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ABSTRACT

The number of women participating in intercollegiate debate is proportionately lower than their representation on campuses. Furthermore, women's rate of success at the highest level of the Cross Examination Debate Association national competition is far lower than their representation in the organization. However, as women enter fields such as law, business, and politics, they are at a disadvantage if they have not been involved in a program which has been proven to be a guarantor of a higher level of professional success. The personal and professional benefits to those who participate in intercollegiate debate are documented: they employ three communication skills (analysis, delivery, and organization) better than those without debate experience; they improve their critical thinking skills; and debate provides excellent pre-professional training in problem solving, critical thinking, and reasoning persuasively. The responsibility for helping women succeed in debate competition lies with the individual coach. Observations in the areas of relationships, the difference between feminine and masculine styles of speaking, and the role consensus-making plays in argument provide guidelines which a coach might use in working with women debaters. (Contains 15 references.) (NH)

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## A PROBLEM-SOLVING ANALYSIS OF WOMEN IN DEBATE

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Intercollegiate debate has long been championed as an excellent training tool for critical thinking skills and democratic decision making (Branham, 1991; Ehninger and Brockriede, 1963; Kruger, 1960). The personal and professional benefits to the person who participates in intercollegiate debate are documented by Thomas and Hart (1987). Those experienced in debate benefit in three areas. 1. In a study done by Semlak and Shields (1977, p. 194, as quoted in Thomas and Hart), students with debate experience were significantly better at employing the three communication skills (analysis, delivery, and organization) utilized in this study than students without the experience. 2. Debaters are introduced to the social sciences and improve their critical thinking skills. 3. Debate is "excellent pre-professional training" (pp.3,4).

Debate is seen as excellent preparation for those entering law, politics, and business.

The results of a recent survey of those responsible for hiring, for a variety of Midwest businesses, listed debating first among twenty other activities and academic specializations that an applicant might present on a resume. Debate was the overwhelming first choice of those responsible for recruiting and hiring for law firms. Moreover, debating was ranked very high by a wide variety of businesses (Center, 1982, p.5 quoted in Thomas and Hart, 1987, p.5

The faith which recruiters place in debaters is well-founded, for debaters tend to succeed in their professions. "Keele and Matlon (1984) concluded that 90% of debaters have attained at least one graduate degree" (Thomas and Hart, 1987, p.5). Their sample included former debaters who are university educators (30%), top ranking corporate executives (15%), and those working in the executive or legislative branches of government (10%). "They suggest that these ratios do not vary between those who graduated 25 years ago and those who finished within the last five years" (Thomas and Hart, p.5).

Debaters are trained to accomplish several tasks which are important to success in almost any field. They learn to solve problems, to think critically, to reason in a way that persuades others to agree, to defend oneself well, and to speak well. These skills make them well prepared for the professional world. This proven success of debate heightens the need for educators to ask whether women have successfully entered the extracurricular activity of intercollegiate debate. As women enter fields such as law, business, politics, they are at a disadvantage if they have not been involved in a program which has been proven to be a guarantor of a higher level of professional success.

Belenky and her colleagues raise an objection to argument in Women's Ways of Knowing, for women will not usually argue for the fun of it. Studies of the gender differences of children in play have shown that little girls will suspend playing together rather than argue about the rules of the game. But academic debate overcomes this aversion women might have toward argument in general. Belenky establishes a continuum of development for women comparable to William Perry's hierarchy of moral development based on a study of college men at Harvard in the 1950's. One of the later stages of development is *procedural knowledge*. At this stage, the individual embraces methodology as a means to know and learn. Academic debate is highly procedural and couched in method, thus it avoids Belenky's criticism and could be a tool to accelerate women's moral development.

