Gender Issues in Cross Examination Periods of C.E.D.A. Debate

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On October 11, 1984, fifty million television viewers watched Geraldine Ferraro and George Bush clash wits in a much publicized vice-presidential debate held in Philadelphia. The political debate not only held importance for the 1984 presidential election, but it also was the first time a man and a woman nominated for such a high office had met face-to-face in a political debate. The participants in the debate each faced a sticky task of demonstrating their leadership ability while, at the same time, maintaining an appropriate decorum in debating the opposite sex. On the one hand, Bush could not be too harsh, for if he attacked Ferraro voters would think he was impolite. As one Bush supporter remarked before the debate, "It's very difficult for [Bush] to prevail. Either it looks like [he's] beating up on [Ferraro] or not standing up to her." On the other hand, Ferraro needed to appear knowledgeable and presidential. As Congressperson Tony Coelho put it: "She needs to avoid looking bitchy. She can't be shrill. She has to come across as a leader."

Regardless of the outcome of the 1984 election, the vice-presidential debate raised an important question concerning the differences between male and female speakers. Do men and women differ in their speaking styles when debating the opposite sex? For the Bush/Ferraro debate the answer was yes. Ferraro, "a brassy, sassy, quick-witted and fast-talking on the stump" speaker, followed the advise of her political analysts to "speak more slowly and adopt a much cooler style for the televised encounter." Bush, who publicly announced that if he attacked Ferraro in the debate "people [would] think [he's] impolite," declared just prior to the contest that he was no longer concerned about the "woman

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3 Nelson, p. 19.
Like Ferraro and Bush, intercollegiate speech participants also should consider gender factors when competing in speaking contests. Intercollegiate debate, the most complicated contest event at speech tournaments, is no exception. Differences in male and female speaking appear very pronounced in debate.\(^5\) More men than women participate in debate and men appear to have a competitive edge since male/male or male/female teams generally are more successful than female/female teams.\(^6\) Since men appear to have a competitive advantage in debate, an analysis of speaking styles, focusing on the similarities and differences between male and female speech, might offer a partial explanation for the differing success.

This study, then, investigates gender differences in debate. Generally, debate calls for four speakers to engage in argument. One team, consisting of two speakers, affirms the resolution while the other team opposes it. Each speaker in a debate is given four occasions to speak: a constructive speech, in which the speaker presents his/her case; two cross-examination speeches, one questioning an opponent and one answering an opponent's inquiries; and finally, a refutation speech, in which the debater refutes the opposition and restates his/her own case. For this study, we have narrowed our research to focus on the cross-examination speeches in an intercollegiate debate.

Studying the cross-examination speeches of males and females appears to be one of the more effective ways to investigate gender differences in an intercollegiate debate since the theory base for gender differences in speech, including such items as total amount of speaking time, interruptions, hedges, filler, the use of less precise language, and the use of tag questions, is closely tied to the analysis of dyadic conversation. In addition, it allows the researcher to watch the struggle for conversational dominance in a debate. With its direct confrontation between speakers, cross-examination is an excellent behavioral demonstration of relational dominance. Therefore, answers to the questions of whether men or women have greater control over the cross-examination period might be deter-

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\(^4\)Nelson, p. 19.
mined by investigating the use of interruptions and the number and type of questions asked during the cross-examination period. This essay, then, reports the differences between men and women's speech in cross-examination debate in two general areas: the attempt to dominate the interview with interruptions; and the attempt to control the interview with specific types of questions. The paper proceeds as follows: first, a summary of the research on gender differences in interruptions of conversational speech is detailed and then the advise of forensic scholars on how to conduct a cross-examination is summarized; second, the method used in this study to evaluate gender differences in the cross-examination portion of an intercollegiate debate is outlined; third, the results of the study are summarized; and, finally, the limitations of the research and suggestions for future research are discussed.

**Interruptions and Cross Examination Debate**

Robin Lakoff's influential and provocative work on women's language provided a springboard for research in language and gender differences. In her article "Language and Woman's Place," Lakoff hypothesized that women's speech was different than men's speech. She is not alone in that judgment. In fact, women's speech consistently has been described as polite, emotional, talkative, and uncertain, while men's speech has been characterized as direct, rational, illustrating a sense of humor, and strong.

