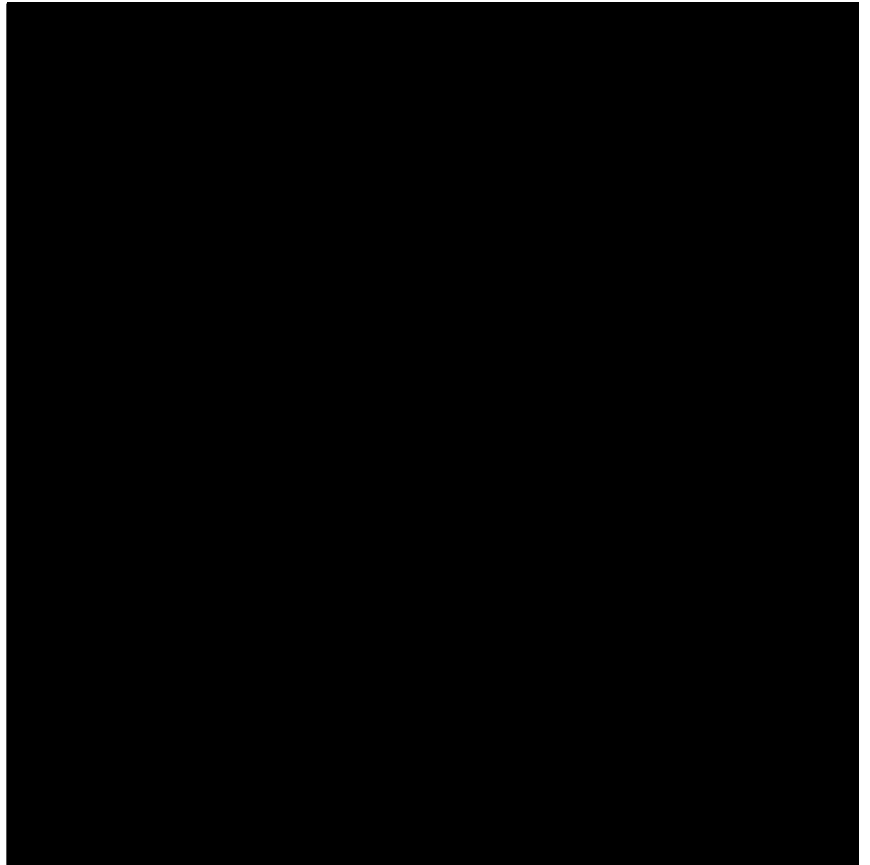ARGUMENTATIVENESS ON COLLEGE STUDENT LEADERSHIP STYLES

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ABSTRACT

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The behaviors and styles of leaders have been studied for many years yet, the study of college study leaders has not been as prevalent. This study examined the possible relationships between the levels of verbal aggressiveness and verbal argumentativeness and college student leadership styles as described by the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (Kouzes & Posner 1995).

Using quantitative and qualitative approaches with multiple college student leadership groups at three different universities and community colleges, this study found that college student leaders are less verbally aggressive than student non-leaders, and are more verbally argumentative than student non-leaders. Furthermore, positive and negative correlations were found with the five leadership styles.

DEDICATION

To *mi famiglia*...every one of "the blue tags."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One key skill involved in leadership is that of making arguments. Early Sophists

in ancient Greece fulfilled a great need in the city-states and fledgling democracies

through teaching citizens how to argue effectively. Arguing was even then recognized as

an essential skill for success. Teachings of Lysias, Hippias, and Protagoras were

developed further and refined by a considerable number of great thinkers of the time,

especially Plato and Aristotle. In Athens and Rome, argumentation was an essential tool

for the conduct of the public business. Aristotle identified three functions of argument in

the public sphere as forensic speaking involving justice and injustice, epideictic involving

honor and dishonor, and deliberative exploring expedient and inexpedient (*Rhetoric*, I. 3).

In the fourth century, B.C., he advanced his famous division of rhetoric into ethos

(persuasion stemming from the speaker's character), pathos (persuasion from putting the

audience into a certain frame of mind), and logos (persuasion resulting from the logic of

the speech).

Over the centuries, rhetorical theorists have formulated principles of

argumentation. Rhetorical critics have studied great debates and also the argumentative

behavior in the careers of many important social figures (Infante, 1981). Hample (1983)

answered the question "What is argument for?" with three answers: persuasion,

knowledge, and personal growth (p. 562). Wenzel (1980) viewed argument as "centrally

involved" with decision-making. In contemporary communication studies, Infante and

Rancer (1995) suggested that the central purpose of argumentation theory is to "enable

people to argue constructively and effectively" (p. 320). Rancer and Avtgis (2006) stated

that "many if not most communication interactions involve some type of persuasion" (p.175).

Benoit and Cahn (1994) posited that argument plays a key role in everyday life and is worthy of scholarly discussion (p. 163). In some cases, everyday argument may be seen as a "more socially acceptable way" of managing disagreement than some other option. Thus, disagreement over a concept by invoking arguments may prevent resorting to unreasonable or violent methods. Researchers' definitions of argument depend on the perspective they take and the research methodology they employ (Allen, Burrell, & Mineo, 1987). Canary, Brossmann, Brossmann, & Weger (1995) argued that argumentation consists of introducing coherent reasons for one's opinion on the issues under discussion. So, in multiple contexts that may range from discussions about global economics to where a department head will spend budget monies, argumentation is a necessary component of one's communication strategies.

A functional conception of argument focuses on purposes, goals, and objectives. Thus, argument can be goal-directed or a means of accomplishing one's wants. For example, people argue in interpersonal, small groups, and public communication situations; furthermore, argumentative behavior is an important part of legislative and judicial processes (Infante & Rancer, 1982). Communicating arguments is a key to advocacy and, often, a key to leadership. Leadership has been referred to as the ability to influence others. Some take argumentation too far to the point that it attacks others. The latter is referred to as verbal aggression.

The function of aggressive and argumentative communication has been studied in relational and family contexts (Waggenspack & Hensley, 1989; Martin, Anderson, &

Horvath, 1996; Semic & Canary, 1997; Myers & Johnson, 2003), organizational contexts (Infante & Gorden, 1987; Gorden, Infante & Izzo, 1988; Infante & Gorden, 1991; Anderson & Martin, 1999), instructional contexts (Vangelisti, Daly, & Friedrich, 1999; Chesebro & McCroskey, 2002; Kearney, Plax, & Allen, 2002), political relationships (Downs, Kaid, & Ragan, 1990), small group relationships (Barbato, 1987; Scheerhorn, 1987; Schultz, 1982); intercultural as well as intracultural contexts (Nicotera, Rancer, & Sullivan, 1991; Sanders, Gass, Wiseman, & Bruschke, 1992) along with mass communication contexts (Kaye & Sapolsky, 2004).

There have been more than 100 convention papers, and numerous dissertations, in addition to the hundreds of articles focusing on verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness (Infante & Rancer, 1996). Yet, few researchers have examined young leaders and their use of aggressive and argumentative communication; furthermore, there is little evidence of this topic of verbal argumentativeness studied as invoked by young leaders being introduced to college student leaders introduced in scholarly journals. This study seeks to explore how young leaders invoke and perceive such argument characteristics.

Leadership has been referred to as the ability to influence others. However, some take the attempt to influence through argumentation too far to the point that it attacks others. The latter is referred to as verbal aggression. Verbal aggressiveness is defined as "to dominate and perhaps damage or maximally, to defeat and perhaps destroy the locus of attack" (Infante & Gorden, 1987, p. 74). Zillman (1979) contended verbal aggression is common yet little is known about the person who exhibits the verbal aggressiveness trait. A situational approach to verbal aggression is necessary because many situational

factors inhibit or facilitate aggressive behavior (Berkowitz, 1962). Will situations that college student leaders find themselves in inhibit or facilitate aggressiveness? The speculative answer is yes to both because there are those situations where verbal aggression would be inhibited due to anticipated punishment, the role of the opponent in the argument, or an unknown motive. Possible facilitative issues may be reciprocity of aggressive language or anticipated positive consequences for aggressive behavior. Infante, Riddle, Horvath, and Tulmin (1992) argued that people with high measures of trait verbal aggressiveness are not always verbally aggressive while people who are low on the trait on occasion do direct self-concept attacking messages toward others.

Research on verbal argumentativeness, which is defined as a "generally stable trait which predisposes [a person] to advocate positions on controversial issues and to attack, verbally, a position" (Infante & Rancer, 1982, p. 72), has established that highly argumentative people generate more arguments and that their arguments are of higher quality (Rancer & Infante, 1985; Onyekwere, Rubin, & Infante, 1991). Also, argumentativeness is thought to be related to improved decision making processes (Barbato, 1987).

The characteristics of verbal argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness suggest a logical tie to those in leadership. Many centuries of study and exploration reveal an interest in leadership. From Confucius to Plato to Machiavelli, many of the world's most famous philosophers have pondered how humans lead one another. James Burns argued that leadership is "one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth" (Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004, p. 151). Rost (1991) collected 221 definitions of leadership, ranging from the 1920's to the 1990's and the one commonality amongst

these definitions is that leadership is about a person or persons somehow moving other people to do something. During the twentieth century, the study of leadership commanded a multitude of research work in a variety of disciplines. Leadership has been given "an important place in organization theory" (Peterson & Sorenson, 1991, p. 501) and, in organizational settings, has frequently been conceptualized in terms of "styles or behavior patterns" (Husband, 1985, p. 103). Yet, styles or behavior patterns can be just the beginning of the analysis and understanding of the many layers of a term like leadership as frequently used in a variety of circumstances such as corporations, families, nonprofits, universities, and governmental organizations. If one considers leadership as a process of influencing others, then "language becomes one of the key means of social influence" (Conger, 1989, p. 70) obviously implicated research in speech communication as a major factor in understanding the greater concept of leadership. Understanding leadership styles as they relate to verbal argumentative and aggressive behaviors is a useful method for drawing out the specifics of communication needed for leadership.

Yet, although a vast number of studies have been done providing insight into organizations involving adult populations, one may ponder how leadership is first developed considering that early life history experiences may predict later action. In a major longitudinal study, Schneider, Paul, White, and Holcombe (1999), explored the nature of adolescent leadership behavior as well as the durability of leadership over time in high school students. They argued that while there was a multitude of work on adolescents, the study of leadership behaviors in these students tended to focus narrowly on academically gifted students and not the general population. Furthermore, they posited that an "individual's developmental years can have an impact on the leadership

exhibited later in the workplace as an adult" (p. 610). Following this work, Schneider, Ehrhart, & Ehrhart (2002) studied constructs that significantly predict ratings of leadership behaviors assigned to adolescents as well as the reflection of early displays of leadership behavior in later behavior as these adolescents move into adulthood. These constructs were represented by the personality types based on the Myers- Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), the students' grade point averages (GPA), peer nominations, and teacher ratings of leadership behaviors. Overall, the most consistent constructs were the Judging-Perceiving dimension of the MBTI and the GPA (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Ehrhart, 2002, p. 275).

Astin (1993) argued that study of the development of young men and women during their college years because this time encompasses various activities, perspectives, and experiences unique to learning life skills. A growing body of research has indicated that the college years are a critical period of students' personal, social, and professional growth (Astin, 1985, 1993). Investigators have examined the impact of leadership on college experiences through conflict resolution (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001), action orientation (Erwin & Marcus-Mendoza, 1988), gender (Romano, 1996; Whitt, 1994), social adjustment (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 1994), and academic enhancement (Cooper, Healy, & Simpson, 1994). There is a deficiency in this context of understanding communicative behaviors such as verbal aggressiveness and verbal argumentativeness. College student leaders may also be unique in ways because they primarily work with volunteers and people from their own peer group (Posner & Brodsky, 1992, p. 231).

Participation in college activities is a predictor of adult leadership (Petty, 1985, p. 3). Most of what college students are exposed to in developing skills are based on studies and models that were developed with managers in business and public-sector organizations (Freeman, Knott, & Schwartz, 1994). Questions have been raised about whether such models are applicable to college students and collegiate environments which differ considerably from environments in which managers and corporations operate (Posner, 2004). College experiences may, however, relate to those encountered in the workplace such as managers seeking compliance from subordinates, and to influence other managers as well as administrators to whom they report.

College student leaders must be able to persuade other students to agreement as well as gain compliance from committee members with whom they work as part of an organizational culture. Sometimes, they must work to "achieve access, recognition, and efficacy in maters of policy formation and governance" (Baldridge, Curtis, Ecker, & Riley, 1978, p. 215). These young leaders must also be able to communicate with university administration, staff, and faculty members when presenting and negotiating the needs of students all the while considering the impact of their messages as well as how others perceive them as leaders. Previous analysis suggested that individuals who are perceived as argumentative will be more likely to be chosen as a leader but it is unclear how argumentative they can be (Schultz, 1982, p. 365). A number of traits have been examined for associations with leadership but few studies have specifically examined any communication trait for such a correlation (Keyton & Frey, 2002). Understanding that the trait of argumentativeness includes individuals advocating and defending positions on controversial issues simultaneously with the ability to refute the positions that others hold

on those issues (Rancer, 1998, p. 152), one may logically hypothesize that young student leaders should be more argumentative than student non-leaders. Communication researchers charge that much leadership research ignores the relationship between communication behavior and leadership perception (Schultz, 1982, p 368).

So, does past research, often conducted in and for the business world, include or encompass the communicative behaviors of college student leaders? Are critical communication skills, such as argument building and advocating, developed and honed in college leadership experiences? Does the assertive student leader use verbal aggressiveness as a strategy to "win" an argument? Do communicative behaviors for student leaders change according to the situation in which they find themselves working? Will the leadership role of the opposition affect the communication behaviors?

To begin to answer some of these questions, it is necessary to explore past research in the areas of communication traits, specifically verbal aggressiveness and verbal argumentativeness, as well as the examination of leadership and leadership styles, especially in the specific context of college student leaders. The literature review will include a deep exploration of these communication traits, leadership theory, as well as the research associated with college student leadership. Following the literature review, the method chapter will describe how the quantitative and qualitative methods were selected for this study as well as the processes used for gathering the data. Then, chapters presenting the results and discussing their contributions and implications for the field of communication will follow.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study encompasses multiple components. Key areas addressed will be

leadership theory, communication traits, specifically verbal aggressiveness and verbal

argumentativeness, as well as student leadership and leadership styles.

Leadership: Trait or State

The concept of leader traits and attributes predates the scientific study of

leadership. In Chinese literature from the 6th century B.C., Lao-tzu described the

qualities of effective leaders as selfless, hardworking, honest, fair and able to "empower"

others (Hieder, 1985). Even early mythology, Plato's *Republic* (1960), Aristotle's *Politics*

(1960), and Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1513/1954) addressed leaders' qualities as well as

roles in society.

In the early 20th century, scientific approaches were used to examine the status of

leaders and geniuses (Galton, 1869) where extraordinary intelligence was seen as a key

leader attribute. The trait approach was one of the first systematic attempts to study

leadership by Terman (1904) who produced the first empirical study of leadership,

examining the qualities that differentiated leaders from non-leaders in school children.

Research concentrated on determining the specific traits that clearly differentiated leaders

from followers.

Yet, in the mid 20th century, Stogdill's (1948) review of leadership work

suggested that leader trait models had a "low utility for explaining leadership emergence

and effectiveness" (p. 64) as reflected in six primary approaches to leadership studies: (1)

observation of behavior in group situations that afforded leader emergence; (2)

sociometric choices by peers; (3) nominations by qualified observers and raters; (4)

selection of individuals into leadership positions; (5) analysis of biographical data and

case histories of leaders and non-leaders, and (6) interviews with business executives and

professionals to specify leader characteristics. He suggested that no consistent set of traits

differentiated leaders from non-leaders across a variety of situations.

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of interest in the trait approach to

explain how traits *influence* leadership. The current resurrection of leader trait research

rests on the studies that provided more "conceptual breadth, methodological soundness,

and statistical sophistication" (Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004, p. 124). The later part of

the 20th century, Bass (1990) provided a comprehensive review of the leader trait

literature up to the late 1980's. As part of this review, over nine chapters were devoted to

the personal attributes of leaders. Furthermore, Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader (2004)

reviewed the studies of leader attributes that were published between 1990-2003. To

provide a basic summary of this review, the researchers identified categories of leader

traits: (1) cognitive abilities; (2) personality; (3) motivation; (4) social appraisal and

interpersonal skills, and (5) leader expertise and tacit knowledge (Zaccaro, Kemp, &

Bader, 2004, p. 109).

The trait approach has several strengths. First, the trait approach is intuitively

appealing. Second, it has a century of breadth and depth of studies which points to the

important role of various personality traits in the leadership process. Last, the trait

approach has provided benchmarks that may be used to identify the traits leaders have

and whether the traits that they have are the best traits (Northouse, 2007, p. 24)

Criticisms of the trait approach are prevalent also. First is the failure of the trait approach to delimit a definitive list of traits produced from studies which have been, at times, ambiguous and uncertain. Another criticism is that the trait approach fails to take the situation into account (Stogdill, 1978). A third criticism is that the approach has resulted in "highly subjective determinations" of important traits. Also, the trait approach is weak in describing how leaders' traits affect the outcomes of groups. Finally, the trait approach may seem to lack pragmatic implications for it is not useful in training and development for leadership (Zaccaro, Kemp, & Bader, 2004, p. 124).

The "state" explanation is that which is situationally specific in that different situations demand different kinds of leadership. The essence of situational leadership demands that a leader match his or her style to the competence and commitment of his or her constituents or followers. The state or situationally specific explanation may not contradict the trait explanation yet it may possibly complement it in that leaders may possess traits that they will use in appropriate situations that may allow them to persuade, influence and lead others. Yet, some question the "empirical or conceptual support" for the state perspective (Daly & Bippus, 1998, p. 11). The state or situational approach has been refined and revised several times since its origination by Hersey and Blanchard (1969). These different state or situational approaches to leadership will be detailed later.

Communication Traits and States

Beyond the discussion of the trait or state explanation of leadership, individual communication traits are a "major force, if not, the dominant explanation" (McCroskey, Daly, Martin & Beatty, 1998, p. 65) for why people communicate the way they do. Traits have been found to account for significant variability in a person's actual

communication and communication-based perceptions (Rancer, 1998). Having said this, it is necessary to turn the focus to how communication traits influence a leader.

