

Political Discussions and the Media:
How Hostile Media Effects Affect Political Discussions

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the

Interdisciplinary Communication

Program

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

May, 2016

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How Hostile Media Effects Affect Political Discussion

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ABSTRACT

This study looked to expand on previous research on the hostile media effect. Looking at the predictors of perceived hostility and effects of partisanship and perceived hostility to determine the implications for political engagement. Unlike other studies on the hostile media effect, this study was a qualitative one. The methodology provided very interesting results on the perception of bias, political engagement, and also a unique look at the perception of bias by Republican women. The study found that there are specific decisions strong partisans make when deciding whether or not to discuss politics. It was found that identification with a group and anticipating third person effects leads people to engage differently in face-to-face and on social media, and that these differences were evidence of the hostile media effect. Although future research is suggested, this study is a great start to expanding the knowledge of political engagement in a political climate that is perceived to be hostile and biased.

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Introduction

President Obama appeared on *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart in 2015 and discussed the polarizing effects of the media. He discussed how media causes people to seek out information that supports their beliefs. The President went further in stressing that because people were only looking for supporting information, an objective discussion was less likely to occur between people who disagree. The concept the President discussed is just a small part of the predictors and individual variables that lead to perceptual and behavioral effects, such as the hostile media effect (HME). Within months of discussing this on *The Daily Show*, Donald Trump rose to be a presidential frontrunner in the Republican Party. His rise to the top occurred even as he made derogatory comments against many different demographics.

Perception of media bias and hostility toward one's political opinions affects engagement in political discussions. Thus this paper focuses on perceived bias and perceived hostility: antecedents, perceptions, and behavioral effects. When people view news that challenges their opinions they tend to react in ways that do not support critical thinking or sharing ideas (Arceneaux, Johnson, & Murphy, 2012). The problem is that by not discussing the issues that influence so many, or by discussing them in hostile ways, an agreement that is reasonable or logical is less likely to be reached. By studying people's perceptions of bias, hostility, and reactions, this study looks to further the discussion of ways to create positive political discussions in face-to-face and mediated communication.

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The hostile media phenomenon (HMP) was originally studied by Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985). They looked at previous studies, such as Hastorf and Cantril's (1954) study of football that found that people from opposing teams could view the same exact game and each team's fans would view his or her team as having been treated unfairly. Vallone et al.'s (1985) study looked at the perceptions of a more serious issue, the Beirut Massacre carried out by pro-Israeli and pro-Arab citizens. Specifically, the researchers studied people's perceptions of bias in media coverage. People had preconceived opinions and beliefs regarding the incident and found support for their opinions in data that was indecisive and contradictory. When participants saw evidence they became increasingly polarized. The pro-Israeli and pro-Arab participants both saw the same evidence and perceived the evidence that supported their preconceived notions as strong and they viewed information that threatened their beliefs as illegitimate.

Recently, HMP has been referred to as HME. HME explains that people on alternate sides to view the same news, meant to be objective, as hostile towards their respective beliefs. As Arceneaux, Johnson, and Murphy (2012) discuss, the perception of hostility affects people's views, such that they see challenging information as less legitimate, patriotic, and HME reduces people's willingness to objectively and critically think over the information they are exposed to. This study analyzes the communication decisions people make based on the more recent variables applied in research on the HME. These variables include the predictors of perceived hostility, effects of partisanship, and the implications for

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political engagement. Technological advances in communication have changed the way people communicate about things with one another. This study looks at how perception of hostility influences people's communication decisions.

Predictors of Perceived Hostility

There are few interesting things to consider when looking at what causes the perception of hostility, identification with a political party, and perceived public opinion. People base their communication decisions on their existing beliefs. The problem is that their views of the subject are influenced by the media and their own established beliefs. Individuals naturally become loyal to concepts and groups that individuals feel a sense of loyalty or belonging to. This connection is partisanship. Partisanship refers to loyalty to or identification with a group or idea (Arpan & Raney, 2003). The source of the loyalty or identification is less important than the extent of the partisanship itself. People can identify with groups of other people, ideologies, and in many other ways. When people feel that their existing partisan beliefs are being attacked, the reaction is consistent with how strongly they identify. This makes partisanship one of the most significant predictors of the perception of hostility and its consequences.

Strong Partisan Views

Perceptions of hostility occur when some level of partisanship is present (Vallone et al., 1985). Partisanship is the identification or loyalty to a group or ideology. From earlier studies (Hastorf & Cantril, 1954) and modern studies on partisanship (Arpan & Raney, 2003), partisanship even occurs in entertainment. In both of these studies, like many others exploring the effect of partisanship on the

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perception of bias, team loyalty was shown to increase the perception of bias as a result of how passionate the fans were. Identification and bias are linked because people perceive themselves as belonging to a group, whether that be fans of a football team, members of a political party, or members of an ideological group.

Identification with a Political Party

People who identify with political parties tend to develop a sense of belonging and identification with people who agree with their values (Reid, 2012). Reid describes self-categorization as a social reality which “is defined through agreement with people subjectively defined as ingroup members” (p. 382). The sense of being in an ingroup builds partisanship. Self-categorization and ingroup are essentially how individuals develop a shared understanding of their realities by interacting with people. To test self-categorization and partisanship the researcher conducted three tests. The first test was on the influence of partisanship on the perception of bias. To study the effect of partisanship on the perception of bias the researchers used two different questionnaires worded, being obviously pro-American and the other was neutral. As predicted, the stronger, more partisan individuals who participated experienced higher perceptions of hostility.

Hartman and Tanis (2013) also examined ingroup membership and partisanship. The researchers discussed partisanship as one’s investment in an issue. They based their definition of ingroup in social identity theory, which asserts that people develop their perceptions from their social environment. Since the abortion debate is one that many people are deeply passionate about, they

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found that the more passionate people were about it, the more likely they were to perceive bias on the issue of abortion. As group identification increased, so did the perception that there was bias in the coverage. Hartman and Tanis (2013) also looked at the perception of status and the view of the outgroup in relation to the ingroup. Participants who perceived that the outgroup had a higher status saw bias in the experimental article. Hartman and Tanis linked this to how the perception of public opinion being against the group can cause people to perceive bias.

The Beirut Massacre in 1982 was a troubling historical event. People were very passionate and upset about what occurred. Vallone et al. (1985) used this event to study pro-Israeli and pro-Arabian perceptions. In doing so they hoped to expand on their preliminary findings and to find the variable behind the perception of bias. Participants viewed news programming of the massacre and filled out a survey. Findings supported their assumption that participants would see bias against their side. Additional findings suggest that people who are intellectually and emotionally engaged will perceive more bias.

Glenn, Hansen, and Kim (2011) analyzed 34 studies on HME and involvement. Involvement, like partisanship, refers to how interested or active an individual is in an ideology or group. As individuals become more involved, they perceive more bias in things that challenge their beliefs. It is clear that partisanship influences the perception of bias in a variety of ways. The sense of belonging to an ideological group influences the perception of bias in media sources. The stronger people's partisanship, the more they will see bias.

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Public Opinion

Partisanship and one's political ideology also affect people's perceptions of public opinion. People think about public opinions about what they are doing. Public opinion is more accessible thanks to the variety of news sources and mediated communication. Every time someone posts something to his or her Facebook or Twitter, he or she is assessing the potential reaction to it (Hampton, Rainie, Lu, Dwyer, Shin, & Purcell, 2014). Being aware of and monitoring how the media influences public opinion is important.

Gunther, Christen, Liebhart, and Chih-Yun Chia (2001) analyzed the perception of public opinion and how it is influenced by the perception of bias. They used the persuasive press inference theoretical model, which is a three part theoretical model that describes people's tendency to generalize what they see as typical, that media will reach a majority of people, and that people expect the media to influence other people. The authors studied students and faculty perceptions of media, and the public's reaction to it, using coverage on the use of primates for research. The researchers found that people develop perceptions of public opinion using media, and that these perceptions depend on the perceptions of bias. In the context of this paper, users' social media timeline may become the tool for the interpretation of public opinion and therefore lead to perceptions of bias and hostility. The perception of a biased friend or follower may influence a person's perception of public opinion in general.

Not only are people gauging public opinion, but their perceptions of public opinion may be skewed. Christen, Kannaovakun, and Gunther (2002) looked at

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the effects of partisanship on perceptions of public opinion. They found that the perception of bias did not influence individuals' perceptions of a hostile public opinion. This is explained by looking at the projection effect, which occurs when an individual sees his or her opinion as being in the majority while the challenging opinion is believed to be in the minority. They also found that as people became increasingly partisan, their perceptions of the media's influence on public opinion also increased. This study suggests that partisans rely on their personal opinions to gauge the effect of biased media on public opinion. Thus, strong partisanship can lead to perceptions of the media as hostile and perceptions that others are being affected by that media coverage.