The number of men participating in intercollegiate debate is proportionately higher than their representation on college and university campuses, and the number of women participating is proportionately lower than their representation on campuses. Past President of CEDA, Brenda Logue reports that in the NDT debate league (National Debate Tournament), "only 14.88 percent [sic] of NDT participants are women at 'local' tournaments. 'Local'...is exemplified by such national NDT circuit tournaments as Northwestern, Kentucky, Emory, Harvard, Kansas, and Southern California" (1986, p.66). Not only do few women participate in NDT debate, but fewer still win at the highest levels. "Since its inception in 1947, a total of eight women have participated in a final [national] round of the NDT and only once has a woman ever won first or second speaker at the NDT" (Logue, 1986, p.68). The larger and more inclusive debate league, CEDA (Cross Exam Debate Association), has proven itself more successful in attracting women to their programs. But Logue raises the alarm for the future of women in CEDA.

For the first time in the nationals history, last year at SMS, not one woman was named in the top twenty speakers. We have reason for concern. The lessons of NDT are too real. Women debaters were anomalies at the national tournament and as top speakers. History should not repeat itself and CEDA should act to insure all students access to the debate activity (Logue, 1992, p.15).

With women comprising one-third of all CEDA debaters in Logue's 1986 study (p.66), and with no reports from the CEDA office that participation of women in CEDA might be decreasing, it is of concern to this researcher that of late women have had so little success at the highest level of CEDA national competition. "A comparison of the participation levels at the 18 regional tournaments and the five national tournaments indicates a significantly higher female participation rate at the regional as opposed to the national level tournaments" (p.67) Additionally, the number of two-person debate teams with a woman partner declines at national tournaments. Logue reports further, "...at the national level there is a greater percentage of all male teams (56%) than at the regional level (52%), fewer all female teams

compete nationally (9%) as compared to regionally (14%), while the male-female rate remains similar at the regional and national levels" (1986, p.68). While not statistically significant, it is of relevance to this paper to point out that the male teams reported in this study won a higher percentage of their debates than the all female teams [52% to 45.3%] (Logue, 1986, p.68; Larson, S. & Vreeland, A. L. 1985, p.14).

While a student benefits from even one season of intercollegiate debate experience, competition at the varsity level is more difficult competition, and a student benefits from the continued challenge at the higher level. It also prepares the student by acquainting her of the type of challenges she will meet in her profession. As has already been shown, debate prepares students for high levels of national leadership. If a woman competes with these male debaters, she is testing herself against the type of, and perhaps the same, people she will compete with for positions of leadership in her profession.

The issue of female involvement is a topic of some conversation in the CEDA community. How to more effectively encourage women and minorities to participate in CEDA was a topic of discussion at the 1991 CEDA Assessment Conference. At the 1992 National tournament in Arlington TX., an amendment was proposed to the CEDA Constitution and By-Laws which read as follows:

PROPOSAL THREE: 'Giving extra CEDA points to teams with women or minority group representatives.' Proposed by the Commission on Women and Minorities chaired by Pam Stepp.

PROPOSAL: Amend Article VII of the Constitution by adding the following sections:

Section 2. (e) Each team consisting of at least one woman or minority will earn one bonus CEDA point at each CEDA sanctioned tournament, provided that the team is one of the school's two teams that earns CEDA points for that particular tournament. If two teams from the same school meet this criterion, then both teams will earn one bonus CEDA point.

Section 2. (f) The Equal Opportunity Commission definition of minority will be used to determine eligibility for bonus points awarded under Article VII, Section 2. (e)....

RATIONALE: CEDA debate is a white male dominated activity and will likely remain that way without specific efforts targeted towards the recruitment and retention of women and minorities. This proposal rewards successful participation by women and minorities, thus creating an incentive for director-coaches to recruit and retain women and minorities for CEDA programs (CEDA Executive Secretary's Report, February 19, 1992).

The defeat of this amendment, the lack of any women achieving status as a Top Twenty Speaker in 1992, the attrition of women to varsity debate, the smaller percentage of wins an all-female team receives on the debate circuit, all point to two conclusions.

