

# An Examination of Male/Female Judging Decisions in Individual Events

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While the educational value of forensic participation has long been established, the parity with which that educational opportunity has been afforded to both men and women is questionable. In 1974, the National Developmental Conference on Forensics at Sedalia included among its conference recommendations a call for research to "determine why certain individuals, women and minority group members, resist involvement" (McBath, 1975, p. 23). During the following decade some demographic descriptions of debaters and tournament participants were developed, but no concerted effort to conduct research recommended by the conference was made; the extent to which female and minority group participation was limited in forensics remained speculative. Ten years later, the Second National Developmental Conference on Forensics at Northwestern University endorsed a resolution "to increase and strengthen forensic participation by identifying ethnic, racial, gender, and handicap barriers which may currently inhibit student participation as well as disseminate findings concerning such barriers throughout the forensic community" (Parson, 1985, p. 43).

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In recent years, forensic educators have begun to examine male/female participation and success in forensics. A 1983 exploratory survey conducted within the forensic community sought to identify the perceptions of male/female participation in forensics (Friedley & Nadler, 1987). In an attempt to compare "perceptions" about forensic participation and success with actual data, Friedley and Manchester (1985a) examined male/female participation and success from three national forensic tournaments in 1984: 1) the National Debate Tournament, 2) the American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament, and 3) the National Forensic Association's Individual Events Nationals. Examination of the actual male/female participation

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level at the 1984 National Debate Tournament indicated that participation in the tournament was largely dominated by males. Though one female did advance to the final round of this national competition, there were considerably fewer male/female teams and female/female teams competing than male/male teams; in fact, no female/female team advanced beyond the quarter-final rounds of competition.

While descriptive data from the preliminary rounds of competition at the 1984 American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament suggested a general balance in male/female participation ratios, analysis of the elimination rounds at these tournaments reflected a sex-based imbalance which emerged—an imbalance that favored male participants in this activity.

Specifically, the data indicated a distinct male domination in the original speaking events and limited preparation events at the American Forensic Association's national tournament while only a male domination in the limited preparation grouping of events at the National Forensic Association's national tournament. Perhaps the most surprising finding, however, was associated with the male/ female participation and success in the interpretive events. While previous research had suggested that these events were generally perceived to be more "feminine" and the ones most likely to provide a barrier to male participation because of conflicting sex-role expectations associated with the events, analysis of the data concerning male/female participation ratios at the two national tournaments did not support this perception; instead, males tended to dominate slightly in this group of events in the elimination rounds of competition, particularly at the American Forensic Association's national tournament.

Finally, to compare male/female participation and success at regional tournaments to male/female participation and success at national tournaments, Friedley and Manchester (1985b) examined male/female participation and success at twenty 1984-85 regional tournaments as well as male/female participation and success at the 1985 American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament and the 1985 National Forensic Association's Individual Events Nationals. In general, the results from these 1984-85 regional tournaments and 1985 national tournaments indicated a slight male dominance in participation and a distinct male dominance in success that ranged from "moderate" (55% male, 45% female) in final rounds at regional tournaments to "overwhelming" (63% male, 37% female) in the final rounds of national competition.

Of the ten events examined at the regional tournaments, women comprised over 50% of the finalists in four events—informative speaking, persuasive speaking, poetry interpretation, and drama. Of the ten events examined at the national tournaments, women comprised over 50% of the quarter-finalists in only one event (informative speaking), over 50% of the semi-finalists in only one event (communication analysis/rhetorical criticism), and over 50% of the finalists in only two events (informative speaking and communication analysis/rhetorical criticism). Women comprised over 33% of the finalists in nine of the ten events at regional tournaments, while they comprised over 33% of the finalists in only four of the ten events at national tournaments. Although individual events is perceived by the forensic community as a sex-balanced activity (especially when compared to debate), national success is still primarily reserved for males regardless of the event grouping.

Perhaps it is important to note that the greatest disparity in both male/female participation and success at both regional and national tournaments was found in the limited preparation events. It appears that it may be far more uncomfortable and difficult for females to violate sex-role expectations and stereotypes in these events than it is for males to violate sex-role expectations and stereotypes in the interpretive events. Because the level of male success in the interpretive events rises slightly in final rounds at regional tournaments and rises overwhelmingly in elimination rounds at national tournaments while the level of female success in the limited preparation events drops considerably in the final rounds at both regional and national tournaments, it appears that males are rewarded more for violating those sex-role expectations and stereotypes than females.