Effects of Partisanship and Perceived Hostility

Vallone et al. (1985) stated that you cannot experience HME without partisanship. Gunther et al. (2001) found that people perceive public opinion from different sources of media. These variables work together to help individuals form their perceptions of the political parties and ideologies. These perceptions lead to effects such as assimilation of content, source perceptions, HMP, and third person effects.

Assimilation of Candidates' Messages and Coverages

The tendency for individuals on opposite sides to view the same information as supporting his or her beliefs is referred to as biased assimilation (Richardson, Huddy, Morgan, 2008). Richardson et al. studied the relationship between biased assimilation and HME. What this means is that two people can both see an article on an issue that they identify with, and believe that the article

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supports their beliefs, even though they have conflicting ideologies. Richardson et al. (2008) hypothesized that biased assimilation would cause partisans to perceive their candidate won the debate. This was overwhelmingly supported. The more a participant favored one candidate over another, the more he or she perceived that his or her candidate had won. It shows that regardless of what actually happens, if people favor a candidate or issue they believe in wholeheartedly, they will perceive an outcome in keeping with their existing choice. Biased assimilation is also related to perceiving issue coverage. Reid (2012) looked at biased assimilation in the presidential election and how it affected the perception of reports and writers of news sources. In an experiment, participants viewed an attack on Democrats. When Democrats viewed the article and were told the article was from a Democratic writer, they saw little bias. When they were told the writer was Republican they predictably saw more bias. While Glenn et al. (2011) found that the use of different sources of media such as television, newspaper, and Internet media did not increase the perception of hostility, it is clear that the perception of the sources can influence partisans to see bias in a source differently.

Perception of Source Bias

Source refers to the sender of the message. The sender of the message can refer to someone on social media, a news anchor, or someone in face-to-face communication. Reid (2012) looked at the influence of ingroup members compared to outgroup members on the perception of bias. By studying participant reactions to ingroup sources, the results showed that people saw more favorable

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information from the source that they perceived as being members of the ingroup. Richardson et al. (2008) explored whether HME explained the perception that debate moderators were biased. They found that, like biased assimilation, candidate preference influenced the perception of bias against an individual's party and ideology. Again it sounds dissonant that someone can believe that his or her candidate won a debate that was biased against his or her candidate, but this research shows that it happens in certain situations. The researchers explored whether their findings were due to a perception of others being influenced by the media, but this was found to not be significant. Overall it shows that different sources of a message face similar perceptions of bias from partisans. Yet the seemingly contradictory variables showcase how perceptions influence an individual's values. People tend to assimilate some information and see bias, but they do not always believe that said bias will influence others. When an individual likes the sources, they assimilate the information the source is providing. When that individual does not like the source and the source challenges their ideology, they see it as hostile.

After considering the relationship between the perception of hostility and biased assimilation, it is important to look at the characteristics of news sources. Chia and Cenite (2012) studied debate moderators' characteristics. Characteristics of the source are described as the viewer's perception of the sources intellectual ability or willingness to report the truth. The study occurred in China, where participants took part in surveys. The researchers found the source, preconceived

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opinions, and the participants' involvement were associated with a perception of bias.

Gunther and Liebhart (2006) studied the perception of source and reach on partisans. Previous research reported inconsistent results on studies of how a source influences the perception of bias. The authors wanted to examine this further. The sources studied were journalists and the college students themselves. In essence, this looks at how people view bias and the expertise or intelligence of the message sender. An individual might consider his or her college friend who is currently studying science less credible than a professional. He or she may assume that the college student is less biased. Reach refers to how many people would see a student paper or mass media story. They sought out partisan recipients to determine the differences. Researchers found that bias was seen in both source and reach. Though there was a significant difference depending on which source and what its reach was. When the source was a student or the reach only extended to a classroom or school, it was seen as less biased. When the source was a journalist or the reach extended to society as whole, as expected, partisans on both sides saw the article as biased against them.

Arpan and Raney (2003) studied the influence of fanship and perceptions of the source in sports. In their study, the source of the information generally did not influence the overall perception of bias. There is clearly a difference between sports fanship and political partisanship as the differences in these studies show. This would suggest that different kinds of partisanship influence perceptual effects differently. Whether it is sports broadcasting or national news, some might

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argue that in a perfect world the media should be responsible for presenting information fairly and objectively. Currently there are programs that represent a point of view rather than reporting on issues. Even those less interested in politics may be familiar with names such as Jon Stewart and Bill O'Reilly. Both Jon Stewart and Bill O'Reilly regularly make declarations of their personal opinion. Feldman (2011) defines opinionated news as "the explicit expression of political views" (p. 408). Feldman looked at the influence of opinionated news on partisans. To study the effects of partisanship on the perception of hostility, the author studied those for and against the War in Iraq and how partisanship influenced the perception of both story and host bias. The findings showed that there was more bias seen in opinionated news and hosts than in non-opinionated news. Partisanship influenced people's opinion of both the host and the news, which depended on how strongly they supported the argument from the host on that subject. There was a significant difference between the political parties noted by the author. The perception of hostile media was found to be more intense in Republicans than Democrats. These interesting findings support that host, source, and partisanship result in different outcomes in terms of the perception of bias and hostility.

In some cases an individual might view a source as being influenced by the government. This perception is often associated with the perception of bias, regardless of whether the source is actually being manipulated by the government. Chia, Shing Yew Joel, Wong, and Wei Ling (2007) studied the effect of a regulated press system on the perception of bias. Unlike the perception of the

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government manipulation, a regulated press system is understood as being controlled by the government. The researchers refer to this inclination to support the government as slant. The research was done to see how the perception of government-controlled media influenced the perception of hostility. The researchers studied a gambling measure in Singapore to test their theory. Participants were either for the gambling measure or against it. As predicted, the researchers found that the perception of bias was linked to the perception of government influence and identification with an issue. Even though the government had a clear position on the issue, and people perceived that the government was influencing the media, both sides of the argument still saw bias against their positions.

Avoidance and Selective Exposure

Arceneaux et al. (2012) subjected participants to both counter-attitudinal and pro-attitudinal news programs. They discussed how counter-attitudinal information is linked to oppositional media hostility. Oppositional media hostility is the avoidance of media sources that do not support the opinion of the viewer. The researchers wanted to study the effect of selective exposure on creating media hostility. They found that the ability to change the channel was related to different reactions based on how politically disengaged an individual was.

Potentially the most dangerous effect of the perception of hostility is its impact on polarization. Arceneaux, et al. (2012) examined selective exposures influence on HME. The potential danger is that people tune in to only programs that support their opinions. This partisan based affiliation is becoming more

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prevalent in programs such as MSNBC and Fox News. These programs are linked to political parties and their ideologies. The research cites several examples where political sources are seen bashing the other side's point of view. The danger is that people who choose a source that supports their opinion, and ignore those that challenge it, are in danger of having a narrow-minded view of the subject and therefore are less likely to form an objective opinion.

Anticipating Third Person Effects

Opinion news was discussed earlier as news that represented an ideology. In recent years people like Jon Stewart and Steven Colbert thrived on Comedy Central. They frequently discussed politics in a humorous way. Becker, Xenos, and Waisanen (2010) looked at the influence of comedy on public opinion and third person effect (TPE) using *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart. TPE is the tendency for individuals to perceive that certain media affect other people differently than they do the individual himself or herself. Studying partisanship, HME, and TPE the authors found that humor did influence the perception of public opinion. They found that Democrats viewed humorous programs as being less effective. Republicans also found that it was less acceptable to be influenced by humor in the media. Considering that they use humor in political discussion it might be surprising to learn that a study by Cassino, Woolley, and Jenkins (2012) found that Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert had the most informed viewers compared to the least informed viewers who watched Fox News. People generally perceive that humorous and opinioned news sources have little effect on others, but the research suggests otherwise.

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The core of public opinion and TPE is the perception that others are being influenced by a message while one sees his or herself as being unaffected. Ran, Chia, and Ven-Hwei (2011) studied the relationship between HME, TPE, and identification with groups. This identification or the feeling of belonging was discussed earlier as partisanship. Ran et al. (2011) examined group identification as social distance. Social distance refers to the perception an individual has of the people in society. Individuals they identify with are considered to be in an in-group. As he or she identifies less with others, they become an out-group. In studying the 2008 American Presidential Election, the researchers supported previous work finding that people tend to view themselves as less affected by media sources. Perception of influence also increased as people perceived others as outgroup members. The final variable the authors studied was behavioral intention. These are behaviors people tend to enact when they perceive bias and its influence on others. They discussed these as the intention to restrict, correct, or amplify messages as a result of the perception of bias. What the authors found points to a very troubling decision by people who perceive bias: the more people believe that a media source is influencing others negatively, the more they agree that they would be willing to restrict voting access to those people who disagree with them.