Viewing key communication characteristics as traits is important because a leader who is argumentative in his or her college environment may carry this behavior into his or her professional lives upon graduation. Guilford (1959) defined trait as "any distinguishable, relatively enduring way in which one individual differs from others" (p. 6). On the other hand, a state represents a person's perceptions of a particular situation that influence the person's behavior in that situation (Infante & Rancer, 1982, p. 73). The trait perspective on argumentative and aggressive communication suggests that communication traits are "relatively stable characteristics" of individuals (Rancer & Avtgis, 2006, p. 66). The differences between trait and state are "primarily differences of emphasis" (Daly & Bippus, 1998, p. 2). For example, personality researchers may emphasize the trait over the state. Yet, some research approaches trait and state leadership qualities as complementary (Chaplin, John, & Goldberg. 1988) in that both trait and state can be recognized and measured (Steyer, Ferring, & Schmitt, 1992).

Zuckerman (1983) suggested that states and traits can be distinguished on four grounds: (1) traits have high retest reliabilities whereas states do not; (2) a state should have moderate correlation with its related trait; (3) a trait should correlate more highly with other similar traits than with its related state; and (4) traits should not be affected substantially by transient changes whereas states may be so affected. Traits attempt to define the meaningful ways in which people differ. Researchers who promote use of a trait perspective accept that one's communication traits across situations will remain reasonably constant and that a person's behavior will not vary seriously from one

situation to another (Infante & Rancer, 1993; McCroskey, et al., 1998; Nicotera, 1993, 1994).

Communication researchers focus on traits that involve dispositional tendencies related to communication like communication style, communication apprehension, argumentativeness and aggressiveness (McCroskey, et al., 1998). Communication traits "account for enduring consistencies and differences in message-sending and message-receiving behaviors" (Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 2003, p. 77).

Infante (1981) demonstrated that differences in communication emerge as a result of people varying in their general trait of argumentativeness. Infante, Riddle, Howrvth, and Tulmin (1992) found that the influence of verbal aggressiveness on general communication behavior is also strong. Yet, accepting a trait explanation for communication does not eliminate or minimize the role that environmental or contextual variables play in determining communication behavior (McCroskey et al., 1998). For instance, if a highly argumentative person displays such an orientation at home, he or she will likely argue with co-workers, friends, and relational partners. Overall, a number of traits have been examined for an association with leadership, but few studies have specifically examined communication traits for such an association (Keyton & Frey, 2002).

Communication traits represent a subset of personality traits. More specifically, communication traits are personality-related traits that deal specifically with human symbolic behavior (communication). Communication traits are considered part of the umbrella of the concept of personality traits. One of those concepts of personality disposition is assertiveness derived from Costa and McCrae's (1980) model of

personality. Verbal aggressiveness and verbal argumentativeness are both part of the assertiveness dimension. Because assertiveness may be seen as a personality trait for leaders, it is necessary to understand each of these key communication components of this study.

Verbal Aggressiveness

In communication situations, people tend to view ideas as their own, an extension of themselves. Within organizations like college campus groups, there is an anticipated variety of viewpoints. And while creating campus programs and policies, members would be expected to disagree and comment on others ideas.

As discussions become more invested in an issue, a sense of defensiveness may surface. When a viewpoint is presented and viewed as an attack they may find the "attack on an idea as an attack on themselves" (Wigley, 1998, p. 191). When reliance on verbal aggression becomes so frequent that predictions can be made about what an individual will do in future encounters, he or she is said to be verbally aggressive. A communicative behavior is aggressive if it "applies force...symbolically in order, minimally, to dominate and perhaps damage or maximally, to defeat and perhaps destroy the locus of attack" (Infante & Gorden, 1987, p. 74). Glauser (1984) found that individuals high in verbal dominance provided more direction, asked for fewer opinions, added more facts to facts, attempted more interruptions, exhibited fewer and shorter pauses, and displayed longer utterances than individuals low in verbal dominance (p. 126). Verbal aggressives communicate more for control (Martin & Anderson, 1996, p. 547).

When examining verbal aggressiveness (VA), one must understand the four traits of control which are assertiveness, argumentativeness, hostility, and verbal aggressiveness (Rancer, 2004), two of which are considered constructive traits (assertiveness and argumentativeness) and two of which are destructive traits (hostility and verbal aggressiveness). Initial studies lent support to the notion that use of verbal aggression is destructive (Gorden & Infante, 1987; Infante & Gorden, 1987).

The locus of attack is a distinguishing factor in the variable of verbal aggressiveness as it involves attacking the self-concepts of others rather than their position on an issue (Infante & Rancer, 1996). Kinney (1994) suggested three broad domains of self-concept attack: group membership, personal failings, and relational failings. The trait of verbal aggression involves attacking the self-concepts of others in order to inflict pain through humiliation, embarrassment, depression, and other negative feelings about the self (Infante & Wigley, 1986). Four causes of verbal aggressions are psychopathology, disdain, social learning, and argumentative skill deficiencies (Infante & Rancer, 1996). Psychopathology is a "repressed hostility expressed by verbal attacks;" disdain is "extreme dislike for a person which is conveyed verbally;" social learning is when the individual is "conditioned by sources in society to be aggressive, to express anger, or to ventilate frustrations" (Infante, 1989, p. 167).

Verbally aggressive messages involve "character, competence, and physical appearance attacks, as well as ridicule, threats, profanity, maledictions, nonverbal emblems, and teasing" (Schrodt & Wheeless, 2001, p. 55). Examples of character-driven verbally aggressive messages might be "You're a liar!" or "You're a cheater!" whereas attacks of competence might be composed of ideas such as "Give me that hammer; you

can never put a nail in the wall correctly!" Next, an example of ridicule and teasing would be through mocking such as "It would be a good idea for you to finally use a map." All of these examples possess linguistic elements that represent verbally aggressive messages. Further, other varieties of verbally aggressive messages may include "blame, personality attacks, commands, global rejection, disconfirmation, negative comparison, sexual harassment, and attacking target's significant others" (Wigley, 1998, p. 192).

Infante, Riddle, Horvath, and Tulmin (1992) indicated that high verbal aggressives seem desensitized to the hurt caused by verbal aggression, primarily due to the fact that they do not view verbally aggressive messages as hurtful, unlike other people (Schrodt & Wheeless, 2001). There are destructive consequences for the target of verbal aggressiveness such as "unpleasant feeling during communication such as embarrassment, relationship deterioration and interpersonal distrust" (Infante, 1989, p. 159). Past work has uncovered a multitude of reasons why high verbal aggressives use such harsh messages. Some may convey a disdain for the target, desire to be mean, be eager to appear tough, and seek involvement in discussions that degenerate into verbal fights (Rancer, 2004). When examining verbal aggressiveness, the locus of attack is the target's self-concept which may emerge from emotional clashes over personal issues or grow out of relevant issues. Fisher (1971) posited that verbal aggressives attack "procedures, selfishness, and role deviation" (Infante, 1989, p. 160).

Infante, Riddle, Horvath, and Tulmin (1992) also studied the differences in high and low verbal aggressives trying to uncover the types of aggressive messages sent and received along with reasons for endorsing the aggression. They were asked to indicate

how frequently they received the 10 types of messages, and the degree of psychological

pain that may be inflicted with the message. Furthermore, there were 12 reasons they

endorsed the aggressive message: reciprocity, disdain for the target, feeling angry,

unable to think of an effective argument, a rational discussion degenerating into a verbal

fight, being taught to use verbal aggression, the situations reminding one of the past hurt,

being in a bad mood, trying to be humorous but not hurtful, having observed a television

or movie character using verbal aggression effectively, trying to appear "tough," and

wanting to be mean to the other person (Wigley, 1998, p. 198).

Beyond the reasons why verbal aggressives engage in this type of communication,

Infante, Riddle, Horvath and Tulmin (1992) investigated beliefs about utilizing

aggressive message behavior. The study found that those who vary in the trait of verbal

aggressiveness perceived differences about beliefs about potential verbal attacks.

Individuals high in verbal aggressiveness believed that competence attacks, physical

appearance attacks, and threats are less hurtful to others than did individuals low in

verbal aggressiveness.

According to Costa and McCrae's (1980) three-factor model of personality,

verbal aggressives are in the neuroticism dimension of personality (Rancer, 2004). Six

dimensions of "self-esteem (defensive self-enhancement, moral self-approval, lovability,

likeability, self-control, and identity integration) were significantly related to trait verbal

aggressiveness" (Rancer, Kosberg, & Sylvestri, 1992, p. 30). Furthermore, verbal

aggressiveness is a joint product of pre-dispositional and situational factors creating an

interactional approach to personality which means that behavior in situations can be

understood to be a joint product of situational factors and the characteristics of the

individual where "traits interact with the situation" (Infante & Rancer, 1996, p. 331).

This relates to leaders because these six dimensions on the neurotic dimension of personality linked with verbal aggressiveness may inhibit a leader's effectiveness due to the lack of self control, defensiveness or likeability amongst their peers or in the organization. Furthermore, these dimensions of verbal aggressives may inhibit their abilities to gain compliance or to be seen as a credible advocate for their followers. Alongside the often damaging trait of verbal aggressiveness, leaders will likely enact the trait of verbal argumentativeness, which is rooted in the history of the discipline of speech communication.

Verbal Argumentativeness

Argument is "inherent in the process of persuasion" (Rancer, 2004, p. 126). Seibold and Meyers (1986) posited that arguments are "observable patterns of interaction manifest in discursive claiming and reason-giving during deliberations about simple or controversial matters of fact, value, or action" (p. 147). Arguing is an "intentional, purposeful activity involving reason and judgment" (Stewart & Roach, 1998, p. 178) and is a form of human communication that is an inherent feature in society and is vital to the evolution of thoughts. Infante, Sabourin, Rudd and Shannon (1990) posited that the ability to introduce issues into an argument is a basic skill, and that individuals lacking this skill may turn to verbal aggressiveness (VA) behavior to compensate.

Argumentativeness is defined as a "generally stable trait which predisposes [a person] to advocate positions on controversial issues and to attack verbally the positions" of others (Infante & Rancer, 1982, p. 72). Argumentativeness is a subset of assertiveness because all argument is assertive. It is also considered a constructive trait because it has

been associated with "increased learning, less ego-centric thinking, better problem-solving, enhanced credibility, leadership and decision-making, more communication competence, and favorable organizational communication outcomes" (Infante, 1989, p. 159). The trait of argumentativeness includes individuals advocating and defending positions on controversial issues simultaneously with the ability to refute the positions that others hold on those issues (Rancer, 1998, p. 152). Infante and Rancer (1982) conceived argumentativeness as a personality construct germane to controversial issues. For argumentatives, the key to the trait involves attacking the positions that others take on given issues (Infante, 1989).

The argumentativeness trait is conceptualized as the difference between an individual's tendencies to approach and to avoid argument situations. The general trait to be argumentative (ARGgt) is composed of two motivations: the tendency to approach arguments (ARGap), and the tendency to avoid arguments (ARGav). The tendency to avoid arguments because of dislike was viewed as a debilitating factor, weakening the tendency to approach arguments by the anxiety associated with arguing. Thus, ARGgt=ARGap-ARGav. Previous research has found that trait argumentativeness is predictive of the perceptions, expectations, the motivation that individuals have for a particular argumentative situation, and also a variety of demographic and educational variables (Infante, 1981).

A number of perspectives may be taken in studying the communicative behavior of high and low argumentatives. One perspective involves the specific verbal and non verbal behaviors which distinguish between the two types; for example, the use of qualifiers, disclaimers, data to support claims, direction of eye gaze, interruptions, and

non-fluencies. Another perspective entails more global dimensions of communication such as degree of flexibility and dynamism (Infante, 1981).

Rancer (1998) found that a more argumentative individual had motivation to approach arguments exceeding motivation to avoid arguments. So, a high argumentative (HA) is high on ARGap and are viewed "more flexible, interested, verbose, dynamic, expert, willing and as displaying more skills in argument" (Terlip, 1989, p. 40) and low on ARGav. High argumentatives argue more on certain topics like "social, political personal behavior, others' behavior and more ethical issues" (Infante & Rancer, 1993, p. 331). Some research in persuasion suggests that high argumentatives may enjoy an advantage over low argumentatives in persuasion (Rancer, 2004). Also, high argumentatives are those that experience little anxiety associated with argumentative communication and "often see arguing as an exciting, intellectual challenge" (Rancer & Avtgis, 2006, p. 17). For example, they are people who enjoy discussing controversial issues and also find it enjoyable as well as exciting. Thus, for high argumentative persons the positive expectations associated with arguing elicit stronger motivations than do the possible negative consequences that might also associated with arguing (Stewart & Roach, 1998).

A low argumentative (LA) is low on ARGap, and high on ARGav. LAs lack motivation and desire to argue across most situations and generally do not engage in much argumentative behavior. LAs seek to avoid arguments and are more likely to attempt to shift the focus of interaction from a controversial issue to a social-emotional matter. Furthermore, when induced to argue, they likely communicate their dissatisfaction by appearing less interested. They are less verbose then HAs; these types

dislike talking about controversial issues because it makes them uncomfortable (Infante, 1981; Rancer & Avtgis, 2006).

Moderate argumentatives (MAs) are those who experience "conflicting feelings" they argue mainly when they feel sure that they can succeed whereas apathetic moderates neither like nor dislike arguing and engage in argument only when they "feel they must do so" (Rancer & Avtgis, 2006, p. 153). They argue when the probability of success is high and the importance of failure is low (Rancer, 2004). For example, they may find themselves in arguments in an attempt to win, but do not necessarily enjoy the experience. As part of the moderate category, there is a grouping of neutral moderates. These are people who are moderate in motivation to approach arguments and moderate in motivation to avoid arguments (Hamilton & Mineo, 2002).

Infante and Rancer (1982) initially advanced argumentativeness as an interactionist characteristic wherein traits interact with factors in the situation to produce the behavior. Situational factors such as nature of the issue, ego-involvement in the topic, the status of interactants and characteristics of an opponent might interact with traits to influence behavior. This characteristic might also be framed as motivation to argue, viewed as advocating and refuting positions on controversial issues (Infante & Rancer, 1982). Onyekwere, Rubin and Infante (1991) found that certain factors can influence the motivation of HAs and LAs. For example, high argumentatives declined to argue when their ego-involvement was low. Stewart and Roach (1998) examined the influence of the nature of the issue (i.e. sale of condoms on campus) where strength of the argument was found to account for "greater amount of variance in reactions to argument than any of the independent variables" (p. 35). Also, Infante and Rancer (1993) investigated eleven

types of issues that a person might engage in advocating or refuting argumentation, such as social issues (welfare reform); moral-ethical issues (whether lying is sometimes acceptable); family issues (chores and responsibilities); sports (which team is best); entertainment (if a movie was good); education (whether a program is needed); work issues (whether a boss is fair); personal behavior (what one should or should not do); religion (value of religion); and politics (who should be elected). Their study reported more advocacy than refutation behavior. Refutation requires more preparation, more skill and more competence to accomplish successfully. The results showed that highly argumentative individuals engaged in more total advocacy and total refutation across issues than did moderate and low argumentatives.

Belief systems about "argument" may play a role in the effectiveness of student leaders. Argument and conflict in the organizational setting have generally been viewed perjoratively (Infante & Gorden, 1985, p. 197). Being a "team player" is the expected appropriate goal of organizational socialization (Whyte, 1989). Rancer, Baukus and Infante (1985) argued that to better understand argumentativeness, one possible direction to investigate would be to determine belief structures people have about arguing. The study was structured on the idea of Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) Theory of Reasoned Action which maintains that a predisposition is controlled by the set of beliefs which the individual has learned to associate with the object of the predisposition. Rancer, et al. (1985) created eight categories of beliefs about arguing: hostility, activity/process, control/dominance, conflict/dissonance, self-image, learning, skill, subjective evaluation and situational. All the categories did have negative beliefs and positive beliefs associated with each. These categories then were placed in two major functions:

cultivation which was perceived as an "active engagement that can stimulate learning or display skills" by HAs and as "unfavorable" by LAs (p. 43) while antagonism, which was perceived as greater in "conflict or hostile dissonance" (p. 44) by LAs, was perceived as a reduction of conflict by HAs.

Rancer, Kosberg, and Baukus (1992) extended the Rancer, et al. (1985) study and proposed that the eight categories of beliefs developed five composite beliefs: enjoyment, self-concept, pragmatic outcomes, dysfunctional outcomes, and ego-involvement (Rancer, Kosberg & Baukus, 1992, p. 383). The most important finding was that HAs "believe they can influence other individuals and that arguing is an enjoyable and constructive communication" (p. 383). Furthermore, several benefits associated with high motivation to argue were identified including perceived leadership, credibility, learning and curiosity, perceptions of ego-centric thinking, enhanced social perspective-taking, and perceived communication competence. Not only were belief structures identified but how those beliefs best discriminate between HAs and LAs was shown also. HAs believed that arguing has "enjoyable, functional, and pragmatic outcomes" (Rancer & Avtgis, 2006, p. 61) while LAs tended to believe that arguing is a communication act that has a "negative impact on self-concept, creates dysfunctional outcomes, and has little to do with enjoyment or practical outcomes"(p. 62). Interestingly, though, Infante and Rancer (1993) found that high, moderate, and low argumentatives are equally likely to use any of the 10 primary forms of verbal aggression.

Gender

Although gender is not a major consideration in this study, it is important to address this issue within the context of these communication behaviors because of the

variations in types of student leaders who participated. Assertiveness is generally regarded as an acceptable behavior for both men and women. Verbal aggressiveness and verbal argumentativeness are both viewed as forms of assertive communication. It is important to note that ideas of gender can be explored through both biological (sex) and psychological (gender) lenses.

Nicotera and Rancer (1994) argued that individuals (regardless of sex) can be identified as "instrumental (i.e. masculine) and expressive (feminine)" (p. 287). Carli (2004) argued that men are considered to possess more "agentic" qualities which reflect "competency and instrumentality" than women, who, in turn are thought to possess more "communal" qualities than men (p. 134). Furthermore, Nicotera and Rancer (1994) also found that females were described with traditional adjectives as *submissive, timid, changeable,* and *weak* while men were termed as *dominant, forceful, rational* and *strong.* Many studies have revealed that men are considered more leader-like, intellectual, and analytical; women are considered kinder, warmer, more supportive and gentler (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Eagly & Mladinic, 1989). Because U.S. women have been encouraged to communicate assertively for decades (Rich & Schroder, 1976) and verbal aggressiveness and verbal argumentativeness are considered assertive communication, there is an interesting conflict of interest for women in roles of leadership.