Few educators would argue that the benefits accrued through participation in the forensic experience should be available to all individuals regardless of sex. In addition, the argumentative and communicative skills fostered by forensics may be especially beneficial to specific groups of individuals who may not otherwise have the opportunity to develop these skills. Since both perceptions and actual data "suggest" there are varying levels of male/female participation and success at both regional and national tournaments, it is necessary to institute exploration of "why" such imbalance may occur.

Perhaps the initiation of such exploratory research should focus on the nature of judging decisions in the activity, since judges determine what is considered "successful" in this competitive activity. An examination of male/female judging decisions related to male/female contestants may provide some insight into why

females are not experiencing more success. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine male/female judging decisions with respect to sex of contestants in final rounds of competition at selected regional tournaments.

#### METHOD

To provide data for this research, the sex of both judges and contestants in final rounds of competition at ten Eastern regional individual events tournaments were identified and tabulated. The final rounds of competition from these regional tournaments encompassed the following nine national events: 1) *original speaking events* including informative speaking, after-dinner speaking, persuasive speaking, and communication analysis/rhetorical criticism; 2) *interpretation events* including prose interpretation, poetry interpretation, and drama interpretation; 3) *limited preparation events* including extemporaneous speaking and impromptu speaking. Dramatic duo was eliminated from the sample because of the complexity of male/female contestant combinations possible in that event.

Using tournament results provided by the tournament directors, the judges' sex and the contestants' sex was determined by noting obviously sex-typed first names. When a judge or contestant's name was not sex-specific, identification was determined through consultation with various tournament directors and program directors. In all, judges and contestants from 115 final rounds of competition were identified and tabulated. However, twenty-one final rounds of competition (22% of the original sample) were eliminated when computing rank-based data because all the contestants in these final rounds of competition reflected only one sex; therefore, judges in these rounds did not have a male/female option.<sup>1</sup> As a result, ninety-four final rounds of competition across the three event groupings were tabulated for differences in male/female judging decisions.

From the data provided by these final rounds of competition, the following tabulations were made: 1) the ratio of males and females that comprise the judging pool; 2) the mean rank given to male and female contestants by male and female judges, with "1" being the highest rank possible and "5" being the lowest rank possible; 3) the ratio of "first" and "last" place ranks given to male and female contestants by male and female judges. Overall research findings

<sup>1</sup>All twenty-one final rounds of competition eliminated from the sample consisted of only male contestants. These all-male rounds included nine final rounds of original speaking events, seven final rounds of interpretation events, and five final rounds of limited preparation events.

are reported initially, followed by specific research findings related to each of the three event groupings.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *All Events Combined*

The judging pool for this research consisted of 280 judges—154 male judges (55%) and 126 female judges (45%). This data indicates a relatively equal balance between males and females used to judge final rounds of competition at these regional tournaments.

In ninety-four final rounds of competition, male judges' mean rank given to male contestants was 2.99 while female judges' mean rank given to male contestants was an identical 2.99. Male judges' mean rank given to female contestants was 3.20 while female judges' mean rank given to female contestants was 3.24. Both male and female judges ranked male contestants slightly higher than female contestants. Comparison of the mean ranks given by both male and female judges indicates an extremely high consistency in male/female judging decision—identical mean ranks in judging males and only slightly different mean ranks in judging females.

When comparing the ratio of "first" to "last" place ranks in these final rounds of competition, male judges ranked male contestants "first" 65.0% of the time while female judges ranked male contestants "first" 71.3% of the time. On the other hand, male judges ranked male contestants "last" 57.8% of the time while female judges ranked male contestants "last" 63.0% of the time. In general, both male and female judges ranked male contestants both "first" and "last" in the final rounds of competition more often than they did female contestants. Most often, female contestants neither rose to the top nor fell to the bottom in final rounds of competition at these regional tournaments.

### *Original Speaking Events*

In the original speaking events of informative speaking, after-dinner speaking, persuasive speaking, and communication analysis/rhetorical criticism, the judging pool consisted of 119 judges—67 male judges (56.3%) and 52 female judges (43.7%). While there were slightly more male judges than female judges in these events, a relatively equal male/female balance was maintained in the judging pool.