The predictors of perceived hostility, effects of partisanship and perceived hostility, and the anticipation of third person effects interact to lead people to analyze their environment and choose how to act. People who identify with political parties and ideologies are influenced by their perception of themselves,

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their group, and others. These perceptions create an encompassing view of the world. Depending on the situation, strong partisanship and the perception of hostility cause people to become hostile to alternative ideas and information. What exactly though does this mean when it comes to people conversing with one another about political subjects?

Implications for Political Engagement

Feelings

Some of the articles briefly touched on how individuals act after perceiving hostility or bias in the media. The last of the responses to perceived bias that were discussed above were the decision to restrict access to elections (Ran et al., 2011). Actions such as the decision to search for information, program viewing, and whether or not to engage in political conversation are other examples of how the perception of biased and hostile media influences people's political communication. I refer to political engagement as the actions people take to express their beliefs whether that is online or in face-to-face communication.

Arpan and Nabi (2011) looked at the influence of emotions on political engagement. The authors wanted to see how anger influenced information searching. Participants viewed news that challenged, supported, or was neutral on a subject and rated their emotional responses. It was predicted that anger would result in individuals wanting to seek out only information that supported their existing beliefs. In analyzing the results they found that anger resulting from supporting and challenging sources lead to searches for both ideology supporting and challenging information. Interestingly though, those who reported higher

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anger in the neutral source did not wish to search for any news at all. They also looked at the mediator, or the host, reporter, or author of the story. They found that anger increases the perception of bias for the mediator. There is clearly a link between perceptions of bias in the media, feelings of anger, and the online content people seek out or avoid.

Participation

Carlisle and Patton (2013) studied the differences between offline and online political engagement. Political participation is usually tied to a sense of belonging to a group. They compare the offline party affiliation and activity to an individual's social media network size. Network size is one's number of Facebook friends. Looking at Facebook and the 2008 presidential election, they explored the traditional predictors of political involvement. Network size and traditional factors of income, race, and gender were not significant in determining how involved participants were on social media in the election. Offline involvement and affiliation were associated with online involvement and engagement, as was the relevance or timing of events. The primary election saw an increase in engagement and, as the election came closer, involvement increased. Thus, online and face-to-face political engagement should be connected and influenced by the political environment.

Self-Representation

Storsul (2014) looked at how and why teens become politically engaged. In the 2008 election, the use of social media by younger citizens was immensely important to President Barack Obama's election. In the same way, the author

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explained that political engagement was supported by Facebook in Norway. The author discussed political engagement as Democratic deliberation. Democratic deliberation is the goal of having useful political discussions. By studying the youth activity in Norway, the author found that political engagement came down to self-representation. Self-representation refers to the conscious planning of a public image. Self-representation was found to be the driving factor in participants not wanting to be politically engaged. The author discusses how this tendency to avoid commenting and engaging with others makes people stick to segregated audiences. This is troubling, but expected with HME, because people close themselves off to objective or possibly dissonant discussions regarding politics in an effort to preserve their self-representation.

Social Media Use, Similar Others, and Voicing One's Opinion

Similarly Gil de Zúñiga (2012) studied social media networks and their influence on political engagement. They studied social capital as the resources tied to social media: the ability to message, create groups, and affiliate with others. In studying the participants' view of their social capital, the author found that the timeline is a different way to gather and analyze a variety of information. Viewing social media feeds and searching for other information correlated with both offline and online political engagement. Svensson (2014) discussed how social media is becoming a space for people to explore and express their ideological beliefs in an effort to find themselves and engage with others. The finding that social media has changed the way people communicate is not a groundbreaking discovery. As social media adapts and people will adapt to new

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ways of receiving information, and if the social media feed is where people are getting that information it must be studied more.

Kim (2011) studied 34 studies on the perception of hostility and the research allowed for a more thorough understanding of the relationship between HME variables, for that reason this paper will look to use a qualitative approach. Researchers must analyze the potential differences between mediated and face-to-face communication, how the perception of hostility affect people's communication decisions, and if the predictors of perceived hostility and the effects of perceived hostility affect the decisions people make in political discussions.

RQ1A: Why do people engage in political conversations in face-to-face versus online contexts like social media?

RQ1B: Do people make decisions to engage differently in face-to-face communication versus mediated contexts based on perceived opinion climate and identification with a group or topic?

RQ2: Is there evidence of perceived hostility, strong partisanship, or third person perceptions in their reasoning?

Method

This study used focus groups consisting of members of both political parties. The plan was to get 5 actively involved members of each political party to participate in separate focus groups to analyze how and why they participate in political discussions. The study took place at a university in the United States. Attempts were made to contact the groups representing each political party on

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campus, but those failed. Using Facebook, a convenience sample was used to find participants who strongly self-identified as either a Republican or Democrat. Many of the members also identified that they were working for some of the campaigns or had a very strong candidate preference. College students were used partly for convenience but also because much of the research on political engagement and social media focused on a younger demographic. Before starting the standardized questions, participants were asked if they strongly identified with the party of the focus group they were in. Each focus group received the same standardized questions with probing questions as were needed. A thematic coding analysis was done on transcriptions of both focus groups.

The Republican group consisted of five female students. Some, but not all, of the participants in the Republican group were very familiar with one another. The Democrat group consisted of three students, two female and one male student. The ages of participants ranged from 20-28. In total there were 8 members in both focus groups, but as they reported being strongly partisan it was an accurate study of individuals who strongly identify with a political party and therefore was an appropriate sample to study. As opposed to a quantitative analysis where they are looking to measure specific variables, this qualitative approach allowed for a much more in depth look at the reasons strong partisans have for being involved in political discussions and whether the predictors of perceived hostility and effects of partisanship and perceived hostility lead to different types of political engagement.

Procedure

Focus groups consisting of members of both parties were conducted within a week of one another. All participants self-reported as strongly identifying with either the Republican or Democrat parties. The Republican focus group lasted 55 minutes while the Democrat focus group lasted only 33 minutes. Both groups answered all of the focus group questions in the allotted time. These focus groups were recorded and transcribed (see Appendix A). Thematic coding was then used to look for themes. Specifically, themes that would show evidence of the perception of hostility, perceived bias, and political engagement.

Focus Group Questions

1. How do you feel about engaging people in political discussions in face-to-face discussions?
 - a. Do you feel differently about online discussions?
2. What are some of the reasons you have for participating in political discussions in face-to-face?
 - a. Do you participate differently in political discussions on social media?
 - b. How often do you comment on these posts?
3. What are some of the reasons you have for not participating in political discussions in face-to-face communication?
 - a. What are the reasons you have to not participate in political discussions on social media?

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4. Is there a subject you find yourself particularly commenting on? Why or why not?
5. Is there a subject you would never comment on? Why or why not? Is there a subject you would never comment on? Why or why not?

Arpan and Nabi (2011) discuss how emotions are linked to the perception of hostility. Question 1 and 2 of the focus group helped use those emotions to open participants up to expressing how they feel and therefore their perceptions. Questions 2 and 3 are looking for participants to express their engagement, and to see if that engagement is different for face-to-face and online communication. Work from Carlisle and Patton (2013) provided great insight to the differences in political engagement between face-to-face and mediated communication differences. Self-representation from Storsul (2014) also suggests that there are things individuals do and do not do when discussing politics online to protect their public image. Questions 3 through 5 look to expand on the effects of self-representation during political discussions. All the questions looked to analyze these differences in depth and provide a deeper understanding of the different decisions that are made between the two during political discussions. The open ended questions gave participants the opportunity to voice their reasons for participating in or avoiding political discussions. This provided some very detailed insight into the perception of hostility, perception of public opinion, and political engagement.

Results and Discussion

This study looked to analyze the effects of the perception of hostility on political discussions using a qualitative analysis. RQ1A asked why people engage in political conversations in face-to-face versus online contexts. RQ1B asked about the differences in political discussions in face-to-face and mediated contexts. Republicans and Democrats both explained that there are very specific reasons that they chose whether or not to be involved in political discussions and that engagement was different based on the perception of the people they were engaging with and how they used social media platforms. RQ2 sought to determine whether the perception of hostility and the perception of third person effects were evident in strong partisans, reasoning for engagement. Not only did the focus groups responses show how similar the effects are between members of different political parties, the focus groups showed that the effects are clearly evident with partisans.

