

Gender as a Predictor of Competitive Success in Extemporaneous Speaking

Leah E. White

Leah White (M.A., Kansas State U, 1993) is a doctoral candidate in speech communication at Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287-1205. An earlier version of this essay was presented at the 1996 SCA Convention, San Diego, CA.

In an intriguing discussion of the parallels between competitive extemporaneous speaking and presidential address, Aden (1992) suggested that students have much to learn from recognizing the similarities between these two forms of speaking. Ironically, he neglected an important similarity between extemporaneous speaking and presidential address: the obvious lack of women participants. Although he made some interesting observations concerning how the choices a student makes when preparing an extemporaneous speech tend to mirror choices made by a president when preparing a briefing on a political issue, Aden's analogy backfires in that it perpetuates the assumption that extemporaneous speaking is a male dominated event. Just as few women have had the opportunity to run for the presidency, few women have experienced the joy of competitive success in extemporaneous speaking.

Murphy (1989) observed that although equal gender representation in forensic events has been a goal discussed at both National Developmental Conferences on Forensics, little has been accomplished to help the forensic community reach this goal. Manchester and Friedley (1985) attempted to draw attention to the problem of gender inequality in forensics, but unfortunately ten years after they presented their startling study many of the same problems they identified are still present. The goal of this paper is to examine the lack of women's participating and succeeding in intercollegiate extemporaneous speaking.

In order to understand this problem, the results of Manchester and Friedley's (1985) study will be reviewed and national out-round participants at both the American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament and the

National Forensic Association's Individual Events Nationals from the years 1990-1996 will be examined. Once this data has been reviewed, I shall offer possible reasons that explain the gender discrepancy and suggest potential solutions to this problem.

The results of Manchester and Friedley's (1985) analysis of male and female participation and success at national tournaments are surprising, if not disheartening. Their analysis of the AFA and NFA 1985 national tournaments found that overall participation at the national tournaments was roughly equal, with 52% of participants being male and the remaining 47% female. However, participants' overall success illustrated an imbalance between genders: 58% of all quarter-finalists were male, whereas 42% were female. The gap grew larger when one considers that 61 % of semi-finalists were male and only 39% were female. The percentages for final round participants also illustrated gender inequality: 63% of finalists were male and only 37% were female, or 47 of the 126 finalists were women.

Manchester and Friedley (1985) found that the largest discrepancy between male and female competitors was apparent in the limited preparation events. 63% of the 1985 quarter-finalists in extemporaneous speaking and impromptu speaking were men, whereas only 37% were female. The number of women in semi-finals dropped to 30% while 70% of the competitors were male (Manchester & Friedley, 1985). The most significant gap was in the final rounds where 79% of the participants were male and only 21 % were female. When Manchester and Friedley compared these figures to other public address results, where 54% of the finalists were male and 46% were female, the discrepancy in limited preparation events is readily apparent.

Based on Manchester and Friedley's initial findings, this study seeks to test the following two hypotheses:

H1: Biological sex is a predictor of the level of success experienced in persuasive speaking.

H2: Biological sex is a predictor of the level of success experienced in extemporaneous speaking.

In an attempt to understand the gender discrepancy present in extemporaneous speaking, the American Forensic Association National Tournament and the National Forensic Association National Tournament results for extemporaneous speaking will be compared to the results for persuasive speaking. Persuasive speaking was selected as a comparative event for three reasons. Initially, Manchester and Friedley (1985) found that the gender discrepancy in the platform events was not nearly as pronounced as it was in the limited preparations events. Additionally, of the four platform events, persuasive speaking is the most similar to extemporaneous speaking in terms of its focus on argumentation. Finally, Murphy (1989) identified persuasive speaking as the public speaking event where women had experienced significant success. Hopefully, an analysis of both events will explain why so few women succeed in extemporaneous speaking.

