

The Gender Factor in Selecting Extra-Curricular Activities

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The issue of gender factors in forensics has been a recently expressed concern. While this concern has encompassed many issues, part of the focus needs to consider the relationship of gender to decisions about participation in the activity itself. Relatively little research has been reported in this area, and the research that has been conducted has been quite limited. Most of the examinations of factors determining participation have focused on the high school level exclusively and have explored reasons for participation in extra-curricular activities in general rather than forensics in particular. The role of gender in those decisions has also been largely overlooked. This essay examines the research exploring the reasons students give for participating and not participating in extra-curricular activities and reports the results of a pilot survey in this area.

As early as 1971, *The Encyclopedia of Education* observed that "a major obstacle to attempts to generalize about student activities in American schools is the unavailability of data" (p. 488). In the intervening years, little has been done to remedy this situation, and this lack of data is even more pronounced in forensics. Recent data has examined perceptions of forensic coaches about gender differences in forensic participation. That data suggested that males were *perceived* to outnumber females in forensics in general. This was particularly pronounced in debate and at the college level (Friedley and Nadler, 1983). Of course, this data is limited since it focused on *perceptions* of male/female participation ratios rather than actual counts of participation; it does, though, raise questions that should be addressed.

Some research has examined gender related patterns of participation in extra-curricular activities at the high school level. The *Encyclopedia of Educational Research* (1982) reported, "on the average, girls have a somewhat higher participation rate than boys in extra-curricular activities. They enroll more frequently in journalism, the arts, and social and community clubs. In contrast, boys are more likely to participate in athletics" (p. 2018). It further

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pointed out that participation in athletic events by girls significantly increased following the passage of Title IX.

In a survey of 122 students from three Phoenix, Arizona high schools, Morris and Starrfield (1982) also found some gender differences in extra-curricular participation. They found that athletic activities were male dominated in general and tended to select their leaders competitively while social and academic activities (which included forensics) were female dominated in general and tended to select their leaders non-competitively.

These findings were consistent with those reported by Buser (1980) in his survey of Illinois public schools. He found that "female participation exceeded male participation appreciably in all categories other than athletics/sports and hobby/leisure related—regardless of school size" (p. 9). Specifically, he reported that "female participation exceeded that of males predominantly in drama, honors, service, cheerleading, publications, speech and social related areas" (p. 9). Buser (1980) included speech and debate activities within his drama category. In the breakdown of the category, females were reported to constitute 61 percent of the speech club and 51 percent of the debate club. Overall, Buser (1980) found that "female and male high school students participated in co-curricular activities to about the same extent, although in different areas" (p. 24).

Nover (1981) obtained results consistent with the previous studies in his survey of 293 students from semi-rural, suburban high schools in southeastern New England. He observed that "high school boys were found to participate significantly more frequently in sports than were high school girls, while girls participated significantly more frequently than boys in the arts and in academic activities" (p. 16). All these studies reported females as being more active within the broad category that included forensics, and all the studies surveyed secondary school students. Only one study, Buser (1980), reported an actual breakdown of gender differences in forensics. While the data does not *conclusively* indicate that females match or exceed male participation in forensics nationwide at the high school level, it does lend considerable support to that hypothesis. Unfortunately, none of these studies examined college level participation in extra-curricular activities in general—or forensics in particular. The perception data reported by Friedley and Nadler (1983) suggests that the male/female ratio is less balanced than this at the college level, and that the ratio varies according to each forensic activity. If females are indeed more active in these events than males at the high school level, then

some exploration of why that would change at the college level is needed.

The other aspect of extra-curricular activity participation that has been reported in professional literature deals with reasons for participation and nonparticipation in extra-curricular events. *The Encyclopedia of Education* (1971) reported that

a number of studies have examined the relationship between grades and part-time work, extra-curricular activities, type of housing and courseload. These investigations are notable because they consistently fail to find the expected inverse relation. . . Similarly, students who devote varying amounts of time to extra-curricular activities earn about the same level of grades as do nonparticipating students of comparable ability; and this relation seems to hold regardless of the nature of the extra-curricular participation, be it athletics, debating, or music. (p. 231-323)

In their survey of Phoenix high school students, Morris and Starrfield (1982) reported that the main reason given for joining athletics was to perform in athletics; the main reason for joining social activities was to socialize; and the main reason for joining academic activities was to enhance knowledge. The motivation given for joining an activity was based on internal rewards for the most part, particularly in academics.

