

## **"I Like Your Suit But You're Too Confrontational"**

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What are the two things that students and coaches are most trying to gain out of parliamentary debate? Education and success. While we do have control over the educational aspects of debate as coaches, success remains more difficult to guarantee. Ultimately the success of debaters comes from their performances in rounds and the judges' evaluation thereof. With this in mind, research that better enables us to understand the mind behind the ballot can only make our debaters more competitive and give us a little more control of the unpredictable.

### **Rationale**

The most important element to consider when delivering a speech is the audience. The audience determines if the speech has achieved its desired communicative goals. Thus, the audience determines whether the speech will be successful or not. The audience has the power to "become actively involved in a speech and react to the speaker, to the subject, to what is said, to how it is said, to other audience members, and to the situation" (Seiler & Beall, 1999, p. 176). Therefore audience analysis must always be accounted for, as it is one of the most important and basic skills in public speaking.

At the core, the basic idea behind audience analysis is to give the audience the speech that they want to hear. This analysis is the "collection and interpretation of data about characteristics, attitudes, values, and beliefs of an audience" (Seiler & Beall, 1999, p. 176). Thus in order to have effective audience analysis, certain characteristics of the audience must be researched, and the speaker must adapt to these characteristics. These characteristics involve a variety of elements including education, knowledge, attitude, sex, age, cultural background, and ethnicity. Unfortunately, it is not always possible to fully research the audience before delivering a speech.

Audience analysis research is also quite valuable when considering speech and debate competition. At the competitive level, the audience is the judge, and a successful speaker must adapt to what the judge wants in order to win. Looking specifically at intercollegiate parliamentary debate competition, it is easy to see that judge adaptation is essential to a successful competitive career. Analysis and adaptation is essential because "although most judges attempt to check their biases, there is no such thing as an

objective decision," (Knapp & Galizio, 1999, p. 144-5). While debaters may not be able to fully identify every characteristic about the judge, there are a few that can be determined simply by looking at the critic. Sex is one of these easily identifiable characteristics. Unfortunately little research has been done in the area of parliamentary debate to see if the sex of the judge has an impact on the outcome of the round. Further research should be done in order to determine whether judge preferences in debate vary systematically by sex. That is, do female judges possess different preferences than their male counterparts?

In order to determine how research should be done on the sex-linked preferences of the judge, it is necessary to look to existing knowledge about attitudes, beliefs, and preferences of each sex. Specifically, beliefs about delivery, demeanor, appearance, debate theory, argumentation, and the use of the flow and organization must be examined in order to provide a study useful to parliamentary debate.

First, women appreciate a more tentative style of communication that is not overly aggressive (Wood, 2001). This leads women to focus more on how something is said rather than what is said. Thus females tend to put more emphasis on delivery than males do.

Women also tend to view communication in day to day activities as something that "functions more as an indication of relationship than as a mechanism for imparting information" (Ivy & Backlund, 1994, p. 152). Thus women view communication as a more personal exchange than men do. This factor increases the level of importance of demeanor while speaking. Women will immediately be put off if someone is rude or crass during a conversation. In short, women take rude and overly aggressive communication personally even if it is not directed primarily toward them.

Additionally, since women put an emphasis on how something is expressed, they are more likely to consider the appearance of the speaker important. Women are likely to use appearance to determine how professional a speaker is or how seriously a speaker takes their speech. In essence, appropriate or inappropriate dress can either contribute to or take away from the validity of a speech.

Men tend to have an overall more aggressive style of communication. Men prefer "dogmatic, pragmatic, and cerebral aspects of communication" (Kirtley & Weaver, 1999, p. 200). Men like language to be concise and to the point. Men often welcome the use of jargon and acronyms more than women do. Men also prefer the use of concrete analysis. Men prefer using instrumentality or "the use of speech to

accomplish instrumental objectives" (Wood, 2001, p. 128). Men use common devices or theories while communicating an argument. These devices are usually concrete and objective. Thus, since men tend to prefer a more objective manner of evaluation, it follows naturally that they would prefer to vote on a parliamentary round based on debate theory rather than a potentially subjective instrument such as appearance or demeanor.

Men also prefer the use of argumentation to the use of communication of personal feelings. Men often perceive the world and relationships more rigidly, thus they employ communicative "styles that are competitive and fact-oriented," (Franzwa & Lockhart, 1998, p. 186). In this manner men tend to focus on the basic argument at hand in a disagreement rather than bringing in extraneous material that they may not see as pertinent. For instance, men avoid the use of personal compassion and anecdotal information while speaking in a public setting; whereas women public speakers tend to use their personal feelings and anecdotal examples while speaking (Wood, 2001).