Argumentativeness, as previously described, has been conceptualized as desirable and constructive and linked with group leadership, better decision making, and enhanced credibility (Schullery, 1998). Past research indicates interesting findings. Men have been found to score higher than females in both argumentativeness and aggressiveness

(Infante, 1981; Schultz & Anderson, 1984). In one study, male students rated female high argumentatives as more credible (Infante, 1985); in another study, male students predicted females using less powerful speech would be better liked by colleagues and subordinates (Wiley & Eskilson, 1985, p. 1000). Carli (1990) found that males awarded greater influence and trust to tentative female speakers. Gardner, Peluchette, and Clinebell (1994) found that female assertiveness have produced "complex and contradictory findings" (p. 133). In the business world, women's moderation in argumentativeness increases linearly with supervisory level (Schullery, 1998, p. 359). In the U.S., women have different beliefs than men about arguing (Rancer & Baukus, 1987). Women tend to believe that arguing is "hostile, aggressive, and combative communication" (Nicotera & Rancer, 1994, p. 288).

Aggressiveness has been conceptualized as applying force to dominate or defeat and perhaps destroy the locus of attack whether it be material possessions, self concept, positions on topics of communication or behavior. Aggressive behavior is typically perceived as male behavior in the United States (Infante, 1987). Females are less verbally aggressive and use more pro-social message strategies. Also, females will use less verbal aggression when arguing with males as compared to females as a "Sign of deference (Infante, 1989). Both males and females expect males to be more argumentative and more verbally aggressive then females (Nicotera & Rancer, 1994).

The purpose of using gender as a minor variable in this study is to look at any differences that may exist between male and female student leaders as potentially similar to those differences that exist in business contexts. Furthermore, the examination of student leader communication behaviors will be interesting to investigate because, as

demonstrated in the review of literature on student leadership, limited research has been done in this area and the results may provide a fresh set of findings to add to the compilation of scholarly work.

Examining traits for their connection with leadership has been, and continues to be, a prolific area of research. Communication traits significantly contribute to the study of leadership and because of this it is appropriate to understand the major theories which have helped to build the body of work in this area.

Leadership, Aggression, and Argumentation

Stogdill (1978) argued that leadership results from an interaction-influence relationship between the leader and other group members. Leadership communication essentially functions as social influence. Klann (2003) labeled influence as a useful leadership skill. Persuasion is an inherent part of leadership through the cultivation of knowledge which makes it acceptable to others (Soder, 2001). Both persuasion and compliance-gaining attempts may involve the use of argumentative and verbally aggressive behavior (Rancer & Avtgis, 2006). When attempting to persuade others, arguments are presented that support the position that is being advocated while also attempting to refute the position of another person. Furthermore, Rancer & Avtgis (2006) argued that being a persuasive person requires the ability to "invent and deliver well-constructed arguments in support of a position" as well as to "refute or pick apart the arguments others present to support their positions" (p. 177). Soder (2001) argued that if a leader cannot persuade others to support a proposal, he or she will not be an effective leader. Influence is crucial to good leadership (Baldwin & Grayson, 2004). Yet

limited research exists regarding communicative behaviors and the exercise of influence (Snowden & Gorton, 2002).

Aristotle believed an effective arguer must identify the best available options to influence a particular group of individuals to arrive at a preferred outcome. Research on this trait has established that high argumentatives generate more arguments (Rancer & Infante, 1985) and that their arguments are higher in quality (Onyekwere et al., 1991) than low argumentatives. HAs are perceived as more credible persuaders (Infante, 1985; Onyekwere et al., 1991), use a greater diversity of strategies (Boster & Levine, 1988), encourage others to express their views on controversial issues (Gorden, Infante & Graham, 1988) and are seen as leaders in group influence situations (Schultz, 1982). Infante (1981) argued that, from a receiver's perspective, high argumentatives have been found to be more inflexible regarding their position when others try to persuade them.

Compliance-gaining attempts are omnipresent in human communication. Although persuasion's overall concern is to change attitudes, beliefs, intentions and behaviors (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), compliance gaining research has focused primarily "on what people do when they want to get something done" (Gass & Seiter, 1999, p. 205). Studies that explored the compliance-gaining messages that people use showed that compliance-gaining messages were generally based on the assumption that persuaders are generally aware of the choices they make. An initial study by Hunter and Boster (1987) argued that the amount and type of strategy preferences a person uses may depend on whether he or she is high or low in verbal aggressiveness or verbal argumentativeness (Hunter & Boster, 1987, p. 82). From this study, the following conclusions were suggested: (1) HAs and VAs would be likely to transmit numerous

compliance-gaining messages that vary widely in emotional impact; (2) HAs who are low

in verbal aggressiveness would be likely to send numerous messages that are

predominantly positive; (3) LAs who are high in verbal aggression would send few

messages which would be negative in emotionality; (4) Individuals low in both traits

would be likely to send few messages yet the messages would simply request compliance

and, if not agreed to, would cease the effort. (p. 82).

Reynolds (1987) studied the effects of argumentativeness and assertiveness on the

selection of compliance-gaining strategies, finding that proactive assertiveness (such as

being forceful and ascendant in support of self) and argument avoidance (the tendency to

avoid arguments) are associated with the use of fewer compliance-gaining strategies.

Boster and Levine (1988) and Boster, Levine, and Kazoleas (1993) extended this research

by examining how argumentatives and verbal aggressives correlate with compliance-

gaining message choices. Both studies found that, "compared with low argumentatives,

high argumentatives used a greater variety of strategies and were generally more

persistent" (Boster & Levine, 1988, p. 117). Verbally aggressive individuals use more

negatively oriented compliance messages (Boster, Levine & Kazoleas, 1993). High

argumentatives are more reluctant to use their power to force compliance (Roach, 1992).

Additonally, Ifert and Bearden (1998) explored types of appeals that are

influenced by verbal aggressiveness and verbal argumentativeness in compliance-gaining

situations, arguing that in persuasive situations, individuals often respond to refusals with

two types of messages: evidentiary and non-evidentiary. Evidentiary appeals are often

referred to as rational appeals because they are arguments that contain information to

support a claim and non-evidentiary appeals are arguments that contain little or no

supporting material but instead rely on simple assertions. Their results found that people high in argumentativeness reported constructing more evidentiary appeals yet people high in verbal aggressiveness reported constructing a greater number of non-evidentiary appeals than did those lower in verbal aggressiveness.

The Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (VAS) was created to measure trait verbal aggressiveness (Infante & Wigley, 1986). The scale contains 20 items with a 5-point linear rating format. This scale is stable across time and the reliability across culture has been observed. Also, a study was conducted to assess the power of the VAS to predict preferences for verbally aggressive messages in various social influence situations. It was concluded that the VAS has "good predictive power" for preference of verbally aggressive messages. Overall, the VAS "shows good reliability and adequate validity" (DeWine, Nicotera, & Parry, 1991). DeWine, Nicotera and Parry (1991) found a good deal of validity evidence that suggests the scale measures what it is intended to measure. Strong evidence of this exists in several organizational communication studies (Infante & Rancer, 1993) and family communication studies which found that observed levels of verbal aggressiveness, as measured by the scale, were predicted by the theoretical framework (Infante, Chandler, & Rudd, 1989).

Argumentativeness has been measured using the Argumentativeness Scale which is a 20-item scale with 10 items for measuring "motivation to approach argumentative situations" (Infante & Rancer, 1982, p. 74). For example, some items used to measure "approach" are "Arguing over controversial issues improves my intelligence" or "I enjoy defending my point of view on an issue" (p. 76). Additionally, there are 10 items for measuring "avoidance" (Infante & Rancer, 1993). For example, some examples of the

statements used to measure "avoidance" are "Arguing with a person creates more problems for me than it solves" or "While in an argument, I worry that the person I am arguing with will form a negative impression of me" (p. 76). The computed trait argumentativeness score is computed by the difference between approach and avoidance. Reliabilities reported in studies reviewed have been in the .80-.90 range (Infante & Rancer, 1993) and the measures appear stable across time and across cultures (p. 322). Considerable evidence supports the validity of the scale. The original article describing the scale reported four separate validity studies (Infante & Rancer, 1982).

After exploring the research on verbal aggressiveness and verbal argumentativeness, the next area to investigate is the vast work that has been done on leadership. Because of the immense results from years of investigation of leadership, only selected relevant areas will be covered.

Leadership Approaches

For the purpose of this study, leadership will be defined as "human (symbolic) communication which modifies the attitudes and behaviors of others in order to meet shared group goals and needs" (Hackman & Johnson, 1993, p. 14). Due to the numerous approaches that might be explored, this study will examine the four general schools: trait, situational, style, and transformational.

In the nineteenth century, the early focus of leadership literature began with the Great Man Theory of Leadership (Carlyle, 1907) while in the early twentieth century, scientists tried to develop a "leadership test" (Pavitt & Sackaroff, 1990) when they attempted to use scientific methods to study leadership. Beginning in 1948, Stogdill published a review of 124 studies covering almost fifty years of work. The trait approach

of leadership focuses on the permanent characteristics of a leader like height, weight, social skills, and popularity; furthermore, researchers believed that traits enhance the perceptions of the person's ability to lead. It is important to note that the specific traits of verbal aggressiveness and verbal argumentativeness are slightly different from this because they are specific communicative behaviors and not general notions of concepts of attractiveness and popularity. Yet, the notion that certain traits guarantee leadership effectiveness has never been satisfactorily supported. The second approach to leadership is situational where the leader behavior is based on variations of situations like task and relational structure, superior-subordinate interactions or the motivation of the followers (Hackman & Johnson, 1993).

Under the umbrella of situational leadership are four commonly cited bodies of work that must be mentioned: Fiedler's (1967) contingency model of leadership that involves not only the relationship between trait and situation but also style variables (Fiedler, 1967, p. 14); path-goal theory (House, 1971) is a fairly sophisticated theory (Schriesheim & Von Glinow, 1977) which focuses on the communication style related to the "nature of the task and to the followers" (p. 399). Hersey and Blanchard's (1969) situational leadership theory posits that if a leader can "diagnose" the situation, he or she can communicate accordingly (p. 69). In the early to middle stages of leadership development, followers tend to respond to communication messages "offering approval for their actions and character" (Zorn & Leichty, 1991, p. 12). Then, leader-member exchange theory (LMX) (Graen, 1976) claims that leaders make choices regarding the inclusion of followers in either in-groups or out-groups. Patterns of communication are established based on these groupings (Hackman & Johnson, 1993, p. 70).

The contingency model of leadership has been found to be "the most successful approach to leadership" (Pavitt, 1998). The data showed that leadership effectiveness is a product of the relationship between a leader's trait and different group situations. The effectiveness of the leader is controlled by three primary factors of position power, task structure, and leader-member relations (Fiedler, 1967, p. 33). Individuals are ranked on a "least preferred coworker" (LPC) scale and the leader can distinguish LPC workers from highly preferred coworkers (HPC). In sum, Fiedler's work involved not only the relationship between trait and situation but also style variables (Fiedler, 1967, p. 14).

Second, path-goal theory (Schriesheim & Von Glinow, 1977) focused on the communication style related to the "nature of the task and to the followers" (p. 399). This communication style can be one of four possibilities: directive leadership (procedure), supportive leadership (meeting the needs of the followers), participative leadership (soliciting opinions from others), and achievement-oriented leadership (goal attainment).

Hersey and Blanchard argued that leader behavior can be divided into task and relationship behaviors that hinge on the maturity level of the followers. The leader behaviors are identified as delegating, participating, telling, and selling. The maturity level (the readiness of the follower to complete the task on his or her own) is designed on a continuum of job maturity (abilities, skills, knowledge) and psychological maturity (confidence, willingness, motivation) (Zorn & Leichty, 1991, p. 12). From these combinations, four readiness levels are plotted against effective leadership behavior. The theory posits that if a leader can "diagnose" the situation, he or she can communicate accordingly (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969, p. 69). In the early to middle stages of

leadership development, followers tend to respond to communication messages "offering approval for their actions and character" (Zorn & Leichty, 1991, p. 12) while in the later stages, followers respond most favorably to messages "granting autonomy" (p. 12). Each of these works contains pertinent ideas in the area of leadership styles and behavior.

The third approach to leadership is the style approach based on the communication behavior of the leader. At the core of the style approach is the distinction between task and relationship communication behaviors which contrast the trait and situational approaches that are concerned with a particular person in leadership. This functional approach examines the "behaviors that allow the group to reach its goals" (Pavitt & Sackaroff, 1990) further examining leaders actions as task and relationship roles. Task behavior facilitates goal accomplishment. In this respect, they help group members to achieve their objectives. Relationship behaviors assist in "subordinates feeling comfortable with themselves, with each other, and with the situations in which they find themselves" (Northouse, 2007, p. 69).

Within this approach, there are four general research areas which were the "most significant attempts to identify the communication patterns of leaders" (Hackman & Johnson, 1993, p. 45): Michigan leadership studies, Ohio State researchers, McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, and Blake and McCanse's leadership grid.

The Michigan leadership studies sought to identify effective leaders of high and low performing teams. Differences were found between a production-oriented focus on accomplishing tasks through planning and procedures and an employee-oriented focus on relationships (Likert, 1961). Simultaneously, Ohio State researchers (Shartle & Stogdill, 1953) developed a questionnaire, based on factors associated with leadership

communication, called the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) that measured the task (initiating structure) and maintenance (interpersonal consideration) behaviors of the leader.

Through the work of McGregor in the late 1950's, two basic approaches to supervision were identified: Theory X and Theory Y (Lord, DeVader, & Alliger, 1986). Simply put, Theory X represents the concept that people actually desire "strict supervision" (p. 48) and leaders believe that followers have an dislike for work and leaders must control, direct, or coerce others in order to ensure performance. The emphasis here is on task supervision with little concern for the individual follower. Theory Y "emphasizes individual commitment by recognizing individual needs" (p. 48) as well as what is best for the organization and leaders believe that followers seek responsibility as a way of demonstrating creativity within the organization. This leader gains a follower's commitment by seeking his or her individual needs. The emphasis here is on task but tasks as viewed in terms of the followers involved.

Finally, one of the most commonly cited examples of the task and maintenance views of leadership communication style is the Leadership Managerial Grid by Blake and Mouton (1964) in which the researchers argued that leaders have two responsibilities or concerns: production and people. The grid plots communication styles on the axes where the five styles are described as "impoverished management, authority-compliance, middle-of-the-road management, country club management, and team management" (Pavitt & Sackaroff, 1990, p. 30). To this point in the review of literature, three of the four leadership approaches have been explored; the remaining approach is transformational.

Transformational leadership was conceptualized by Dowton (1973) and Burns (1978) which created interest in research that went beyond the "transactions" that occur between leaders and followers based on initiation and structure (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Bass also argued that transformational leadership is likely to have a greater impact on performance (Zorn, 1991, p. 180). This type of leadership has the "effect of 'transforming' followers' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors" (Zorn, 1991, p. 179) and four primary characteristics distinguish these leaders from those who maintain the status quo. Zorn (1991) argued that specific effects on followers can be traced to those who transform including cognitive changes, acceptance of an articulated vision, the use of dramatic and inspirational language, and have an "intuitive understanding" of the followers' needs (Zorn, 1991, p. 178) and must use communication to meet those needs. Furthermore, transformational leaders may be creative, interactive, visionary, empowering and passionate (Hackman & Johnson, 1993, p. 79) and these active behaviors may be enacted by leaders and filtered through a group or organization.

The four approaches to leadership provide a framework for understanding leadership behaviors and possible follower behaviors. Adapting to the situations and functions where groups and organizations exist is an important requirement in the development of effective and fulfilled leaders. Focusing on the communication styles of the leaders may uncover or reflect a philosophical belief about human nature.

Approaches to Communication in Leadership Process

Sometimes groups or organizations operate without an assigned or elected leader, and, in a "leaderless" group, one member comes to perform leadership functions. That "new" leader is defined as an emergent leader. Generally, an emergent leader approach to

communication is concerned with predicting who will emerge as leaders and why some people emerge rather than others. Perceived leaders can be a "function of the task...the needs of the team, and/or individual abilities" (Seers, 1989). Further, members are particularly likely to be viewed as leaders if they perform procedural functions during group discussion (Pavitt & Sackaroff, 1990). The amount of communication is the most important concept in determining which group member will emerge (Mullen, Salas, & Driskell, 1989). Communication traits (and abilities) significantly contribute to leadership emergence (Limon & LaFrance, 2005, p. 125). Thus, communication traits may "account for enduring consistencies and differences" in communication behaviors among individuals" (Infante, Rancer, & Womack, 2003, p. 77). This approach to leadership communication may be evident on college campuses in Greek organizations or service/political clubs where students enact such traits.

The perceptual approach to communication in the leadership process is an outgrowth of emergent leadership; this view is built on the impression formation process (Pavitt & Sackaroff, 1990). Leadership, through this idea, is built on what organization members think leadership is and how the leader communicates this to the members. Behavior typically is "enacted in the presence of group members" (Peterson & Sorenson, 1991, p. 507) and the leader's role is "augmented by collective rules, norms, or 'cultures'" (p. 507) by group members. Thus, this enactment by the leader and the augmentation by the followers build perceptions of what a leader is. "Good" traits are seen as the "halo effect" and "bad" traits are seen as the "horn effect" (Pavitt & Sackaroff, 1990). Communicatively, research shows that traits such as "forceful" and "enthusiastic" as well as behaviors like "states the group's procedure" and "encourages

group member participation" provide a picture of what an "ideal" leader should exhibit (Pavitt & Sackaroff, 1990).

Charismatic communicators are the "superstars" of leadership and have qualities such as vision, empowerment, unconventionality, and risk taking (Conger, 1989, p. 4). Charismatic leaders have many traits in common like the need for power, great self-confidence, willingness to take risks, and a strong conviction. From the vantage point of communication, Richardson and Thayer (1993) argued that charisma is the product of communication. Charismatics excel in building relationships through being at the "center of things" by providing an impact on the course of events. They may be described in terms of their ability to "create symbolic visions" through the use of metaphors, analogies, and organizational stories (Conger, 1989, p. 73). Finally, charismatics are influence agents through projecting an image of competence, confidence, and trustworthiness.

Styles of Leadership

Lewin, Lippit, and White (1939) explored types of communication that impacted followers thus trying to undertake a study of the two-way process of leadership. They argued that the use of delegation, empowerment, and participation has been found to affect effectiveness outcomes of leaders. Through this study, Lewin, Lippit and White identified three major styles: authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire that each emphasize the basic manner in which leaders engage others. These primary concepts highlight the communication contribution to the success or failure of attempts to exert influence.