In a survey of 1500 students drawn from 65 randomly selected high schools across the nation, Long, Buser and Johnson (1977) concluded that

over half of the students report they don't participate because they have a job outside of school, because activities are irrelevant, or because activities are scheduled after school. High costs, teacher domination, parental disapproval, and unavailability for their sex are given as reasons by fewer than 40 percent of the students. More than three of four students state they participate for fun and enjoyment, personal achievement, or needs and interests. (p. 3)

These studies have focused exclusively on high school students. They did not examine gender differences and they failed to check on whether the reasons varied by activity. Thus, these would be an inadequate basis for drawing conclusions about reasons for participation and nonparticipation in forensics or for gender-related differences in those reasons. They would also be an inadequate basis for drawing conclusions about college level students.

Survey

A survey was created to explore the reasons college students give for participation and nonparticipation in extra-curricular events. Students from the Miami University forensic team and an introductory public relations class filled out a survey about their participation in extracurricular activities. They were asked to identify the activities they currently participate in, rate 17 reasons for participation on a seven-point scale according to its importance to them, identify the activities they would like to participate in, and rate 21 reasons for not participating in extra-curricular activities on a seven-point scale. Demographic data consisting of gender and year in school were also collected. A copy of the questionnaire is included at the end of this essay.

A 2 x 2 design was employed examining differences for gender as well as forensic participation (i.e., forensic participation, no forensic participation). Analysis of variance procedures were utilized concerning the number of activities participated in, each reason for participation and nonparticipation in extracurricular activities, and number of additional activities subjects wanted to participate in. Subjects consisted of 17 forensic participants (seven males and ten females) and 28 non-forensic participants (12 males and 16 females).

Results

Significant results occurred for nine of the 39 dependent measures. A summary of the significant results is provided in Table 1. There were four factors of the 17 reasons for choosing an extra-curricular activity that had significant results. Females in forensics valued relevance to career goals as a reason for choosing an extra-curricular activity least (Mean=3.00), while males in forensics

Table 1
Significant Results

Factor	Source of Variation	Mean Square	F	Sign.
Career Relevance	Interaction	5.727	4.457	0.04
Several Activities	Forensics	12.130	4.023	0.05
Friends Participate	Gender	22.977	7.924	0.01
Parents Approve	Forensics	12.925	3.974	0.05
Time Inhibits	Gender	13.207	6.447	0.02
Employment Inhibits	Gender	13.403	4.302	0.05
Lack of Invitation	Interaction	24.714	5.298	0.03
Cost Inhibits	Gender	12.130	4.791	0.04
Cost Inhibits	Forensics	15.425	6.092	0.02
Social Interaction	Forensics	2.679	5.565	0.03
Social Interaction	Interaction	1.989	4.130	0.05

valued it most (Mean=1.86). Subjects not in forensics valued the ability to be involved in several activities as more important (Mean=3.28) than forensic participants (Mean =4.38). Males valued friends' participation in an activity more (Mean=2.76) than did females (Mean=4.28). Forensic participants valued parental approval (Mean=4.47) more than did non-forensic participants (Mean=5.60).

There were five factors of the 21 reasons for being inhibited from joining an extra-curricular activity that yielded significant results. Males are more inhibited by activities that would take time away from schoolwork (Mean =2.75) than are females (Mean=3.96). Males are also more inhibited by conflicts with jobs or employment (Mean=2.75) than are females (Mean=3.96). Male forensic participants are the most inhibited by a lack of invitation or selection to participate (Mean=2.67), while male non-forensic participants are the least inhibited by this factor (Mean =4.60), and forensic participants find cost (Mean =3.00) to be more inhibiting than non-forensic participants (Mean=4.36). Forensic participants also find the presence of social interaction (Mean=6.25) to be slightly more inhibiting than non-forensic participants (Mean=6.83). The interaction effect shows that female forensic participants find social interaction (Mean=5.86) to be more inhibiting than subjects in any other cell, while female nonparticipants find social interaction less inhibiting (Mean=6.86) than subjects in any other cell.