RQ1A

In looking at why people choose to get involved in political communication in face-to-face and online contexts there were some clear reasons. As Carlisle and Patton (2013) discussed, there are variables, like the sense of belonging to a group or an upcoming election, that affect an individual's decisions to discuss politics. Republican respondents reported that they simply did not want to engage in face-to-face discussions about politics. Participants from the Republican group stated that this was because they would be "attacked" on campus from both teachers and other students. One student stated "I think a lot of

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times people just tend to avoid it especially being on a public university.

Conservatives for the main part the minority. I feel like I will get attacked.” This feeling of being attacked was reported several times as the reason they would not participate in discussions in both contexts. As discussed in previous research (Hampton et al, 2014) people make decisions based on their perception of bias and public opinion climate.

The group of Democrats was not in agreement as to when they would engage. Two of the participants were only willing to engage if they thought that the person listening was going to listen and be respectful. The third participant in the Democrats group was willing to engage at any time for the sake of being able to negotiate and influence people. Who was being engaged was also a theme for decision making. Family members, friends, and coworkers all elicited different levels of engagement. If participants were close to the individual, knew they would have a respectful discussion, and if the individual agreed with them, they felt more comfortable discussing politics with that individual. For online discussions things were different.

The choice to engage in social media was seen as potentially dangerous in both face-to-face and online contexts. Participants reported avoiding social media. The reason was to avoid making a comment that might inflict damage on an individual’s personal career relate this to the study on self-representation. One individual stated “In my job field I try to avoid it because I do and have heard, not necessarily losing your job but you get attacked often in the work field.” Stating that a screenshot or a search of the persons profiles on social media might prevent

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an individual from getting a job. It is important to note that these perceptions were from the Republican group which did perceive themselves as victims of attacks and abuse in political discussions. In the Democrats focus group the decision to engage in political discussions on online platforms was situational and based on who was making the post. Worrying about political discussions in the workplace was only briefly discussed in the Democratic group and was not unanimous.

Members of the Democrat group relied heavily on the situation when deciding to engage in political communication. Participants in the Democratic group relied heavily on the perception of the individual and how potentially hostile or close-minded they were expected to be. As participant B stated, "If it is someone you're going to be able to have an intelligent conversation with and it won't turn in to a hostile environment, but if it's on a particular issue I don't know about or it's a hostile environment I won't engage." Respondents from this group did limit different social media platforms for different uses and different groups of people. One participant said, "I am not friends [with] somebody that would hold a radically different view than myself." Participants expressed either avoiding or having stipulations on when to engage in discussions, but that did not mean they did not engage in them. The decision to engage in political discussions in face-to-face communication and online are really about who they were talking to, the political perception of that person, how that person perceived them, and the potential consequences of engaging in that discussion. The main difference between the two groups was the potential consequences in engaging in a political discussion with associates or friends and family. These differences support and

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expand on research from Carlisle and Patton (2013) and supports Storsul (2014) claim about self-representation. These participants were concerned about their public image, and their behavior on social media is distinctly different online than in face-to-face communication because of this.

RQ1B

There was an interesting response for why respondents from both the Republican and the Democrat group would engage in political discussions face-to-face. The reason that members of both parties stated that they would choose to engage in a discussion was “when I know I am right and they are wrong.” That quote from the Republican group was repeated during the Democrat focus group when a participant said that they comment when someone says something “that I know is not true or is an opinion that is not well informed, it triggers me” (to engage in the conversation). In face-to-face discussions, participants from the Republican group and Democrat group varied a little, but in general the idea was to assert the “truth” or “facts” when they knew they were right or something that was perceived to be hateful or ignorant was said. This would support research that partisans become more active in certain situations (Storsul, 2014). Both groups mentioned how the opposition usually avoided face-to-face arguments because they were not able to back up their comments. This is a great example of anticipating third person effects. Participants were eager to assume, and generalize about the opposition being able to not support their claims.

Online communication was very similar in that people decided when to comment on discussions based on their perception of the individual who posted it

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and how much they identified with the subject. The general consensus was to avoid engaging in political conversation on social media in general. Both Republicans and Democrats would post things to their profiles, but again avoided replying or commenting on other individual's posts. A participant from the Republican group said, "I don't think it's worth it. The ones on social media are petty. I would rather talk face-to-face. Employers, after that conversation, on social media it's there forever." Participant B from the Democrat group stated they would never comment on a "hateful" post because "You'll never change their mind." Democrats also said they would engage in situations when they knew they were "right." This could be the interpersonal form of selective participation. Selective participation could be the result of people's perceptions of other's opinions and ideology. This is also an example of an outgroup stereotype. Participants also made decisions to engage differently based on how they thought they might be perceived. Republicans reported that they did not want to be seen as "that girl" that posts too much, or is too political, by their friends on social media. The need for the protection of self-image was a reoccurring theme for social media conversations.

There was a clearly expressed avoidance of discussing politics in both groups. For online interactions the potential risk of someone taking a screenshot or manipulating a comment using Photoshop was discussed by both groups. There was a preference to discuss things face-to-face rather than online. The reasons were based in wanting to confront people, or have the opportunity to catch them off guard. As a member of the Republican Party said "I have noticed too that

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when they're having a face-to-face conversation and don't have their facts.”

Members of the Democratic group felt that there was a tendency for people to intentionally post mean things, which cause them to avoid engaging them as previously discussed. This perception of trolling is another example of an outgroup stereotype.

Throughout the focus groups, respondents reported choosing to engage based on whether they believed they were correct, if they could influence the other person, and their self-representation. The actions they take during these conversations must be analyzed more to determine what effect perceptions of hostility and bias have on the decisions people make online. The concept of self-representation from Storsul (2014) and these findings support the idea that individuals have essentially become sources of media in interpersonal relationships. The friends list is used as a tool to interpret public opinion and influence political engagement.

RQ2

RQ2 was completely answered. The perception of hostility, and the effects of partisanship, and perceived hostility were latent in people's responses. In some cases these issues were very clearly expressed. For instance the perception of hostility, partisanship, and public opinion were clearly discussed during the Republican focus group. Participants discussed how it was refreshing to finally be able to voice their opinions with rational individuals compared to how they were attacked by members of the opposing political party. Many times the Republicans stated that liberals were hostile towards them. This was especially true in

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discussions of on women's right issues, such as abortion, where a participant said, "You lose women's rights if you're a women and for this this and this." This participant was referring to receiving hostility during debates on women's rights because they were Republican. Members of the Democrat group reported hostility from people with "hateful" beliefs and avoided those people on social media. It is clear that partisanship and the perception of hostility are linked and implicit in participants' decisions about engaging in political discussions. Arpan and Nabi (2011) discuss how emotions influence political participation, and it is clear that when certain emotions are perceived, political engagement is affected.

Selective exposure was one of the most interesting variables to find. Like the choice to change the channel from an opposing ideological news source (Arceneaux et al, 2012), participants reported controlling the use of social media and even their friend networks to avoid "hateful" ideas. A member of the Democrat group said "I am not friends somebody that would hold a radically different view than myself." Some participants reported acting differently in social situations and treating certain people differently based on their perception of them. Many of the individuals stated that certain social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, are useful for political discussions and others they use for enjoyment. This supports the idea that people become media sources themselves as they post and form groups on their social media platforms and people will avoid them if they are perceived as part of a political group. It also suggests that previous research, such as Svensson (2014), is correct in saying the social media feed is a platform that is being used to gauge public opinion. These

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platforms and whom individuals socialize with are further influenced by how far they perceive others from being in their ingroup.

Ingroup identification is how people view their social environment, both in person and on social media (Reid, 2012). The perception that their political party was “for the most part the minority”, was part of the perception of being victimized and why the members felt attacked (by the opposing party, both professors and students alike). One participant in the Republican group, while stating that she would get attacked by ideologically opposite students on campus for stating their opinion, was interrupted by another participant who stated “she does, I mean we do.” Although the individual was talking about how they felt about communicating, other participants eagerly agreed that they were attacked for their political views. There was a perception that they were victims of severe verbal abuse from the dominant outgroup. The effects of ingroup vs outgroup were further evidence in how participants from the Republican focus group would call out the other party as being differently affected during political discussions while claiming that they were being victimized, generalized, and “attacked.” Immediately after the Republican participants brought up how in situations where they consider themselves a moderate, they reported being attacked and harassed. Specifically, the Republican group reported that on the subject of abortion they were often asked how they could be a Republican and care about women’s rights. Further, although many of the Republican participants were supporting different candidates in the election, they reported that other candidates’ followers from their party were sometimes as disrespectful as those from the opposing party.