Finally, men prefer arguments and thoughts that are well organized, whereas, women may prefer a more free flowing analysis (Wood, 2001). Therefore it follows that men would be more persuaded by an argument that is well structured and organized versus one that is a stream of consciousness.

In order to see how these gender traits relate to the world of parliamentary debate, it is necessary to conduct research. Such research has not been conducted in the past through other studies. This research is needed to further enhance the process of audience analysis in parliamentary debate. If competitors are able to account for traits of their judge simply by observing their sex, it is likely that they will be better able to adapt to these traits, offering them some opportunity to adapt to the audience. Thus, research in this subject is both unique and necessary.

### Hypotheses

It is easy to see that men possess different communication qualities than women. It is now necessary to see if these qualities occur in the world of parliamentary debate through the judge. The review of literature led to the following hypotheses:

The first two hypotheses deals with the fact that women focus on how something is said rather than what is said when communicating. Women prefer the use of a pleasant, conversational tone during communication.

H1: Female judges are more likely to comment on delivery than are male judges.

H2: Female judges are more likely to comment on demeanor than are male judges.

The next hypothesis deals with the fact that women put more of an emphasis on appearance than men do.

H3: Female judges are more likely to comment on appearance than are male judges.

The next hypothesis shows how men prefer the use of debate theory as an objective measurement of the round.

H4: Male judges are more likely to comment on the use of debate theory than are female judges.

Public speaking research shows that men prefer the use of argumentation to the use of personal or anecdotal examples.

H5: Male judges are more likely to comment on argumentation than are female judges.

The final hypothesis builds on the male tendency to prefer clear, concise, and organized argumentation.

H6: Male judges are more likely to make comments about the debaters' organization and use of the "flow" than are female judges.

## **Methodology**

### *Sampling*

We used a convenience sample of ballots as stimulus for this study. The ballots used were from the 2000 Nebraska Double-Up tournament hosted by Creighton University and Concordia University. This tournament has a national draw, and is hence, somewhat representative of the National Parliamentary Debate Association community. Additionally, because the tournament was held September 29-October 1, 2000, this data is quite current.

Because the ballot is the judge's mechanism for providing feedback to the students, this was the obvious choice for analysis. All ballots turned in at the Nebraska Double-Up tournament were included in the sample.

### *Coding*

The researchers coded the data for content. For the purposes of coding, we counted "mentions," which were defined as a separate idea or thought. Thus, one sentence might have several mentions. For example, if a judge commented "your argument regarding deficit spending is excellent, but I don't know where it belongs on the flow and you have to slow down if you want me to follow you," his or her comment would contain three separate mentions to be coded: argumentation, flow, and delivery. A coding scheme including six categories and "other" was developed prior to data analysis (see appendix A for coding categories). Overall interrater reliability (Holsti, 1969) was 98%.

### **Analysis and Results**

The sample produced 287 ballots and 2,952 total mentions. Of those, 172 ballots were written by male judges and 115 by females. Ballots by males yielded 1869 mentions and ballots by females produced 1083 mentions.

The first hypothesis predicted that female judges would be more likely than male judges to comment on the debaters' delivery. Analysis revealed 104 male comments about delivery and 77 female comments. Delivery comments represented 5.56% of all male comments and 7.11% of all female comments. Hence, a small difference in evaluation based on delivery is shown, although this difference is negligible.

Our second hypothesis argued that more females than males would comment about the debaters' demeanor and in-round behavior. Males commented on demeanor 56 times, representing 3% of total male comments, while females made 34 references to demeanor, representing 3.14% of their comments. Again while there is a difference between the two groups, this difference is insignificant.

Hypothesis three held that female judges would comment on appearance more often than males would. In fact, few judges made any comments on appearance. Males made ten references to appearance while females made three. Appearance comments accounted for .535% of male comments and .277% of female comments. These differences are quite small.

The fourth hypothesis indicated that male judges would be more likely to use debate jargon or theory in their commentary, for example commenting on inherency, solvency, and so forth. Males commented on or with jargon 208 times (11.13% of total male comments) while females commented on or with jargon 53 times (4.89% of total female comments). This indicates that there is a slight preference of male judges for debaters' use of jargon. It also indicates that male judges are more likely to include debate jargon and theory as a reason for decision, although only slightly so.