Discussion

These results show no clear pattern that would support the hypothesis that there are widespread gender differences affecting choices regarding reasons for participating or not participating in extra-curricular events. Males in forensics value extra-curricular activities relevant to their careers more than females in forensics. If this is true, then it may indicate that male forensic participants find forensics to be more relevant to their anticipated careers than do female forensic participants. Since forensics is a time-consuming activity, it is difficult to be active in a number of organizations while participating in forensics. Since individuals not in forensics valued the ability to be involved in several activities more highly than forensic participants, the time required for the activity could be a factor inhibiting some students from participating in forensics. Contrary to the popular stereotype of females wanting to join activities with their friends, this survey found males valuing friends' involvement more highly. Forensics has traditionally been considered a very time consuming activity, and males found time away from schoolwork and employment conflicts to be more

important factors than did females. This would suggest that males should be less involved in forensics than females which is contrary to the perceptual data at the college level as discussed above.

This study has some serious limitations that must be taken into account before the results are viewed as dismissing gender differences in decisions about whether to participate in forensics or in validating the significant results reported above. The sample size for the survey was not ideal. There was an imbalance between the sizes of the forensic population (17) and the non-forensic population (28). That imbalance became even more critical when examining interaction effects. Cell sizes ranged from 7 to 16, and those levels lead to questions about the validity of the results. In addition, 117 statistical tests were performed. Significant results for 11 of them could have occurred by chance, and thus great care should be exercised in drawing upon those significant results.

Directions for Future Research

This paper offers a beginning step in examining the importance of gender to decisions about whether or not to join forensic activities. There are a number of directions additional research could profitably explore. Broader-based college samples of both those involved in forensics and those not involved should be explored. It might also be valuable to break down forensics to examine debate and individual events populations or to break down the debate group even further into CEDA and NDT debaters. An examination of non-forensic participants' perceptions about forensics as an activity or exploration of reasons for not choosing forensics in particular could also be useful. Aside from the question of gender, these areas of exploration could provide important information to programs attempting to involve more students overall in forensics.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

1) Please list *all* extra-curricular activities and/or organizations you are currently involved with. (For example, debate, individual events, drama, music related activities, athletics, social organizations, honor societies, fraternities, sororities, student government/council activities, professional and class related activities, etc.)

2) What factors are important to you in choosing an extra curricular activity and/or organization? Please rate each of the following factors on a scale of 1 to 7 with *1 being very important* and *7 being very unimportant*.

- Fun/personal enjoyment _____
- Relevance to career goals _____
- Relevance to personal needs or interests _____
- Minimal time interference with school work _____
- Acceptability of activity by peer group _____
- Minimal costs _____
- Ability to be involved in several activities _____
- Appropriateness of activity for my sex _____
- Availability of activity for my sex _____
- Competition is involved _____
- Social interaction is involved _____
- Opportunity for leadership positions _____
- Friends participate _____
- Parents approve _____
- Learning experiences not available in the classroom are offered _____
- Improve relations with faculty _____
- Being invited and/or selected _____
- Other (Please specify)

QUESTIONNAIRE - continued

3) Are there any extra-curricular activities and/or organizations you are *not* participating in that you would like to be involved in? If so, please specify which ones.

4) What factors would inhibit your participation in extra-curricular activities and/or organizations? Please rate the following factors on a scale of 1 to 7 with 1 being *very inhibiting* and 7 being *not at all inhibiting*.

Lack of fun/personal enjoyment _____
 Lack of relevance to career goals _____
 Lack of relevance to needs and/or interests _____
 It would take time away from school work _____
 Conflicts with job/employment _____
 Not being invited or selected _____
 Activity controlled by a select group _____
 Sponsors or faculty advisers play favorites _____
 Activity is dominated by sponsor or faculty advisor _____
 Lack of advertisement of opportunity to join _____
 Costs _____
 Required transportation _____
 Not an "in" thing to do _____
 Not available because of your sex _____
 Not the norm for your sex _____
 Too many rules _____
 Desire to participate in many activities.
 Competition is involved _____
 Social interaction is involved _____
 Grades aren't high enough _____
 Parents disapprove _____
 Other (please specify)

5) Are you Male _____ or Female _____

6) What year in school are you in?
 Freshman ___ Sophomore ___ Junior ___ Senior.