The differences between men and women's language readily become apparent when studying power relationships between the sexes and the use of interruptions to gain control of the conversation. Generally, it is accepted practice for a man to interrupt a woman but not for a woman to interrupt a man, especially in public. "As the 'superiors,'" wrote Spender, "men are free to do the talking and the interrupting when interacting with women."

Research supports the position that men interrupt women more often than men interrupt men in social conversation and that the interruption is a device for exercising power and control in conversation.

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10 Spender, p. 45.
According to Scheloff, the basic rule for conversation is one party at a time.\textsuperscript{11} However, in cross-examination debate this is not always achieved. Speakers who ask questions are forced to interrupt respondents who give lengthy answers or interrupt respondents once the answer they want has been given. Likewise, individuals responding to the questions interrupt the person asking questions in order to qualify or elaborate on an already given answer. Thus, the rule for conversation, that being one speaker at a time, frequently is violated during debate examination periods. The way individuals manage their turn-taking in cross-examination ultimately affects a critic’s perception of a participant’s speaking ability. For example, a person who constantly cuts off a respondent may be perceived as being too aggressive, while a person who never cuts off a respondent may be perceived as too passive.

The research on interruptions in conversations is fairly extensive and demonstrates that a male’s speech is more dominant. Goffman and Duncan each have studied turn taking by identifying turn-yielding and attempted turn-suppressing signals in conversation.\textsuperscript{12} Bernard found that women in a mixed-sex task-oriented group have a difficult time in gaining the floor and are more susceptible to interruptions from men.\textsuperscript{13} Early research by Zimmerman and West found similar results. They reported that in same-sex conversations interruptions were initiated rarely but in cross-sex conversations an asymmetrical relationship was discovered with men initiating a major portion of the interruptions.\textsuperscript{14} In a subsequent study, West and Zimmerman confirmed their previous judgment that a gross asymmetry existed in conversations of cross-sexed groups when they found that ninety-six per-cent of the interruptions were done by males to females.\textsuperscript{15} Males interrupted the females more in every conversation which West and Zimmerman studied and the findings

\textsuperscript{11}Emanuel A. Scheloff, "Sequencing in Conversational Openings," \textit{American Anthropologist}, 70 (1968), 1075-95.
even held when the subjects previously were unacquainted. The explanation for why men interrupt women more frequently seems difficult to grasp. Two explanations were excluded by West and Zimmerman when they argued in the conclusion of their study that women did not invite interruption by seeming to tolerate it, nor did men interrupt women in order to get a word into the conversation.\textsuperscript{16}

Research by Kennedy,\textsuperscript{17} Octigan and Niederman,\textsuperscript{18} and Rogers and Jones\textsuperscript{19} lend credence to the position that men interrupt women more frequently than women interrupt men. Likewise, Hoffman arrived at a similar conclusion but with the qualification that the sex of the person spoken to was more important than the sex of the speaker.\textsuperscript{20} Wills and Williams study of conversations in a high school discussion group, a university faculty office, and the cafeteria in a university student union revealed that listeners were more likely to speak at the same time as a female was speaking and that men were more likely to initiate talk while a woman was speaking.\textsuperscript{21}

Although cross-examination in debate is not the same type of dyadic communication as social conversation, the research on interruptions and gender differences in speech does provide a starting point for understanding gender differences in cross-examination. We define cross-examination as a process of dyadic communication with a predetermined and serious purpose involving one person who asks questions and a second person who answers questions. Cross-examination is similar to an interrogation interview in that its participants are frequently aggressive and the interview is highly directive. In a highly directive interview, "the interviewer establishes the purpose of the interview and . . . controls the pacing of the communication situation."\textsuperscript{22} The person