The authoritarian style is indicated through the leader's strict control over his or her followers through policy, procedures, and behavior. He or she engages, primarily, in one-way, downward communication, dominates interaction, exhibits poor listening skills, and controls discussion with followers. Research concerning the effects of the authoritarian style of communication finds that it increases productivity when the leader is present (Shaw, 1955) is more positively accepted in larger groups (Vroom & Mann, 1960), but decreases commitment, independence and creativity. Authoritarian communication styles are recommended when the leader is much more knowledgeable than his or her followers.

The democratic leader's style engages and facilitates interaction between leaders and followers. He or she connects to his followers through goal setting, engages in two-way open communication, and provides suggestions and feedback as well as exhibiting effective listening skills (Mohr, 1971; Shaw, 1955). Such communication habits further follower satisfaction as well as increase follower participation (Hespe & Wall, 1976). Additionally, the democratic style of leadership communication is best suited for situations that require participation, involvement, and commitment to a decision.

Finally, laissez-faire, a French word meaning "leave them alone," has been deemed 'non-leadership' which involves abdication of the responsibility of the leader. When adopting this style, leaders are accused of leadership avoidance. Although this communication style may result in feelings of isolation and a decrease in participation (Baumgartel, 1957) as well as decreased quality and quantity of output (Muringham & Leung, 1976), highly motivated individuals and knowledgeable experts positively

respond to it because it may represent guided freedom under which some followers respond well.

These traditional views of leadership styles provide frameworks for how one may view the way a person leads. Because leadership has been a major focus of researchers for much of the twentieth century, researchers have named many other groupings that share some of the properties of the major styles reviewed here. Some of those other groupings are autocratic, democratic, executive, and reflective (Bogardus, 1918); autocratic, considerate, democratic, directive, initiative, laissez-faire, motivated, participative, supportive and instrumental (Stogdill, 1978); exploitative, benevolent, consultive, and democratic (Likert, 1961); delegating, participating, selling, and telling (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969). Research on leadership styles has led to useful typologies of leader functions yet further narrowing of understanding those functions and therefore leadership styles was necessary. One example was the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) (Kouzes & Posner, 1987) which supplied the leadership styles used in this particular study. The styles will be covered in depth in a later section, yet these do fit in with discussion of the transformational leadership approach. These styles emphasized *challenging, modeling, encouraging, enabling, and inspiring* one's self and the followers in the organization. This approach was beneficial to this study because the LPI was later adapted to accommodate students' experiences in the leadership context. To this point, descriptions have been provided of overarching views of approaches to leadership theory as well as traditional dimensions of communication, so now a narrowing to explore the work on student leadership will be useful.

Student Leadership

The focus of this study is the communicative behaviors of college student leaders. Yet, the question, "Where does leadership begin?" may be asked. In an effort to provide a relevant scope of research, youth leadership studies deserve mention.

Early research of student leaders classified them as "social climbers, intellectual successes, good fellows, big athletes, and leaders in activities" (Spaulding, 1934, p. 19). Cox (1988) noted that, in the youth leadership arena, few approaches "appeared to be grounded in a solid research base" (Cox, 1988, p. 51). Van Linden and Fertman (1998) suggested that high school based leadership development experiences are typically transactional in nature. Furthermore, few studies of peer evaluations of young leadership exist (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Ehrhart, 2002). There are some studies that have used the basic personality inventory like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator as well as the Five-Factor Model of personality that revealed significant predictors of leadership (Schneider, et al., 1999). In the introduction of this work, two significant studies (Schneider, et al., 1999; Schneider, Ehrhart, & Ehrhart, 2002) were referenced. Researchers explored behaviors skills, abilities and interests of high school leaders. Findings indicated that skills and interests like helping, influencing, and creating displayed significant relationships to leadership behavior. Results also revealed that variables from each of the domains mentioned above, significantly and consistently predicted leadership ratings for as long as 12 months after the collection of the predictor data. Although these types of studies explore the predictability of future leadership behaviors, there is little evidence in youth leadership literature concerning the influence of communication behaviors on the effectiveness of young leaders.

Beyond the realm of secondary education, there is the significance of the growth and experience of college students and the organizations they lead. College student organizations have their roots in the debating clubs that date back to the Revolutionary War era, and literary societies that evolved in the early nineteenth century (Rudolph, 1962) and were frequently referred to as the extracurriculum. It was argued that the emergence of the extracurriculum continued and enhanced the early American colleges' mission to educate the whole person (Schmitz, 1997).

Examining leadership and communication skills during the college years is important because what occurs during "an individual's developmental years can have an impact on the leadership exhibited later in the workplace as an adult" (Schneider, Paul, White, & Holcombe, 1999, p. 610). Roberts and Ullom (1989) argued that the "central purposes of higher education have been the preparation of citizens for positions of leadership" (p. 68). Astin (1993) posited that there is "strong evidence" in support of the argument that increases in leadership skills during the undergraduate years are associated with the college experience rather than with maturation or other environmental factors (p. 123). Astin (1993) defined student leadership in terms of three areas: leadership ability, popularity and social self-confidence (p. 123). Furthemore, Astin's (1993) research identified that student leaders showed a predilection for majors in communication. They also have a greater proclivity for student-faculty interaction and student-student interaction (p. 384) such as discussing course content, being a member of a social fraternity or sorority, participating in a campus protest, being elected to a student office or being involved in student clubs or organizations (p. 385). One type of college student organization with perseverance has been student governance associations, at both the

campus-wide level and within certain living areas. Bloland (1967) provided a definition of student government as "a form of student organization [which] differs from the collegiate clubs and societies through its representative function . . . [Its members are most often elected or appointed] to represent larger constituent groups to act or speak on their behalf"(p. 1). Student governance has generally evolved into student influence through participation on committees or cabinets, yet students' roles in campus governance lacks research and is "problematic" (Schmitz, 1997, p. 39). Furthermore, research does suggest that this population may differ from the general student population; still, "very little" is known about this population (Schmitz, 1997; Astin & Kent, 1980; Boardman, Calhoun, & Schiel, 1972; Karnes, Chauvin & Trant, 1984).

Heath (2005) argued that there appears to be a lack of research to indicate how organizations can best direct efforts to be most effective in their work with students. There is a gap in research concerning the leadership communication behaviors of college students who lead organizations on campuses such as student government associations as well as fraternities and sororities (Chambers & Phelps, 1994; DeJulio, Larson, Dever, & Paulman, 1981; Duran & Kelly, 1994; Rubin, Graham, & Mignerey, 1990, Schuh & Laverty, 1983).

Newton (1981) argued that effective leadership by an individual includes behaviors and skills that may be learned or enhanced. Logue, Hutchens and Hector (2005) defined student leadership as "holding an elected or appointed office in a student organization formally registered with the university" (p. 396). Astin (1984) stressed the role of student involvement which is defined as "the amount of physical and psychological energy that the student devotes to the academic experience" (p. 297).

Baxter Magolda (1992) found that many students' most meaningful experiences were co-curricular in nature. Caruso (1981) speculated that student leadership development has had a positive impact on the higher education community and society as a whole. Leadership experiences lead to long-term positive impacts (Pugh, 2000, p. 23). Research indicates that participation in student organizations is related to increased skill development and other dimensions of personal growth (Schuh & Laverty, 1983). Harville (1969) believed the significance of "the college experience is to provide an opportunity to develop leadership qualities" (p. 333). Participation in college activities was predictive of adult leadership. Further research by Arendt (2004) found that those who held official leadership positions on campus reported greater leadership behaviors.

Astin (1985) suggested that leadership experiences of students holding an office, position of responsibility, or active membership status within extracurricular organizations, are directly proportional to the richness and magnitude of learning experiences as well as to their personal development during college years. In a phenomenological study of college student leaders, Logue et al. (2005) identified positive experiences involved in serving as a student leader such as personal development and skill development as in "good communication skills" and enhanced "interpersonal skills" (p. 399). Students further revealed that they would continue to seek future leadership opportunities "even in the workplace" (p. 399).

Many leadership experiences in the college environment are based upon studies and models that were developed with managers in business and public-sector organizations (Freeman, Knott, & Schwartz, 1994) indicating that of the 68 instruments that are supported by technical data found in training and development resources which

are used to measure leadership skills and styles, only two indicate "a direct application to student populations" (p. 23). To that point, Posner and Brodsky (1992) argued that "serious questions can be raised about whether such models are applicable to college students, who differ from managerial populations by age, experience and types of organizations" (p. 231). So, they developed a student version (SLPI) of a well-known leadership inventory named the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) by Kouzes and Posner (1987).

Before discussing the strength of the SLPI, it is necessary to explore the development of the Leadership Practices Inventory. The LPI (Kouzes & Posner, 1988) is an assessment tool that has been used for almost 20 years in a multitude of successful and well-respected organizations in the business world such as IBM, Motorola, Cib-Giegy, and Levi Strauss. The model identifies specific behaviors and actions that managers report using when they are at their "personal best" through the collection of case studies from over 1,200 managers about their personal experiences as leaders. A content analyses of these studies suggested a pattern of behaviors used by people when they were most effective as leaders. These behaviors are categorized into five leadership practices that are labeled as Challenging the Process, Inspiring a Shared Vision, Enabling Others to Act, Modeling the way, and Encouraging the Heart. The Challenging style is characterized by leaders seeking out challenges for opportunities to change, grow, innovate and improve their work and the work of others as well as the desire to experiment, take risks and learn from mistakes. The Inspiring style is characterized by envisioning the future as well as enlisting others in a common vision. Enabling is viewed by fostering collaboration and strengthening people through empowerment, choice,

competence and support. Fourth, Modeling is comprised of setting an example through consistent values and through achieving small wins that promote consistency. Finally, Encouraging is distinguished by recognizing individuals and their efforts in your success and celebrating personal and others' accomplishments.

A variety of contexts have been examined with the LPI instrument such as engineering managers and their constituents , women in executive positions in banking and higher education, correctional institution leaders, frontline supervisors in large telecommunication firms, home health care agency directors (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 343).

With the SLPI, the development of a student version of the instrument followed the same case-study approach to investigate whether the leadership behaviors of college students were comparable with those of managers (Brodsky, 1988; Posner & Brodsky, 1992). The five leadership practices identified in Kouzes and Posner (1988) "correspond well" to the development issues of importance for college students" (Roberts, 1981, p.) and the specific qualities required by student leaders (Newton, 1981). The findings indicated that college students did engage in leadership actions or behaviors relevant to *their* experiences not those of the business world (Posner, 2004, p. 444). Specific differences were in the student leaders' self-perceptions. They were not significantly different from other members of the student executive boards of their organizations whereas business leaders' self-perceptions' were significantly higher (Posner & Brodsky, 1992, p. 236). Also, internal and external effectiveness for students were combined into one single dependent measure of effectiveness (p. 237). Student leaders representing a variety of campus leadership positions who practice leadership behaviors regard

themselves as more effective and are regarded by observers as "more effective than those who do not engage as frequently in leadership behaviors" (Posner, 2004, p. 454). The development of the student version of the instrument followed the same case-study approach to investigate whether the leadership behaviors of college students were comparable with those of the managers. Overall the findings indicated that college students leaders did engage in these leadership practices and that the conceptual framework of the instrument was relevant to the LPI.

Much study of student leadership focuses on student involvement within the educational environment (Chambers & Phelps,1994). Schuh and Laverty (1983) used a two-part questionnaire to evaluate the influence of leadership experiences on graduates of three different college institutions. In the area of communication skills, forty-five percent reported they experienced "considerable" influence while twenty-eight percent reported "tremendous" influence (Schuh & Laverty, 1983, p. 30). Furthermore in the area of leadership skills, thirty-two percent reported "considerable" influence while forty-six percent reported "tremendous" influence (p. 30). Of the nineteen items covered, leadership skills was the highest ranked "tremendous" influence item and communication skills was the second highest ranked "considerable" after teamwork (p. 30). Thus, experience with student leadership has been found to directly influence leadership in later life in varied contexts. Putting all of these variables together, then, verbal aggression, verbal argumentativeness, and leadership styles should be related. This study sought to uncover possible relationships between the levels of verbal aggressiveness, verbal argumentativeness and leadership styles.

Hypotheses

First, because college student leaders' positions require them to participate in the

university organizations to represent the needs and directions of their followers, they

must be constructive in their communication strategies. Because verbal aggressiveness is

a destructive strategy, hypothesis one states:

H1: College student leaders are lower in verbal aggressiveness than student non-

leaders.

Furthermore, because verbal argumentativeness is seen as a constructive communication

strategy based on advocacy of issues, hypothesis two states:

H2: College student leaders are higher in verbal argumentativeness than student

non-leaders.

Leadership and communication are necessary partners in the process of influencing

others. Part of this study looked to uncover the relationships, if any, between student

leadership styles and verbal aggressiveness and verbal argumentativeness. Past research

demonstrates that verbal aggressiveness is a destructive communication behavior that has

damaging consequences, thus:

H3: College student leaders' level of verbal aggressiveness will correlate

negatively with leadership styles in college student leaders.

Furthermore, advocating for an issue through constructive argumentation while refraining

from personal attacks has been associated with enhanced credibility, leadership, decision-

making, and favorable organizational outcomes. Thus:

H4: College student leaders' level of verbal argumentativeness will correlate

positively with leadership styles in college student leaders.

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Infante and Rancer (1982) posited that pursuing an argument is influenced by variables such as topic, importance of the issue, perceived likelihood of success, ego-involvement of participants, and relationship with the opponent. When positive conflict becomes negative controversy, constructive arguers may become destructive aggressors. These concepts leave the researcher with some questions that may not be able to be answered through correlations with surveys. To gain a greater understanding of those issues, the following research questions were suggested to seek participant perceptions of verbal aggressiveness, verbal argumentativeness and perceived constraints on argumentation, respectively.

> RQ1: If a person uses communication behaviors to dominate or perhaps defeat another person by using damaging strategies highlighting personal failings, or his/her participation in a group, how would you perceive that person who engages in this style of communication behavior?

Furthermore, due to belief systems that may play a role in a person's perceptions of verbally aggressive and verbally argumentative communication strategies, questions linger as to when or how these communication behaviors are used by college student leaders. Also, college student leader positions may present problems because of a student's desire to be liked by peers instead of "doing a good job" such as leaders found in the business or military contexts which may require aggressive communication behaviors.

> RQ2: If someone tends to advocate positions on important issues and to attack, verbally, positions with which he or she disagrees, how would you

perceive that person who engages in this style of communication behavior?

Finally, are some communication behaviors seen as favorable in certain situations? Do the people or situations in which student leaders are verbally engaged influence the communication strategies they use? Some leadership theory allows for leaders to adapt to the given situation in which they find themselves as well as adapt to the people being led.

RQ3: What constraints do student leaders perceive about their enactment of advocating positions or arguing about important issues concerning organizations they represent?

These research questions seek to explore further the perceptions of actual student leaders about uses of verbal aggressiveness, verbal argumentativeness, and potential constraints on arguing as a leader on behalf of their organization. The following chapter details the methodology for gathering and analyzing this data.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Surveys were used to gather in-depth information about respondents' attitudes and beliefs and the goal was to obtain data from a sample of a larger population that can be generalized to that larger population. Berger (2000) posited that one of the major advantages of conducting surveys is to obtain current information that can be quantified and analyzed statistically which allows for a "higher degree of precision" about the group being studied that other forms of research cannot duplicate (Berger, 2000, p. 191). Another advantage of using survey research is that it goes a long way toward eliminating unreliability in observations made by the researcher (Babbie, 2004, p. 275). Finally, surveys provide the best method available to those who are interested in collecting original data for describing a population too large to observe directly (Babbie, 2004, p. 243). In the case of a study like this one, of course, reaching every college campus would be a practical impossibility. Using the survey method with an attempted representative sample is appropriate as well as rigorous. A survey was used to evaluate the verbal aggressiveness and the verbal argumentativeness of elected, appointed, and voluntary college student leaders (SLs) to various student organizations. For the purpose of this study, students not elected, appointed, or volunteering for such offices were referred to as student non-leaders (SNL). The surveys identified the levels of verbal aggressiveness, verbal argumentativeness of SLs and SNLs. Additionally, the students' leadership styles of SLs were identified through an inventory survey.

Setting

A student government association is a fixed entity on most college campuses. On some campuses, the name of the organization may carry different titles yet the function is the same. This association is comprised of student leaders elected to their offices of leadership by the general student body. In most cases, the elected leaders appoint other influential students to serve on cabinet posts who head up committees within the student government. These students create programs and formulate suggestions for campus administrators that seek to benefit the greater student body. Beyond those positions, there are other student-led organizations on college campuses. Student leaders are typically involved with social, service, fraternal and civic organizations as compared with the product or technology-based organizations of business managers.

For the purpose of this study, a major southeastern university as well as two regional community colleges were used. They were selected based on several reasons: (1) locale (Southeast); (2) size (middle); (3) status (public); (4) diversity of students (race, gender); and (5) control of response rate. These parameters help address the issue of desired level of generalization which is one that many researchers face. Although this sample was most convenient for this study, convenience sampling is not unusual. Enrollment statistics provide support for the appropriateness of the range of the potential study population.

The University of Southern Mississippi's enrollment on the Hattiesburg campus was 12,248 (usm.edu/currentstudents, 2008), Jones County Community College's enrollment was 3,463 (jcjc.edu, 2008) and Southwest Mississippi Community College's enrollment was 2,071 (swmc.edu, 2008). These campuses' student government

associations vary in the total number of student leaders who are elected to leadership positions because of the total enrollments as well as how the areas of student representation are devised. Additionally, a variety of student-led organizations covering academic, service, social, and civic arenas were used at the university level. At the community college level, the student government associations, the student recruiters, as well as Phi Kappa Theta, an honor society, were used. At all of the institutions, students who are not involved in working with any student association position or in leadership positions of named organizations (non-leaders) were gathered from the basic public speaking courses.

Participants

The population of interest is all college students including their selected leaders. The sampling frame of student leaders (SLs) was the documented rosters that certify the names of the student leaders, and the sampling frame of student non-leaders was the roster of students enrolled in selected basic courses. To ensure adequate and diverse representation of racial and gender components, three different institutions' leaders, with approximately eighty student leaders each, created a sample size of 220 student leaders. This included the student body officers (president, vice-president, attorney general, chief justice and financial officer) as well as cabinet members, student representatives or "senators." The specific organizations at the University of Southern Mississippi were SGA Cabinet and Senate, Residence Hall Association, Southern Style, University Activities Council, Inter-Fraternity Council, National Pan-Hellenic Council, Baptist Student Union, Amnesty International, and Air Force Reserve Officers Training Corps.

