

Women in Intercollegiate Forensics: Experiencing Otherness

Robert W. Greenstreet

Robert Greenstreet (EdD, Oklahoma State U, 1996) is assistant professor, Communication Department, East Central University, Ada, OK 74820-6899.

That women's experiences in intercollegiate forensics differ from the experiences of their male contemporaries comes as no surprise to the thousands of women who have participated, nor is it entirely unexpected in an activity which traces its historical origins to a time when women were barred from higher education (Greenstreet, 1989). That such inequity continues to exist nearly a century after the advent of intercollegiate forensics activities (debate and individual events competition) is more difficult to accept (Norton, 1982; Rieke & Sillars, 1975). Despite calls to encourage forensic participation by members of traditionally underrepresented groups, the intercollegiate forensic community has not reached out to women (McBath, 1975; Parson, 1984; Ziegelmueller, 1984; Bartanen, 1993; Duke, 1994). One reason significant improvement has not occurred may be that research into gender differences in forensics has not been directed toward any particular goal.

Recent research provides such direction in the form of a taxonomy of women's gender-based experiences in intercollegiate forensics (Greenstreet, Joeckel, Martin, & Piercy, 1996). This taxonomy affords forensic researchers a systematic approach to the phenomenon of gender inequity. When the forensics community understands which experiences women perceive to be gender-based, it will be able to recognize and address those experiences. This paper presents and explains the taxonomy, discusses the results of other forensic research where possible, and suggests a method for exploring the experiences of traditionally underrepresented groups.

THE CRITICAL INCIDENT TECHNIQUE

Before considering the taxonomy itself, it is helpful to

understand how it was developed. Greenstreet, Joeckel, Martin, and Piercy (1996) invited 280 female members of professional forensic associations to complete reports of their experiences using the Critical Incident Technique, a method used in thousands of studies in both education and industry for a variety of purposes. The purpose of this study was to develop a descriptive taxonomy that could serve as a basis for future research. The Critical Incident Technique asks subjects to provide brief descriptions about specific events they find significant to their experience (Flanagan, 1954; Downs, 1988). Flanagan (1954) writes "critical incidents obtained from interviews can be relied on to provide a relatively accurate account "of the subjects experiences" (p. 331). Completed incident reports were reviewed by all four researchers (Greenstreet, Joeckel, Martin, and Piercy) working independently. They independently distilled the subjects' statements, then clustered them within broad categories (positive or negative) according to the subjects' classifications. If a subject felt an incident to be positive, readers had no choice but to accept that subject's judgment in regard to its classification.

Since all data in a Critical Incident study are provided by subjects in narrative form, the method encourages those conducting the study to adopt the framework of the subjects, reducing the likelihood of research yielding a self-fulfilling prophesy. Variations on the Critical Incident Technique have been used in recent studies in the discipline of communication. The *Journal of Applied Communication Research* (Wood, 1992) recently published a "SPECIAL SECTION-TELLING OUR STORIES": SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE COMMUNICATION DISCIPLINE" [capitals in original] to focus attention on an issue critical to communication scholars. The narratives provided by respondents in the study represent critical incidents focused on sexual harassment. Foss and Foss (1994) indicate the use of personal experience in feminist scholarship empowers women by validating their experiences and helping them make sense of their world: "The exploration and use of personal experience as data is a significant

and subversive act in the process of constructing new methods and theories that truly take women's perspectives into account" (Foss & Foss, 1994, p. 42). Eichler and Lapointe (1985) indicate that since women have been largely overlooked in past research, it may be necessary immediately to focus studies on women in order to establish a base for future research that includes both genders.

The taxonomy developed by Greenstreet, Joeckel, Martin, and Piercy (1996) through this method includes matrixes of both positive and negative experiences. As yet, these matrixes have not been confirmed by further study. Limitations indicated in their report include an anticipated low return rate typical of Critical Incident studies and the sample bias in favor of forensic activity— subjects' names appeared on rosters of professional forensic associations (Greenstreet, Joeckel, Martin, and Piercy, 1996).

THE TAXONOMY

Relying on the subjects' initial classifications, Greenstreet, Joeckel, Martin, & Piercy (1996) clustered women's gender-based forensics experiences in the following taxonomy.