1. Women have difficulty competing with men for the highest levels of recognition in CEDA debate. 2. The structure of CEDA debate seems unlikely to change for the purpose of allowing more women to

have access to those higher levels of recognition. This being the case, women debaters and coaches have two choices. 1. Compete primarily at the novice level for one year, where women do seem to achieve proportionate to their numbers, and be satisfied with the professional training one year of debate experience offers. If the debater continues into varsity competition, she should realize the accolades will be infrequent, or perhaps nonexistent. Novice experience would certainly advantage women in areas which call for critical thinking and analytical skills and presentation skills. However, one year would not suffice the need to develop skills in negotiations at highly intense levels, or the need to develop the skill of making intense impersonal arguments, or the need to develop flexibility when adjusting to various hearers, or the need to practice arguing with those similar to those they will meet throughout their careers. 2. Find a way to teach and practice debate so that women carry with them into a debate round distinct skills which make them highly effective as women. It is this second choice which the remainder of this paper addresses.

The question thus becomes, what can women do in intercollegiate debate to increase their numbers and their chances to win? What adaptations can be made in coaching women debaters which might increase their success? (Success throughout this paper refers to success as a debater at a tournament. While debate experience itself increases one's chances for professional success throughout life, motivation to stay involved in the debate activity comes from success in that activity.)

Research in the field of women in argument is limited. Deborah Tannen's You Just Don't Understand (1990) discusses conversation between men and women, and the inherent conversational differences which can make understanding between the genders difficult. While her theoretical base is in socio-linguistics, Tannen draws similar conclusions concerning women's communication as does Carol Gilligan (1988). Although Tannen focuses on interpersonal communication, there are nevertheless similarities between persuasion in interpersonal communication and that in argument.

Gilligan, Ward, and Taylor include a chapter in Mapping The Moral Domain (1988, chap. 13) which discusses women lawyers. Although debaters are not lawyers, the ideas are instructive for women debaters, and solutions offered later are in some part suggested by this chapter.

Walter J. Ong's Fighting For Life (1981), begins with the agonistic, or argumentative nature of language in general. He claims that Greek civilization established the western tradition of arguing to conclusions, and gave us formal logic (p.34), which is also agonistic (pp.43-44). The unique contribution of Ong is his statements regarding the value of adversativeness in society. "Adversative action, action against, can be destructive, but often it is supportive. If our feet press against the surface we walk on and it does not resist the pressure, we are lost" (p.15).

Karlynn Kohrs Campbell (1989) discusses arguments made by individual early feminist speakers. Beginning in the 1830's, she

labels the types or arguments used by these women. (p.15). Campbell concludes her study by saying, "These works not only exemplify the rhetoric essential to a successful social movement, they also underscore the fact that women used the full range of rhetorical possibilities to respond to the obstacles they encountered" (p.190). She does not accept the idea that there is a "feminine style" of speaking which is biologically determined. "...critical analysis demonstrates that the style had little to do with biology as such, because the rhetoric of early women activists contained equally compelling instances of confrontational, deductively developed, assertive rhetoric" (p.190). Campbell makes an important contribution to the study of women's rhetoric by labeling the arguments of specific women speakers, but she does not address women and argument in the generic sense.

Pearson (1985) covers many areas of interpersonal communication, but does not discuss women in informal or formal settings. She does touch upon the issue of assertiveness and aggressiveness in women, which is relevant to this subject.

More telling than these few authors who present ideas which link women and argument, are the innumerable titles which would seem logically connected to the subject, but which do not discuss the matter. A computer search of Eric from 1982-1992 revealed over 3300 citations concerning women, over 1300 citations concerning argument, and no citations were found combining the descriptors women/argument, women/debate, or gender/argument. Women and argument is not an area of study which has been pursued. The historical precedent for successful argument being set forth by women has been established. The questions are not: (1) Are women capable of presenting forceful and winning arguments?; but rather, (2) How can we motivate women to work on developing successful argument techniques; and, (3) How can we help them become more competitive at the varsity level than they are now?"