In final rounds of competition, male judges' mean rank given to male contestants was 2.92 while female judges' mean rank given to male contestants was 2.90. Male judges' mean rank given to female contestants was 3.27 while female judges' mean rank given to

female contestants was 3.44. Both male and female judges ranked male contestants slightly higher than they ranked female contestants in the original speaking events. Comparison of the mean rank scores given by both male and female judges again reflected extremely high consistency in male/female judging decisions—a difference of only .02 mean rank when judging males and .17 mean rank when judging females.

When comparing the ratio of "first" to "last" place ranks in the final rounds of competition in the original speaking events, male judges ranked male contestants "first" 70.0% of the time while female judges ranked male contestants "first" 81.4% of the time. In fact, the highest percentage of "firsts" given to male or female contestants across the three event groupings occurred when female judges ranked male contestants in the original speaking events. On the other hand, male judges ranked male contestants "last" 53.1% of the time while female judges ranked male contestants "last" 61.9% of the time. In general, both male and female judges ranked male contestants both "first" and "last" in the final rounds of the original speaking events more often than they did female contestants. Perhaps it is most interesting to note that female judges ranked male contestants both "first" and "last" considerably more often than male judges.

#### *Interpretation Events*

In the interpretation events of prose, poetry, and drama, the judging pool consisted of ninety-nine judges—forty-nine male judges (49.5%) and fifty female judges (50.0%). With almost identical numbers of male and female judges used to judge the final rounds in these events, the judging pool in the interpretation events was the most balanced of the three event groupings.

In the final rounds of competition, male judges' mean rank given to male contestants was 3.16 while female judges' mean rank given to male contestants was 3.08. Male judges' mean rank given to female contestants was 2.92 while female judges' mean rank given to female contestants was 3.12. Male judges were likely to rank female contestants in the interpretation events slightly higher than male contestants (.23 mean rank difference) while female judges were likely to rank male contestants in the interpretation events slightly higher than the female contestants (.04 mean rank difference). In fact, the highest mean rank female contestants received across the three event groupings (2.93 mean rank) occurred when they were judged by males in the interpretation events. Furthermore, the lowest mean rank male contestants received across the three event groupings (3.16 mean rank) occurred when they were judged by male judges in the interpretation events.

When comparing the ratio of "first" and "last" place ranks in the final rounds of competition in the interpretation events, male judges ranked female contestants "first" 53.6% of the time while female judges ranked male contestants "first" 60.0% of the time. On the other hand, male judges ranked male contestants "last" 65.8% of the time while female judges ranked male contestants "last" 60.0% of the time. Specifically, the only time female contestants received more "first" place ranks than male contestants across the three event groupings was when they were judged by males in the interpretation events. Female judges, however, gave both male and female contestants virtually the identical percentage of "first" and "last" place ranks in the interpretation events.

According to the data collected by Friedley and Nadler (1987) in their 1983 survey, the interpretation events are most often perceived as "feminine" events. It appears that male judges are more likely to reinforce this traditional sex-role expectation associated with the interpretation events by rewarding females with a higher mean rank and a higher percentage of "firsts" than their male counterparts. Female judges, on the other hand, rank male contestants almost no differently than they rank female contestants and give each sex a virtually identical percentage of "first" and "last" place ranks in the interpretation events. Again, it appears that female judges are not nearly as concerned about reinforcing traditional sex-role expectations in their judging decisions in these events as are male judges.

#### *Limited Preparation Events*

In the limited preparation events of extemporaneous speaking and impromptu speaking, the judging pool consisted of sixty-two judges—38 male judges (61.3%) and 24 female judges (38.7%). Of the three event groupings, the disparity between the number of male and female judges was most apparent in the limited preparation events. While such a disparity exists, there is probably a reasonable explanation for the imbalance. Data from previous research (Friedley & Manchester, 1985a; Friedley & Manchester, 1985b) indicates that the limited preparation events are heavily dominated by males in both participation and success. If a qualified judging pool at regional tournaments is selected from those individuals who have most likely participated and succeeded in the events, a predominantly male judging pool is likely.