Table 1
Taxonomy of Women's Gender-Based Experiences
in Intercollegiate Forensics

Positive Experiences

- I. Expressions of Gratitude or Recognition
 - A. From Males
 - B. From Females
- II. Mentoring
 - A. By Males
 - B. By Females
- III. Access through Quotas
- IV. Consciousness-Raising
- V. Nurturing/Personal Concern

Negative Experiences

- I. Sexual Harassment
 - A. Sexual Propositions
 - B. Verbal Abuse
 - C. Remarks about Body or Appearance
- II. Sexism
 - A. Traditional Roles
 - B. Feminine is less than Masculine
- III. Discrimination in Employment
- IV. Lack of Support/Failure to Recognize Problem
 - A. By Colleagues
 - B. By Coach
- V. Aggression/Conflict
 - A. Female-Female
 - B. Female-Male
- VI. Overemphasis on Competition

The Positive Matrix

The positive matrix includes five distinct experiences, two of which were further divided for clarification.

I. Expressions of Gratitude or Recognition include such things as former students thanking coaches for encouraging them in forensics, contestants and coaches from other programs recognizing professional contributions, and remarks reinforcing professional status or personal achievement. One subject reports a graduating senior male thanking her for encouraging his participation in forensics; another subject is recognized as a trailblazer for her contemporaries. Typically these memorable moments occur during pivotal events or times of significant achievement for those expressing gratitude or recognition to the subjects. This area is separate from area V., Nurturing/Personal Concern, because it deals with work-related items.

II. Mentoring involves encouragement toward professional development as well as help along the way. Subjects reported being

mentored by both male and female undergraduate and graduate faculty. One subject credits her success at a national championship tournament to the tutelage of her "feminist" male coach. Another recalls a female program director encouraging her to enter the field. Important aspects of the mentoring relationship include professional development as well as re-visioning the subject's personal orientation.

III. Access through Quotas includes three instances where subjects felt their gender identification opened doors to professional advancement or enhanced status. One subject reports that being nominated for a national office was a positive experience because the organization became more gender-sensitive as a result of her candidacy. Another reports being invited to judge the final round of debate at a national championship tournament:

When I asked why me? [sic] the caller responded that they needed a representative from my district and he was looking for female judges to be represented.... I was flattered although I wondered if I would have been considered if I was [sic] a male.

Even when not fully accepted, subjects report increased access as a positive experience. One subject reports being named to the administrative committee for a tournament that serves to qualify students to participate in the national championships. Although she indicates "the males rarely spoke to me about anything pertaining to the tournament" and "I ended up doing go-for type things," she nevertheless classifies the incident as positive.

IV. Consciousness-Raising deals with learning experiences gained through participation in the activity. One subject reports using an impromptu speaking topic to "crystallize" her thinking concerning "the women's movement."

Other incidents involve professional activity around forensic events. One subject reports a women's debate forum helped her realize she was not the only one perceiving different treatment due to gender. Another reports a confrontative job interview in which

A male department chair "informed me that he had never hired a female teaching assistant in forensics and asked why he should amend that policy for me." The job was offered to me. I took great pleasure in declining that position.

Although this latter subject reports difficulty rating the incident as positive, she also indicates its value was that she learned from it.

V. Nurturing includes experiences of a personal nature, such as caring for someone who is ill, substituting for a parent, or personal encouragement unrelated to the job. Subjects reported nurturing as well as being nurtured by males and females. One subject recalls a tournament director finding her a place to rest and suggesting methods to relieve her discomfort as she suffered from the flu. Sometimes subjects themselves provided the nurturing. One subject reports "I served as a female role model for 'a student' and had fostered her growth as a person [emphasis in original]."

The Negative Matrix

Greenstreet, Joeckel, Martin, & Piercy (1996) developed a six category taxonomy of negative gender-based experiences from reports submitted by their subjects. They subdivided four of the major categories in the hope that such division would provide potentially significant distinctions for future researchers.

I. Sexual Harassment includes: sexual propositions, verbal abuse, and remarks about body or appearance, all of which are discussed below. Women who participate in intercollegiate forensics risk sexual harassment (Stepp, Simerly, and Logue, 1993; CEDA, 1993). All incidents in the research report males harassing females. Although subjects were not asked to indicate the strength of their response to the incidents, these reports often included very directly worded statements attesting to subjects' feelings.

A. Sexual Propositions

Szwapa (1992) reports that "almost forty percent [of survey

respondents] reported being the victims of forcible sexual advances at debate tournaments or at home while preparing for debate tournaments" (p. 11). The frequency and nature of reported sexual harassment should come as no surprise to those familiar with research in the area. Certainly the discipline of communication is not immune to such practices (Wood, 1992). Dziech and Weiner (1984) provide further proof of the ubiquitous and insidious nature of sexual harassment in higher education. Their study contends as many as 30% of women involved in higher education may expect to be sexually harassed during their stays in the academy.