Logue (1986) suggests directing more women to graduate school to train for coaching debate, adjusting the CEDA tournament schedules to synchronize with perceived women students' schedules, protecting those aspects of CEDA which seem to be friendly to women (two topics per year, less emphasis on evidence than NDT, slower speaking speed), and constructing debate topics which would appeal more to women's interests. However, in the six years since Logue's suggestions were made, no noticeable change has been observed in women's opportunities (Logue, 1992).

Thus, the responsibility for helping women succeed in debate competition lies with the individual coach. Observations in the areas of relationship, the difference between feminine and masculine styles of speaking, and the role consensus-making plays in argument contribute to conclusions we may draw about coaching women debaters.

### Speaking as relationship

1. *Women can be assertive, even aggressive* "Females, of course, including human females, are aggressive, in some ways as much as or more so than males, but their pattern of aggression is

different" (Ong, 1981, p.61; see also Tannen, 1991, p.157). The problem does not lie in a woman's "inherent passive nature". Rather teachers and coaches of debate should watch for women in their classes who do not fear assertive behavior and recruit them to debate competition. Then the job becomes coaching the woman debater so that she is comfortable in the manner of speaking which she is taught.

2. *Debate cases based on the ethic of care can be written.* There is a logic involved in making decisions based on attachment (Gilligan, et al, 1988, p.131-132). Winning cases can be written using the ethic of care. The spring 1992 topic concerning advertising, for instance, allowed cases which focused on the consequences of advertising on individuals, rather than looking only at what is legal or common practice.

### Feminine/masculine styles of speaking

3. *Rhetoric is not antagonistic to female styles of speaking.* Rhetoric is not antagonistic to female styles of speaking. "Rhetoric, out of which formal logic grew, proceeds also by opposition, but by contrast with formal logic, rhetoric deals typically with soft oppositions. Rhetorical oppositions are negotiable" (Ong, 1981, p.22). "In contrast, voice--the attempt to change rather than escape from an objectionable situation--contains the potential for transformation by bringing the self into connection with others" (Gilligan, et al, 1988, p.154). While theory in women's studies recognize the differences in how women and men argue to conclusions, women can and do argue in order to make good decisions, and they often grow as a result. The need is for women to realize that their method of argument is effective, and then to argue within their strengths.

4. *Women are frequently criticized if they act in a masculine manner.* While women in professions such as law sometimes feel it is necessary to develop masculine ways of arguing, other people most often see this behavior as negative. (Pearson, 1985, p.136; Tannen, 1991, p.239) Women can and should develop the style of speaking which is comfortable and effective for them, and employ that style in debate rounds without apology.

5. *However, some feminine behaviors should be avoided.* There are certain typically feminine styles of speaking which could be misunderstood and negatively evaluated in a debate. Looking at another debater as she or he delivers a speech; using too much cross-exam time to gain consensus with the opposing team; trying to establish connection with the opposing team; communicating ambivalence rather than authority in metamessages; allowing the opposing team to "teach" her throughout the debate; failing to strike a comfortable balance between assertiveness and antagonism in cross-exam; all these are behaviors which a woman debater must control in order to send the message of confidence and success to the judge.

6. *Practice makes perfect* In order to become proficient at defending their ideas in public, women need to practice this skill. Tannen claims that women could benefit from learning men's ways in

some areas (1991, p.294), and this is one of those areas. She also argues that women 'experts' lack experience defending themselves against challenges, which they misinterpret as personal attacks on their credibility, but also, adults become skilled at what they practice. (1991, p. 127-129, pp.135-136) Debate provides practice in this very skill--the skill of maintaining one's position in the midst of heated criticism, without seeing the criticism as a personal affront. This is an important skill for an aspiring professional.