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{16} "West and Zimmerman, "Small Insults," p. 103.
\item \textsuperscript{17} Carol W. Kennedy, "Patterns of Verbal Interruption Among Women and Men in Groups," Paper presented at the 3rd Annual Conference on Communication, Language, and Gender, Lawrence, Kansas, 1980.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Mary Octigan and Sharon Niederman, "Male Dominance in Conversations," \textit{Frontiers}, 4 (1979), 50-4.
\item \textsuperscript{19} William T. Rogers and Stanley Jones, "Effects of Dominance Tendencies on Floor Holding and Interruption Behavior on Dyadic Interaction," \textit{Human Communication Research}, 1 (1975), 113-22.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Frank N. Willis and Sharon J. Williams, "Simultaneous Talking in Conversation and Sex of Speakers," \textit{Perceptual and Motor Skills}, 13 (1976), 1067-70.
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asking questions, therefore, performs the role of information-gatherer and the person answering the questions assumes the role of information-giver. The interviewer in a cross-examination debate has unlimited freedom to probe into answers and adapt to changing situations in the examination period. Personal risk both for the interviewer and interviewee is often very high in cross-examination periods.

It is our position that simultaneous speech is a violation of norms regulating conversational exchange. Consistent and repeated interruptions during a cross-examination signals dominance of one person over another person. One of the purposes of this present study was to test three hypothesis with respect to interruptions in cross-examination debate. First, men would interrupt more than women during the cross-examination period of the debate. Second, when men question women there would be more interruptions than when women interview men. Third, men would be more successful than women in regaining control of the floor through the use of interruptions.

In addition to studying interruptions, we also were concerned with the method of questioning used by the debaters during the cross-examination period of the debate. Forensic educators have not studied gender differences in cross-examination debate in the past. Fuge and Newman, Henderson, and Norton are a few of the authors who have addressed strategies of cross-examination in our journals. But none of these authors have included gender issues in their discussions of cross-examination.

Authors of debate texts also have ignored the gender issue but have supplied the debater with a list of commandments, the do's and don't's for cross-examination. The commandments for cross-

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examination can be summarized in one phrase: "control the witness." Several authors have advised the examiner to control the answers of the respondent by asking closed questions, especially leading questions. At the same time, these authors caution the student to avoid open ended questions since these questions would permit the person answering the questions to hold the conversational floor for a significant period of time. As Walter put it, "a leading phrase is like a spoon to put the castor oil of unpleasant facts into a witness's mouth." Although Walter was discussing cross-examination in a courtroom setting, the same advise would hold for cross-examination in academic debate since it is an important illustration of a debater's credibility.

How the cross-examination is conducted can contribute to or detract from the overall image of the debater in the mind of the critic-judge. The use of leading, closed, open, tag, multiple questions or the making of statements instead of just asking questions seems to have particular importance in controlling the cross-examination period. This study, therefore, attempts to fill the gap in our knowledge in the type and use of questions by gender in cross-examination debate. In doing so we test three hypotheses: First, women would use more open questions than men; second, men would use more closed questions or leading questions than women; third, women would use more tag questions than men. Warrant for these three hypotheses is based on the belief that women are less forceful and dominant in cross-examination and, thus, would exhibit behavior which was more tentative and less in control, such as asking tag questions or open questions more frequently.

METHOD

Sample

28Walter, p. 36.
29Henderson, p. 118.
four-year universities and two-year colleges during October, 1984 to January 1985. The debaters all argued the fall 1984 CEDA topic that "The method of conducting presidential election in the United States is detrimental to democracy." The debates recorded were selected randomly from the open division competition. Two of the debates were excluded from the final sample because one team in each of those debates had been recorded during an earlier period of the tournament. The sample size, therefore, consisted of sixty-four three-minute cross-examination speeches. Overall, 192 minutes of questions and answers were recorded. Forty-three men and twenty-one women were included in the final sample.

**Procedure**

Two individuals, using the taped cross-examination speeches, coded the data. Before an item was coded into a category, each of the coders had to agree on where the item was to be categorized. Two general areas were investigated: interruptions and types of questions. An explanation of each of these areas follows.

Interruptions were coded for both the person asking questions and the person answering the questions. For the purposes of this study, an interruption was defined as the occurrence of simultaneous speech and was assigned to the participant who initiated speech while not possessing the conversational floor. Thus, brief utterances such as "yes" or "uh huh" which a listener intersperses during a speaker's pauses were not coded as an interruption. A successful speech interruption resulted in a switch of which speaker held the floor. Successful speech interruptions were recorded only for the person who was asking the questions and not for the person answering the questions.

