SPECIAL TOPICS

SEPARATE AND UNEQUAL: WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC ADDRESS EVENTS

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Over the past fifteen years, the forensics community has sought to understand and eliminate the barriers against women and minorities in the activity. Unfortunately, progress has been slow. In 1974, the First National Developmental Conference issued a call for research that would address these issues (McBath, 1975, p. 23). A full decade later, however, the Second National Developmental Conference made essentially the same request (Parson and Ziegelmueller, 1987, p. 43). In the time since then, several researchers have sought to identify the difficulties facing women in forensics.

This research has used primarily empirical methods to reveal patterns of participation and success by men and women in the activity. Friedley and Manchester (1985) charted relative participation by males and females at national tournaments in 1984. They discovered that males have a strong preference for debate and that individual events tend to be more gender-balanced. A disturbing trend emerged in this research and it was reaffirmed in a later study they conducted (Friedley and Manchester, 1987). They discovered that men have enjoyed a greater level of success in individual events, particularly in the limited preparation events, than women (1987, pp. 11-14).

These studies, as the authors emphasized, have focused exclusively on the important task of revealing the patterns of bias. Although more research certainly needs to be done, it is clear that the imbalance exists and it is important to try to discern the reasons for it. Why do males enjoy a greater amount of success in individual events? How does our activity create that bias? This essay will attempt at least a partial answer to those questions. I argue that, in the public address events, the traditional standards of evaluation favor masculine communication styles. Women are faced with the unpalatable choice of adapting to these norms or of starting a revolution. Such a situation reinforces prejudice against women and their styles of communication, erodes a woman's

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opportunity to succeed, and reduces the educational value of the activity for all participants. In order to explore these problems, I shall first, examine the traditional standards of rationality that prevail in the public address events; second, contrast those standards with research on the communicative strategies of women; and, finally, discuss the educational implications of this analysis. This essay, then, hopes to spur discussion of the criteria for evaluation in the public address events, urge people to make changes that would allow competitors to explore alternative styles of communication, and make the activity more rewarding for women competitors.

The Rational World Paradigm

For many years, the judging criteria in the public address events have reflected both the norms of society and the standards developed in the field of speech communication for speaking effectiveness. Those norms encompass both traditional standards of rationality such as a deductive, argumentative structure, large amounts of supporting material to prove claims, vocal and physical cues that establish authority, and the establishment of a motivational link, or reasons why the audience should act as the speaker wants. While speakers are often encouraged to use "pathetic appeals," three trends have reinforced what Fisher has termed the "rational world paradigm."

These trends are a natural result of the history of the activity. First, many individual events programs began as an outgrowth of debate and adopted the argumentative perspective that characterizes debate. Second, even as the activity of individual events has matured and moved away from debate, the traditional norms have been supported even more vigorously. This has occurred partly because of the search for academic respectability. As programs seek increased funding and a place in speech communication departments, they have needed to demonstrate that they have as much educational value as debate and possess an equal amount of intellectual rigor. Another reason for this trend results from the inbred nature of the most successful programs. Three of the four coaches at Bradley University have received graduate or undergraduate degrees from Bradley itself, Miami University, Northern Illinois University, and Southern Utah State College. The current director and assistant director of forensics at Eastern Michigan University have studied and graduated from EMU. The individual events directors at Miami University and Illinois State University have both matriculated from Ball State University, another tradi-
Success breeds imitation and these coaches naturally rely upon their past experience; they reinforce the traditional norms of rational argumentation.

Third, the enormous growth in the size of the activity over the past ten to fifteen years has created an irresistible groundswell for uniform judging criteria. Until recently, it could be legitimately contended that few uniform standards existed. That has changed. Students and coaches naturally want to know what the standards of evaluation are at the increasingly larger number and variety of tournaments they attend. Moreover, the growing prestige and size of the NFA and AFA national tournaments have raised the stakes for the people that make the financial commitment to attend them. Schools are spending more money for individual events and programs sell themselves to administrators and recruits by advertising their national success; thus, all participants want clear rules to follow to reduce the possibility that misunderstandings will damage performances and, eventually, the program. Just as important are the growing outlets for publication on the events, such as the National Forensic Journal. As a new generation of directors seeks jobs and tenure, they take advantage of the opportunity to publish articles that establish the norms for the events. Those studies become the guidelines for new programs as those coaches attempt to understand the activity and coach their students. Those criteria reflect the rational world paradigm.

It requires only a brief review of various articles on the events to recognize the truth of that assertion. The assumption of an argumentative world view begins with the definition of the activity itself. In 1974, the First National Developmental Conference defined forensics as "an educational activity primarily concerned with using an argumentative perspective in examining problems and communicating with people" (McBath, 1975, p. 11). While the first conference dealt almost solely with debate, the second conference in 1984, with individual events participation, adhered to that definition with only slight modifications. McBath again wrote the rationale for the activity and endorsed his original statement (1984, p. 6). An alternative definition was offered, but it varied little in perspective: "Forensics is a communication-centered experience in scholarship in which one's own ideas and arguments are subjected to the judgment of others" (1984, p. 6). Clearly, the activity itself is defined as an exercise in argument, an endorsement of communication within the rational world paradigm.
Research in the public address events has adopted this perspective with a vengeance. The 1984 Developmental Conference issued a series of general criteria for judging that reflect the argumentative goals of forensics (Murphy, 1984, p. 90). A strictly deductive structure is endorsed along with a statement urging that the speech be organized in a "coherent" manner. Speakers are asked to establish a "motivational link" in their speeches between the topic and the audience. In no way are they expected or urged to reveal their own feelings or connection with the topic. Public address events, from this statement, are to be strictly impersonal exercises in argument.