METHODOLOGY

Data for this study were collected through a close analysis of the tournament results tabulation sheets from the AFA and NFA national tournaments. These tabulation sheets are carefully prepared by tab room staff members, and thus provide the most easily accessible and accurate report of results of the national tournaments. The AFA and NFA national tournaments were selected as sources for the data because these two tournaments are used by the forensics community to measure individual and team success for each competitive season. Because all students must qualify to attend the AFA and NFA national tournaments, they have attained a level of competitive success prior to attending the national tournaments. Additionally, these national tournaments are not limited to participants from specific geographical regions, for competitors and judges from all competitive districts in the nation attend the AFA and NFA national tournaments. Consequently, these two national tournaments are representative of the regional tournaments held earlier in the year.

Three AFA national tournaments and two NFA national tournaments were selected for analysis. Because Manchester and Friedley's (1985) earlier study identified a gender discrepancy problem in the 1980s, this study determines if this discrepancy continued into the next decade; thus, all five tournaments selected for analysis in this study occurred between 1991 and 1996. The 1,345 students entered in persuasive speaking and extemporaneous speaking at the five selected tournaments were each considered as individual cases in the study. As each event entry was recorded, information regarding the contestant's sex and success at the tournament was also recorded. Sex was indicated by the contestant's first name, and success was measured as a contestant's ability either to advance or not to advance to each of the three elimination rounds.

This measure of competitive success was highly reliable because the AFA and NFA national tournaments utilize strict rules to determine which individuals advance into the elimination rounds. These rules are consistently followed every year; thus, the success of each of the contestants from each of the five selected tournaments included in this study was measured in an accurate and consistent manner. Although competitive success was easily determined, sex was sometimes difficult to identify. Utilizing first names as indicators of sex presented a weakness in reliability when confronted with an ambiguous first name, such as "Jamie." In such situations, attempts were made, through the consultation of other members in the forensic community, to identify properly each contestant's sex. Unfortunately, in 72 cases this information was unavailable. However, the 72 cases were contestants who did not advance to elimination rounds; thus, although the study was somewhat weakened by missing cases, their impact was minimal, and these cases were deleted from the analysis.

RESULTS

The hypothesis was that sex is a predictor of competitive success in extemporaneous and persuasive speaking events. Basic

frequencies and Chi square analysis were used to test the proposed hypotheses.

Initially, frequencies demonstrated that the total number of men and women entered in both extemporaneous speaking and persuasive speaking combined was almost equal. As shown in Table 1, of the 1,273 contestants entered in extemporaneous and persuasive speaking in the five analyzed tournaments, 633 were male and 640 were female. Thus establishing a near 50% split between men and women. A similar split was also found when the total number of entries was divided by event. Table 2 shows that extemporaneous speaking and persuasive speaking were almost equally as popular, with 630 students entered in extemporaneous and 643 entered in persuasive.

TABLE 1
Frequency of Total Entries by Biological Sex

Event	Frequency	% of Total Entries
Male	633	49.7%
Female	640	50.3%

TABLE 2
Frequency of Total Entries by Event

Event	Frequency	% of Total Entries
Extemporaneous	630	49.5%
Persuasive	643	50.5%

Although the frequency of total men and women entered, and the number of entries within each event were almost equal, a rather large discrepancy is found when the number of men and women

entered in each separate event was analyzed. The frequencies, as reported in Table 3, illustrate that more men qualified for the national tournaments in extemporaneous speaking, and more women qualified for the tournaments in persuasive speaking. These differences are significant, with almost twice as many men entered in extemporaneous speaking than women, and nearly twice as many women entered in persuasive speaking than men. A Pearson Chi square analysis supported the significance of this discrepancy. When sex was tested against type of event, the resulting Chi square value was 94.56, with a significance of $p < .00000$ at the .05 level. Clearly, sex may predict whether a contestant will enter in extemporaneous or persuasive speaking.