Hypothesis five posited that male judges would make more comments about a debater's argumentation than would female judges. Males made 1,089 references to argumentation while females made 725. Argumentation was the central content of ballots by both sexes, representing 58.27% of male comments and 66.94% of female comments. This hypothesis was not supported, as it appears that women were, in fact, more likely to comment on argumentation than men were.

The final hypothesis argued that male judges would be more likely to comment on debaters' use of the flow and their organization, cross application, dropped arguments and so forth. Comments regarding the flow accounted for 246 male comments (13.16%) and 92 female comments (8.49%). Indeed, it does appear that there is some preference by males for argumentation that is made in a linear, organized manner. However, these differences are fairly small.

Additionally, 96 male comments (5.14%) and 92 female comments (8.49%) were categorized as illegible, unintelligible, or irrelevant to the analysis at hand. Such comments included those wishing the debaters luck, congratulating them on a good round, or inside jokes written on the ballot. Women did make more of these types of comments.

### **Discussion**

Results indicate that, despite much literature focusing on the communicative differences between men and women, these differences do not manifest to a significant degree on parliamentary debate ballots. What this suggests is that there is quite a bit of uniformity in preferences by judges of parliamentary debate.

Hypothesis one predicted that female judges would be more likely to comment on delivery than male judges. To a very small degree (about 2%) this proved to be true, but this difference is extremely small, suggesting that while judges do not comment on delivery very frequently, it is of about equal importance as a judging criterion to men and women.

Hypothesis two argued that female judges would be more likely to comment on demeanor than their male counterparts. The two groups were similar in the percentage of comments devoted to demeanor, suggesting that judges of both sexes appreciate good in-round behavior equally. In other words, if a debater is a jerk in a round, no judge, male or female, is going to like it.

Hypothesis three held that female judges would make more comments about the appearance of debaters. Very few appearance comments were found in analyzing the sample, however (p. 13). Of these, the majority came from male judges and not female judges. Not only does this dismiss the assumption that female judges are more likely to "fall for a pretty face," but it also suggests that the days of the "nice shoes, loss, 25 speaker points" ballot may be behind us. It appears that if physical appearance factors into a judge's decision, the ballot does not indicate this.

Hypothesis four suggested that more males than females would comment on debaters' use of jargon and theory or would use jargon in their comments. There was a difference in the two groups, suggesting that there is some preference for jargon and theory in parliamentary debate by male judges. Another possible explanation for this result is that many of the female judges in the sample were hired judges who may be less likely to be so entrenched in parliamentary debate that they readily "speak the language."

Our fifth hypothesis predicted that male judges would be more likely to comment on argumentation than female judges would. However, analysis revealed that female judges were more likely to comment on argumentation than were male judges. This could mean that public speaking research suggesting that men prefer structured arguments while women prefer stories and examples is not applicable to parliamentary debate. This difference could also be due to the fact that men more often commented using debate theory and jargon to articulate their point. Such comments were coded into the "theory/jargon" category rather than the "argumentation" category. Because fewer women used jargon, more of their comments, even if their meaning was similar, were coded as comments about argumentation.

The final hypothesis predicted that male judges would be more likely to make comments regarding organization and flow than would female judges. Indeed, there appears to be a greater likelihood that male judges will comment on debaters' organization and will prefer an organized debate. Again, however, this difference is not overwhelming.

With regards to the comments coded in the "other" category, females elicited more such comments. Our informal observation was that more of the male comments were coded as "other" due to illegibility and more of the female comments in this category were encouraging comments such as "good job," or "thank you for a great debate." Following this analysis, we believe that women are more likely to include encouraging, congratulatory comments than their male counterparts.

Several conclusions can be drawn based on the above results. First, assumptions regarding sex-based differences in communication do not necessarily transfer to the judging arena. When differences did exist, they were not substantial. This leads us to conclude that men and women are basically looking for the same things when judging a debate round, and for both sexes argumentation is the most important component of a good round, followed by flow, theory/jargon, delivery, demeanor, and appearance in that order. Although there were small differences in the number of overall comments by males and females in each category, the hierarchy of importance remained the same for both groups. Most importantly, this finding shatters the stereotype that women are less able to adjudicate a round of parliamentary debate because they vote based primarily based on delivery, and do not know the intricacies of debate theory, organization, and argumentation. If this is the case, their ballots certainly do not indicate it.

