

CEDA:Male/Female Participation Levels  
A Research Report

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Both National Developmental Conferences on Forensics recommended that the forensic activity be open to as many people as possible. At the Evanston Conference a resolution was endorsed calling for the forensic community

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. [1]

This article, based on research previously presented at regional and national conventions, is an attempt to provide the CEDA membership with a picture of the organization's participation levels of male and female debaters. Finally, some explanations will be given as to why female involvement is not proportional to the overall female college population.

#### Regional Participation Levels

Three studies [2] examining male/female participation levels and success rates in regional CEDA tournaments found women comprise one-third of the participants. Medcalf found at seven Western tournaments that women accounted for 28.5 percent of the participants.[3] Similarly, Logue found a 34.6 percent participation rate for women at seven Northeast tournaments.[4] In a followup study, she found a 35.4 percent female involvement rate at four additional regional tournaments (two in the East and two in the Midwest).[5] Although an application of Chi-square indicated no significant difference between actual and expected female participation across the three studies, the slight increase in percentage of female participation in the followup study might suggest a gradual trend upward for women in competition.

Two tournaments which Logue investigated had novice divisions. At the Suffolk University Tournament, novice women (32.5 percent of the division) out-numbered varsity women by three to one. This was not the case however at the University of Illinois Tournament where 12 varsity women competed as compared to 11 novice women (45.8 percent of the novice division). When success rates are considered at this level, half of the novice speaker awards at Suffolk went to women; in the varsity division, one-third of the speakers' awards went to women. Similarly, 60 percent of the top novice speakers were women at the Illinois tournament (20 percent of the varsity speaker awards were to women). The U.S. Military Academy also recognized varsity and novice speakers: 67 percent of the novice awards went to women while only 20 percent of the varsity awards were to women. In final rounds, at the Suffolk Tournament, all the debaters were women and at the Illinois Tournament three of the four debaters were women. Though limited in number, these novice tournaments might suggest the strength of women as beginning collegiate debaters.

Overall, at regional tournaments in varsity divisions women accounted for 44 percent of the speaker awards [6] and 24.6 percent in the earlier study. [7] These percentages are proportional to the numbers of women competing in the varsity division. The 44 percent figure may be inflated due to an unusually high percentage of awards to women at the Pittsburg State University Tournament, where five of the six speakers were female.

The composition of teams is fairly consistent across the three studies as seen in Table 1. The all male team predominates, followed by mixed teams. The all female team was the least likely pairing. Only in the last Logue study [8] did the mixed team slightly outnumber the all male team.

Table 1  
A Comparison of 3 Studies as to CEDA Team Makeup

Study	Female-Male	Male-Male	Female-Female
Medcalf	73 (38.8%)	98 (52.2%)	17 (9.0%)
Logue (1985a)	56 (29.8%)	95 (50.2%)	37 (19.7%)
Logue (1985b)	51 (45.1%)	47 (41.6%)	15 (13.3%)
Totals	180 (36.8%)	240 (49.1%)	69 (14.1%)

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Success rate by team makeup was fairly consistent across the three studies at the regional level as shown in Table 2. The all male team (with the exception of the latest Logue study) had a slight win advantage over the male-female team and the all female team; however, no team combination had a significantly better win record than the others.

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Table 2  
Win-Loss Records by Team Makeup across Three Studies

Study	Win-Loss Percentage		
	M-F	M-M	F-F
Medcalf	48.1	52.8	46.2
Logue (85a)	50.5	52.1	48.9
Logue (85b)	48.7	50.4	57.1
Averages	49.1	51.8	50.7

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Comparatively speaking, with women making up one-third of the participants in regional CEDA debate, they play a significantly greater role in CEDA than do women in NDT. Harris and Boone [9] report only 14.88 percent of NDT participants are women at "local" tournaments. "Local" for these researchers is exemplified by such national NDT circuit tournaments as Northwestern, Kentucky, Emory, Harvard, Kansas, and Southern California. Perhaps, if truly regional NDT tournaments were investigated a greater female involvement would be apparent.