In final rounds of competition, male judges' mean rank given to male contestants was 2.89 while female judges' mean rank given to male contestants was 3.02. Male judges' mean rank given to female contestants was 3.15. Both male and female judges ranked male

contestants higher than they ranked female contestants in the limited preparation events. In particular, male judges' mean ranks reflected a greater disparity between male contestants and female contestants (.62 mean rank) in this event grouping than in any other event grouping. Furthermore, the highest mean rank for either male or female contestants across all the event groupings (2.89 mean rank) occurred when male judges ranked male contestants in the limited preparation events. Also, the lowest mean rank for either male or female contestants across all the event groupings (3.51 mean rank) occurred when male judges ranked female contestants in the limited preparation events. In comparison, female judges' mean rank for male contestants was only slightly higher (.13 mean rank difference) than their mean rank for female contestants in these events.

When comparing the ratio of "first" to "last" place ranks in the limited preparation events, male judges ranked male contestants "first" 79.3% of the time while female judges ranked male contestants "first" 72.2% of the time. On the other hand, male judges ranked male contestants "last" 55.2% of the time while female judges ranked male contestants "last" 72.2% of the time. In general, both male and female judges ranked male contestants both "first" and "last" in the final rounds of competition in the limited preparation events more often than they did female contestants. Specifically, the second highest percent of "first" place ranks across all the event groupings occurred when male judges ranked male contestants in the limited preparation events. As in the interpretation events, it is interesting to note that female judges ranked male contestants "first" and "last" equally (72.2% of the time) while male judges ranked male contestants "first" considerably more often (79.3% of the time) than "last" (55.2% of the time) in the limited preparation events.

According to the data collected by Friedley and Nadler (1987) in their 1983 survey, the limited preparation events are most often perceived as "masculine" events. As with the interpretation events, it appears that male judges are more likely to reinforce this traditional sex-role expectation associated with the limited preparation events by rewarding males with a higher mean rank and a higher percentage of "firsts" than their female counterparts. Female judges, as in the interpretation events, rank male contestants almost no differently than female contestants and give each sex a virtually identical percentage of "first" and "last" place ranks in the limited preparation events. Again, it appears that female judges are not nearly as concerned about reinforcing traditional sex-role expectations in their judging decisions in these events as are male judges.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this research provides an initial analysis of male/female judging decisions in individual events at the regional level, it is only the first step necessary to identify some of the sex-based barriers confronted by participants in this activity. With this initial analysis, however, the authors clearly recognize the need for continued research to discuss if these research findings are generalizable to the larger forensic population.

First, similar research that examines the same type of data including regional tournaments throughout the nation over a period of time would certainly provide a greater sense of "trend" than one isolated study. In addition, data from regional tournaments throughout the nation would provide the opportunity to explore the possibility of regional differences in male/female judging decisions. If such data continues to support a "trend" toward relative consistency between male/female judges, then educators will conclude that the sex of judge may not be a significant variable in understanding male/female differences in participation and success in individual events. As a result, future research may well begin to focus on the qualities that affect participation and success as well as why these qualities may be fostered in one sex more often than the other sex.<sup>2</sup>

Second, male/female judging decisions in individual events should also be examined at the national tournaments. Because the greater disparity in male/female contestant success has emerged at the national level of competition (Friedley & Manchester, 1985a; Friedley & Manchester, 1985b) perhaps the greater disparity in male/female judging may also occur at this level of competition. An analysis of the male/female composition of the judging pool used at the national tournament as well as a comparison of male/female judging decisions at the national tournaments may provide valuable insight into why males tend to succeed more than females across all event groupings at the national level.

### CONCLUSION

While this research is somewhat limited in its scope, it does provide an exploratory examination of male/female judging decisions at selected regional tournaments. Perhaps the most significant finding of this research is that male/female judging

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<sup>2</sup>For example, Schein (1973, 1975) reports that both male and female middle managers consistently describe successful managers according to characteristics commonly ascribed to men; if a male-oriented management model is the norm, then women managers will inevitably be judged as deficient by both sexes. Perhaps a similar phenomenon occurs in individual events.

decisions related to the contestants' sex appear to be extremely consistent both within event groupings and across event groupings. While it may be comforting to know that mean rank differences between male and female contestants are not generally related to the sex of the judge, these findings only lend support for the argument that success in the activity may not be as much a result of the judges' sex as it is a result of the contestants' sex. Future research may need to focus on the personal characteristics of the students attracted to the activity as well as the model for evaluating "success" in the activity. Such information may prove most valuable in both recruiting and training successful forensic competitors of both sexes.

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