One subject writes "The clearest memory I have regarding being a woman occurred while attending a coaches' reception and being harassed." Another, reporting incidents of continuing propositioning, writes that "memories of the actual conversations are vague, but not the effects they had on me. Even years later looking back I would describe it as a chilling effect." She further reports feeling her team's results would be in jeopardy if she responded too negatively, and adds that "My discomfort with male-female relations on the circuit was a contributing factor in my decision to disengage from...coaching." Another reports being propositioned by a coach for a period of over five years, beginning during her junior year of college.

B. Verbal Abuse

Reports of verbal abuse were difficult to misinterpret. One subject reports after she, as a judge, asked a debater to clarify his use of evidence he "flew into a rage yelling at his partner, the other team, and myself. We were 'bitches,' and 'fucking idiots.'" Another, attempting to encourage debaters who had finished to vacate the room so an already overdue round could begin, reports that "One of them turned on me and yelled 'who the fuck do you think you are, bitch?' " [emphasis in original]. Subjects also report being disappointed when this sort of behavior is reported to these students' program directors and no action is taken.

C. Remarks about Body or Appearance

Uninvited and inappropriate remarks about the subject's body

or physical appearance generally came out of the blue. Two incidents stem from written comments on judges' ballots referring to the contestants' looks or bodies rather than to their performances. One subject writes: "I found this extremely offensive and inappropriate. I was angry at this male judge [plus] disappointed in my male coach who did nothing about it." A third incident reports a short-lived male mutiny when, as new program director, the female coach banned puerile male behavior from squad functions.

II. Sexism is divided into two subcategories: traditional roles, and feminine is less than masculine.

A. Traditional Roles

In Greenstreet, Joeckel, Martin, and Piercy's (1996) report, sexism is often reported as stereotyping the subject into traditional roles, sometimes by the person the subjects expected to mentor them into the field. One subject reports being told to go home and cook dinner for her husband rather than attend a night class in forensic program management. The instructor, "the head debate coach and my boss," told her, "debate is a man's world" that she should leave. At the time, she was a year away from her Ph.D. Other subjects report male acquaintances assuming the subjects' reduced level of involvement resulted from decisions to bear children rather than seek advancement in their careers.

B. Feminine is Less than Masculine

Friedley and Manchester (1985) found males were much more likely to receive superior ranks and ratings at national championship individual events tournaments. In a subsequent study, Friedley and Manchester (1987) found contest judges in individual events generally treat males more favorably than females. J. Murphy (1989) tried to explain such differences by arguing that women engage in less competitive "women's speech" patterns. While documenting the debate community's "unconscionable" affirmative action record, Logue (1993, p. 8) contended women are unsuited to the competitive world of debate (and better suited to collaborative activities.) Of course, numerous researchers (Wright and Hosman, 1983; Crosby and Nyquist, 1977; Martin and Craig, 1983; Kennedy

and Camden, 1983; Dindia, 1987; Infante, Trebing, Shepherd, and Seeds, 1984; Bradley, 1987; and McMillan, Clifton, McGrath, and Gale, 1977) refute the claims that women are less rational, less expressive, less assertive, or less argumentative than men.

These reports relate expressions that "feminine" attitudes, abilities, or events are less significant than their "masculine" counterparts. One subject writes about being assigned "soft" (i.e., oral interpretation) events rather than debate or public address events. She also reports her male students' success in those events was attributed to factors other than their preparation and presentation (e.g., the events were perceived as less challenging than other events). Another subject reports increased success in her events as a result of adopting a more masculine look. A third subject reports seeking election to national office and having her candidacy belittled by a colleague who felt she would be foolish to oppose a man whom she had taught for several years.

III. Discrimination in Employment deals with hiring, promotion, treatment on the job, and assignment of job responsibilities. All reports detail discrimination by men. One subject reports a college president telling her the school was going to hire the male finalist for a position because driving to tournaments in severe winter weather was too dangerous for a woman. She was also asked if she would join the women's aid group, composed of faculty wives, to do work for the church sponsoring the school. A second subject reports being promised a high school position that was given to a man. Another subject reports that during tournament trips, she was roomed with undergraduate contestants while male graduate assistants were not.