In individual events regional competition, Friedley and Manchester

[10] reported 52 percent male and 48 percent female participation levels at 20 tournaments. Females in final rounds were proportional (45%) to their participation levels. When just impromptu and extemporaneous events are examined (those more closely associated with debate), the percentages of participation and success rates are remarkably similar to that of CEDA: Participation is 63 percent male, 37 percent female with similar representation in final rounds (69% male; 31% female).

#### National Participation Levels

Five "national" level tournaments were examined in two studies [11]: 1984 University of Nevada- Reno, 1985 University of Nevada - Reno, 1985 Towson State University Chesapeake Classic, 1984 and 1985 Vanderbilt University. At these tournaments, 896 debaters competed; 661 were male (73.8%) and 235 were female (26.2%). 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 tournament. Table 3 shows the application of Chi-square to actual and expected participation levels at regional and national tournaments.

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Table 3  
Chi-Square Application to Actual and Expected Participation  
Levels at Regional and National Tournaments

Type (#)	Female	Male	Total
Regional (18)	317 [288]	661 [690]	978
National (5)	235 [264]	661 [632]	896
Totals	552	1322	1874

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Chi-Square (1) = 8.656,  $p > .01$ , (expected values in parentheses)

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At the national level the regional trend persists that the all male

team dominates the pairings, followed by the mixed team, and finally the all female team (as seen in Table 4). Likewise, the all male team wins more, but not significantly more so than the male-female or all female pairings. 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.

Table 4  
Makeup and Success Rate of Teams at National Level Tournaments

Tourney	#M-F	%wins	#M-M	%wins	#F-F	%wins
Vandy (84)	16	53.9	22	49.4	4	43.8
Towson (85)	10	51.3	31	48.8	3	58.3
Reno (85)	62	46.9	84	53.4	11	48.5
Vandy (85)	24	50.5	34	52.2	6	35.4
Reno (84)	41	48.3	82	51.0	18	44.4
Totals	153(34%)	49.4	253(56%)	52.0	42 (9%)	45.3

On an individual basis, the success of women at the national level is proportional to their participation rates. Women comprised 32 percent of the recognized top speakers at the tournaments examined by Logue. [12] They were also proportionally represented in national elimination rounds: 25 percent in finals, 31 percent in semis, 25 percent in quarters, and 26 percent in octofinals.

It appears that CEDA national level tournaments provide women with a greater (though not statistically significant) opportunity for participation (26.2%) than is reported for the last five years of the National Debate Tournament (1981 to 1985) where participation rates for women have ranged from 14.52 percent in 1983 to 19.36 percent in 1981. Since its inception in 1947, a total of eight women have participated in a final round of the NDT and only once has a woman ever won first or second

speaker at the NDT. [13]

National competition in impromptu and extemporaneous speaking is somewhat more conducive to female competitors (36%) than are CEDA and NDT. A relatively equal proportion of women advance to quarters (37%), 30 percent to semis, and 21 percent to finals. [14] The female involvement in elimination rounds is similar to that of elimination rounds in CEDA, even though these individual events begin with 10 percent more women competitors.

#### Discussion and Implications

In terms of gender, the forensic community needs to ask itself if the proportions of men and women competitors are acceptable at the national and regional levels. The 1980 population at four-year institutions was made up of 51 percent men and 49 percent women. [15] Whereas, overall individual events competition reflects these figures, debate does not. CEDA regional tournaments vary approximately 14 percentage points and national level events by 23 percentage points from the general college proportions of men and women. Being sensitive to these facts may be the initial step in better equalizing the situation.

Four-year institutions are staffed with approximately 23 percent women faculty [16], not unlike the 21 percent of woman directing CEDA programs (from the 1984-85 Membership Directory). Available data for individual events programs is not so readily available, and NDT data suggests that 13.7 percent of the coaches at the 1985 NDT were women. There appears to be a correlation between number of women coaches and number of female contestants: The 1985 NDT had 16.9 percent women debaters with 13.7 percent women coaches; the 1985 CEDA final tournament had 26.7 percent women debaters while the national coaching directory listed 21 percent women directors. To see if this correlation holds true, an examination of

high school coaches would most likely indicate a higher percentage of women coaches. Illinois high school data, argued to be generalized nationally, reveals females making up 51 percent of the debaters.[17] If there is a relationship between female coaches serving as role-models and thus encouraging more female participation, then more women students should be directed into graduate schools to become debate coaches.