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Even though the other candidate the participant was referring to was in the same political party, they were seen as distant from one's own candidate and their supporters were perceived as hostile. This is a great example of different levels of ingroup and outgroup identification. Hartman and Tanis (2013) explained that the farther someone is perceptually from an individual's identified group, the more hostile they are perceived as being.

The perception of others continued as participants described anticipating third person effects. While discussing how they have to be informed and up-to-date, Republican participants expressed that they often see media or posts that state something about one of their candidates. They continued that this would then spread throughout the opposing party without being fact checked. They reported that even when they approached these individuals, the opposing party would ignore the facts of the matter. For Example, one Republican group member stated, "When they're looking up facts on Google (they're Republican), and when they're talking about how they feel and not think, they're liberals." Democrats kept referring to those they would not engage with as being "hostile" or "aggressive." One Democrat stated that they would not discuss something with "when they say something hateful. I think we have all seen in, especially on the other side." The anticipation of third person effect affects both sides as previous research suggests.

As discussed earlier, Democrats discussed how hateful things lead them to avoid engaging conservatives in political discussions. Their perception of the individual who made the post caused them to avoid commenting. This represents

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perception of source bias as discussed by Reid (2012). During the Republican focus group they mentioned a post from the *National Inquirer* and talked sarcastically about how they got it wrong and joked about the source's validity. Republicans later discussed how the *National Inquirer* was used as a valid source in an argument by a Democrat. Republican participants also stated that members of the opposing party develop their ideologies based on feelings and not facts, and continued to discuss how the sources these individuals relied upon were false. In referencing the Republicans the Democrats said that "when they're just posting randomly or won't hear anything you'll say or be hostile" that there is no use in discussing things. Both sides believe that they have the correct "facts" and that the other side is driven by emotions.

The unwillingness to communicate is essentially the root problem with the effects of the perception of hostility. People closing down or simply being completely unwilling to discuss politics. RQ2 was answered thoroughly. Participants who identified with a political party saw hostility against themselves and their political party, anticipated third person effects, and made decisions based on those perceptions when it came to discussing politics.

Limitations and Future Research

It seems that people choose to engage in political discussions on a situational basis. The majority of respondents reported that they try to avoid political discussions in both face-to-face and mediated contexts. On the other hand they also stated that they preferred face-to-face in most situations. The reason was that they could catch the opposition in person not being prepared to

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argue with “facts.” There were also situations where they reported being attacked by others for their political beliefs, but that in the workplace and in the classroom people who hold power over them would attack them. These very interesting relational and power dynamics point to a few areas of potential research on the effects of perceived hostility on communication decisions.

In looking at RQ1B, focus groups may not have been the best way to analyze the differences in communication decisions between face-to-face and online communication. Future research using a qualitative analysis might analyze comment sections or create a situation where people could argue in online focus group. Participants mentioned how people from the opposition would not look at sources or that the sources they did retrieve were inaccurate. Follow up questions should have asked individuals to describe some discussions they engaged in. In analyzing the responses from the questions on these differences, themes did emerge. The use of the word attack by Democrats was used in their decision to engage in social media arguments related to ideological issues that are perceived as hateful. Republicans stated several times that they felt attacked in person and online for voicing their opinions. A qualitative study of political discussions would be very helpful to understand aggressiveness.

These students were members of both political parties and all but one were involved or had been directly involved in the presidential candidate’s 2016 campaigns. The study took place during a hostile political climate with both parties talking about brokered conventions and establishment politics. For instance, even ingroup identification was not absolutely defined. The Republican

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group said they perceived hostility from supporters of other Republican candidates. Hostility was perceived from supporters of other candidates despite that their supporters were from the same party. It is possible that the climate affected responses of participants and created an environment of perceived hostility or victimization.

This study provided a unique look at the perceptions of hostility and the implications of political engagement for female college students in the United States. Since colleges are seen as traditionally liberal places, having five Republican women in a focus group provided a very unique look at the demographic. An interesting area of research resulted from the Republican focus group where they expressed that they did not want to become “that girl” who is overly political or vocal on social media. Members expressed that men do not become “that guy” when they post and are verbal about their beliefs on social media. The group also reported that Democratic women are purposely demeaning toward them because of their beliefs about women’s rights. Participants in the Republican focus group, which were all female, reported that even men from the opposing party harass them on subjects dealing with women’s rights. One Participant stated that she was attacked by a man on campus specifically for her views on women’s rights. The Republican focus group also provided insight into the possibility of being attacked on liberal campuses. All five female participants in the Republican group reported that faculty, other students, and even people in social situations attacked them for being conservative. Considering the location of the university, which is considered a liberal stronghold, it is perfectly reasonable

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that the perception of bias was partially, if not completely, justifiable. Although the participants may have been from a narrow geographic region, it does speak to the potential for one to both experience and perceive exaggerated hostility in other geographical areas. A study that explored gender and analyzed how people respond to political discussions on social media could potentially be very interesting to the communication field at large.

Conclusion

In these focus groups, both the Republicans and Democrats reported that they knew the “truth.” The absoluteness of their beliefs is very interesting, assuming that in these hypothetical situations they believe they are absolutely correct. In these scenarios, each side has their own version of the truth. As the research shows, people decide to engage when there is little consequence, and when they know the material, and when they believe that they are right. The problem is that people anticipate a third person effect, and use that to decide whether they can influence the person or not. When an individual believes that the other person will be hostile or unwilling to learn that persons “truth,” they avoid engaging. The reasons why focus group participants chose to engage were linked to the perceptions of hostility and bias. Though a more thorough study should be conducted to determine what specific decisions are made in an actual argument, this study supported previous research on the perception of hostility and bias in mediated messages and perceptions of the source of mediated messages.

The extent to which the perception of hostility influences these decisions remains to be seen, but focus group members’ decisions were clearly motivated,

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in part, by the perceptions of hostility. People from both sides preferred to discuss politics in only face-to-face communication, but rely a lot on their social media feeds to perceive public opinion. The danger is, as previous HME research suggests, social media may create an environment for political discussions that are unhealthy. Participants see opposing information in their social media feeds that challenges their beliefs, and that may cause them to react negatively or completely withdraw. This is very significant considering that this perception of hostility can influence an individual's social network and cause selective exposure and reduce participation. This form of selective participation could be dangerous to the political climate. Continued research could help expand on how partisans argue and how people can take measures to prevent the type of conflict and polarization that has permeated the political climate. If not, people from both parties will be fervently determined to only communicate when they "know" they are right, with people who agree with them already, leaving both perceiving bias and anticipating the other side is wrong without ever hearing both sides of the issue.

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Appendix A

Focus Groups Transcripts

Republican

So you all strongly identify with the Republican Party?

(Collective yes)

How do you feel about engaging people in political discussions in face-to-face discussions?

A. nobody wants to do it. I feel like people just try to avoid it.

B. I think a lot of times people just tend to avoid it especially being on a public university. Conservatives for the main part the minority. I feel like I will get attacked.

C. She does. I mean she will. She would.

A. For my part, my mom lost her job because of healthcare. She even becomes attacked, when it comes to elderly.

B. I prefer face-to-face discussion about it though rather than social media. I feel like on Facebook people always say more than what they would of in person. I prefer face-to-face to get actually what they think rather than

(Collective agree)

B. Yeah I talk about politics in person, people get really political on Facebook and then they'll comment on your thing and sort of fight and everyone will get in on it and it'll get bad.

D. In my job field I try to avoid it because I do and have heard, not necessarily losing your job but you get attacked often in the work field. Unless it's something I feel strongly about I stay away from it. I work for a political organization, I try to limit how much I do it. I don't want to be that girl, but I am already turning in to that girl

B. Just because they share my onions.

D. Turning in to that girl just for posting your opinions.

C. My friend posts, no one calls him that guy.

So there is a gender thing related to it?

(Collective) I think there is/Yes

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A. Liberal woman will attack or be demeaning towards me.

D. You're frond upon.

C. They'll tell you that you're wrong.

D. No, they'll argue with you on social media but in person they'll be like "don't wanna go there" because they don't want to back up their reasoning.

(Collective agreement laughs)

D. Or it's like you know, when I work a table on campus, a liberal on campus, starts arguing about pro-life and he's a guy, and it's kind of weird he's arguing about women's rights to me a woman I mean I don't identify as some third rate feminist, and it's contradictory.

C. I am not trying to sound like a (expletive) but sometime liberal woman are aggressive or identify as feminists. It blows up out of abortion.

E. My mother was attacked. At a parent teacher conference they asked her if she felt a certain way because she was conservative and a business's owner. My mother said to them that what goes on her business has nothing to do with what my lifestyle and beliefs are. She used that to attack her (my mother).