These participants operationalized the description of student leaders. Furthermore, the non-elected students (SNLs) were gathered from the basic courses at each of the schools.

Instruments

Verbal Aggressiveness. Each student leader and each student non-leader completed the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (VAS) (Infante and Wigley, 1986), which was developed based on the conceptualizations of verbal aggressiveness as a trait in which individuals attack the self-concept of others. Statistical analyses (factor analysis and item analysis) resulted in a 20-item scale consisting of 10 positively worded items and 10 negative worded items. The scores can range from 20 to 100. Upon the initial creation of the VAS, Infante and Wigley distinguished the mean score as 49.10 and had a standard deviation of 9.79. Scores between 39.31 and 58.89 were considered moderate in verbal aggressiveness. Scores above 58.89 were considered high in verbal aggressiveness and a score below 39.31 will be considered low in trait verbal aggressiveness (Rancer & Avtgis, 2006, p. 256). This study will make this same distinction.

The scale is reported to be both valid and reliable, with alpha coefficients generally around .80 (Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 1994). The instrument is composed of 20 Likert-type items designed to measure an individual's likelihood to use verbally aggressive messages. The response range for the Aggressiveness Scale ranges from (1) "Almost never true" to (5) "Almost always true."

Verbal Argumentativeness. Each student leader and each student non-leader completed the Verbal Argumentativeness Scale. Infante and Rancer (1982) indicated that the Verbal Argumentativeness Scale consisted of two dimensions. The first dimension consists of motive to approach argument and is measured by ten items on the scale. The other ten

items are thought to represent motive to avoid argument, the second dimension of argumentativeness. The authors, in developing the scale, indicated that their two-factor solution (based on a principle components analysis and a varimax rotation) accounted for 95% of the common variance: motive to approach argument accounted for 55% and motive to avoid argument accounted for 45%. The instrument is composed of 20 Likert-type items designed to measure an individual's predisposition to argue, including 10 items which measure motivational tendency to approach arguments (ARGap) and 10 items which measure motivational tendency to avoid arguments (ARGav). The response range for the Argumentativeness Scale ranges from (1) "Almost never true" to (5) "Almost always true." The interpretation of the scores is as follows: low motivation to argue is between -4 and 4; moderate motivation to argue is between 5 and 13; high motivation to argue is between 14 and 40. Previous investigations support the reliability and validity of the scale, with reliability coefficients ranging from .83 to .91 for the ARGap and from .79 to .86 for the ARGav (Avtgis, & Rancer, 1997; Infante & Rancer, 1982; Rancer, Kosberg & Silvestri, 1992).

Reliability and validity. The internal consistency of the Verbal Argumentativeness Scale, which has been in use for almost 25 years, was investigated by calculating Cronbach's co-efficient alpha which was found to be .91 for the 10 ARGap items, while the co-efficient for the 10 ARGav items was .86. (Infante & Rancer, 1982, p. 76). Also, the validity of the scale was evaluated through a series of studies. The results of an initial study supported the speculation: attitudes toward the argumentative situation were "significantly and positively correlated with their general tendency to be argumentative" (Rancer & Atvgis, 2006) and was deemed "both a reliable and a valid measure of trait

argumentativeness" (DeWine, Nicotera, & Parry, 1991; Infante & Rancer, 1982, 1996). This scale for measuring argumentativeness has been used in other organizational communication research with apparent construct validity (Infante & Gorden, 1987, 1989).

Student Leadership Practices Inventory (SLPI). Each student leader completed the Student Leadership Practices Inventory-Self Report (SLPI) that consists of 30 descriptive statements. Each of the five leadership practices was assessed by six items on the SLPI, each measured using a 5-point Likert-scale (with 1 being rarely or not very frequently and 5 representing almost always or very frequently). These statements focus on leadership behavior and on the frequency with which the person engages in the particular behavior. Internal reliabilities (Chronbach's alpha) on the SLPI range between .81 and .91. Reliabilities for the SLPI-Self range between .71 and .85. Test-retest reliability for the five practices has been at the .93 level. Early studies reported internal reliability alpha scores as .68 for Model, .79 for Inspire, .66 for Challenge, .70 for Enable, and .80 for Encourage (Pugh, 2001; Menendez-Grant, 2001). Furthermore, SLPI scores have been found, in general, not to be related with various demographic factors or organizational characteristics and test of social desirability bias have not shown statistically significant relationships with SLPI scores (Walker, 2001).

A set of open-ended survey questions that addressed the study's research questions was presented at the end the SLPI survey. Verbal aggressiveness and verbal argumentativeness were defined for the participants to ensure perception of the distinction between the two communication behaviors. A categorization method will be addressed in the data analysis section.

Procedures

Each participant was read an informed consent statement that described the purpose of the research and explained how the information would be used (i.e. dissertation of Ph.D. candidate). Assurances of confidentiality were given before each session.

The student leaders had the VA Scale and VArg Scale instruments administered during a regularly scheduled meeting or session. The instrument was administered and collected immediately. The student non-leaders had the same instrument administered by the researcher or a trained representative during a regular class session. All subjects were instructed to respond to the statements indicating the degree to which items reflected their communication behaviors and experiences. Both sets of instruments were administered and collected by the researcher or a trained representative.

A set of research questions were presented at the end of the SLPI as open-ended questions and the responses were student-generated according to their views and experiences. The student leaders were the only participants to receive these questions because of their unique perspective of understanding all of the inner-workings of the organizations as well as the missions and objectives of their groups.

Data Analysis

The test for reliability was the previously established measure of the instrument (Infante, 1981; Infante & Wigley, 1986; Rancer & Avtgis, 2006). The content validity should demonstrate how the VAS and the VArg scales cover the range of meanings included within the conceptualization of verbal aggressiveness and verbal argumentativeness (Infante, 1981; Infante & Wigley, 1986; Rancer & Avtgis, 2006).

For H1 and H2, 2-tailed t-tests were run to draw a rigorous comparison of means of verbal aggressiveness and verbal argumentativeness between the leader and non-leader participants. The expected outcome was that the level of verbal aggressiveness in SNLs would be greater than SLs and that the level of verbal argumentativeness in SLs would be greater than SNLs. For H3, there was an expected outcome of negative correlations between verbal aggressiveness and the SLPI leadership styles. Finally, for H4, there was an expected outcome of positive correlations between verbal argumentativeness and the SLPI leadership styles.

The responses to the research questions were coded or categorized using systematic procedures to ensure that the categories are grounded in the data. Coding provides for the naming of segments of data that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for the data. The coding procedure for this research involved a two-stage process: open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Open coding allowed for the examination of similarities and differences and placed into categories. Once the data were separated into categories, they were unified by axial coding, wherein relationships between the categories were explored and provided a frame (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Categories were examined in light of the *perceptional adjectives* that SLs used to describe the verbally aggressive and verbally argumentative people with whom they had contact. For example, RQ1 asked for perceptions of verbally aggressive people. The open-ended questions allowed for SLs to provide adjectives that are used to describe those types of leaders. The categories were examined in the *context* in which they occurred. After the categories were identified, the answers provided some insight into

the motivations and beliefs that college student leaders had about verbally aggressive and

verbally argumentative behaviors.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter reports the results of the Student Leader Practices Inventory (SLPI)

survey, the Verbal Aggressiveness Scale (VAS), the Verbal Argumentativeness Scale

(VArgS) as well as the open survey questions. The college student leaders (SLs) were

administered the SLPI, VAS, VArgS and RQs while the student non-leaders (SNLs)

responded to the VAS and VArgS. The chapter will be organized in three parts: sample

descriptions and restatement of hypotheses and open survey questions, results of

hypotheses, and results of the open survey questions. To create a clear picture of the

project, it is necessary to describe the sample first.

Description of Sample

The entire sample for the study was composed of 440 participants composed of

two groups: student leaders (N=220) and student non-leaders (N=220). The student

leaders sample included representatives of 10 different student organizations at the

University of Southern Mississippi that has a total enrollment of 12, 248 on its

Hattiesburg campus (www.usm.edu, 2008) as well as representatives of 3 organizations at

Jones County Community College that has an enrollment of 3,463 (www.jcjc.edu, 2008)

and 3 organizations at Southwest Mississippi Community College that has an enrollment

of 2, 071 (www.smcc.edu). The student leader participants totaled 172 from the

following organizations at the university level: Cabinet (19), Senate (17), Residence Hall

Association (20), Southern Style (21), University Activities Council (14), Inter-Fraternity

Council (22), National Pan-Hellenic Council (20), Baptist Student Union Leadership

Board (19), Amnesty International (10), and Air Force Reserve Officers Training Corps

(10). The community college student leader participants accounted for 27 and 21 respectively and they are specifically described below.

The student groups were selected to demonstrate diversity in gender, race, organizations' purposes as well as how the student leaders were selected to be a part of their organizations. Less than half of the student organizations (Cabinet, Senate, Residence Hall Association, Inter-Fraternity Council, National Pan-Hellenic Council, and community college student body officers) were elected by other students via student body elections or student-to-student selection. The other student leaders were selected by staff/faculty members via interviews and applications processes or volunteered to enroll in a university program or organization.

The desired diversity of leader representation in this study was demonstrated by the varied purposes and functions of each organization at USM. The Cabinet was a collection of students who applied to work for the Student Government Association (SGA) in various capacities to create activities and programs for the student body as well as work with the university staff to improve services on campus. They were led by the SGA president who was elected in a general student body election. The Senate, an elected group of students, represented the student body and the different colleges. Their purpose was to create policies that benefit the student body; the policies were sent to the university administration for consideration for inclusion in university policy and procedures. The Senate was led by the SGA Vice-President, also elected in a general student body election. The Residence Hall Association (RHA) was comprised of students living in the campus dormitories elected by members of those dorms. Each dormitory on campus had a representative in the association. They worked to create

social and domestic policies and activities to improve the experiences of dorm life. USM's Southern Style was a representative group of students who were chosen based on an application and interview process through the Office of First Year Experience. They represented the university students and the campus community to groups of potential students visiting the campus. Furthermore, they enrolled in a class emphasizing different components of leadership.

Another organization of student leaders included in the study was University Activities Council (UAC) with members selected based on applications and interviews to create entertainment and social activities for the general student body through the Programming Office of the Student Union. Furthermore, Inter-Fraternity Council (IFC) was comprised of students representing various social fraternities on campus who were appointed by their specific fraternities to hold a position on the council. Along with IFC, the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) was the collection of chosen members of historically African-American Greek fraternities and sororities representing the views of each of their fraternities or sororities. Both of these Greek organizations were guided by the Office of Greek Life. The Baptist Student Union (BSU) leadership group was comprised of students applying for and selected to lead small family groups of general student body members who chose to learn about and participate in Christian activities and spiritual gatherings. Amnesty International was comprised of students volunteering their time and resources to improve the quality of life for various local, regional, national and international populations who are underrepresented in political and economic processes. Finally, the Air Force ROTC cadets chose to participate in leadership training as well as

coursework allowing for learning about the history and current policies of the United States Armed Forces.

The total participants at the community college level included 27 student leaders at Jones County Community College and 21 student leaders at Southwest Community College. Both colleges were represented by their elected student government executive officers, officers of Phi Theta Kappa (the international honor society for two-year colleges) and members of the student recruiter organizations: Bobcat Brigade at Jones County (19) and Bear Trackers at Southwest (15).

The student non-leaders (N=220) were represented by students enrolled in the basic public speaking course at each respective school. These were gathered after the student leaders had participated. To protect the boundaries of the study, participants in this population were asked before the survey collection began if they had already participated in the study as a student organization member. If they had, they were to be excluded though none reported as such.

The total sample (N=440) comprised of 209 males and 231 females with a mean age of 20 years old. They identified as Caucasian (286), African American (138), Hispanic (6), and Asian/Pacific Islander (11). One participant double-identified as Asian/Pacific Islander and African American. Finally, the sample included various classifications of students including 137 freshmen, 190 sophomores, 63 juniors, and 50 seniors.

By group, the student leaders (N=220) comprised of 138 males and 82 females with a mean age of 20 years old. They identified as Caucasian (157), African-American (57), Hispanic (4), and Asian/Pacific Islander (3). As noted previously, one participant

double-identified as Asian/Pacific Islander and African-American. Finally, the student

leader sample included various classifications of students including 62 freshmen, 88

sophomores, 40 juniors, and 30 seniors. The student-non leaders (N=220) comprised 79

males and 141 females with a mean age of 19 years old. There identified as Caucasian

(129), African-American (81), Hispanic (2), and Asian/Pacific Islander (8).

Gender was part of the demographic information gathered through the surveys and the

results showed that, as past research has demonstrated, that males were more verbally

aggressive and more verbally argumentative than females. The study found a mean

(M=49.19; SD=13.25) higher in verbal aggressiveness for males than the mean

(M=45.12; SD=18.66) for females, t = 2.612, (df) = 438, and 2-tailed significance of

=.009, (p <.05). Also, the study revealed a mean (M=7.14; SD=9.55) higher in verbal

argumentativeness for males than the mean (M=4.57; SD=9.23) for females, t=2.870,

(df)=438, and 2-tailed significance of=.004, (p>05). These findings support past research

on gender and verbally aggressive and verbally argumentative communication behavior.

Yet, because the samples for student leaders (N=220) were comprised of

predominantly male participants (138 males and 82 females) and the student non-leaders

(N=220) were comprised of predominantly female participants (79 males and 141

females), the difference may have less to do with leadership identification and more to do

with cultural differences. To address this, a 2x2 factorial analysis was run. Using a

univariate analysis test between-subjects, a statistically significant difference was found

for gender in verbal aggressiveness: F (1, 220) = 7.68, df=1, significance=.006. Yet, for

leadership, there was no leadership difference: F (1, 220)=1.53, df=1, significance=.216.

These results suggest that a gender difference was found while the role of leadership did

not affect verbal aggressiveness levels. Using the same univariate analysis test between-subjects, a significant difference for leadership in verbal argumentativeness was found: F (1, 220)=.65.4, df=1, significance=.000 but not a significant difference for gender: F (1, 220) = 3.08, df=1, significance =.080. This suggested that leadership was the primary source of the difference rather than gender.

Relationship between Verbal Aggressiveness and College Student Leadership

Hypothesis one predicted that the mean verbal aggressiveness rate for student leaders (SLs) would be less than the mean verbal aggressiveness rate of student non-leaders (SNLs). The Verbal Aggressiveness Scale, as described in the instruments section of the Methodology section, was the instrument that was used. The scale was reliable and valid, with an alpha coefficient of .66. For the SLs, statistical analysis of verbal aggressiveness scales revealed a mean (M=46.40; SD=12.42) lower than that for SNLs (M=47.89; SD=19.2792) as represented in Table 4.1. An independent groups t test revealed that SLs differed significantly from SNLs as predicted, t = .841, (df) = 438, and, for a more rigorous finding, a 2-tailed test was run resulting in a significance of=.401. Although statistically significant, the difference could be viewed as minor. Furthermore, a Levene's Test for Equality of Variances of F=2.230 was run with a significance = .136. The hypothesis that verbal aggressiveness is higher in student non-leaders than student leaders was supported, thus rejecting the null hypothesis.

Relationship between verbal argumentativeness and college student leadership

Hypothesis two predicted that the mean verbal argumentativeness rate for student leaders (SLs) would be greater than the mean verbal argumentativeness rate of student non-leaders (SNLs). The Verbal Argumentativeness Scale, as described in the

Methodology section, was the instrument used. It was found to be valid and reliable with a co-efficient alpha found to be .71. For the SLs, the statistical analyses of verbal argumentativeness scales revealed a mean (M=9.35; SD=8.62) greater than that for SNLs (M=2.80; SD=9.20). An independent groups t test revealed that SLs differed from SNLs as predicted, t= 8.523, (df) = 438, and 2-tailed significance of .000 ($p < .05$). Although this result may not bear a high level of statistical significance, it is still meaningful. Also, a Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was run with a results of F= 2.185 and a significance=.140. The second hypothesis that verbal argumentativeness is higher in student leaders than student non-leaders was supported, thus rejecting the null hypothesis.

Table 4.1
Report of Means

Student Leader/Non		Verbal Aggressiveness	Verbal Argumentativeness
Student leader	Mean	46.400	9.359
	N	220	220
	Std.Dev.	12.421	8.622
Student non	Mean	47.718	2.227
	N	220	220
	Std.Dev.	19.645	8.927
Total	Mean	47.059	5.793
	N	440	440
	Std. Dev.	16.429	9.465

Relationship between Verbal Aggressiveness and College Student Leadership Styles

Hypothesis three predicted there would be a statistically significant relationship between verbal aggressiveness and leadership style. The Student Leadership Practices Inventory assessed five styles of leadership: Challenge (CH), Inspire (INSP), Enable (ENB), Model (M), and Encourage (ENC). The SLPI was given to the SLs only to gauge the leadership styles. The third hypothesis was tested through the computation of the correlation between the five styles of SLPI and the VAS measure. Because the SLPI

gauges five different styles, there were five possible relationships investigated for significant relationships. The SLPI revealed significant negative relationships between verbal aggressiveness and each of the five styles: CH r (220) = -.169 ($p < .05$); INSP r (220) = -.083 ($p < .05$); ENB r (220) = -.158 ($p < .05$); M r (220) = -.082 ($p < .05$); ENC r (220) = -.189 ($p < .01$). These results are significant but are minute correlations and these findings will be discussed in the next section.

Relationship between Verbal Argumentativeness and College Student Leadership Style

Hypothesis four predicted there would be a statistically significant relationship between verbal argumentativeness and leadership style. The fourth hypothesis was tested through the computation of the correlation between the five styles from the SLPI and the VArgS measure. Because the SLPI has five different styles, there were five possible relationships investigated for significant relationships. The instrument was found to be valid and reliable. Cronbach's alpha on the SLPI ranged between .71 and .87. The reported reliability scores as .87 for Challenge, .74 for Encourage, .77 for Inspire, .78 for Enable, and .71 for Model. The SLPI revealed significant negative relationships with two of the five styles: CH r (220) = -.001 ($p < .05$) and INSP r (220) = -.028 ($p < .05$). Yet, significant positive relationships were exhibited with ENB r (220) = .021 ($p < .05$); M r (220) =.22 ($p < .05$) and ENC r (220) =.033 ($p < .05$).