Although it might be suggested that the predominant perception in the speech communication field is that debate is a "masculine" activity [18], this view is not consistent with the finding of student perceptions at a major land grant university in the Northeast.[19] For the most part those students (71.5% male and 93.9% female) rated the debate activity as androgynous, having the characteristic of both men and women. If this study involving some 3,400 students is generalizable, then the debate activity from the student viewpoint, and particularly the female student perception, should not be a threatening male bastion.

Perception of the activity and the actual participation are two different creatures. Eakins and Eakins write that "many females find the argumentative style not only difficult to use, but inhibiting when it is used against them." [20] This style might also explain why more women prefer individual events to debate. Although the argumentative nature of debate does not seem to prevent high school females from competing, something may happen to young women as they progress through the educational system. Schneider and Coutts offer an explanation. They report that females from the tenth grade to the twelfth experience more levels of anxiety, experience more intensity of role conflicts, and reduce their achievement strivings in an effort to deal with these sex role/career conflicts.[21] If this conflict and anxiety continue into the freshman year

of college, likely many young women would see the rigors of the debate activity as only exacerbating their tensions.

In fact, very few college freshmen women (36.9%) rated their public speaking ability as above average [22], as compared with some 52 percent of the males who did. This feeling of inadequacy in the area of public speaking, coupled with the confrontational nature of debate, might provide some explanation as to the reluctance of college women in becoming involved. The inherent competitive structure of individual events and debate may be yet another barrier preventing increased female participation. A serious and concerted effort needs to be made to provide more discussion-oriented events and workshop environments as alternatives to the current win-lose tournament circuit. Perhaps viewing CEDA novice divisions as less competitive, women take a more active and successful part at this level while avoiding varsity competition.

In general Mueller reported that non-participation in extracurricular activities was attributed to part-time work, weekends away from campus, lack of interest, and time-required for academic activities. [23] These may still be reasons why fewer women participate in the debate activity, and explains why women may more readily travel regionally than nationally. If scholarships are not available, more and more students must turn to part-time employment and thus work constrains the freedom to travel. A shorter forensics season and a willingness of coaches to travel less involved and thus less competitive students is essential if women and minorities are going to be provided more opportunities in the forensic activity. CEDA's two topic system may unwittingly serve students who face more academic and financial burdens, allowing them to debate during whichever semester is less demanding.

Perhaps most obvious to this discussion is the male dominance of the



activity. Coaching staffs are more often than not male dominated. The topic choices and therefore those topics selected are perhaps going to have more male than female appeal (e.g., military support, terrorism, nuclear war). Those officials writing topics should take into account the role that topic interest may play in enlisting a more varied student population. Androgynous, minority-oriented, and more feminine topics should be considered on a single ballot (e.g., day care, reproductive rights, comparable worth). Also, the value-orientation of topics might be a factor drawing more women to debate in CEDA than toward the strictly policy mode of NDT. The less emphasis on evidence in CEDA may also be a contributory factor to CEDA's increased popularity with women. If these reasons are important considerations for women, then CEDA should maintain its objectives of offering alternative topics, formats, and a sane approach to evidence.

Hall and Sandler in comparing a woman's experience in the classroom with the climate outside the classroom suggest that the classroom may be more egalitarian because

there is an immediate task at hand; there are usually at least overt criteria for treating students fairly and similarly; the 'rules' of interaction are more formalized and explicit than in less organized settings. Outside the classroom, however, there is often more leeway for differential treatment by faculty, peers and other: more segregation by race and sex; more invoking of gender as a mark of difference and deficiency; more overt exclusion and sometimes even hostility.[24]

Coaches may not even realize that such subtle discrimination may take place in forensics, especially in debate. Sensitivity to the problem of women participation, as well as that of minorities, is a necessary first step in increasing the ranks of these participants.