C. That's another thing, people get nosy when you talk about stuff. They're like "oh so you're a liberal and oh so you're a conservative". I don't know.

E. Another thing I have noticed, people expecting a cookie cutter Republican. Like I am pro for spending in this way, oh "well you're not a Republican too".

D. I am not a confrontational person, so unless you say something that really bothers me.

B. Just like conversations with people, will get really heated. It's annoying.

(Collective yes)

C. It's even people who believe in other candidates. I don't know if any of you like Donald Trump (collective laugh). A lot of the older supporters, will call you names because you support a candidate.

B. I interacted with someone last week, and they said "I bet you voted for Kasich". I said, what does that have to do with anything? Cause he was conservative, and said you seem like a Kasich sort of girl.

How would you summarize how you feel about talking about face-to-face communication though? What are the differences between online?

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B. When you're behind a screen people feel like they can say whatever they want, like "oh I can say this to them online but I won't say that in person because I am not confrontational".

C. Not only that but I think that people will do it more on social media, because they can't back up what they feel, so they don't want to talk about it in person because they have nothing to say.

A. They have time when you're online.

B. Yeah, to look up facts.

What are some of the reasons you have for participating in political discussions in face-to-face?

A. I think that if someone, I find that if someone says something that is blatantly wrong. I was in a classroom and someone say that Donald trump hates all African Americans and wants to send them back to Africa. It was myself and the real teacher and we're like did you hear him say that? In an interview? Debate? They said "no, someone was talking about it". I think if people have misconceptions I will address them. Like if it's something and I know the truth. Something I can say well this is not exactly true and this is how I know and this is why. People will kind of start to attack you, so you have to defend yourself.

D. I find that also.

C. Like my parents, we get attacked quite often for owning a business and being conservative. I have found myself, I can avoid the conversation but I am confronted often so I have to educate myself.

B. People just assume things and don't read the news. I was a journalism undergrad and I know people don't read the news anymore, they just go on social media "oh Donald trump says all dogs need to get out of this country".

A. Oh and then they'll continue talking to people about it and then that's how these like insane things start to happen.

B. Even the ted Cruz thing "he had sex with all these women". Who said that the national inquirer?

D. But the national inquirer has gotten it right so many times. (Collective laugh)

E. I hear people, using memes. They're not going out and finding things. They're just using memes.

C. You'll see those stupid videos online and it's just like, look it up, google takes like two seconds. You don't have to be uninformed.

A. I don't start discussions, because I am outnumbered. I am friends with a lot of Democrats and I don't want to lose them. They have their opinions I have mine. I

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would rather us keep them to ourselves than argue. If someone brings something up to me, I'll talk about it, but I like to avoid it.

B. They think it's easier to attack a Republican.

(Collective yeah)

C. It has ended friendships. They just can't put our differences aside and move on.

E. One of my friends picks fights with my family. He just has to. I have noticed to that when they're having a face-to-face conversation and don't have their facts, they tend to have conservative views but there Democrats and they vote Democrats. When they're looking up facts on google (their Republican) and when they're talking about how they feel and not think, they're liberals.

B. And you'll ask them a question and they'll just be like "well I don't know". It's not like just what they know. They go along with what they hear.

D. Yesterday I tabled on campus and asked people what they think about big government. They'll be like "I don't like it" but then they have a Bernie sticker on their book bag. I tell them they need to talk to use because they're confused. Then sometimes they'll be like "I didn't even realize that", but it's because when you have that face-to-face interaction rather than just social media that's so impersonal.

Do you participate differently in political discussions on social media?

(Collective) I stay out of it.

B. If you get me in person I will talk to you about politics for 45 minutes.

E. It's not worth it to me.

C. Social media in general, it's just not worth it. Somebody screen shots something, even though it's not something that I would think make you lose your job, but they'll spin it or Photoshop it.

D. There is Photoshop and people could use it and your employer would believe it.

A. I only just share a lot, but I don't post a lot. More and more I don't share because people will make comments. I am not doing it, if you want to comment on my stuff fine, but I am not doing it. There are many posts I simply just don't respond to.

E. It's not even just disagreement though. They're saying "you're dumb you have no idea" they can't have a conversation with you.

D. I contribute for high point, I wrote an article about my personal experience on campus. Personal perspective. Opinion peace. This guy, he's much older and lives

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around here. Don't know him. He comments "oh well I am wrong because I don't agree with you" he used his faith, and rambled about political correctness.

E. My cousin's posts stuff, people he doesn't know attack him.

B. From either party, you're always getting attacked. I just stay out of it. Unless someone gets me in person. I have a class right now, and sometimes we get off topic, but this we talk about politics and its fun but it's a safe environment. Say you're in a bar and someone assumes you're a conservative and they joke about buying a beer but then say never mind because you support trump. There's a time in place for it

C. It's funny you say that because my boyfriend was getting a haircut and the lady asked who he voted for, and he said " I know I shouldn't of said anything" and said " Donald trump" and the hair dresser was like "oh (pause) I voted for Bernie" and like didn't speak to him the rest of the time. They want to ask them but when you give them your opinion you're just done.

B. When people do you find out who you voted for they start to question you based on that person's record. Blah blah blah.

How often do you comment on these posts?

A. I never comment, because of my Democratic friends. They'll share, someone can find that, I am not going to comment, for the most part I see posts I'll like it and not actually share. If people on both sides can benefit from it, I share it.

B. I like looking at Donald Trump's twitter. When they make fun of the other candidates. That's the only stuff I share. The funny stuff.

E. Someone I saw posted that meme comparing Donald to Hitler. It's funny because I saw the same one for Bernie. So I went back to that, and screenshotted it and posted it on there.

(Collective laugh)

B. Yasssssssss.

E. And I wasn't like trying to be rude or anything. She deleted it though. You're an idiot. People are saying the same exact thing about Sanders.

B. Even if you look at all the candidates they've messed up. Hilary sent her emails.

C. I am waiting for her to go to jail.

B. Get president, and that gets arrested.

E. My dad is convinced. She's going to jail. I have learned though not to post, it's not worth it. It affects people.

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D. I post all the time. Even before I started working for them I just post and share things all the time. People get all upset, I didn't even give my opinion I just shared it.

C. For some reason it's easier for Democratic people to jump all over a conservatives post. It's easier for liberals to bash us.

E. They're more common at our age (liberals). They feel like its...

A. I talk to my parents a lot about politics. My family is involved in it. I explain it to them, and I talk about how my friends are Republican, and I think our generation is a new brand of conservative. We're more moderate on certain issues, my mom was a Democrat, she was in a union, and she changed. My grandfather was a Democrat, and as he got older his views changed. But I have made my decisions on my own, like people judge Democrats like "you were raised a Democrat and that's why you're there" and they view us the same.

C. I think I have my own opinion though, my parents, the whole abortion thing. I am fine with it. I have seen firsthand Obamacare take a toll on my family.

B. SAME!

C. I have seen the effects on small business. We live comfortably. We had 30 people, 30 people lost their jobs. It makes me upset though, people do think you can't have your own opinions because you were raised that way.

B. With me it's interesting, my mom is a dem and my father is a libertarian. My parents would argue. My dad always votes for Rond Paul. My mom would always vote dem. Once I got older I started to look at things and read policy and realized I would be a Republican.

D. Isn't there a sang that like if you're young and a Democrat you have a heart or something and if you're older and Democrat that means you're stupid or something like that. I heard some kind of sang like that.

E. I did notice something like that.

What are some of the reasons you have for not participating in political discussions in face-to-face?

A. If it's just with a friend, losing friendship. If you're a Democrat you can talk to me till you're blue in the face and you're probably not going to take my opinion on things. And I know like that what I say is not going to say your opinions either. I am not going to waste my breath.

E. Me too, like in the work place.

B. You're always judged.

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E. It's uncomfortable.

D. I have family on Facebook. My cousin and I argue. Family gatherings, he always switching it to politics. Trying to argue or comment on things when he doesn't agree. I feel like family gatherings should not be a place for...

B. One of my best friends is a dem. He'll try to do it. I'll just be like "not happening".

E. That's my best friend too, he comes over and we'll just be with my family. And I know what you mean.

C. My friend waited to come out because he was afraid of my reaction because I was a Republican.

B. it's funny you say that, my boyfriend's friend is and was like "I don't want to say anything".

E. It's sad. But like you said as our generation goes on we evolve on that.

What are the reasons you have to not participate in political discussions on social media?