Those general standards have been reinforced by studies on specific events. Aden and Kay explicitly endorse the definition of forensics as an argument-centered activity when they review the state of questions in extemporaneous speaking (Aden and Kay, 1988). They maintain that the goal of the event is to make a claim and "provide support or 'good reasons' to convince others to accept the claim" (1988, p. 44). In his study of extemporaneous speaking, James Benson (1978) takes a similar perspective. A number of articles on rhetorical criticism or communication analysis have appeared recently and they seem to endorse the rational world paradigm. Murphy, for instance, maintains that the fundamental nature of rhetorical criticism is argument (1988, pp. 3-5). Kay and Aden, while disagreeing with Murphy on a number of points, also accept the rational world paradigm (1989, pp. 38-41).

These two events are usually considered the most strictly logical or rational. The remaining public address events, however, implement the rational world paradigm. In their discussion of impromptu speaking, Reynolds and Fay accept a number of rhetorical strategies, such as the use of personal experience, that seem to lie outside of the norms of argumentation. They also, however, urge speakers to find other tactics to "legitimate" those appeals and they base their discussion of impromptu on the classical canons of rhetoric (1987, p. 87). Allen and Dennis have proposed a series of criteria for informative speaking that emphasize the traditional standards (1989, pp. 53-54). In their hierarchical ballot, research, significance, and organization and support are by far the three most important considerations (1989, p. 54). Even after-dinner speaking has adopted the argumentative perspective. Dreibelbis and Redmond maintain that an ADS is a "humorous-persuasive" speech and that the most appropriate form of organization is problem-solution (1987, p. 97).
Perhaps the most telling evidence of the increasing popularity of logical standards of evaluation comes in a recent study of persuasion. Sellnow and Ziegelmueller (1989) review twenty years of speeches from the Interstate Oratorical Contest. They note that, over the years, the persuasive speech has become a distinctly more logical enterprise. Emotional appeals, personal stories and narratives, and so forth have all declined precipitously. They lament this change and argue that a "persuasive speech should be something more than a well-delivered first affirmative debate speech" (1989, p. 85). Their study, however, reveals clearly that persuasion is moving rapidly in that direction.

While this review has not covered every analysis of public address events, the trends are clear. The rational world paradigm dominates the judging criteria used in individual events. While I believe, as my previous work has shown, that these standards are valuable, such norms alone cannot provide students with the skills they will need in the variety of situations they will encounter. Just as Neo-Aristotelian criticism, as a unitary system, could not help but ignore or denigrate rhetoric that violated the traditional standards, so our current judging criteria punish students who fail to meet them to the detriment of the activity. The limitations of the rational world paradigm become particularly clear when compared to the communicative styles of women.

"Women's Speech: Separate but Unequal?"

Over the past twenty years, gender differences in communication have become an increasingly provocative field of study. Much of the research has been focused on discovering empirically verifiable differences in language use between men and women. Recently, however, that kind of study has come under fire and feminist critics have begun to approach the issue of gender differences from a new perspective. I shall briefly review this research and explain the recent efforts to articulate a "woman's style" (Penelope (Stanley) and Wolf, 1983, p. 125).

Until recently, as the heading of this section drawn from an important essay by Kramer suggests, women's speech has been unfavorably compared to "objective standards" (1974). A long series of language studies have engaged in that kind of research. As Lana Rakow (1986) notes, for instance, Lakoff compares "women's language" with "neutral language" and reveals a series of significant differences. Lakoff argues that women use a different vocabulary, lack aggressiveness, display considerable uncertainty through the use of tag questions and other strategies, and tend toward "hyper-
correct grammar" (Rakow, 1986, p. 15). Rakow joins Spender (1980) in critiquing this approach, claiming that Lakoff characterizes women as "lacking" various qualities and privileges male speech as the norm (Rakow, 1986, p. 16). As Thorne, Kramarae, and Henley note in their review of sex differences research, few of Lakoff's claims, or indeed, situation-invariable gender differences of any sort have emerged (Thorne, Kramarae, and Henley, 1983, pp. 12-14).