Questions asked by the questioner were coded as either an open question which called for the respondent to give a more extended answer (What is the value of the electoral college?), a closed

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30The four tournaments included: Sacramento City College's tournament, an early tournament in the competitive season drawing schools mainly in the Northern California region; Sacramento State University's tournament, a Northern California tournament which draws teams from Nevada, Oregon, and Washington; University of Southern California's tournament which draws teams from across the nation; and University of California at Los Angeles's tournament which also draws teams from across the nation. Of the teams who were recorded, the majority came from the Western States with the largest number coming from the state of California. Teams from eight different states were recorded.

31Students with more competitive debate experience compete in open division. Students who have not debated before compete in novice division.
question which called for the respondent to give a yes/no or a short answer (Do the primaries extend the length of the political campaign?), a leading question in which the person asking the questions phrased a very narrow and specific question (Would the election have resulted in a different person being elected if one per-cent of the population had changed their vote?), and tag questions in which the person asking questions would add a single phrase onto the end of a declarative sentence (The two party system positively supports democracy. Correct?). In addition, tag questions also were coded as a closed, or leading question depending on how the sentence was phrased. Questions asked by the person being interviewed (Q. What are the factors which influence voting. A: Well, I don't understand what you mean. What do you mean by factors?), and general questions which were given as an answer instead of a statement (Q: Do you think it's fair that the criteria be limited to only one person one vote? A: Do you think it's not fair?) were both coded as respondent questions.

An open question is broad in nature and allows the respondent considerable freedom in determining the kind and amount of information to give. Closed and leading questions are more restrictive. A closed or a leading question would limit the answers available to the respondent. A leading question supplies all the possible answers in the question. Closed questions require less effort on the part of the respondent because they do not require long explanations.

Statistical Analysis

The data were interpreted in two stages. First, the sixty-four cross-examination speeches were divided into two categories: men asking questions, and women asking questions. Then an analysis-of-variance test was performed for five of the six hypotheses. A difference-of-means test was used to test the hypothesis that men would interrupt women more than women would interrupt men. Second, the sixty-four cross-examination speeches were divided into four categories: Male interviewing male; male interviewing female; female interviewing female; and female interviewing male. Due to small cell sizes only means and percentages were computed for each of the four coded categories. Finally, additional variables were tested in an analysis-of-variance test to determine if there was any other explanation for differences in the number of interruptions and use of questions. Variables tested included speaker position, success of the debate team at the tournament, amount of experience of the speakers, and comparison between the four selected tournaments.
RESULTS

Interruptions

The mean ratings for interruptions, on the part of the cross-examiner, are reported in Table 1. As the table indicates, there was an asymmetry in the initiation of interruptions on the part of males. The mean number of interruptions made by males was calculated at 12.47 while the mean number of interruptions initiated by females was only 8.62. An analysis-of-variance test was significant at the .03 level. This marked asymmetry seemed to be present for respondent interruptions as well. The mean score of interruptions made by male respondents was found to be 5.51 while female respondents interrupted an average of 2.95 times. Furthermore, no significance could be found when comparing interruptions with tournaments, speaker position, amount of debate experience, or success rate of the participant. Thus, these results clearly support the first hypothesis: That men interrupt more than women during a cross-exam period of debate.

Affirmation of the second hypothesis, that being that men who question women will interrupt more than when women question men, also clearly is indicated by the results. The mean score for total interruptions suggested that a disproportionate number exists between interruptions initiated by males and females. For

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<th>Table 1 Analysis-of-Variance Test</th>
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<td>Hypothesis</td>
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<td>1. Men interrupt more than women.</td>
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<td>3. Men would be more successful in interrupting than women.</td>
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<td>4. Women would use more open questions than men.</td>
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<td>5. Men would use more closed or leading questions than women.</td>
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<td>6. Women would use more tag questions.</td>
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men interviewing women, the mean number of interruptions was calculated at 14.89. Yet the mean score for women interrupting their male respondent was found to be only 8.83. A one-tailed T-test, calculating the difference of means, reached significance at the .005 level. These results are reflective of the "gross asymmetry" West and Zimmerman reported in their study of cross-sex interruptions. Furthermore, these findings indicate that male examiners show greater control than female examiners over their respondents in limiting their opponents' response. Thus, the male interviewer may be perceived as managing his time more effectively.