A. It's the same. I just don't want to get in to it.

B. I don't want my family and friends to see this big fight I am having about politics.

A. I don't think it's worth it. The ones on social media are petty. I would rather talk face-to-face. Employers, after that conversation, on social media it's there forever. I am careful about what I say, even on Facebook. I never swear. I try to be very, and we're in the teaching profession and the only Republicans in the country. I know one there are not many of us in our program. Our parents have views when it comes to that, when it comes to your career you have to keep it to yourself?

SO career, friendship? Nothing else?

D. Like professors and stuff to.

E. Oh don't get me started. I feel sometimes professors, they will attack you because you're conservative. Not knowing that I am but they'll make very open comments and everyone in our major knows we're conservative and everyone looks at us and this is so stupid and I am here for my education.

D. I have co-workers where they go to schools in Chicago where if you share your views they're like "what planet are you from!?" but like they've actually failed their students because they have conservative views. I get outraged.

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A. I got a lower grade because of my views on education because they were conservative. I earned a lower grade because my views did not correspond with the final paper with the traditional.

E. I had this teacher, and my friend and I and he's a conservative, and he talked all the time, but she loved him. When people who are conservative spoke she looked at us and said "you're not living in reality, you need to wake up because you're not living in reality". It was just the most mind blowing thing, I have never seen anything like it.

Is there a subject you find yourself particularly commenting on? Why or why not?

A. Yep! The 2nd amendment. I was raised. I feel. (laughter) My life we're not rednecks, but I was raised I grew up with them. You respect them. How to use them. Appropriately. When we did our debate against the Dems that issue I debated I feel very passionate about it. My thing is a lot of people don't really know the process. I sold ammo, firearms, I know what people have to go through. That's my main, because I have to. The only subject I will tell you that you're wrong.

D. Because you know more about it so you can easily just have good comebacks.

You say because you know more and because you were raised on them?

A. I would not engage in a conversation I don't know something about. I'll be honest, and I'll say that I am not really sure if it's about a certain issue or like oh, what was this? I am not going to bs. If I have personal experience with it, I will comment if I know more about it.

E. I got an argument with my boss because she said after that shooting we should ban guns, and I just looked at my boss and said I went to school with your son I can show you on both hands right now how many people have carried illegal guns on them. Certain things like that, and healthcare, I know everything about it so I will comment on those topics always.

D. Me, I comment on a lot of things. So a lot of things with the VA. So those government programs. I am a gun owner. 2nd amendment rights is important to me too. Mostly VA though. I have experienced it because of my family and I know more about it.

C. I am 2nd amendment rights and that and healthcare as well. There are somethings that make you lose your mind.

B. you said I have seen people affected by Obamacare.

E. I have seen people argue, and once they start attacking me, like I am not hitting you with a soft spot. I just looked at them and my parents tried to save so many

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jobs, we lost our house because of that. I get so ticked off, and they just attack you.

B. 100 percent. 112 percent.

E. I get very angry, very quick.

A. I am having fun, thank you!

Is there a subject you would never comment on? Why or why not? Is there a subject you would never comment on? Why or why not?

B. Abortion.

A. it's just a topic no one wants to go there.

C. There is like somewhat of the middle ground.

E. I think I am in the middle ground, but if you say that you get attacked. God forbid you're in between.

B. I am the same way, and I say that and I get attacked.

C. I am against it, because of my religious views. They would make us stand outside holding pro-life signs.

(Collective) Really?

C. Yeah, I was in 2nd grade.

B. You had no idea what they meant.

C. yeah, no idea. As I got older, but none of their views would influence mine. I would never bring it up though because like, "what if you're raped or what or you're this, you're a woman".

D. You lose women's rights if you're a women and for this this and this.

E. My parents are ok with it, but they just don't want to pay for it. It's your body do what you want, I Just don't want the government to pay for it.

A. Being a women, having that discussion is a very touchy subject. I don't want to talk about it with a man. Honestly, that's abortion is number one I don't want to discuss. Something I did forget that I will discuss is education. When people discuss it I am like "you don't know what you're saying". We even have professors who talk about things and now being in the school system in the field we, I could tell my professors "this is wrong and I can tell you why". Cause they're dealing with college kids and they haven't been to the schools. Some of them never were.

E. I just say I am in between don't ask me any questions.

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C. I feel that way about immigration sometimes too. I don't talk about it. I don't even know, it's just such a hot topic. If you believe that everything is supposed to be the way it's supposed to be, like Donald says build a great wall.

(Collective laugh).

C. It's just a big mess, then Donald's daughter being an immigrant. What's the right or wrong answer?

D. My grandparents are conservative, they immigrated here with \$20 and lived in a 1 bedroom apartment. Like just a bedroom. Nothing else. They don't agree, they think you should be coming here legally.

Those are the end of the official questions. If you need to leave for class, feel free.

A. I am actually having a lot of fun.

B. This is enjoyable.

So I will ask a few things for clarification. Then we will have a brief debrief of our discussion. Was there anything else you wanted to say?

B. No, I think we talked enough about it. I don't think we get the opportunity to talk about it. It's both parties. We don't get to talk to likeminded people. Always have to be PC about what you're saying.

(Collective mh-hm)

B. It's nice to have healthy arguments. To talk with people who share the same beliefs as you.

You guys use the word attack a lot, do you think you're treated differently? When you say "they" who are you talking about?

D. Non-Republicans.

(Collective) Yeah

Do they react in a certain way?

B. They're very reactionary.

A. Especially as a woman, people ask me about politics. I have a Rubio sticker on my computer and one of my students asked "I don't know if this is rude or not but are you are a Republican". I said yeah, cause I have the sticker. I told her, I think that coming from a woman's perspective people react differently than they do to men. We have that stereotype that women's rights are for liberals.

D. That's why I became involved in politics. So I could share that just because I am a woman I don't have to be liberal. There's more (inaudible). So I don't feel like everyone's out to get to me, with an organization like we have different

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minority people. Hispanics, we have a lot of stuff. They're all people who share the same views, so those organizations show the other side like hey you're full of crap. Just because I am a woman does not mean I have to be liberal. A Latino doesn't have to be pro-immigration.

Do you think the other side reacts differently in political discussions?

B. Coming from my perspective, while sitting with my mom and watching debates my mother would say "well what makes you think you're so much better than me, well I know how you feel because I am a woman".

C. It's my mom the same way. Well if you were younger, and if I was under age she would of tried to force me to get an abortion. My dad was like "hell no" and my mom was like, and it was a whole conversation.

B. Every time I watch a debate with my mom it's just a (expletive). My mother is like "well this is your party". They're just reactionary as a whole.

E. They think you're so wrong that they're just going to give it to you.

B. They think they're better than you because you're a conservative.

E. I think there are some people that are better, because that they're so caught up in it.

D. When I table on campus, everything relates to when I table, my activists they encounter people and people will come to the table and debate with us for an hour or to. We want to talk to other people to, you're not going to change what our organization stands for.

B. It's just nice to be here with all of you guys. It's nice to get our views across and no one is fighting. But when you get other parties involved it's just like (inaudible).

E. Everything things we're better off and we're living rich. My school is basically going to be an inner city school soon. I am more culturally aware than half the people that I have met at this university. We went to (removed) some people were so shocked. They want to make sure they can take you down a notch.

D. One of my family members who is a conservative told my mom in person, "is Kelly really conservative or is it just a fad?" I was like first off conservatism is not the trend it's the opposite.

(Collective laughter)

D. It's sometimes other Republicans. Who say like you haven't even lived life yet. How do you know you're a conservative.

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E. I say things to people, it's just political things. When you see and you really don't like being attacked. You argue about your views. Kind of give them more facts, you kind of see their brains start to work.

B. Yeah it's really just about if they're open-minded. If they're strict to they're candidate. They'll take in your facts if they are but if they are just there to give you hell, then go home.

END

Democrats

So all of you strongly identify as liberals?

(Collective) Yes.

How do you feel about engaging people in political discussions in face-to-face discussions?

A. I think that depends on who it is. What party they affiliate with. I feel more comfortable talking face-to-face with a family member. Or someone that I know pretty well.

B. If it is someone you're going to be able to have an intelligent conversation with and it won't turn in to a hostile environment, but if it's on a particular issue I don't know about or it's a hostile environment I won't engage.

C. It doesn't really depend on party for me. I have heard a lot of radical opinions in my lifetime. I think for the most part what it really depends on is a, whether I am able to have a part in the conversations whatsoever. If they're something they're willing to negotiate about. I don't necessarily dislike or like talking to the opposite party.

What about starting the conversation? What do you think about? When you participate in face-to-face?

C. Listen to what they have to say. It just depends upon their political behavior to, because people have a political behavior about them too. I feel like they believe it's kind of a sports team they're rooting for. If it came down to action vs. words that would be another thing. If someone was going to take action it would make me uncomfortable.

