

"Women in Parliamentary Debate: An Examination of Women's Performance at the National Parliamentary Debate Association's National Tournament"

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The National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA) is rapidly growing in the United States (Johnson, par 13; Trapp, par 5). Originally, this style of debate started in the Rocky Mountain region. One of the reasons for starting this form of debate was over concern that students who had little to no experience in debate could not compete in the other forms of debate that were available (Johnson, par 1). Parliamentary debate has been inclusive of these students and inclusive of programs that did not have the financial means to participate in the other styles of debate.

The NPDA should be commended for its efforts to include these students and forensics program. We can see that these efforts are fruitful because parliamentary debate is growing at an exponential rate. However, now is the time to be reflexive and evaluate how inclusive parliamentary debate has been of women. In other forms of debate, such as the Cross-Examination Debate Association (CEDA) and the National Debate Tournament (NDT), the under representation of women in intercollegiate debate has been a large concern (Bruschke and Johnson, 162; Stepp, 176). Stepp urged all debate organizations to track the demographics and success of women in debate (183). Yet, no research has been conducted to examine how well women perform at the NPDA's national tournament. The purpose of this study is to examine how male/male, male/female, and female/female teams perform in elimination rounds in the NPDA's national tournament. Before we examine this topic, we must first review past research on women in CEDA and NDT.

Literature Review

As mentioned previously, both CEDA and NDT have been concerned about the representation of women in debate. Past research indicates that women haven been under represented in both forms of debate. According to Logue, in the 1980, the percentage of women who participated in policy debate at the NDT ranged from 14.52% to 19.36% (*Minority Students*, p. 2). Furthermore, at national CEDA tournament only 26% of the debaters were female (*CEDA*, p. 3). In the 1990s, there was a slight increase in the number of women who participated in CEDA and NDT. Logue found that the number of women that participated in the NDT in 1992 and 1993 were 16% and 19% respectively (*Minority Students*, p. 3). Little to no information is available for how many women participated in NPDA

nationals out rounds from 1996-2001, therefore the following research question is offered:

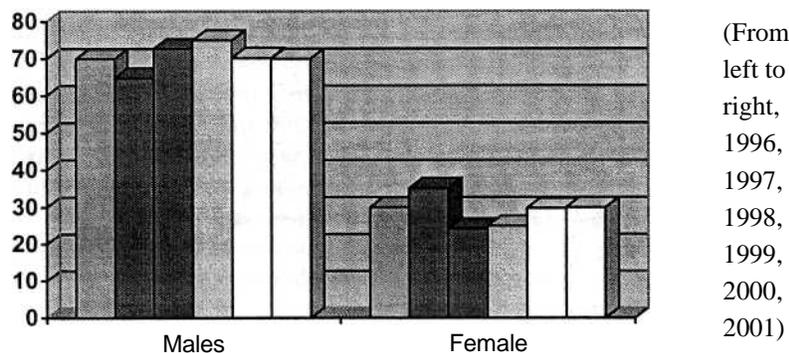
RQ1: How many women and men competed in eliminations rounds at the NPDA national tournament?

Additionally, the trend in the CEDA and NDT data illustrates an increase in women participating at their national tournaments. There is no data available about this trend at the NPDA tournaments for the six years that complete results are available for. Therefore, the following research question is offered:

RQ2: Does the participation of women in out rounds at the NPDA national tournament change between the years of 1996-2001?

Past research also illustrates that women in debate are less successful than men (Bruschke and Johnson, p. 167). Women seem to be caught in a Catch-22 (Bjork, p. 15). Worthen and Pack found that passive females were perceived to be poor debaters and aggressive females were perceived as "bitchy" (Stepp, p. 182). Furthermore, among mixed sex tournament participants, studies illustrate that female/female teams were least successful. Although parliamentary debate is markedly different type of debate from CEDA and NDT, debate itself is characterized as a masculine activity. Stepp argues that academic debate is characterized by "information processing, linear thinking, deductive logic, control, objectivity, and independence" (p. 180). She argues that these are typically masculine traits. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Female/Female debate teams are under represented in out rounds of the NPDA national tournament.



Method

Results for the NPDA national tournament were content analyzed for this study. NPDA has complete results for the years 1996-2001. Only complete results were analyzed for the project. The data were downloaded from the NPDA website. The data were coded by the researcher for gender of the debater (male, female), type of debate team (male/male, male/female, female/female), out round (double octafinals and above, octafinal to finals). A check for intercoder reliability was done on 10% of the data by an independent party. Intercoder reliability was estimated at (.98) for gender, and (.96) for type of debate team. A total of 380 debate teams participated in out rounds over the 6 year time period.

Results

Research Question One

Research question one asked how many males and females participated in out rounds of the NPDA national tournament between 1996-2001. A total of 760 individuals participated in elimination rounds at the NPDA national tournament, of these 536 (70.53%) were male and 224 (29.47%) were women. The results indicate that men far outnumber women in participation in out rounds at the NPDA championship tournament.