Table 3
Frequency of Entries in Each Event by Biological Sex

Sex	Event	Frequency	% of Total Event Entry
Male	Extemporaneous	400	63%
Female	Extemporaneous	230	37%
Male	Persuasive	233	36%
Female	Persuasive	410	64%

Although a discrepancy existed between the number of men and women entered in each separate event, one should note that the percentage of men entered in each event who advanced to elimination rounds is still higher than the percentage of women who advanced. This is true regardless of the number of total men entered in each event. Tables 4, 5 and 6 show the number of students who advanced to each of the three elimination rounds in extemporaneous and persuasive speaking. When looking at the percentage of those entered in each event, it is clear that even though nearly twice as

many women were entered in persuasive speaking, the percentage of men entered who advanced is still larger than the percentage of women entered who advanced. Although this incongruity occurs in both events, it is most apparent in extemporaneous speaking.

The inequality in the number of men and women advancing to elimination rounds in extemporaneous speaking is further illustrated when one examines the percentages of all the competitors advancing to elimination rounds. Tables 4, 5, and 6 clearly show that the percentage of male students who advanced to elimination rounds in extemporaneous speaking was significantly higher than the percentage of female students who advanced. This is most dramatically seen when looking at the percentage of students advancing to the final round of extemporaneous speaking, for only 4 students, or 13%, were women.

Table 4
Contestants Advancing to the Quarter-Final Round

Sex	Event	# of Contestants Advancing	% of Contestants Entered	% of all Advancing
Male	Extemp	92	23%	77%
Female	Extemp	28	12%	23%
Male	Persuasive	51	22%	42%
Female	Persuasive	69	17%	58%

Table 5
Contestants Advancing to the Semi-Final Round

Sex	Event	# of Contestants Advancing	% of Contestants Entered	% of all Advancing
Male	Extemp	50	13%	82%
Female	Extemp	11	5%	18%
Male	Persuasive	29	12%	48%
Female	Persuasive	31	8%	52%

Table 6
Contestants Advancing to the Final Round

Sex	Event	# of Contestants Advancing	% of Contestants Entered	% of all Advancing
Male	Extemp	26	7%	87%
Female	Extemp	4	2%	13%
Male	Persuasive	15	6%	50%
Female	Persuasive	15	4%	50%

The discrepancy was not nearly as noticeable in the results generated for persuasive speaking. Of the total number of students advancing to elimination rounds in persuasive speaking, women demonstrated a slight advantage in the quarter-final and semi-final rounds. However, once students reached the final round, women equaled men, for 50% were men and the other 50% were women.

Although this examination of frequencies provides information in support of the hypothesis that sex may be a predictor of success in some competitive speaking events, further analysis was

necessary. Thus, Pearson Chi square analysis was utilized. Because tests were run examining the number of students advancing to the quarter-final, semi-final and final rounds, the .05 confidence interval was divided by 3 resulting in a significance level of .0167. The Chi square analysis utilized event and sex as independent variables, and level of success as the dependent variable. Table 7 reports the results of the Chi square analysis. These results did not support hypothesis 1 that sex is a predictor of competitive success in persuasive speaking. However, hypothesis 2, that sex is a predictor of competitive success in extemporaneous speaking, was supported with significant results at each level of competitive success. Therefore, these results indicated that a male speaker is much more likely to experience success in extemporaneous speaking than is a female speaker.

Table 7
Results of Pearson Chi Square Analysis ($p < .0167$)

Event	Level of Success	Chi Square Value	Degrees of Freedom	Significance
Extemp	Quarter	11.09992	1	.00086
Extemp	Semi	9.94552	1	.00161
Extemp	Final	7.29841	1	.00690
Persuasive	Quarter	2.50508	1	.11348
Persuasive	Semi	4.19109	1	.04064
Persuasive	Finals	2.57999	1	.10822

The results clearly indicate an imbalance between male and female participants in the elimination rounds of extemporaneous speaking. Unlike persuasive speaking where the imbalance is not severe, males consistently dominate extemporaneous speaking. In order to understand reasons for why this discrepancy occurs, I shall

review the characteristics of these two events and the current literature that discusses gender differences in speaking styles. An overview of this literature can identify possible explanations for why women are not equally represented in extemporaneous speaking national elimination rounds.