After using quantitative measures to identify the verbal aggressiveness and the verbal argumentativeness of student leaders and student non-leaders, the study utilized the SLPI to identify possible relationships between leadership styles and communication behaviors of the student leaders. Beyond the quantitative measures, two open-ended research questions were provided to the SLs to uncover their perceptions of people who

enact either verbally aggressive behavior or verbally argumentative behavior, worded thus:

RQ1: If a person uses communication behaviors to dominate or perhaps defeat

another person by using damaging strategies highlighting personal

failings, or his/her participation in a group, how would you perceive that

person who engages in this style of communication behavior?

RQ2: If someone tends to advocate positions on important issues and to attack,

verbally, positions with which he or she disagrees, how would you

perceive that person who engages in this style of communication

behavior?

Strauss and Corbin (1998) provided a framework for techniques and procedures when coding and categorizing qualitative research. The two steps used were open coding and axial coding. First, answers were conceptualized to enable the grouping of similar objects under a common heading due to the sharing of common characteristics or related meanings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 104). Due to the meanings evoked when examining ideas given by the SLs, comparative analysis allowed for placing words and concepts into the same code. Through this conceptualization process, certain topics were grouped within a category based on its ability to explain what occurred. Once the initial open coding process had been completed, axial coding was used to begin the process of "reassembling data that were fractured during open coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 124). In this phase of coding, categories were divided into subcategories.

The results of these processes were two-fold: first came the creation of categories of perceptions, then came the counts of categories. Survey questions one and two asked participants how they would perceive: (a) a verbally aggressive person and (b) a verbally argumentative person. The answers ranged from complete paragraphs to single words. After each response was coded and categorized, a frequency of responses was calculated. In total, 943 responses were provided.

Perceptions of Verbally Aggressive Behavior Uses

The written responses to question one created a total of 313 answers from the student leaders, meaning some had none and some had more than one. The categorical frequencies and percentages of the responses were: (1) *internal issues*-151 or 48%; (2) *external issues*-112 or 36%; (3) *personal deficits*-41 or 13%; (4) *no answer*-9 or 3%. These totals are represented in Table 4.2. From this collection of data and the use of open coding conceptualization process, three categories emerged from answers regarding perceptions of verbally aggressive communicators: *internal issues, external issues*, and *personal deficits*. Through the use of axial coding, *subcategories* were created for each category. For **internal issues**, two subcategories were fashioned: *personality* and *character;* the former was exemplified by responses such as "low self-esteem,"or "close-minded." Character, meanwhile, was personified by "no integrity," "no morals," or "I wouldn't trust him." **External issues** included *organizational outcomes* and *barriers*. The former comprised expressions that demonstrated perceptions of how the verbally aggressive person would affect the organization's work and mission such as "not interested in the group," "doesn't care about the organization," "disruptive," "not a team player," "likes to be in charge," and "gets little or nothing accomplished." Barriers

involved difficulties the person would create for himself or herself that would affect

relationships within and outside of the organization. Examples of those responses

included "I would try not to work with her," "power hungry," "do anything to get

ahead," "disrespectful," and "bossy."

Finally, the last subcategories created were under the category of **personal**

deficits: *intelligence* and *skills* were distinguished by shortcomings in naturally occurring

work issues or lacking skills that should have been acquired through social maturation

and education. Responses for the former were differentiated through reactions such as

"she does not understand ideas," "unintelligent," "he is ignorant," and "aren't smart."

The latter was expressed with thoughts like "lacks communication skills," "poor

leadership skills," "poor home training," "brought up poorly," "not qualified," and

"inconsiderate."

Table 4.2

Frequency of responses for survey question one

Survey Question	Category	Subcategories	*f*	%
1				
	Internal	personality character	151	48
	External	organizational outcomes barriers	112	36
	Personal Deficits	intelligence skills	41	13
	No answer		9	3
Total			313	

Perceptions of Verbally Argumentative Behavior Uses

Question two provided a total of 285 responses: (1) *internal issues*-138 or 46%;

(2) *external issues*- 96 or 33%; (3) *personal deficit*- 30 or 9%; (4) *no answer*-21 or 7%.

These totals are represented in Table 4.3. The second research question was similar to the first question except that the focus was on the perceptions of the verbally argumentative person. The **internal issues** were coded, like verbal aggressiveness, according to *personality* and *character*. The first was signified by "low self confidence," "not likable," "defensive," "insecure," "strong-willed," and "aggressive." Character was illustrated with "dedicated," "standing up for beliefs," "firm," "knows what they want," and "ambitious." Yet, interestingly enough, another subcategory of *name-calling* emerged. This last subcategory was exemplified by words like "jackass," "stupid," "childish," "loud-mouth/know-it-all," "dictator," "a jerk," "attacker," and "bull headed." **External issues** were, again, focused on *organizational outcomes* and *barriers*. The former was represented by phrases like "destructive to the organization," "severely damaging," "only wants their ideas heard," "too much power," and "only thinks of his own perspective." Barriers were articulated with words like "not open minded," "biased," "passionate," "too opinionated," and "does not share common beliefs."

Lastly, **personal deficits** emerged based on *intelligence* and *skills* that a person lacks in the perceptions of those who are working with him or her. Intelligence was explained through words or phrases such as "ignorant," "stupid," "ignorant to surroundings," "lacks intelligence," "uneducated," and "closed off to world issues." Finally, the deficits in skills were listed as "inappropriate," "lacks communication skills," "unable to be clear and calm," "doesn't see big picture," "should be more careful in delivery," "inability to engage," "not prepared," " needs to learn how to act," "unprofessional," "blind communicator," "lacks etiquette," "not a leader if they don't stand up for what they believe," and "guarded but logical."

Table 4.3

Frequency of responses for research question two

Survey Question	Category	Subcategory	*f*	%
2	Internal	personality character	138	46
	External	organizational outcomes barriers name calling	96	33
	Personal deficits	intelligence skills	30	9
	No answer		21	7
Total			285	

Lastly, a survey question was provided to explore perceptions that student leaders have about constraints they feel when they advocate positions through argumentativeness.

RQ3: What constraints do student leaders perceive about their enactment of

advocating positions or arguing about important issues concerning

organizations they represent?

Perceived Constraints of College Student Leaders

Question three supplied 345 total responses. From the four major categories that emerged, the response frequency was as follows: (1) *peers*-88 or 26%; (2) *self*-75 or 21%; (3) *organization*-61 or 19%; and (4) *university*-74 or 21%. Beyond the four categories, two other categories had to be added: (5) *missing*-38 or 11%, and (6) *no constraints perceived*-9 or 2%. All of these totals are represented in Table 4.4. The third survey question was distinctly different from the previous two questions because it focused on the *perceived constraints* that college student leaders believe keeps them from advocating for or against issues that have a direct bearing on their organizations'

missions. The categories that emerged from the responses given by the college student leader participants were *peers, self, organization*, and *university*.

The **peer** category included those issues that peers of the student leaders help in creating. Issues that were expressed included need for approval, need for respect from others, worry about offending others, and the views of peers about the organizations of which the student leaders are members. Student leaders used expressions such as "want to please everyone," "pressure to be popular," "worried about peer perception," "not being accepted by peers," "negative views by friends," "peers distancing themselves from us," "peers shoot it down," "don't want to offend others," "discouraged by others," "embarrassed by others perceptions of me," "stereotypes," "no one else cares about things like I do," "diversity of students lead to misunderstandings," "what our friends think."

The second category was **self.** This category included those perceived shortcomings of self whether a lack of personal skills, age, experience or even an internal conflict between oneself and the philosophy of the organization the student was serving. Through expressing their views about how they perceive constraints placed on college student leaders, participants conveyed ideas about self through words like "focus should be on the university and not on me," "fear of leaving comfort zone," "youth is a hindrance," "individual agendas," "voiceless," "fear of failure," "fear of standing alone," "lack of knowledge of needs of organization," "ashamed or nervous to talk about things," "argument of personal beliefs may not match organizations beliefs," "no skills to handle issues," "unfamiliar territory," "time, experience," " actions versus mistakes," "want to hide my pride," "willing to make the changes but others aren't," "not willing to put forth

the work it takes to really change things," "feeling misunderstood," "lack social skills," "fear of being reprimanded," and "can only do so much."

The third category was **organization** based on constraints that exist because of issues that occur due to the nature of the organization and its members. Issues included pressure to represent the organization in an appropriate way, explaining the real mission behind the organization to outsiders as well as a complete understanding of what the organization expects of its leaders. For example, student leaders expressed themselves with ideas such as "offending members," "up to officers not members," "outnumbered," "audience's point of view," "stereotypes of organizational mission," "tactical issues of long-term goals," "easy to make enemies when defending organization," "bureaucracy," "have to be harmonious," "lack of complete freedom," "part of duty to stand for certain things," "one person cant speak for the group," "running the same way for a long time," "strong inner relationships keep us from making the best decision," "opposition from those who don't understand our vision," "talk but no action" "overly sensitive to mission of organization," "participation by all may be impossible," "all people are not open minded about our organization," "small group, less impact," "understanding limitations of position," and " keeping the peace among organizations within the bigger picture."

Finally, the **university (or community college)** was also a category of perceived constraint for student leaders. This was best described by respondents as hierarchical issues, lack of common ground, lack of understanding of the process of "getting things done," as well as the perception that the student leaders really were not listened to by the university staff and administration. As was expressed in the organizational category, students perceived issues that were out of their control as in " we rely on the

administration too much," "faculty support of issues and positions," "some issues only handled by administration," "some issues are over our heads or are too intimidating," "our views are not seen as viable," "lack administrative support then work is all for nothing," "too much waiting," "people above them," "not on the radar of the university officials," "lack of campus support," "one person decides...the person," "any non-conformity from students is frowned upon," "advisors and administrators," "we don't have a Ph.D. and we don't contribute money to the school," "higher powers always intervene," and "getting on the bad side of the administration."

As with the previous two survey questions, some participants chose not to provide an answer to this question **(missing)**. Yet, different from the previous two questions, some respondents perceived no constraints at all, intimating that students have **no barriers** or **constraints** to advocating the positions of their organizations or of themselves, and answered it as such.

Table 4.4
Frequency of responses for research question three

Survey Question	Category	F	%
3			
	Peers	88	26
	Self	75	21
	Organization	61	19
	University	74	21
	Missing	38	11
	No constraints	9	2
Total		345	

Table 4.5 displays the categories that emerged from the third open survey question along with examples that fit within each.

Table 4.5

Category examples of responses

Survey Question	Category	Examples
3	Peers	"want to please everyone" "pressure to be popular" "worried about peer perception" "not being accepted by peers" "negative views by friends" "peers distancing themselves from us" " peers shoot it down" "don't want to offend others" "discouraged by others" "stereotypes" "embarrassed by others' perceptions of me" "no one else cares about it" "diversity of students leads to misunderstandings" "what our friends think"
	Self	"focus should be on the university and not on me" "fear of leaving comfort zone" "youth is a hindrance" "individual agendas" "voiceless" "fear of failure" "fear of standing alone" "lack of knowledge or needs of organization" "ashamed or nervous to talk about things" "argument of personal beliefs may not match the organizations beliefs" "no skills to handle issues" "unfamiliar territory" "time, experience" "action versus mistakes" "fear of being reprimanded"
	Organization	"up to officers not members" "outnumbered" "lack of complete freedom" "small group, less impact" "talk but no action" "running the same way for a long time" "opposition from those who don't understand our vision" "all people are not open minded about the organization"

	University	"we rely on the administration too much"
		"faculty support of issues and positions"
		"our views are not seen as viable"
		"too much waiting"
		"lack of administrative support then all work is for nothing"
		"not on the radar of university officials"
		"advisors and administrators"
		"any non-conformity from students is frowned upon"
		"one person decides...the person"
		"we don't have PhDs and we don't contribute money to the school"
		" higher powers always intervene"
	No constraints	"There are none"
		"Nothing"

From this body of answers, several general results can be reported. Almost half of the responses provided for the questions posed about the perceptions of those who engage in verbally aggressive and verbally argumentative behavior referred to internal issues reflecting a problem with the inner-workings of the individual. The second-closest percentage of responses was external issues. Furthermore, the third question that was posed inquired about constraints that student leaders may feel when enacting verbally argumentative behaviors, and the overwhelming percentages of responses were peers (external) and self (internal). These results may assist in understanding the motivations for student leaders to engage in such behaviors or alternatively to disengage from them.

Now that the results have been presented, several conclusions emerge upon reflection. The next chapter provides an in-depth discussion of these hypotheses and open survey question results.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the possible influences that verbal aggressiveness and

verbal argumentativeness have on college student leaders as well as the predominant

leadership styles of those leaders and the correlations of those predominant styles with

verbal aggressiveness and verbal argumentativeness. The first section will discuss

findings regarding hypotheses one through four while the second section will feature the

outcomes of the three open survey questions. The third section will discuss limitations of

the study, and the fourth section will draw out implications and suggest future directions

for research.

Verbal Aggressiveness: Student Leaders and Student Non-Leaders

Student leader verbal aggressiveness levels were less than those of student non-

leaders, demonstrating support for hypothesis one. For this study, this was not a surprise.

Although verbal aggressiveness is part of the control dimension of the personality, it is

identified as a destructive component (Rancer, 2004). The use of name-calling,

ridiculing, teasing, and personally attacking others in the name of an organization (or for

any reason) seemed to implicate leaders as lacking the ability to rationally take positions

that further the mission of the organization. As noted later, in open survey responses, the

participant student leaders articulated specific negative feelings based on their

perceptions of verbally aggressive behaviors used by leaders. Hypothesis one was clearly

supported.

A possible explanation as to why SNL's were higher in verbal aggressiveness

than SLs may be the lack of connection by SNLs to a mission greater than themselves or

SNLs feeling less responsible for their words and the ramifications that negative consequences may create. Because student leaders volunteer, choosing to be a part of a university community or organization with a mission or agenda, they may be more inclined to be mindful of strategies used in persuasive situations. Rancer (2004) uncovered reasons why verbal aggressives use harsh messages like a desire to be mean, eagerness to appear tough or to seek involvement in discussions that degenerate into verbal fights. The consequences are damaging including relationship deterioration and interpersonal distrust. Such consequences seem to be disincentives for people who work for or are included in an organization's mission that is based upon building a community whether it is Greek, civic, academic or campus life.

In the context of leadership, this result may not support either the trait or state approach to leadership communication but a both/and approach of complementary explanations (McCroskey, Daly, Martin, & Beatty, 1998) because knowledge of both trait and situational factors may be crucial for predicting a person's communication behavior. The latter is seen as a joint product of situational factors and the traits of a person. Infante's early work (1987) argued that the theory of argumentativeness includes both trait and situational factors "to more accurately predict how motivated people will be to argue" in a given situation (p. 313). Furthermore, Rancer and Avtgis (2006) argued that "both argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness support the interactions perspective" (p. 83) which suggests that a person's behavior seems to be best understood as a joint product of situational factors and trait characteristics (p. 77). Previous research demonstrated that sometimes people are drawn into negative strategies after extended efforts at positive or constructive communication behaviors (Rancer, 1995). Student

leaders are not immune to the use of negative/destructive strategies for they are growing and learning about the nature of leadership and organization missions. The evidence in this study demonstrated that although student leaders do not value negative strategies, they sometimes do revert to those strategies as demonstrated in the responses to the open survey questions about their perceptions of verbally aggressive behaviors to be addressed later.

Although gender was not a major variable in the study, it is necessary to note a key difference indicated that related to it. This study proposed that student leaders would be less verbally aggressive than student non-leaders and the results demonstrated this finding. Yet, when split down gender lines, regardless of the leadership designation, males were more verbally aggressive than females. This is supported by past research in this area. This may demonstrate that, regardless of one's leadership role or designation, that males are more verbally aggressive than females which may be more about greater overarching issues of culture and gender rather than leadership issues.

Verbal Argumentativeness: Student Leaders and Student Non-Leaders

The second hypothesis predicted that the mean verbal argumentativeness level of student leaders would be greater than the mean level of student non-leaders. The data supported the hypothesis though the level of difference was not high. Earlier research (Barbato, 1987; Infante, 1989; Terlip, 1989) suggested that higher levels of argumentativeness are linked to better decision-making, greater problem solving, leadership skills and favorable organizational outcomes--all things that would be valuable assets for college student leaders; therefore, one would expect that their levels of argumentativeness would be stronger. Furthermore, past research also indicated that

argumentativeness in leadership reflects personal flexibility, interest, and dynamism furthering the idea that college student leaders' levels of verbal argumentativeness would be significantly higher than student non-leaders. The mean differences were significantly greater but not by a large margin. In the end, the greater question to be answered may be why was the difference not stronger?

A possible explanation may be the tool used to gather the data and gauge the level of verbal argumentativeness. Perhaps a new data-gathering tool should be employed or added to understand the entire picture of verbal argumentativeness such as the ABACS (Hinkle, 2003) which measures the affective, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions associated with verbal argumentation. It gauges the feelings, actions and thoughts about arguing beyond the level of argumentativeness one possesses. Another explanation may be that because being a "team player" is the expected appropriate goal of organization members (Whyte, 1989), some participants may have been hesitant to provide full disclosure of their persuasive strategies for fear that they would be seen as something other than a team player. Furthermore, Rancer & Avtgis (2006) argued that to be a persuasive person (in this study, a leader) one should be able "to invent and deliver well constructed arguments in support of a position" as well as "refute or pick apart" the arguments others present. While these ideas may generally serve leaders well, some of the open survey question responses revealed that although student leaders may realize their argumentation skills are necessary and meaningful, they also reported that they are reluctant to use them for fear of rejection by their peers, negative impressions of them that are created by the enacting of these behaviors, and their concerns about their possible interference with the goals of the organizations. These types of ideas and perceptions

cannot be gauged using a quantitative survey. These important perceptions will be discussed later.

All in all, it seemed that in every group of SLs that were administered the VArgS, some were uncomfortable with the idea that they were "argumentative." Dowling and Flint (1990) suggested that the term "argument" could mean different things to different people. Past research demonstrated that individuals perceived as argumentative will be more likely to be chosen as a leader but it was unclear "how argumentative they can be" (Schultz, 1982, p. 365). Student leaders may be walking a thin line of understanding the importance of advocating for an idea or issue but not knowing how much is acceptable in given situations. Although argumentativeness does point to effective leadership, the perceptions of the term may be negative. If student leaders understand that at the crux of argumentativeness is advocacy and refutation, this may provide an acceptable norm for them. Interestingly, though, the responses to the open survey questions discussed later in this chapter provided backing for conclusions about the issues mentioned above. Overall, the data supported the position that student leaders had a higher level of verbal argumentativeness than student non-leaders.