IV. Lack of Support/Failure to Recognize Problem includes dismissal or trivialization of grievances by colleagues as well as failure by higher-ups to seek redress for grievances. A former Executive Secretary of the Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA) writes: "There is no evidence that we are successfully reaching out to diverse groups. Relying on our pool of 'ex-debaters' to judge all of our rounds, retrenches the very patriarchal attitudes

we seek to change [sic]" (Bartanen, 1993, pp. 2-3). Logue (1993) claims that intercollegiate debate marginalizes women, as well as minorities, through a structure that assures white male dominance. One subject reported reducing her involvement in forensics and increasing her participation in student congress-type activities: "There seems to be less awkwardness in the presence of women and more respect for everyone's contribution in this activity."

Forensic research sometimes ignores the presence of women. Tomlinson (1986) failed to consider gender-oriented issues (e.g., participation rates, bias, harassment) in an examination of issues confronting CEDA. When Littlefield and Sellnow (1992) studied stress at the AFA-NIET, they did not isolate gender as a variable. Porter and Sommers' (1991) review of "Legal Issues Confronting the Director of Forensics" mentioned no gender-specific legal issues. Gill (1990); Sellnow and Ziegelmüller (1988); and McMillan and Todd-Mancillas (1991) gathered sufficient demographic data in their research projects to differentiate gender differences. None appears to have sought such distinctions, even when gender demographics are reported in their results.

V. Aggression/Conflict includes inappropriate responses to conflict by the subjects, usurpation of the subject's authority, and in one instance prohibition by a female judge of an argument from male debaters because the argument was overly-masculine. None of the reported incidents involves male-female conflict, perhaps because such conflicts are subsumed into more specific categories. One subject writes of disappointment in her own conduct, as she failed to confront an unprofessional judge. A former debater reports a "cat fight" with two female opponents during a debate. A third reports a female coach attempting to assume control of the subject's results tabulation room.

VI. Overemphasis on Competition indicates the perception that one subject's female colleagues place forensic activity too centrally in their lives. This subject felt her colleagues should discuss something other than the activity during their breaks from it.

DISCUSSION

The taxonomy of women's gender-based experiences in intercollegiate forensics suggests women value those experiences that include them—or allow them to include others—in the activity. The taxonomy also suggests experiences that exclude women and reinforce their identity as "other" are likely to discourage their participation. The negative matrix of the taxonomy suggests a patriarchic social system that works to deter threats to white male hegemony. Although this latter conclusion is not entirely supported, available evidence appears to point rather strongly in that direction.

Positive Experiences Include

The positive matrix includes many items male and female teachers find rewarding about their profession, such as expressions of gratitude or recognition, mentoring, consciousness-raising, and nurturing or personal concern. Several items appear to support stereotypes of traditional gender roles for women as nurturers and care-givers, but (as in previously-cited challenges to "Feminine is less than Masculine") other explanations appear equally likely.

The positive matrix appears to support Gilligan's (1982) argument that women mature toward a different moral ethic from men. Gilligan argues women mature toward an ethic of caring and affiliation rather than toward individuation. The women studied by Greenstreet, Joeckel, Martin, and Piercy (1996) appreciate experiences that draw them toward other people in a mutually caring manner. Such experiences include them—and allow them to include others—in the intercollegiate forensic community, reveal the concern of that community for them as individuals, and reinforce their sense of agency by recognizing their unique place in that community.

Only one item stands out as clearly a concern of a traditionally underrepresented group: access through quotas. Accepting the subject's apparent perspective, this item may also be viewed as inclusive. After all, as a result of the demand for

diversity, the subjects were able to participate on a more elite level in forensic activities. They also reported their participation helped open access for other women by making the intercollegiate forensic community more sensitive to issues of inclusion, at least insofar as gender is concerned.

Negative Experiences Exclude

The negative matrix further supports Gilligan's (1982) view, especially as several items correspond to behaviors that segregate or indicate either neutrality or outright hostility. Women in the field report being confronted with sexual harassment, sexism, employment discrimination, a lack of collegial support or even collegial awareness that these events constitute a problem, and gender-based aggression from other females—all of which are behaviors that exclude them and label them as "different."

Harassment makes the victim feel isolated and vulnerable. In one report, the victim also felt her students' success was at risk. The combination of feeling personally excluded from the comfort and security that males appear to share, and, at the same time, exposing students one is charged with nurturing to predatory behavior, is not an attractive prospect. As if the prospect of harassment alone were not enough to deter women from participating in the activity, those who would normally be expected to provide a support system, teammates, coaches, and colleagues, are likely to disregard such incidents, thus denying the significance of both the behavior and the victim. Such behavior denies the victim's agency and excludes her from the community's care. She becomes special, different, and outside the norm. If Gilligan (1982) is correct, this exclusionary treatment should be particularly uncomfortable for women, who at the highest level of maturity seek to connect and to include.