DISCUSSION

Extemporaneous speaking has several specific characteristics. Aden and Kay (1988) explained that success in extemporaneous speaking "requires contestants to understand complicated subjects of worldly importance, to analyze and synthesize, and to display their intellectual wares by powerfully and persuasively presenting their judgments to a myriad of critical listeners" (p. 43). The criteria of pertinence, synthesis of information, and powerful delivery are valued characteristics in an extemporaneous speech. Aden and Kay (1988) added that logical organization, focused analysis, and an argumentative approach were also important aspects of extemporaneous speaking. Agreeing with Aden and Kay (1988), Crawford's (1984) discussion of standardizing the topic displayed a value for well developed organization in extemporaneous speeches and Crawford specifically called for a formulaic approach to the event.

Benson (1978) addressed the issue of acceptable organizational patterns for extemporaneous speeches. He argued that the "primary objectives of an extemporaneous speech are to demonstrate the speaker's ability to synthesize information and to reason validly" (Benson, 1978, p. 150). Benson's (1978) criteria of synthesis and reasoning are consistent with those criteria outlined by Aden and Kay (1988). Additionally his value for organization compliments Crawford's (1984) discussion. In summary, the literature identifies complex understanding, solid analysis, complete synthesis, powerful delivery, argumentativeness, valid reasoning, and impeccable organization as characteristics of a strong extemporaneous speech.

The literature concerning criteria for evaluating effective persuasive speeches identifies several characteristics unique to this genre of speaking. Benson and Friedley (1982) provided a comprehensive list of criteria, which several coaches identified as necessary in the development of a successful persuasive speech. Although their study proved that various audiences will value each of these criteria differently, all of the criteria were considered important. Initially, Benson and Friedley (1982) explained that a successful persuasive speech must establish a significant problem and also provide information concerning how this problem relates to an audience. Judges value clarity of organization, and they reward the problem-solution format. Although the quantity of evidence is important in a persuasive speech, Benson and Friedley (1982) stressed the need for quality evidence, and a balance between emotional and logical evidence was expected. Judges also valued well developed and workable solutions, which appeal to audience's needs, and they expected a sincere yet conversational delivery.

Sellnow and Ziegelmüller (1988) added to this list of criteria for evaluating persuasive speeches. After reviewing several years of successful speeches at the Interstate Oratory Contest, Sellnow and Ziegelmüller (1988) identified four specific areas that are unique to all of the analyzed speeches. Initially, they found that many early persuasive speeches used the tactic of personal relevancy as a way to develop speaker credibility. Personal relevancy is established in a speech when the speaker explains how he or she or the audience has been, or could be, directly affected by the problem discussed in the persuasive speech. The second general area is the use of evocative or logical support material. The recent trend has been to move away from using evocative support material in favor of more logical forms. Documentation is the third area. Documentation has always been valued in successful speeches, even though in recent years the amount of documentation has increased. Finally, a workable solution is also present in most successful persuasive speeches. Although Sellnow and Ziegelmüller's study demonstrated a move in persuasive speaking toward a more logical

and less personal form, persuasive speaking has been traditionally viewed as a speech ripe with personal involvement and emotional influence.

Now that the characteristics of extemporaneous and persuasive speaking have been identified, a brief overview of literature concerning gender differences may help to identify if the characteristics of either of these speaking events are more conducive to a masculine or a feminine communication style.

Initially, in an analysis of masculine and feminine language differences in public speaking situations, Mulac, Lundell and Bradac (1986) reported several gender differences. They found that male public speakers use linguistic features that "suggest a relatively egocentric orientation" (Mulac et.al., 1986, p. 123), which means the use of first person singular pronouns. Men also tend to focus their language on the present rather than on the past or future. Additionally, they found that male speakers use many active verbs, tend to make several grammatical errors, and possess a high desire to control a discussion. Mulac et.al. (1986) characterized women's communication patterns in public speaking situations as complex, formal, and occasionally tentative; additionally, women often make references to emotions and use intense adverbs.