Yet, similar to the reported results and discussion of verbal aggressiveness, the idea that verbal argumentativeness has to do with a designation of leadership may not be the only explanation. In the results, males were reported with higher levels of verbal argumentativeness, yet, after filtering gender out, a significant difference for leadership was also found. Although for the variable of verbal argumentativeness there was not a significant difference for gender, it approached significance. This may indicate that gender is still present in the functioning of leadership roles. In these college settings

studied, overarching gender issues may yet pervade aspects of college student leadership, as people may more readily expect leaders to be male. Interestingly, gender, regardless of leadership designation or role, may be playing a part in one's communication behaviors. Finally, it is worthy of note that the two samples were skewed via gender, though not by design. Although evidence of leadership differences was found, some gender differences cannot be ruled out and thus gender and leadership still are intertwined.

Correlations of Leadership Styles and Verbal Aggressiveness

Beyond the identification of the mean differences between student leaders and student non-leaders, the study hypothesized there would be correlations between the student leaders' level of verbal aggressiveness and the leadership styles identified by the Student Leadership Practices Inventory (SLPI). Due to the destructive nature of verbal aggressiveness, the outcome of the correlations represented negative relationships with all of the leadership styles.

Identified leadership styles were Challenge (CH), Inspire (INS), Model (M), Enable (ENB) and Encourage (ENC), and each style represented prominent behavioral strategies used by student leaders. As a point of review, Challenge is characterized as searching for opportunities to confront and change the status quo; Inspire is imagining ideal scenarios and attracting people to a common purpose; Model is described as setting an example through beliefs and values, where actions speak louder than words as well as unifying the constituents; Enable is promoted the fostering of collaborative efforts through cooperation and mutual trust in relationships; finally, Encourage values critical

thinking and rewards those in an organization who examine issues and ideas with a critical eye.

The most significant finding in this section was that ENC demonstrated the style with the greatest negative relationship to verbal aggressiveness (-.189; p <.01). The reason may be because of what ENC represents: recognition of contributions by followers and celebration of accomplishments by an organization. Recognition and celebration do not fit the VA communication behavior that is marked by name calling and attacking the self-concepts of others. A deeper examination of the characteristics of ENC further support the statistical finding with elements such as building confidence in self, being positive and helpful, having high expectations, cheering about the values of the organization and being committed to living and loving the organization.

Along with the negative relationship between ENC and VA, the four other leadership styles also reflected a negative relationship with VA. Challenge (CH), which was characterized by searching for opportunities to confront and change the status quo, may seem to demonstrate an aggressive approach. Yet, when one examines the characteristics of CH style, one could recognize why there was a statistically negative relationship between the two variables. The challenging style is marked by change, moving toward opportunities, balancing routines and tasks and arousing intrinsic motivations in followers and self. Clearly, these types of characteristics, behaviors or motivations for leading are not conducive to success by one who is verbally aggressive. VA's participate in attacking another's self-concepts through isolating and bringing attention to personal failings, relational failings, and another's group membership. This seems to support the identified negative relationship between Challenging leadership

style and verbal aggressiveness. Furthermore, the style labeled Enable (ENB) seemed, at glance, to be the style that would stand in greatest opposition to the premises of verbal aggressiveness. Enable promotes the fostering of collaborative efforts through cooperation and mutual trust in relationships. Even more, seeking integrative solutions seemed more in opposition to verbal aggressiveness as leaders incorporate an overall improvement in performance through collaboration. Collaboration would be a style that a verbally aggressive leader would not likely choose for he or she would be more apt to verbally attack others who have ideas that are different.. One may even resort to destructive tactics to have ideas seen as worthy because of VA's connection to the neurotic dimension of personality, which as explained earlier may limit a student leader due to lack of self control, defensiveness or lack of likability. If these characterizations are not enough, the Enabling leader also shares power and information by putting others in control of their own jobs and lives by providing choice and developing competency among those within the organization, clearly not a strategy consistent with VA's.

The next style, Inspiring (INS), is characterized by the SLPI as imagining ideal scenarios and attracting people to a common purpose. This style stresses the importance of leaders having a vision and the ability to imagine and articulate that vision through relying on intuition. As well as having vision, a leader who engages in the Inspiring style also develops a common purpose with his or her followers. While discovering a common purpose and developing a shared sense of destiny, a leader possessing this style would not likely engage in verbally aggressive tactics. This leadership style stands in contrast to what a leader who was verbally aggressive would do. The last style that demonstrated a negative relationship with verbal aggressiveness was Modeling (M), described as setting

an example through beliefs and values (where actions speak louder than words) as well as unifying the constituents. When reviewing even the most basic definition of verbal aggressiveness, there was nothing within the definition that embraces the characteristics of Modeling.

All in all, none of these findings were a great surprise, yet all were important to the impact of the study for little statistical research had been done in the arena of college student leadership and the coupling of the SLPI with the communication trait of verbal aggressiveness.

Correlations of Leadership Styles and Verbal Argumentativeness

The final hypothesis stated that there would be relationships between VArg (advocating for issues and attacking positions) and the SLPI leadership styles. The findings were different from the construct of verbal aggressiveness in that there were positive relationships found with the Enable, Model and Encourage styles yet there were negative relationships found with Challenge and Inspire.

The leadership style with the greatest level of positive relationship to verbal argumentativeness was exhibited by Modeling, the style that integrated setting an example and doing what one says he or she will do. This may be linked to credibility in leadership which is one of the markings of the outcomes of positive verbal argumentation by supervisors since being verbally argumentative lends greater credibility in leadership roles. According to Kouzes and Posner (1995), leaders must be able to "gain consensus" (p. 213) and they must be able to "articulate the principles for which they stand" (p. 213). Furthermore, leaders who embody the Modeling style must also "sell the benefits" of progress and commitments within an organization (p. 266). These points provide insight

into the link between the style of Modeling and verbal argumentativeness. The college student leader respondents who personified the style of Modeling and were also considered verbally argumentative were still in a congruent position and not an oppositional one. This style seemed to have the greatest effect.

The second leadership style with a positive correlation to verbal argumentativeness was Encouraging. At first glance, the act of encouraging and the act of argumentation would not seem to be a positive relationship. Yet, when one further examines the style explanation, some connections can be attributed. For example, the Encouraging style values critical thinking and rewards those in an organization who examine issues and ideas with a critical eye. This could be a small link to a verbally argumentative communicator for he or she takes pride in creating a critically examined accomplishment as well as deconstructing ideas that others build. So, the followers of an Encouraging verbally argumentative leader may find greater intrinsic value in what they have helped to create, shape and mold. Second, one could argue that, because one of the basic characteristics of the Encouraging style is to "find people who are doing things right" (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 291) and get them to act, a verbally argumentative leader engages his or her persuasive and compliance-gaining attempts involving the use of verbally argumentative behavior or messages.

The final SLPI style that had a positive correlation with verbal argumentativeness was Enable which, at its core, fosters problem-solving partnerships and increases interaction while strengthening people by developing competence. Immediately, through this description, there seems to be a connection to the act of verbal argumentativeness. Part of verbal argumentativeness is the desire to participate in the critical engagement of

important issues and the enabling style provides an "opportunity to create a climate where people are involved" (Kouzes & Posner, 1995, p. 179) in the decision-making and creation of ideas and policies. Further, a leader who engages in the Enabling style generally uses interpersonal competence (which Kouzes and Posner defined as the "ability to communicate and persuade" p. 185) to build more effective and credible co-worker and follower relationships. With such a style, the leader and the follower are willing to be mutually influenced by one another thus increasing influence for all in the organization. Beyond the positive correlations found between verbal argumentativeness and the SLPI styles of Model, Encourage and Enable, the remaining two styles, Challenge and Inspire, had negative correlations.

The negative correlation of VArg with the style of Challenge seems to be a surprise. For one may conclude that the more verbally argumentative a leader is, the more challenging he or she is thus supporting a positive correlation. Some of the leadership strategies used by Challenging leaders include idea gathering, questioning the status quo, working on ideas that seem unpopular and encouraging possibility thinking. Even past research demonstrated a positive relationship of innovativeness and verbal argumentativeness (Nicotera, Smilowitz, & Pearson, 1990). These qualities seem to line up with one who engages in verbal argumentativeness. For example, verbally argumentative communicators want to assert themselves and others through expressing thoughts, beliefs and feelings in an open manner. As described above, a Challenging leader would enact these communication behaviors---yet, the statistical evidence found in this study says otherwise. One possible explanation may be rooted in the *beliefs* that SLs hold about leaders who engage in verbal argumentativeness per the results of open survey

questions addressed later. As a point of clarification, though, SLs in this study had more negative perceptions about those who engage in argumentative behaviors. So, the SLs believed that a leader who engaged in arguing for unpopular ideas and questioning the status quo will be met with resistance for it goes against the norm that has been established within their organizations. Because of these beliefs, the leadership styles may be affected by the negative perceptions of verbal argumentativeness. Interestingly enough, the results of open survey question three revealed that SLs wanted more opportunities to challenge the organization (whether it was the immediate student group or the university as a whole) to grow and develop ideas for the greater student body. These ideas will be addressed later.

Finally, the style of Inspire was the other component of the SLPI that was evaluated to have a negative relationship with verbal argumentativeness. According to the characterizations of the style of Inspire, such leaders envision an uplifting and ennobling future for the organization as well as enlist others in common vision by appealing to their values and interests. Of that description, only half seems to fit the depiction of what a verbally argumentative communicator does. Uplifting someone, verbally, does not seem to fit the content of the verbal argumentative's messages. Yet this type of leader may promote the exchange of ideas by encouraging members to argue issues, hence linking to the idea that Inspired leaders appeal to the values and interests of the followers. This may be an explanation for the Inspired style's weak, negative relationship with verbal argumentativeness, as it only correlated in a small way to the description of the leadership style.

SLPI Styles and Verbal Argumentativeness

Overall, the correlations of the styles to verbal argumentativeness seemed, at first, to be curious for characterizations of the words encouraging and enabling do not seem to correspond with what the general public may associate with one who is deemed argumentative. Beyond first reactions, though, most of the correlations of the leadership styles to verbal argumentativeness are logically firm. As discussed in previous paragraphs, Modeling, Encouraging, and Enabling styles had a sensible relationship to this study's conceptualization of argumentativeness. Interestingly, Modeling did have the greatest strength of positive significance and this may be attributed to the attributions of strong leadership via strong communication behaviors. As reported in the literature, subordinates and co-workers of those in roles of leadership find that verbally argumentative behavior in supervisors is a positive concept as it impacts decision-making, leadership, improved problem solving and favorable communication outcomes (Infante, 1989). In this situation, college student leaders demonstrated the same finding—yet, as demonstrated in the research question responses, they were not sure of how argumentative they could be and were aware of the social and personal ramifications of this communication behavior. This finding may provide a future research opportunity in that Modeling, as a leadership style, could be studied in depth.

Of the correlations, Challenging's negative correlation was the oddest for the characteristics of a Challenging leader seem to mirror the basic precepts of verbal argumentativeness as defined by Infante (1981) and this negative relationship in this case may have been rooted in certain beliefs that SLs hold about verbal argumentativeness and leadership. Given the varying degrees of correlations to verbal argumentativeness, there

is still an appropriate "fit" for the styles of measuring leadership. Many of the behaviors that are characteristic of student leaders can include communication behaviors such as verbal argumentativeness. This type of communication behavior is embedded, however great or small, within the overall style of leaders as demonstrated in the findings as evidenced in the levels of verbal argumentativeness found in the results of all of the student leader participants.

After evaluating and discussing the results of the four hypotheses proposed in this study, now attention turns to the qualitative portion of the study. Responses were provided to three open-ended survey questions that were answered only by the student leaders. The questions addressed each student leader's perceptions about three elements: (1) others who engaged in verbally aggressive communication behavior; (2) others who engaged in verbally argumentative communication behavior and, (3) those constraints that student leaders felt that kept them from advocating for issues that were important to them and their organizations.

Impressions of Verbal Aggressiveness

The first open question asked participants to describe their impressions of those who engaged in communication behaviors characterized by verbal aggressiveness. Words and phrases used by student leaders supported previous research (Infante, 1989) showing that destructive consequences of verbal aggressiveness include relationship deterioration and interpersonal distrust. Fellow members and followers in an organization develop loyalty and commitment when they are inspired to feel good about themselves. Low verbal aggressives affirm others' self concepts through "relaxed" and "friendly" behavior (Infante & Rancer, 1996, p. 338).

Of all of the responses provided, the greatest percentage fell into the category of *internal issues,* including deficits in personality and character, demonstrating support of attribution theory (Hieder, 1985) which states that people make inferences about the causes of their own and others' behavior. Others' bad behaviors are due to personal characteristics while our own are due to situation and circumstances. These responses represented *almost half* of the 313 responses provided. Of all of them, none described a verbally aggressive communicator in a positive way or in a way that would provide a constructive outcome for the individual leader or the organization that he or she was representing. This suggests that the common perception of a verbally aggressive communicator is that the person is internally flawed and, in some ways, such communicators cannot change their strategies or "that is just the way they are." Interestingly, though, the SL's level of verbal aggressiveness was in the moderate range (M=46.40) so this may demonstrate that student leaders are aware that verbally aggressive communication is destructive but are not aware of their personal tendencies. All in all, though, the average reported mean for the VAS was 49.10 (Infante & Wigley, 1986), so SLs actually ranked themselves just below the reported overall mean for the established scale. Of course, social desirability may play a factor in the survey responses (as self-report) but when asked to reflect on the behavior of another, respondents cast a more critical eye in judging or evaluating the action or behavior. SLs did as past research suggested assert that verbal aggressiveness provides *destructive outcomes.* Thirty-six percent (f=112) suggested trouble for an organization if the verbally aggressive person is the leader. Participants described negative, external consequences for the organizational outcomes as well as barriers to success or to goal attainment. The remaining large

category was *personal deficits* (*f*=41) that reflected issues with one's intelligence or skill

set. The impressions may convey that a person practicing this type of behavior is not

qualified to hold a position of leadership due to the inhibitive nature and the social

disapproval of an undesirable form of communication (Rancer & Avtgis, 2006).

Evidently, this corroborates past research on verbal aggressiveness and its destructive

nature toward relationships, productivity, and the ability to be seen in a positive light by

others.

Impressions of Verbal Argumentativeness

The second open-ended question asked participants to describe their impressions

of those who engaged in communication behaviors characterized by verbal

argumentativeness. According to the results, *internal issues* led the way in reported

responses at 46% of the 285 items concerned with comments about personality and

character; yet, a difference did emerge from perceptions of verbal aggressives, in that

participants included some positive attributions to verbal argumentativeness based on

beliefs, dedication to the organization, ambition and personal success The paradox here

is that SLs know that verbal argumentativeness is a constructive behavior but are not

always prepared to enact that behavior in the workplace with supervisors and in the

instructional context. For example, in the workplace, supervisors are perceived as higher

in argumentativeness (and lower in verbal aggressiveness), the greater the subordinate

satisfaction (Infante & Gorden, 1985). Also, Infante, Anderson, Martin, Herington, and

Kim (1993) found that verbal argumentativeness positively impacts the quality of work-

life as perceived by subordinates and supervisors alike. In the instructional context,

classroom instructors seen as higher in argumentativeness are also seen as more

competent and credible, promoting higher levels of student affective learning, and stimulating greater positive affect toward both course and teacher (Rancer & Avtgis, 2006). These examples of workplace context and instruction context shed some light on the concept that verbally argumentative behavior is generally viewed as constructive and necessary for leadership. Yet, student leaders demonstrated the paradox of the outcomes of verbally argumentative behavior in their situations.

One unexpected occurrence also did emerge in that, although the student leader participants did acknowledge, through their open-ended answers, the destructive nature of verbal aggression, some indeed resorted to such a strategy when describing their impressions of verbal argumentatives using name-calling strategies exemplified through words like "childish," "a jerk," and "loud-mouth/know-it-all." Although this appears that participants were describing verbal aggressives, a possible explanation for this may be explained by the earlier reference to Rancer (1995) who argued that sometimes people are drawn into negative strategies after extended efforts at positive or constructive communication behaviors.

Only 33% of the responses were deemed to involve *external issues* that included organizational issues or barriers that would prevent the organization from being effective or important on campus. Much like the internal category, some answers did have a positive tone such as "passionate," "necessary," and "understands what is needed to get the job done at this school." Finally, there were *personal deficits* that participants cited as their perceptions of verbal argumentatives that mainly focused on intelligence and skill. In repetition of the previous two categories, there were some positive responses such as "guarded but logical,"or "not a leader if they don't stand up for what they believe in."

Some of these beliefs that student leaders hold about verbally argumentative behaviors mirror the categories of beliefs about arguing found earlier in research that tried to explore and identify the underlying beliefs that individuals hold about argumentative communication. Rancer, Baukus, and Infante (1985) concluded that there were seven categories of beliefs about the purposes and effects of arguing: hostility, activity/process, control/dominance, self-image, learning, skill, and subjective evaluation (p. 40). These beliefs were found to distinguish individuals who vary in argumentativeness. Understanding these beliefs about arguing is significant because through gaining an awareness of said beliefs may help individuals function more effectively in leadership positions. The categories in this study are based on a similar concept of understanding the perceptions of why people choose actions like verbal argumentativeness as well as the consequences of those actions in relation to personal relationships, organizational issues and administrative functions. Furthermore, in this study, some of the seven categories mentioned above are mirrored in the qualitative results: control/dominance (internal and external), self-image (internal), learning (external), and skill (personal deficit). The relationships of each of these categories should be examined further. The implications here reflect back to the components of the theory of reasoned action in that this study's categories are rooted in what motivates people to engage or not to engage in verbally argumentative behavior because of the attitude toward the act and the normative components (peers, organization, and administrators).