B. I wouldn't start a conversation unless somebody said something that facts had proven wrong. I wouldn't just start talking about it.

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A. I probably would just start talking about it. I would usually gage the environment and ask questions to see where they're coming so I won't say something that's off-putting. I'll try to frame it in a way that's nicer so we can have a nice discussion about it.

Do you feel differently about engaging in online discussions?

A. Yeah absolutely. If somebody posts something on their private page. I feel they have every right to do so and if I don't agree I can just not look at it. I read something like online hat said something that had something that the amount of people that engage online that change their views based on something they saw online was very small. So I try not to. If someone posts something online or comments I'll just delete it. I don't think there is room online for negativity. That's usually the way it ends up going.

C. I usually argue with everyone. Even face-to-face. It's kind of a classic American ideology that you disagree with something you should debate it. How obviously (inaudible) but if you just come out and say something crazy. I've always believed in conflict. I don't believe in peace in debates. There is a state of conflict and engagement.

B. I am not one to hide behind a computer screen and voice my opinion. That's just me personally. Um, I would much rather hold a conversation face-to-face. Especially if I disagree with them. Like you said, I am not friends somebody that would hold a radically different view than myself. I think it would take a lot for me to fight someone with me. Especially behind a computer.

What are some of the specific reasons you have for engaging people in political discussions in face-to-face?

B. I think my main motive is hate. When they say something hateful. I think we have all seen in, especially on the other side. A lot of hateful things being said. Um, so I feel like that is my main motive for stepping forward.

A. I think for me it's just mainly making conversation. I am curious for what other people think. I think as a college student it's time for me to learn different viewpoints and learn what they think. Also if someone is saying something that I disagree with, for example if it's something I know is not true or a well-informed opinion it'll just kind of make me a little upset. Trigger me.

C. I have been through a lot of bad experiences. There is nobody I know that's like me. There's no one who has faced all the scenarios I have faced and has made it out. So when I see people suffering it compels me to say something whether it agrees with the person they should know that it's happened to other people that have made it. I have seen people who don't make it out of those scenarios and I think that if I hadn't said something I am not doing my damndest that I am not

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doing my job. I very much value my political opinion because I feel I help people have better lives.

Do you participate differently in political discussions on social media? When you are engaging them?

A. Yeah I think I am a little more careful, just because I know that if I ever want to run for office some day someone could go back and find what I said and use it against me. Which sounds kind of superficial but I like I don't know it's a lot more permanent and can be read differently because your tone of voice isn't a factor. I agree

B. I agree with that. Going what off you said. I also think a lot of people changed who they are online. I feel like I could be much more easily attacked online by somebody than face-to-face.

C. It's not much different for me. I feel like there's a PC culture and that culture I don't identify with. So many times people don't know how to take my statements. Cause I try to stay tactical and be neutral and objective about the conversation piece. I may not specifically agree with, but I feel like it's also the same except for the PC culture. IF you have a face-to-face conversation people are not going to freak out, but on the internet when people feel like they have a wall then they won't be the same.

How often do you all comment or post or share things would you say?

C. I do pretty often. I like to mask it a little bit. Make it tactful. See if people will bite. It's usually pretty slow motion. (Inaudible) people don't slow their tongues, or fingers in this case. They don't like to take the bait because they know I'll debate because they know my character. Which is kind of funny to me. I think people think it's a bad thing, but I think debate should be great because people should want to do it to brainstorm.

A. A lot of times I'll post things without a comment attached or be very vague. From what I post you can tell I am a liberal. And the reason I do that are a lot of people that I am friends with on Facebook are conservative or people that I have worked with or for and I don't want to get on a weird dynamic with them, because I do respect them a lot and I don't want us to dislike each other. I rarely comment unless it's something positive.

B. I don't post very often. Once or twice a week depending on what I find. I am kind of opposite of the table I don't like to stir up controversy. And I don't see that I see and um yeah I am not one to post that much in general.

What are some of the reasons you have for not participating in face-to-face political discussions?

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C. I avoid the one at my (organization name). I am kind of like the devil that they already know there's no need to paint me out as anything. They're like "uh, we know you're liberal. We've seen you debate before, you've debated us we know that you're good at it but we have separate beliefs".

I agree and we are all still friends but that's just the way we are we are not going to change their minds.

So when you know you cannot change their minds?

C. When I know when they are going to do a Plato. They will humor my opinion but they are not going to believe anything I say.

B. I think there's not really incite on myself or the other person I am speaking to than it's kind of just a waste of time. If I am not learning from them than they are not learning from me.

A. If I know we can't have a constructive or intellectual conversation I will shy away from it. Or if it will turn in to a screaming match?

C. One time there was a man in the library and he was being very hostile. Telling me about britebart. He told an inappropriate joke that was degrading to women and my girlfriend was right there. I kept very calm and we quietly left. I felt like he would incite violence. It's not that I feared the man, because I would like to incite violence on him, but I knew no matter what it would be a bad outcome so I left. Whenever violence comes up I leave, it's too much.

B. If I feel personally offended by a comment it's just game over. Yeah, um I feel like I wouldn't even engage.

A. I think I also wouldn't engage if the person was in a higher position or someone I work for or a professor or administrator.

What about social media? What are the reasons you don't participate there?

C. Usually when they're just posting randomly or won't hear anything you'll say or be hostile. There's no point in debating, you might start, but after that I find myself holding back and observing. Waiting for something that's too radical and I have to comment.

B. I think people will post things that are so negative that 1. You'll never change their mind and 2. Any conversation you have is not going to be productive. I won't engage. Any of those dumb memes, like the ones that happened after the whole Beyoncé thing. That is just a waste of time. Any type of argument is just going to be toxic to both of you and you're not going to change their mind. It's a waste of time.

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A. I feel like people are really set in their beliefs, but also when you're online I think a lot of people post negative things just for attention. So again just not worth engaging in.

Is there a subject you find yourself particularly engaging on and why or why not?

A. I think I find myself commenting on people from the other party or that spew hatred or are offensive. I just feel like you're blinded by that you deserve another incite.

B. Anything that posts anything constructive and not just anti trump, I'll typically post like "lol" or something like that. Particularly things that I agree with or women's rights issues. Not a whole lot of negative. Things that affect me or will affect me.

C. I comment a lot so let's see. Intolerance a lot and misinformation. I don't like quoting the past incorrectly. Whenever I see that, and they'll use it and it'll be wrong. I research it, see if they said it. Then come back and make a comment and say they didn't say that or correct the context. A lot of media cherry picks. Other times I feel like, I debate any political party, I don't believe in one single thing is right. I believe in debating any unobjective point.

Is there a subject you would never comment on? Why or why not?

B. If it's something that has to do with someone's religious views that you're never going to change. Most likely not going to change, I won't comment on and because I come from a religious background and I have had people tell me, you can't prove that why do you believe that? I find that to be very offensive. I don't think I would say that to someone else even if there viewpoints are way out there. How on earth could I tell them they're wrong. It's general, but won't apply in all cases. I avoid it, not because I agree, but it's a much harder argument to make.

A. I think it's not what, but why. If there is somebody I went to High school with I won't voice my opinion if we haven't talked. Also if I am not confident in what the subject matter is I would either educate myself beforehand or not engage at all.

C. I suppose I would never comment on would be, somebodies or somebody who has passed away. I have seen posts on people that have passed away or on people who are not well sick weak or deceased. I have seen it. I have seen outrageous stuff on social media. To not be offensive or rude.

What do you think the differences are political discussions, or what people do or how they react in them?

A. I kind of surround myself with people who identify as feminists and believe in women's rights so you know I don't really see that many people who would, and the people that would um affiliate with the other political party would be some

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family members and I just, they're very passive. It would be.. Passive in the sense that they don't want to hear what I have to say, but they're not going to change their minds. I don't put myself out there much as I should or as others believe as I should. I see things more passively. They're stuck in their ways. They hear me, but they're not really hearing me.

B. I think it depends on who I am having discussion with, if it's with a college student or a professor it tends to go well because, well most of the things we try to say are based on factual information.

By we do you mean other liberals?

B. I mean college students and professors. Liberal or conservative. I surround myself with other political science majors. So we've been trained. But at home I am more aggressive because I know I am in a safer environment. They're going to love me even if I say something offensive. On a college campus I feel like I need to stay professional.

C. I believe in exhaustive debate, so no matter who it is I debate them. They know who I am, so tactfully I try to make it bitter sweet, I don't back out of anything. They'll know where I stand, they usually end up liking me as a person. It's cost me some friends and gained me some allies.

End