Andrews (1987) also examined gender differences in communication styles. Specifically, she focused on gender differences in persuasive speaking situations. On a general level, Andrews found that women tend to express lower levels of self-confidence than men. Whereas men often attribute their communicative success to their own natural abilities, women credit their own effort. In terms of persuasive argumentation, Andrews found that men often use criterion based arguments that can be directly linked to the persuasive situation at hand. Women, however, are more prone to create their own criteria, which means a woman may look for explanations that are outside the immediate boundaries of the argument at hand. For instance, females may prefer to refer to possible exceptions rather than the actual evidence apparent in the argument. Andrews (1987) also found that both men

and women perceive women to be "more devoted to community and societal concerns than men" (p. 383).

Feminist critics also discussed possible differences between masculine and feminine communication styles. Campbell classified feminine communication as inductive, based in personal experience, laden with the use of examples and opposed to objectivity and power (as cited in Murphy, 1989). Foss and Foss (1991) argued that "women have an eloquence of their own, manifest in a variety of contexts and forms" (p. 2). They specifically focused on the need for scholars of public address to value alternative contexts of speaking that may be more conducive to the female experience. In summary, Murphy (1989) argued that "feminist literary critics are beginning to identify a style of communication traditionally female, one based on personal revelations, examples and women's own symbols and experiences" (p. 121).

When discussing gender differences in communication styles, one should understand that most of what is believed to be true about male and female communication traits is rooted in what society has dictated as acceptable behavior for men and women. Kramer (1974) referred to such societal expectations as "folk linguistics" or those unwritten rules about gender roles. Kramer (1974) wrote:

there seems to be a conflict not only between what women's speech really is like and what people think women's speech really is like, but also between what people think women's speech is like and what they think it should be like (p. 17).

She cited several examples of what people think women's speech "should" be like. For instance, women should not speak as much as men, they should use fewer declarative sentences, and they should rarely state an opinion directly. Kramer (1974) specifically cited the female's higher pitched voice quality as a possible reason why society often does not listen to women's voices in public settings. She cited a quotation from a broadcaster stating, "As a whole, people don't like to hear women's voices telling them serious things" (Kramer, 1974, p. 19). Kramer's (1974) discussion of how society

views the feminine communication style is a reminder that the identified differences between male and female styles are often based in society's perceptions of what men and women should be like. Essentially, differences in communication style are more differences in gender traits than in actual biological make-up.

Since perceived gender differences in communication styles are socially created, one could not expect the forensic community to be immune to such social pressures. Therefore, in order to understand why women are not nationally successful in extemporaneous speaking, the characteristics of extemporaneous and persuasive speaking should be compared to what are considered acceptable feminine and masculine communication styles. Such a comparison may reveal that women are not as successful as men in extemporaneous speaking, because this speaking activity violates the socially approved feminine speaking style.

When comparing the literature reviewed concerning characteristics of extemporaneous and persuasive speaking with the literature concerning gender differences in communication styles, connections between the two are easily made. The characteristics of extemporaneous speaking parallel many masculine communication traits. A highly confident, criterion based, argumentative, objective, and deductive masculine style works well with the analytical, formulaic, carefully reasoned and synthesized, clearly organized, and powerfully delivered extemporaneous speech. However, the feminine style, inductive reasoning, use of personal experience, and a tentative approach does not meet the criteria for a successful extemporaneous speech.

However, the feminine communication style is appropriately matched to the characteristics of a successful persuasive speech. The feminine style of using evidence based on personal experience is similar to the use of evocative supporting material in a persuasive speech. The feminine style of using non-criterion based arguments is conducive to the more personal approach of the persuasive speech. Perhaps most significant is Andrews's (1987) observation that women are perceived to be more concerned about community and

societal welfare than are men. Certainly such a perception would add to a female's enhanced credibility when advocating a solution to a societal problem.