In the first set of beliefs, control/dominance underscores an idea that one wishes to establish, enforce, and maintain power. Within the context of this study, this relationship is best expressed through the internal and external categories of belief about

verbal argumentatives. Internal was described by respondents as "strong-willed", "ambitious", "dedicated", and "firm." External parallels can be drawn to control/dominance as expressed by respondents with "destructive power," "only wants their ideas heard," and "too much power." Both sets of descriptions, both internal and external categories, can be comparable to the control/dominance belief structure. Next, self-image can correspond to the internal category of verbal argumentative beliefs. Self-image focuses on how argumentative behavior overtly impacts self, in this case, the college student leaders. SLs used phrases such as "people will dislike me if I argue," and "I am not confident in myself when I argue," "isolating," and "lonely person." The third set of composite beliefs about arguments is learning which is explained as one's need to gather information about others and self. There is some congruence between learning and the external category of this study because respondents claimed that a leader "would understand what needs to be done here," "based on information," "logical support," and, if acting negatively, would not "be open-minded when talking to others." Finally, the composite belief about skills resembles the verbal argumentative category found here of personal deficit. Skill is indicative of verbal and rhetorical proficiency. SLs described personal deficit issues as "lacks skill," "blind communicator," "not enough facts," "inappropriate," and "ill-equipped to deal with the task." Yet, in the positive realm, they described the skills of verbal argumentativeness as "sharp," "passionate about topic," and "smart."

Student leaders seemed to walk in uncomfortable territory when they engage in verbally argumentative behaviors. If they perceive a person who enacts verbally argumentative behaviors as one who presents internal and external problems for the

organization, this may be too costly for their futures with peers and administrators. Also, if a VArg leader demonstrates low personal skill and intelligence deficits, then they may be less likely to engage in the behaviors regardless of what they may think is best for the group they represent or that which is deemed necessary for the organization to succeed. For example, if a student ambassador believes that a program offered by the college or university does not truly engage all types of students and he or she asks for a change in program or requests an explanation of why it exists, he or she may not personally perceive himself or herself equipped with the skill set that compares with the likes of a Dean or program director. To shed further light on this uncertain position, question three asked student leaders to describe what they perceive constrained them from advocating positions within or outside of their organizations.

Perceived Student Leader Constraints

The final question asked participants to describe their perceptions of constraints that student leaders may face when trying to advocate for issues related to their organizations. Considering Baldridge, Curtis, Ecker, & Riley (1978) posited that student leaders must work to achieve access, recognition, and efficacy in matters of policy and governance, this question provided a unique opportunity to gauge students' perceptions based on their real personal experiences. The belief systems that some student leaders have about argumentative behavior were reflected in the answers provided by the participants. For example, many responses were dependent upon others' evaluations of them as people and not as leaders as to when or whether they would engage in verbal argumentation. Concerns about peers (26%), organization (19%) and university (21%) all were embedded in the responses. Student leaders may be concerned that people will

not associate with them or attribute negative ideas to them with the argumentative

behavior. Waggenspack and Hensley (1989) posited that people make decisions about

whether to associate with argumentative or non-argumentative individuals based on

whether the interaction is seen as primarily social, emotional, or negotiator-oriented. The

responses may suggest that concerns about negative attributions by peers may affect

student leaders' personal communication behaviors. For example, in the open responses,

SLs cited things such as "wanting to please others," "not being accepted," "don't want to

offend others," "embarrassed," " discouraged," "peers shoot it down," "pressure to be

popular," "stereotypes," and "what my friends think" as factors constraining their

advocacy. All of these responses include negative attributions or negative concerns about

how these communication behaviors will affect the social and emotional interactions of

the participants. In addition, communicative behaviors for student leaders may change

according to the leadership role of "the opposition" such as administrators, staff

members, or other organizational members who may be in opposition to SLs' ideas or

programs. As reported by respondents, their concerns centered on keeping harmony and

understanding how their ideas need to be considered in the long-term all while

maintaining their "duties" to those they represent. More than likely, the normative

component of societal expectations that helps establish what is appropriate may shed light

on leader perceptions. Beliefs and motivations about arguing may be more socially

driven than individually determined (Rancer & Avtgis, 2006, p. 193). Based on the

evidence provided by the respondents, the concerns of their peers may be more likely to

affect their communication behaviors. One must consider that the organization may

share peer influence as well. This presence of peer influence may raise concern about

negative attributes by peers because within the organization there are situational factors like effects of others' dispositions on the student leader and personal factors like beliefs about arguing. Normative actions influence the choices that are made.

Yet, from a leadership perspective, functionally dealing with others in different or higher levels of influence in the university hierarchy does involve an anticipated norm of acceptable behavior with social (peers), emotional (internal reactions and feelings), and negotiated contributors (hierarchy of the organization or administration of a college or university). So, in total, the participants' concerns about peer perceptions compounded or added to the norms of the campus organizations may create or equal the perceived constraints by SLs.

The theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) holds that individual attitudes toward arguing in a particular way, paired with beliefs about what people who are important to them think about arguing, may determine when and with whom student leaders will present arguments for their organization. The normative component concerns societal (peers, members of their organization, administration) expectations of what is appropriate or inappropriate. Stewart and Roach (1998) even speculated that because high argumentatives (HA) are "more competent communicators" they may be more aware of norms and the pressures that come with acknowledging those norms. When the student leaders who engage in positions of advocacy decide whether to participate in an argument, they may feel pressure to perform in an argumentative situation. Thus, based on the responses provided on the open survey questions, they may skew their preferences away from engaging in that behavior because they may feel that they themselves are ill-equipped, perceive that the organization does not want them to

engage in the behavior, or that they do not have leverage to argue in a situation where university dynamics and hierarchy are involved.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study attempted to gain a better understanding of the influence of verbal aggressiveness and verbal argumentativeness traits on perceptions of college student leaders. An issue encountered while administering the surveys was the feedback given by the participants after the surveys were completed implicating the wording of some of the statements on the Verbal Argumentative Survey. Some student leaders expressed issues with the word "argument." Perhaps the integrity of the instrument would have been enhanced had the word "argument" been changed to wording that would have made the SLs more comfortable and more clearly understanding the nature of the concept. Yet, the directions on the survey directed participants to consider an argument as an advocating behavior. Also, past research cited argument topic, choice of adversary, and context as also playing a role in criticisms of the VArgS (Rancer & Avtgis, 2006). One possible method could be the use of examples of what advocacy or refutational behaviors are or the use of the Beliefs about Arguing Measure (Rancer, Kosberg, & Baukus, 1992). The BAM scale provides a measure for peoples' beliefs about arguing as predictors of trait argumenativeness. This BAM scale is different from the VArgS because the BAM establishes one's level of *beliefs about arguing* whereas the VArgS establish the *level of argumentativeness* one has. These may provide other avenues for exploration instead of just stopping with establishing the Verbal Argumentativeness level of a student leader. Obviously, this study did not provide for those elements to be considered when evaluating the level of verbal argumentativeness of student leaders.

Some future directions in the study of the enactment of communication strategies or behaviors by young leaders may entail, 1) most importantly, studies based on communication behaviors of leaders beyond style; 2) a qualitative examination of decision-making sessions that would provide insight into the perceptions and realities of barriers faced by up-and-coming leaders during their academic and personal growth in their college careers; 3) a study that would allow a possible look at how the culture of the organizations affect student leaders' enactment of communication behaviors.

All of these future directions have a markedly different approach from the current study because one exciting component that stemmed from this research was the benefit of ability to examine the wording of perceptions that student leaders express beyond a self-report or pencil-and-paper view of their experiences. Future research should be conducted in field studies designed to occur in real-life situations in an attempt to discover important variables and their interrelationships of attitudes, values, perceptions, and behaviors in the situations. On a grander scale, research should attempt to submerge itself into a cycle of work of a group of student leaders, possibly following an entire academic year of interaction between student leaders and the organizations for whom they work. This may provide links to those insights that were provided by the open survey question responses provided by the participants in this study. By doing so, this may provide additional support for a current initiative in the study of leadership called "full-range leadership theory" designed to consolidate research on transformational and charismatic leadership theories and research with empirical findings on leadership behaviors (Antonakis & House, 2002). Further, this may provide opportunity for interdisciplinary work.

In sum, college student leaders are related to verbal aggressiveness and verbal argumentativeness in three general ways: (1) they demonstrate support for the interactionist perspective through both trait and situational factors. Just as Infante (1987) argued, the theory of argumentativeness including both trait and situational factors could more accurately predict how motivated people will be to argue in a given situation; and (2) they have demonstrated an understanding of the constructive and destructive nature of verbal argumentativeness and verbal aggressiveness; and (3) the five practices of leadership identified by Kouzes and Posner (1987) are specific and behaviorally focused which recognizes that leadership involves some sort of personal characteristic or trait relating to transforming others through many behaviors including one's communication behaviors.

A necessary understanding of verbal aggressiveness and argumentativeness started over two decades ago through the research of Infante and his collegues. College campuses are ripe with communicators and leaders who are experiencing many important life lessons and are learning about their personal beliefs, attitudes and positions on many types of issues in many different arenas. All the while, students are also experiencing what Rancer and Avtgis (2006) deemed the "blurring of distinctions between argument and verbal aggression" (p. 253). Because of this, and many other ideas, they provide an interesting look at how communication behavior and leadership styles are related. This study showed that college student leaders do understand and can articulate the destructive nature of verbal aggressiveness yet struggle with the biases or beliefs that come along with enacting verbally argumentative behavior, all the while understanding that it *should*

be an accepted form of communication in leadership when advocating for beliefs or issues that are important to them or their organizations.

In conclusion, after seeking out and analyzing the research on verbal aggressiveness, verbal argumentativeness, and leadership theory, specifically looking at college student leadership, it is obvious that there is a gap in the research pertaining to this population. Colleges and universities play a vital role in the development of future leaders (Posner & Brodsky, 1992, p. 237). If society expects leaders to be strong in communicative and leadership characteristics as they graduate in great numbers from university campuses into the business, military, health care, and educational arenas, we should analyze them in the organizations where their communication and leadership skills are being implemented and sharpened. Consistently, this population is used in research projects to assist in the generalizability of research hypotheses yet they are not explored as having a contribution to understanding the *development* of communication behaviors.

While in this environment, student leaders may have more opportunities to use or develop their argumentativeness as an asset in accomplishing important responsibilities and duties on campuses. Student leaders, by nature of their responsibilities, are called upon to advocate positions as compared to non-student leaders. It is a "job" for them that they are expected to perform.

APPENDIX A

HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW FORM   Protocol # 28022506
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI   (office use only)
(SUBMIT THIS FORM IN DUPLICATE)

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College/Division _Arts and Letters_   Dept _Speech Communication_

Department Box # _5131_   Phone _6-4271_

Proposed Project Dates: From _March 1, 2008_   To _October 31, 2008_
(specific month, day and year of the beginning and ending dates of full project, not just data collection)

Title _The Influence of Verbal Aggressiveness and Verbal Argumentativeness on College Student Leadership_

Funding Agencies or Research Sponsors _none_

Grant Number (when applicable) _____

_____ New Project

___X___ Dissertation or Thesis

_____ Renewal or Continuation: Protocol # _____

_____ Change in Previously Approved Project: Protocol # _____

Jane A. Mattina   2/20/08
Principal Investigator   Date

John C. Meyer   2/21/2008
Advisor   Date

Charles H. Tardy   2/22/08
Department Chair   Date

RECOMMENDATION OF HSPRC MEMBER

_✓_ Category I, Exempt under Subpart A, Section 46.101 (b) (2), 45CFR46.

_____ Category II, Expedited Review, Subpart A, Section 46.110 and Subparagraph (   ).

_____ Category III, Full Committee Review.

                                                    3-17-08
HSPRC College/Division Member   DATE

Lawrence A. Hosman   3-26-08
HSPRC Chair   DATE

APPENDIX B

THE VERBAL AGGRESSIVENESS SCALE

Instructions: This survey is concerned with how we try to get people to comply with our wishes. Indicate how often each statement is true for you personally by placing the appropriate number in the blank to the left of the statement. Use the following scale:

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

____1. I am extremely careful to avoid attacking individuals' intelligence when I attack their ideas.

____2. When individuals are very stubborn, I use insults to soften their stubbornness.

____3. I try very hard to avoid having other people feel bad about themselves when I try to influence them.

____4. When people refuse to do a task I know is important, without good reason, I tellthem they are unreasonable.

____5. When others do things I regard as stupid, I try to be extremely gentle with them.

____6. If individuals I am trying to influence really deserve it, I attack their character.

____7. When people behave in ways that are in very poor taste, I insult them in order to shock them into proper behavior.

____8. I try to make people feel good about themselves even when their ideas are stupid.

____9. When people simply will not budge on a matter of importance, I lose my temper and say rather strong things to them.

____10. When people criticize my shortcomings, I take it in good humor and do not try to get back at them.

____11. When individuals insult me, I get a lot of pleasure out of really telling them off.

____12. When I dislike individuals greatly, I try not to show it in what I say or how I say it.

____13. I like poking fun at people who do things which are very stupid in order to stimulate their intelligence.

____14. When I attack a person's ideas, I try not to damage their self-concepts.

____15. When I try to influence people, I make a great effort not to offend them.

____16. When people do things which are mean or cruel, I attack their character in order to help correct their behavior.

____17. I refuse to participate in arguments when they involve personal attacks.

____18. When nothing seems to work in trying to influence others, I yell and scream in order to get some movement from them.

____19. When I am able to refute others' positions, I try to make them feel defensive in order to weaken their positions.

____20. When an argument shifts to personal attacks, I try very hard to change the subject.

Infante, D., & Wigley, C. (1986). Verbal aggressiveness: An interpersonal model and measure. *Communication Monographs, 53,* 61-69. Copyright 1986, Taylor & Francis.

APPENDIX C

THE VERBAL ARGUMENTATIVENESS SCALE

Instructions: This questionnaire contains statements about arguing controversial issues. Indicate how often each statement is true for you personally by placing the appropriate number in the blank to the left of the statement. Use the following scale:

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

____1. While in an argument, I worry that the person I am arguing with will form a negative impression of me.

____2. Arguing over controversial issues improves my intelligence.

____3. I enjoy avoiding arguments.

____4. I am energetic and enthusiastic when I argue.

____5. Once I finish an argument I promise myself that I will not get into another.

____6. Arguing with a person creates more problems for me than it solves.

____7. I have a pleasant, good feeling when I win a point in an argument.

____8. When I finish arguing with someone I feel nervous and upset.

____9. I enjoy a good argument over a controversial issue.

____10. I get an unpleasant feeling when I realize I am about to get into an argument.

____11. I enjoy defending my point of view on an issue.

____12. I am happy when I keep an argument from happening.

____13. I do not like to miss the opportunity to argue a controversial issue.

____14. I prefer being with people who rarely disagree with me.

____15. I consider an argument an exciting intellectual challenge.

____16. I find myself unable to think of effective points during an argument.

____17. I feel refreshed and satisfied after an argument on a controversial issue.

____18. I have the ability to do well in an argument.

____19. I try to avoid getting into arguments.

____20. I feel excitement when I expect that a conversation I am in is leading to an argument.

APPENDIX D

Communication Perception Questionnaire

Instructions: Respond to this question honestly and openly. Explain your answer based on your general opinions about your experiences.

QUESTION #1

If a person uses communication behaviors to dominate or perhaps defeat another person by using damaging strategies highlighting personal failings, relational failings, or his/her participation in a group, *how would you perceive that person* who engages in this style of communication behavior?

Instructions: Respond to this question honestly and openly. Explain your answer based on your general opinions about your experiences.

QUESTION #2

If someone tends to advocate positions on important issues and to attack, verbally, positions with which he or she disagrees, *how would you perceive that person* who engages in this style of communication behavior?

Instructions: Respond to this question honestly and openly. Explain your answer based on your general opinions about your experiences *with this organization.*

QUESTION #3

What constraints do student leaders perceive about their enactment of advocating positions or arguing about important issues concerning organizations they represent?

APPENDIX E

STUDENT LEADERSHIP PRACTICES INVENTORY – SELF

How frequently do you *typically* engage in the following behaviors and actions?
Circle the number to the right of each statement, using the scale below, that best applies.

1	2	3	4	5
RARELY OR SELDOM	ONCE IN A WHILE	SOMETIMES	VERY OFTEN	FREQUENTLY

	1	2	3	4	5
1. I set a personal example of what I expect from other people.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I look ahead and communicate about what I believe will affect us in the future.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I look around for ways to develop and challenge my skills and abilities.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I foster cooperative rather than competitive relationships among people I work with.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I praise people for a job well done.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I spend time and energy making sure that people in our organization adhere to the principles and standards we have agreed upon.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I describe to others in our organization what we should be capable of accomplishing.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I look for ways that others can try out new ideas and methods.	1	2	3	4	5
9. I actively listen to diverse points of view.	1	2	3	4	5
10. I encourage others as they work on activities and programs in our organization.	1	2	3	4	5
11. I follow through on the promises and commitments I make in this organization.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I talk with others about sharing a vision of how much better the organization could be in the future.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I keep current on events and activities that might affect our organization.	1	2	3	4	5
14. I treat others with dignity and respect.	1	2	3	4	5
15. I give people in our organization support and express appreciation for their contributions.	1	2	3	4	5

1	2	3	4	5
RARELY OR SELDOM	ONCE IN A WHILE	SOMETIMES	VERY OFTEN	FREQUENTLY

16. I find ways to get feedback about how my actions affect other people's performance.   1 2 3 4 5

17. I talk with others about how their own interests can be met by working toward a common goal.   1 2 3 4 5

18. When things do not go as we expected, I ask, "What can we learn from this experience?"   1 2 3 4 5

19. I support the decisions that other people in our organization make on their own.   1 2 3 4 5

20. I make it a point to publicly recognize people who show commitment to our values.   1 2 3 4 5

21. I build consensus on an agreed-upon set of values for our organization.   1 2 3 4 5

22. I am upbeat and positive when talking about what our organization aspires to accomplish.   1 2 3 4 5

23. I make sure that we set goals and make specific plans for the projects we undertake.   1 2 3 4 5

24. I give others a great deal of freedom and choice in deciding how to do their work.   1 2 3 4 5

25. I find ways for us to celebrate accomplishments.   1 2 3 4 5

26. I talk about the values and principles that guide my actions.   1 2 3 4 5

27. I speak with conviction about the higher purpose and meaning of what we are doing.   1 2 3 4 5

28. I take initiative in experimenting with the way we can do things in our organization.   1 2 3 4 5

29. I provide opportunities for others to take on leadership responsibilities.   1 2 3 4 5

30. I make sure that people in our organization are creatively recognized for their contributions.   1 2 3 4 5

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