Forensics as Patriarchy

The picture provided by the negative matrix describes a field

unprepared or unwilling to accept women as participants. Women are sexually propositioned, verbally abused, and subject to inappropriate random remarks concerning their bodies or appearance. They sometimes perceive that their responses to such behavior will determine their students' future success. They are discouraged from entering nontraditional fields or assuming nontraditional roles, such as arguing assertively or cross-examining aggressively. They are consistently told to stay within their traditional stereotyped female roles, and are reminded that such roles are necessarily less significant than the masculine roles within the activity. They are subject to special gender barriers in gaining employment, and are treated as "different," read "inferior," once employed. When they bring these problems to those who should help resolve them, they are met with indifference or are discouraged from raising legitimate concerns. They are attacked by those with whom they wish to cooperate, as if every aspect of the intercollegiate forensic community were some sort of competition where one party has to win and the other must lose. Haslett, Geis, and Carter (1992) describe such behaviors as consistent with a social system used to exclude women or devalue their work. Lewis and Simon (1986) report similar experiences in higher education classrooms. If intercollegiate forensics provides such a system, and for many respondents it clearly does, lack of participation by women should be easy to understand.

Future Research

Although the taxonomy appears to describe a patriarchy determined to retain its hegemony, this data alone cannot justify such a description of the field. The matrixes described above are based on very few responses from a small percentage of the possible sample. Additionally, Greenstreet, Joeckel, Martin, and Piercy (1996) did not ask subjects to rate the experiences in terms of their affect loading, nor did they provide any indication of either the frequency with which these events occur or the arenas in which they might be

found. Indeed, such data was outside the scope of their project. However, their subject selection process, inviting participation from subjects identified on the rosters of forensic organizations, necessarily biased the results in such a fashion that they are likely *more positive* than one might expect. Still, future research is necessary to confirm and refine this taxonomy of gender-based experiences.

Once the taxonomy is established, researchers may begin to tackle tougher questions, such as how these factors relate to women's decisions to remain in the field or leave it, the frequency with which women experience these phenomena, and the commitment of the intercollegiate forensic community to resolving issues raised by its formally announced desire to include traditionally underrepresented groups in the activity. Certainly, CEDA (1993) has already taken formal steps to discourage many of the most odious of the behaviors reflected in the negative matrix. The taxonomy developed by Greenstreet, Joeckel, Martin, and Piercy (1996) enables researchers to draft surveys to be circulated at tournaments, among program alumnae, or as exit surveys for those who choose to discontinue participation.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is to share the recently-developed taxonomy of women's gender-based experiences in forensics in the hope that the taxonomy will enable the forensic community to understand those experiences. Such an understanding should enable those involved in that community to begin movement toward the goals espoused in Sedalia and Evanston and find ways to encourage participation in forensics from a group that has traditionally been underrepresented—women.

The taxonomy provides a starting point from which research may move forward. These matrixes also inform forensic practitioners of experiences their students and colleagues may encounter as part of their forensic education. It is not difficult to understand why a

person who experienced what the negative matrix reports would be unlikely to continue participating in the activity that enabled those experiences. Clearly, valid reasons exist to explain why women may continue to be underrepresented in the intercollegiate forensic community, especially in debate. But just as clearly, the positive matrix offers experiences that have continued to attract women, and men, to the activity.

The method used to develop the taxonomy also offers promise for researching the experiences of other traditionally underrepresented groups. By encouraging researchers to adopt the perspective of their subjects and by encouraging the subjects to share their perceptions in their own words, the Critical Incident Technique affords researchers the opportunity to glimpse the world through the eyes of the research subject. The resultant world view offers the intercollegiate forensic community its best opportunity to understand and respond to that view.

From the base of information revealed in this paper, educators may begin to devise coping strategies to help their students and colleagues deal with the negative experiences. Educators may also find ways to emphasize and broaden the positive experiences that draw women to the activity. Such planning might be expected to enhance efforts to recruit and retain women in the activity. At a minimum, this taxonomy may also help forensic educators become more sensitive to the real pain the negative matrix behaviors cause their students, their professional colleagues, and their friends.

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