Although a connection exists between event characteristics and masculine and feminine communication styles, the question still remains: "Why are men nearly equally as successful as women in an event that seems to call for a 'feminine' style, but women do not experience this same success when competing in an event that calls for a 'masculine' style?"

Researchers have proposed two possible answers. Murphy (1989) argued that women must struggle to succeed in all public address events, because these events are rooted in a standard of rationality, and as such the "traditional standards for evaluation favor masculine communication styles" (p. 115). Therefore, even though persuasive speaking allows for a more personal and less rigid approach, the argumentative core of the problem-solution format is still deeply rooted in the rational paradigm. Thus, one could argue that persuasive speaking is not a feminine form of speaking, but rather is a *less masculine* format than extemporaneous speaking. Manchester and Friedley (1985) offered an alternative explanation. They suggested that in our society men receive rewards when they violate sex role expectations and stereotypes, whereas women rarely receive such rewards. Consequently, few women feel comfortable violating their expected roles. Manchester and Friedley's (1985) argument helps to explain why women are rarely positively rated in extemporaneous elimination rounds. Their low level of success may be due to judge's unwillingness to accept women's gender role violations. Such a hostile environment may intimidate many women from even competing in extemporaneous speaking, for such women may turn to other public address events that, although they may not be ideally suited to their communicative style, welcome alternative approaches.

Identifying specific reasons why women do not experience success in extemporaneous speaking at national tournaments will take more study. However, steps can be taken to prevent this gender

discrepancy from continuing. Initially, alternatives to the current form of extemporaneous speaking should be considered. In his article addressing how to create a gender balanced curriculum, Peterson (1991) argued that in order to have any influence on gender bias in an academic setting, changes in the curriculum must be made. Such an approach should also be encouraged in forensics. Changes need to be made in the forensic curriculum, which means that forensic educators should discuss possible alterations in the format of events that are susceptible to gender bias. For instance, judges could admit a less standardized approach to extemporaneous speaking that would help to eliminate its dependence on the rational world paradigm (Murphy, 1989). Judges could allow a place for narrative and example, along with logical reasoning and evidence, as acceptable support material in an extemporaneous speech in order to make the event more palatable to the feminine communication style. Judges might consider another alternative in extemporaneous speaking: Permit students to use an inductive approach to answering the proposed question rather than the traditional deductive approach. This change would accommodate other forms of reasoning, which could be educationally beneficial for all students regardless of their communicative style.

Changes must also be made on a personal level. Coaches and judges need to re-evaluate their own policies and positions to determine if they are doing anything to contribute to gender bias in forensic competition. In their discussion of tactics to enhance gender sensitivity in communication classes, Wood and Lenze (1991) explained that self-evaluation is a highly effective and low risk agent of change, for self-evaluation "tends to be most successful when instructors focus on one or two specific behaviors at a time, rather than trying to monitor simultaneously all behaviors related to gender sensitivity" (p. 20). For example, a coach could spend several weeks monitoring the comments he/she writes on ballots, in order to determine if his/her criteria for evaluation in any events are perpetuating bias. Finally, forensic competitors need to change their attitudes. Clearly, more women need to be encouraged to participate

in extemporaneous speaking, and they need support if their participation leads to initial failure.

Future research should investigate the culture of the extemporaneous preparation room to ascertain if this culture is in any way hostile to female competitors. Interviews with current and past female competitors could shed light on an aspect of extemporaneous speaking that coaches are unable to experience. Research also needs to be conducted to determine the role judges play in perpetuating this problem. Are females adequately represented as judges on elimination round panels? If not, what actions need to be taken to change this lack of representation? Further, research is needed to ascertain if the sex of the judge has an effect on how he/she evaluates male and female students. For example, do male judges evaluate male competitors differently than female competitors in extemporaneous speaking? Steps need to be taken to identify and to stop any judging behaviors that make this disturbing discrepancy possible.

Change rarely happens immediately, but the forensic community has known about the problem in extemporaneous speaking for over ten years. Proactive measures should be taken now to prevent future gender discrepancies in any of the individual events sponsored by the National Forensic Association.

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