Perhaps the more interesting note here is that, in a comparison of cross-sex and same-sex cells, males tended to interrupt females more than males tended to interrupt males. This statistic seemed to hold true not only when the male was asking the questions but also when answering the questions. Whereas the mean score of a male examiner interrupting a female respondent was figured at 14.89, a male respondent was interrupted by a male examiner a mean score of only 10.72. As a respondent, the males interrupted the female examiner 8.28 times while the male examiner was interrupted only 3.52 times. However, this same phenomenon did not seem to hold true for women. As questioners, females tended to follow their male counterpart, interrupting the male respondent a mean score of 8.83 and the female respondent a mean of only 7.33. Yet the reverse occurred when women take the respondent position. Female respondents interrupted their male interviewer a mean score of only 2.61, whereas the female interviewer was interrupted a high mean of 5.00. These findings indicate that a style difference exists, with respect to interruptions, when opposite sexes enter into the debate.

Most surprising are the results that pertain to the third hypothesis that men would be more successful than women in interrupting and regaining control of the floor. As reported in Table 2, the mean score of successful interruptions would seem to infer that the male examiner is far more successful in regaining control than his female counterpart. Furthermore, the analysis-of-variance test showed significance at the .0004 level. However, an investigation of the percentages of successful interruptions in the cross-sex and same-sex cells would support the rejection of the hypothesis. The results indicated that female debaters were slightly more successful at interrupting than male debaters. As examiners, women were successful in interrupting their male respondent 52% of the time.

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<th>Table 2: Percentage and Mean Interruptions by Questioner</th>
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<td>Interruptions</td>
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<td>Successful Interruptions</td>
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<td>Number of cases</td>
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<td>Percentages of Successful Interruptions</td>
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While a female respondent was successfully interrupted 54% of the time. On the other hand, male examiners were only successful 41% of the time in interrupting their female respondents, while male respondents were successfully interrupted a low of 34% of the time. These findings seem to support the rule for turn-taking established by Scheloff: One party at a time. In following the rules for politeness, a speaker seemed to turn the control of the floor over to the person who is interrupting. It appeared that women enjoy a small advantage in this respect perhaps because men give deference to female opponents. One feasible explanation for this unexpected result may be that men change their style in cross-examination so that they do not appear to be brow-beating women in front of a critic-judge. Regardless of the explanation, these findings suggest that women were more successful than men in regaining control of the floor.

**Types of Questions**

A comparison of the mean number of open questions males and females ask affirmed the fourth hypothesis that women use more open questions than men. As Table 1 suggests, the mean number of open questions asked by female speakers was 5.9 while the male debater asked a mean of only 3.9. The analysis-of-variance test was calculated to be significant at the .01 level. The implications of these findings should not be overlooked. An open question hardly "controls" the witness. Instead, an open question gives the respondent easy access to the floor. Open questions, therefore, not only can indicate poor use of cross-examination time, but can reduce the effectiveness of the examiner by allowing the respondent significant opportunity to control the cross-examination period. A critic-judge might devalue a female debater who spends a third of her time using open questions when her male counterpart spends

33 Scheloff, pp. 1075-95.
only a fourth of his time on open questions. In fact, both males and females would be better advised to reduce the number of open questions asked during the cross-examination period of a debate altogether.