Research Question Two

Research question two inquired about how has the participation of women changed at the NPDA national tournament between 1996-2001. In 1996, the percentage of men that participated in out rounds was 70% and the percentage of women was 30%. In 1997, the participation of women increased slightly. Men represented 64.8% of participants, and women represented 35.2% of participants. In 1998, men represented 72.7% of the participants, and women represented 24.3% of the participants. In 1999, men represented 75% of participants and women represented 25%. In 2000, males represented 70.2% of participants, and women represented 29.8% of participants. Finally at the 2001 tournament, 70% of the participants were males and 30% of the participants in out rounds were female. The results show that over the years there has been consistently a 70/30 percent split between men and women at the NPDA national tournament.

Hypothesis One

Hypothesis one posited that female/female debate teams would be under represented in elimination rounds at the national tournament

compared to male/male teams and male/female teams. Hypothesis one was supported $\chi^2(2) = 100.45$, $p. < .001$. During this 6 year period, 195 (51.32%) of the teams were male/male, 146 (38.42%) of the teams were male/female, and 39 (10.26%) of the teams were female/female. Additionally, of the female/female teams in 6 years of elimination rounds only 10 of the 39 teams advanced beyond double octa-finals at the NPDA national tournament. In fact, a female/female team has never won the NPDA championship tournament.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that in the past six years at the NPDA championship tournament, there has been a consistent 70/30 split between male and female participants in elimination rounds. Additionally, the majority of teams that participated in out rounds were either male/male teams or male/female teams. On average, only six female/female teams participated in elimination rounds at the NPDA national tournament each year. Furthermore, of the 39 teams female/female teams that participated during the past six years, only 10 have advanced past the double octa-finals. It is interesting to note that there has never been a female/female team to win, nor compete in, the final round of the championship tournament, and only three out of eight champion teams have been male/female.

Before implications and solutions can be offered about women's participation in parliamentary debate, it is important to note that there are several limitations to this study. First, this study only looked at data from elimination rounds. The overall percentage of women who participate at the national tournament may be more or less. Second, it would be important to analyze this data proportionally. For example, if there was a 70/30 gender split among all the teams participating at the NPDA national tournament, it would be logical to find a 70/30 gender split in out rounds. However, data from preliminary rounds at the national tournament must be collected in order to address this limitation.

Despite these limitations, we must look at the implications of this study for the NPDA. First, NPDA should be encouraged by these results because compared to CEDA and NDT, NPDA has been more inclusive of women. As mentioned previously the participation of women in NDT has hovered below 20% in the 1990s while the participation of women in NPDA has consistently hovered around 30%. There seems to be more women involved in parliamentary debate than the other forms of debate. Although the NPDA is doing better compared to other debate organization, like these other organization females are still less successful than their male counterparts. There are many possible reasons for this finding.

First, debate is perceived as a masculine activity (Stepp, p. 181). This perception could affect how judges perceive women and women's interest in the activity. Bruschke and Johnson found that women in NDT received significantly lower speaker points than men (p. 167). The researchers argued that judges may be influenced by gender stereotypes. The judges at the NPDA championship tournament may also be influenced by these ideas. Stereotypically, women are not supposed to be aggressive, but women are supposed to be submissive, nurturing, and friendly. When women are aggressive in debate rounds it may be held against them, but when men aggressively pursue an argument it is seen as normative behavior. Women face a double-bind in debate. If they do not debate aggressively they may be less successful, but if they do debate aggressively they may also be less successful. These stereotypes are one plausible explanation for female/female teams being less successful. And second, this depiction of women being less successful in debate and debate being stereotyped as a masculine activity may also deter women from competing in debate. Thus, women may simply choose not to participate in this activity because of this perception.

In general, academic debate is an activity that prepares students for careers, leadership positions, and increases confidence and self-esteem. Men and women should equally enjoy the advantages of debate. NPDA has been an organization known for inclusion. The findings of this study seem to beg the question, what can NPDA do to increase the participation and success of women in debate? There are several possible solutions that NPDA can pursue.

NPDA is beginning to take steps to examine this important issue. For example, during the 2001 National Tournament a forum was held that discussed the issues of women and minorities in debate. Forums like this one are very important in tackling diversity issues, and NPDA should hold more forums like this at the national tournament. However, much more needs to be done. First and foremost, it is important for NPDA to track the demographics of participants in the activity. This would provide NPDA with valuable insight into gender equality, as well as give us other information about the ethnic diversity of parliamentary debate.

Another solution is to look to our friends and colleagues in CEDA and NDT to understand how they have dealt with this issue. In the 1990s, CEDA started a formal Commission on Women and Minorities in Debate. The mission of this committee was increasing the numbers of women and minorities participating in the activity. Stepp stated that this committee also created "awareness and organizational change" (p. 182). A commission on diversity in the NPDA organization could not only promote organizational change, but explore how to get more women involved in the activity.

Additionally, this committee could be in charge of tracking the demographic characteristics of participants and creating more informational forums at the national championship tournament and at the National Communication Association's annual conference. This commission could provide the NPDA organization valuable information about the nature of the organization and ways to improve the organization.

In conclusion, this study was a reflexive look at the data available about the involvement of women in elimination rounds at the NPDA's national tournament. The study found that the number of women who participated in out rounds was approximately 30% over the past six years. Additionally, female/female teams were least successful at this tournament. Although NPDA has a higher percentage of women participating in this form of debate when compared to other debate organizations, more needs to be done to examine attitudes toward women and minorities in debate.

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