#### Argument for consensus

7. *Women typically argue in order to agree.* While females will argue, the purpose of argument is agreement or consensus (Tannen, 1991, p,167; Gilligan, et al, 1988, pp.148-149). Patterson and Zarefsky (1983) argue that the true purpose of debate is to help decision makers arrive at the best possible decision for a given situation (p.4). This is closely related to the female drive to gain consensus and agreement through talk. Additionally, Branham argues, "Debate is thus a matter not only of declamation, in which conflicting opinions are aired, but of resolution in which these conflicting opinions are compared and tested against each other in the process of decision making" (1991, p.2). Again, this is not inconsistent with researchers' descriptions of women's talk. The solution here seems to be the context in which the coach/professor places debate. If debate is seen as strictly adversarial, a game to be played for the sake of winning, women will be less attracted to the activity than if it is seen as a means to the end of understanding and eventual consensus on how to deal with a real problem in the real world.

8. *Women avoid certain failure.* Women do not like to take risks which might cause them to fail or lose (Gilligan, et al, 1988, pp.148-149; Ong, 1981, p.62). Working closely with the team's coach might help reduce the risk of losing. This would also serve the valuable need women feel to have their ideas confirmed by others (Belenky, et al, 1986, p.196).

9. *Women develop identity through dialogue.* Confrontation with the ideas, or voices, of others, is a way for one to develop her own voice. "Defined in this context of relationships, identity is formed through the gaining of voice or perspective, and self is known through the experience of engagement with different voices or points of view" (Gilligan, et al, 1988, p.153). If she is receiving sufficient support and confirmation from her coach, the process of debate can contribute to a woman's personal development.

Two additional issues which affect the success of women debaters are speed and the cross-exam period. Debate, NDT in particular, and CEDA to a lesser extent, are known for the above average rates of speed at which speeches are delivered. This practice is detrimental to women for three reasons. 1. Women speakers will be seen as more aggressive if they speed through a speech, and Pearson reports that aggression is most often viewed negatively in women. (1985, p.136) 2. Speed decreases one's ability to establish connection with the judge while

speaking. Because most debates have an audience of one judge, the judge is the only person with whom connection is possible. Speed does not allow either judge or speaker to relax, thus the judge cannot "listen" to the speaker, and the speaker has difficulty overcoming the feeling she is talking "to a wall". This would seem to discourage developing a unique "voice" as a debater. 3. Speed debating discourages women debaters. (Logue, 1992, p.17)

Cross-examination could become a strong block of the debate for women. Most judges will describe the four question and answer periods as a "friendly exchange of ideas", but often the reality of cross-exam is much different. During cross-exam, debaters pose questions and answers to one another often without looking at each other--both stare at the judge. The three minute periods often become verbal wrestling matches for dominance with the judge acting as referee. If a woman becomes too aggressive, she is seen as snippy and mean-spirited. If she strives to control her time against an aggressive male opponent, she will be hard-pressed to succeed in both controlling the time and favorably impressing the judge. Also, the impersonal nature of the questioning can be unsettling. However, if the woman is taught to attempt to connect with the judge rather than the other speaker, she will be striving for the same effect with the judge that the male debater is attempting with the stare down. It is only possible and necessary to connect with one person in the room, and that person is the judge. Developing a conversational style while remaining professional would better suit a woman speaker than the brusque dominance she often tries to imitate. (Gilligan, et al, 1988, p.267; Pearson, 1985, p.136) If experimentation in cross-exam periods does show this time to be conducive to a woman debater's style, CEDA could then promote female participation in CEDA simply by making cross-exam binding, and factoring the effectiveness of the teams in cross-exam into the final decision.

In our culture boys play competitive games with clear rules and winners and losers. Boys learn to 'depersonalize the attack', to compete against friends and cooperate with people they dislike. Team games teach boys emotional discipline--self-control rather than self-expression. Boys tend to practice adversarial relationships and organizational skills necessary to coordinate large groups.... Girls play more than boys; boys game more than girls (Gilligan, et al, 1988, pp.164-165).

If women hope to compete in adversarial professions, they must be trained to package their important skills in relationships and in caring so that argument is subsumed under these greater concerns. If women could see the argument game as no longer the end, or no longer the means to dominance, status and hierarchy but instead the means to understanding, interdependence and peace, then women would embrace argument as a helpful tool to be used in advancing their careers, and more importantly, their ideals.

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