The reasons for lower female participation in intercollegiate debate are speculative at best: fewer female coaches, anxiety, role conflict,

parttime work, academic pressures, lack of interest, travel requirements, topic choice, overt or covert discrimination. But what is fairly certain is that extracurricular activities are important for women and that faculty behavior affects student outcomes. "Specifically, faculty members who take time to socialize with their women students may help them to overcome any doubts they have about their own intellectual competence and thus to develop greater academic self-esteem." [25] Hall and Sandler regreably report that

many studies also show that women students generally get less attention from faculty and others outside the classroom, and less in formal feedback than do men. This problem is exacerbated by the small number of women in senior faculty positions and administrative posts. [26]

By self-study, the forensic community can help put its own house in order by recognizing the facts of woman participants, being sensitive to their unique problems, and encouraging their involvement -- even if it means such changes in coaching staffs, tournament format, shorter seasons, and different topics.

#### Notes

[1] Donn Parson, ed. American Forensics in Perspective (Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1984), p. 43.

[2] Lawrence D. Medcalf, "The Participation and Success of Women in CEDA Debate," paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention, Chicago, 1984; Brenda J. Logue, "An Examination of Gender-based Levels of Participation in CEDA debate," paper presented at Eastern Communication Association Convention, Providence, RI, May 1985 [a]; Brenda Logue, "Male/Female Levels of Participation in Regional and National CEDA Debate Tournaments," paper presented at Speech Communication Association Convention, Denver, 1985 [b]

[3] Medcalf, p. 5.

[4] Logue, 1985 [a], p. 2.

[5] Logue, 1985 [b], p. 2.

[6] Logue, 1985 [b], p. 6.

[7] Logue, 1985 [a], p. 3.

[8] Logue, 1985 [b], p. 4.

[9] Ed Harris and Gloria Boone, "An Examination of Participation in NDT Debate by Gender," paper presented at Eastern Communication Association Convention, Providence, RI, May 1985, p. 2.

[10] Sheryl A. Friedley and Bruce B. Manchester, "Male/Female Levels of Participation in Regional and National Individual Events Tournaments," paper presented at Speech Communication Association Convention, Denver, 1985, p. 5.

[11] Medcalf, p. 5; Logue, 1985 [b], p. 7.

[12] Logue, 1985 [b], p. 9.

[13] Robert E. Rosenthal, Gloria M. Boone, and Ed J. Harris, "Male/Female Levels of Participation in Regional and National NDT Debate Tournaments," paper presented at Speech Communication Association Convention, Denver, 1985, p. 3.

[14] Friedley and Manchester, p. 10.

[15] Charles J. Andersen, 1981-82 Fact Handbook (Washington, DC: American Council on Education, 1981), pp. 58 and 72.

[16] Andersen, p. 119-120.

[17] Ronald E. Gholson and Robert L. Buser, Cocurricular Activity Programs in Secondary Schools, report prepared for NASSP, Reston, VA, 1983, p. 12.

[18] Sheryl Friedley and Marjorie K. Nadler, "Perceived Gender Differences in Forensic Participation and Leadership," paper presented at Speech Communication Association Convention, Washington, DC, 1983.

[19] Mary A.D. Sagaria and Sabato D. Sagaria, "Sex-Role Stereotyping and Freshman Students' Intended Extracurricular Activities," Journal of College Student Personnel (March 1984), p. 131.

[20] Barbara W. Eakins and R. Gene Eakins, Sex Differences in Human Communication (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), p. 49.

[21] Frank W. Schneider and Larry M. Coutts, "On Decline of Achievement Orientation of High School Females," paper presented at Annual Meeting of American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, 1984, p. 12-14.

[22] Helen S. Astin and Laura Kent, "Gender Roles in Transition: Research and Policy Implications for Higher Education," Journal of Higher Education 54 (May/June, 1983), p. 314.

[23] K. L. Mueller, Student Personnel Work in Higher Education (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1961).

[24] Roberta M. Hall and Bernice R. Sandler, Out of the Classroom: A Chilly Campus Climate for Women? Report for the Association of American Colleges (Washington, DC, 1984), p. 2.

[25] Astin and Kent, p. 321.

[26] Hall and Sandler, p. 2.