

OFFICIAL ABSTRACT and CERTIFICATION

Analyzing the Foundation of Rhetorical Gender Inequality through Competitive High School Debating During Adolescence and the Connection to the Workplace

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This project focuses on how prevalent gender disparity is in competitive debate, and how disparity affects how successful females are in the activity and how females are perceived in comparison to men in professional forums. Debate simulates the transition from academia to workforce to see if attributional rationalization prevalent in the field of law, exists in competitive Lincoln Douglas debate. Previous studies analyzing high school debate tournaments display underrepresentation of females as both competitors and judges at the tournament on the local, state, and national level where women were less likely to win against men and received disproportionately lower speaker points. Implications of these results, both theoretical and practical, are explored in the experimental debates conducted with 34 nursing students at Hunter Business School where debates are conducted and judges analyze the debate, where the two debaters are one randomly chosen male and female who. Judges must attribute characteristics to debaters to describe competence by deciding the winner of the debate round, ranking them on a speaker point scale of 1-30, and choosing one debater to hire at a hypothetical law firm. Judges also attributed 5 performance characteristics to each debater from a bank of gendered adjectives compiled. They also filled out 3 likert scales ranking each debater on their level of professionalism, persuasiveness, and aggressiveness. A correlation between women and being attributed more negative and more gender stereotyped words was found. Similarly, women received significantly lesser speaker points, wins, and were less likely to be hired. Debaters also had to rate their confidence from 1-10 after concluding the debate round, and female debaters ranked themselves as less confident. Likert scale analysis found professionalism as a gender neutral characteristic. While aggressiveness and persuasiveness as both correlated and increase the likelihood of winning for male competitors and were significantly more attributed to men.

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