However, this lack of difference brings up an interesting question: if almost all judges seem to be looking for the same thing in parliamentary debate, how does this lack of diversity affect the event? Indeed, a key argument in favor of diversity in any venue is that this difference brings with it alternate ways of evaluating a situation, in this case, a debate round. However, this sample reveals a great deal of homogeneity. Is it possible that, as the organization strives to promote fairness in decision it is stifling diversity and encouraging all judges to base their decisions on the same criteria? Different cultures, for example, approach persuasion differently, and even within U.S. American culture, there are different rhetorical and persuasive traditions (Lustig & Koester, 1999). For example, the African and African American style of persuasion values presentation and performance more than argument and reasoning while the Asian style relies on contextual cues rather than explicit statements to make connections between points. Is it possible that the NPDA's value of consistency is marginalizing these diverse argumentative approaches?

#### Limitations

A primary limitation of this investigation is that it only considered ballots from one invitational tournament. It is possible that if the

tournament considered had been conducted in a different region the results could have been different. For the data to be truly representative of the entire organization, ballots from the national tournament should be analyzed.

Secondarily, analysis only considered the number of comments in each category, and not the directionality of the comments. In other words, all comments regarding jargon, whether good or bad, were coded in the jargon category. A more detailed analysis could consider the intent of such comments rather than just their mere existence.

Additionally, only descriptive statistics were used in data analysis. Perhaps a different research design might yield a more precise understanding of differences. Along these same lines, if we were to analyze the data a second time, this time treating it only as yes-no data, our results might be different. In this kind of analysis, we would simply consider whether each judge made at least one of each comment, rather than coding each mention. It is possible that if the data were reconsidered in this way, we could see different results.

Also, because the researchers coded the data themselves, there is some possibility of researcher bias. To be totally objective, coders who were unaware of the nature and intent of the research (and willing to code nearly 3000 comments) should have been used.

### **Suggestions For Future Research**

This investigation provides a first glance into sex-linked differences in judging preference. Future studies might continue to investigate this phenomenon. One interesting study might ask multiple judges to watch the same round and then code feedback, to examine differences in a more controlled environment.

Future research might also investigate male and female preferences for particular types of cases; for example, do males prefer foreign or domestic cases? Do females prefer policy or value cases? This data would also be useful to government teams in trying to adapt to their judges.

Research could also investigate differences in preferences and ballot feedback between hired, or lay judges and non-lay judges using the coding categories presented in this paper. It is possible that those who are less familiar with parliamentary debate will be less likely to comment on theory/jargon, argumentation, and flow.

Additional investigations could ask debaters which kind of comments they find most helpful in improving for future debates and in justifying a decision, could look at total number of comments offered on ballots and sex-linked differences therein, could look at the number of ballots with a reason for decision, or at differences in comments aimed at male versus female debaters.

Research into parliamentary debate is only beginning to answer questions and to question assumptions that all of us, coach, judge, or debater may have. Indeed, this investigation raises as many questions as it answers. But one thing remains clear: whether male or female, all judges are looking for the same thing: a good debate.

### References

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## Appendix A: Coding Categories

Instructions: For each of the highlighted sections, choose the one category that the statement BEST fits into.

### *Appearance*

Comments in this category will refer to a competitor's physical appearance including dress, hairstyle, makeup, glasses, footwear and so forth.

### *Demeanor*

Comments about demeanor refer to the debater's in round behavior, politeness or rudeness, etc. Comments that a debater is impolite, adversarial, etc. should be coded in this category.

### *Argumentation*

These comments will refer to the debater's actual arguments, case construction, choice and use of criterion and value, use of support, examples, analogies, and so forth.

### *Flow*

Flow refers to comments about the speaker's organization and refutation, cross application, etc. These comments are not about the substance of the argument, but the order in which it is presented.

### *Jargon/Theory/Stock Issues*

Comments about jargon would either welcome or discourage its use; for example a judge might report that a debater's use of jargon makes him or her hard to understand. A judge who comments on stock issues will refer to inherency, topicality, solvency, harms, and significance as voting issues, reasons for decision, or clarification of the round, and as separate from argumentation.

### *Delivery*

These comments would deal with a speaker's rate, pitch, volume, gestures, eye contact, physical behaviors, and so forth. This is not what the speaker says, but how he or she says it.

### *Other*

Include in this category all illegible, nonsense, or unintelligible comments. Also include comments that do not fit into any of the other areas.