The fifth hypothesis, that men use more closed or leading questions clearly was confirmed. As indicated in Table 1, an analysis-of-variance test was found to be significant at the .008 level for both leading and closed questions. In both cases, the male examiner showed a decidedly improved ability over his female counterpart in eliciting the desired answer from the respondent. Male examiners used a mean score of 12.1 closed questions. At the same time, female examiners used a mean score of 9.5 closed questions. The illustration of this point becomes most noticeable when comparing percentages of closed questions used by male and female interviewers. As suggested in Table 3, males devoted 65% of their inquiries to closed questions when interviewing other males. Similarly, when querying a female respondent, 65.5% of all the questions asked by the male examiner could be categorized as closed. However, when females took over the task of interviewing, only 50% of all their questions were coded as closed. The results concerning leading questions revealed the same imbalance with respect to gender. Males used a mean of 5.20 leading questions, whereas leading questions used by women averaged a mean of only 3.42. By comparing percentages it becomes clear that men questioning men show the best use of leading questions, devoting 30.4%
of their questions to the use of this technique. Men interviewing women used 24.5% leading questions, while women interviewing men used only 19% leading questions. The poorest use of leading questions occurred when females interviewed females, where only 16% of the questions asked were leading in nature.

In an analysis-of-variance test the hypothesis that women use more tag question was not confirmed although in a comparison of both means and percentages, females used slightly more tag questions than their male counterparts. The mean number of tag questions used by females was figured at 3.66, whereas, the mean number of tag questions for men was calculated at 2.44. Likewise, in examining percentages, only 13.14% of all questions asked by males were classified as tag questions, yet 19.64% of the questions posed by females fell under the tag question category. Although tag questions are generally leading or closed in nature, they exhibit a more tentative style of speech. Thus, women or men who use tag questions exhibit less control of the questioning in the cross-examination period.

Although this study did not hypothesize about either the use of multiple or statement questions, it appeared that both sexes should be advised to avoid these types of questions. Good questioning style calls for one question at a time. Multiple questions, therefore, are not an effective use of the cross-examination time. Furthermore, statement questions also are an ineffective use of time and usually are perceived as "just talk." Warnings against such statements often are given by judges. Comments such as "Ask questions in CX nothing else, just questions," or "Don't make arguments in CX, ask questions" are common criticisms on ballots. Thus, both men and women would do well to heed this advice.

Finally, additional variables were tested to determine if there might be an alternative explanations for the differences between gender in the use of questions and interruptions. Speaker position, debate experience, and differences between the four tournaments (early versus late season) showed no differences. A fourth variable, success rate, did show significance in an analysis-of-variance test for both tag questions and interruptions. However, further comparisons of percentages among the groups indicated that no such significance existed and thus any difference might be due to small cell size of the sample. Therefore, these alternate variables do not appear to be factors which influenced interruptions or use of questions.

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study does not purport to be a definitive answer to how men's and women's speech in cross-examination debate differs. It
does, however, attempt to determine if differences existed in the use of questions and in the amount of interruptions. If a debater wants to maintain control over the structure of the cross-examination period, interruptions are necessary because interruptions help manage the interaction between questioner and respondent. Likewise, the use of questions can assist a speaker in controlling the cross-examination period.

The conclusions of this research are limited due to the small sample size. We tentatively suggest that in cross-examination periods of CEDA debate men attempt more interruptions than women; men questioning women interrupt more than when women question men; women are slightly more successful than men in completing their interruptions; women use more open questions than men; and men use more closed or leading questions than women. The only hypothesis on which we found inconclusive information was in the area of tag questions. Although females use more tag questions than men, the difference is not significant. Overall then, women exhibit more hesitant or polite speech in cross-examination. By not interrupting as much, by permitting their own speech to be interrupted, by not using closed and leading questions but using open questions, female debaters are not as in control of the cross-examination period as male debaters.  

The current study focused on interruptions and questioning techniques in cross-examination. However, other variables, such as the use of hedges, tentative language, humor, the use of less precise language, and the use of fillers, might prove to be important differences between men's and women's speech in debate. Future research could take these other items into account.

Finally, there is one limitation to this study. Only the verbal responses of the participants in the cross-examination periods were evaluated. No nonverbal dimensions were coded or used. How a question is asked or answered is often times more important than what is asked. Future research should take into account the nonverbal behaviors in debate.

This study provides a beginning point for understanding language differences between genders in debate. We hope this initial study will serve as a springboard for more lengthy research into the differences between men's and women's speech in debate. If women continue to be less successful than men, forensic educators have the responsibility to search out potential explanations for this phenomenon.