Instead, feminist critics in communication, such as Rakow and Kramarae, and in literature, such as Showalter and Kolodny, have begun to argue that the gender differences in communication arise from social contexts, social roles, and power relations (Rakow, 1986, p. 16; Thorne, Kramarae, and Henley, 1983, pp. 11-21). Research has begun to focus on the fact that, as an oppressed group, women have developed alternative styles of communication based upon their subordinate status, their tasks, the division of labor between the sexes, and their talk among themselves (Thorne, Kramarae, and Henley, 1983, pp. 7-21). Scholars have begun to argue that these style are not necessarily lacking the prerequisites for "proper" communication. Instead, they are different strategies that respond to unique circumstances. These studies in communication have been reinforced by the work of feminist literary critics. Showalter notes that the second phase of "feminist criticism was the discovery that women writers had a literature of their own, whose historical and thematic coherence, as well as artistic importance, had been obscured by the patriarchal values that dominate our culture" (1985a, p. 6). While she acknowledges the considerable debate over the nature of the female aesthetic, she stands firm in her claim that feminist criticism can find its "own subject, its own system, its own theory, and its own voice" (1985b, p. 247).

To a large extent, feminist literary critics have begun to find that that voice is rooted in the experiences of women. In her classic essay on feminist criticism, Kolodny (1985) notes that women often create their own symbols and meanings based upon their lives. As she puts it, "the sewing circle rather than the whaling ship, the nursery instead of the lawyer's office" serve as the "functional symbols of the human condition" (Kolodny, 1985, p. 49). Penelope (Stanley) and Wolf argue that a "woman's style" has evolved because women have traditionally been unable to participate in the communication of the society at large: "The women of the twentieth century who write speak out of a tradition of silence, a tradition of closely guarded, personal, revelatory language of dia-
Feminists in communication studies have long been engaged in the similar task of finding the voice of women and their conclusions bear a remarkable resemblance to their sisters in literature. Karlyn Campbell (1973) has argued that the social and rhetorical constraints on women have created a particular style of communication she labels "consciousness-raising." Campbell maintains that women's rhetoric is grounded in personal experience, given that they have been denied the public forum for so long. Often, given the radical nature of their task of overturning the social system, women violate traditional speaking norms in an effort to shatter reality and reveal the contradictions within a woman's role. Campbell also contends that traditional notions of leadership and speaking success cannot account for such rhetoric (1973, pp. 74-86).

Kathleen Jamieson has elaborated on these arguments in her recent analysis of *Eloquence in an Electronic Age* (1988). She distinguishes between a masculine and a feminine style of public speech. Quoting Campbell, Jamieson maintains that feminine rhetoric is "inductive, even circuitous, moving from example to example, and is usually grounded in personal experience. Consistent with their allegedly poetic and emotional natures, women tend to adopt associative, dramatic, and narrative modes of development, as opposed to deductive forms of organization. The tone tends to be personal and somewhat tentative, rather than objective and authoritative" (pp. 75-76). Jamieson argues that societal norms have traditionally opposed this style of speech; the masculine style has dominated public rhetoric and women have adapted accordingly.

That masculine style has also dominated the "Ivory Tower." Treichler and Kramarae have explored the bias against women in classroom settings and they provide more insight into "women's talk as a socio-linguistic subculture" (1983, p. 119). They claim, like Campbell and Jamieson, that women tend to be more concerned with storytelling, with narrative, with personal experience, and with the use of talk to establish equality and maintain relationships, rather than to prove a point. Drawing on sociologists, they maintain that these patterns are established in childhood and tend to carry forward to school experiences; women and men "bring different cultural patterns to interaction" (p. 119).
There exists a growing body of evidence, then, that women's talk differs substantially from the traditional, rational standards of public speech and the criteria developed in forensics. Moreover, the cultural expectations here are very strong. Since the masculine style has historically been privileged, any indication that women do not meet those expectations seems to imply that women are "irrational" or some such. That is not the case. Instead, women have developed alternative communication strategies that do not fit the masculine norms or the rational world paradigm. By elevating that paradigm, we ignore such strategies to the detriment of the activity.

**Implications**

The use of the rational world paradigm by the forensics world has several important consequences. Most immediately, these traditional standards erode the potential that women have for success. In their important essay on the "rhetoric of confrontation," Scott and Smith note that traditional rhetorical forms reinforce the Establishment (1969, pp. 1-9). The comfortable, conservative nature of the discourse that results from the rational world paradigm gives white males a distinct advantage by privileging their communicative style and preventing legitimate alternative strategies from achieving success.

Moreover, the trends do not bode well for women. As Selnow and Zeigelmueeller argue, persuasion has increasingly resembled a first affirmative speech and, from personal experience, I would contend that the other events are moving in that direction as well. The articles cited that define the events in a rational manner are not old or outdated; to the contrary, most are of quite recent vintage. If anything, the norms that have contributed to a lack of success on the part of women are becoming entrenched.

That situation leaves the woman forensic contestant with two options. She can choose to defy the norms and compete anyway. Some outstanding women will undoubtedly have success, but most, if they rely on the strategies outlined above, will likely be defeated and grow discouraged about the activity. On the other hand, the more popular solution is adaptation. In recent years, particularly in persuasion, women have had outstanding success. Yet I would still maintain that the conspicuous achievement of some women should not be taken as the norm. Jamieson outlines in detail the problems women encounter when they try to adapt. Men who attack their opponents, for instance, are acting in a culturally accepted manner. Women are thought of as overly aggressive bitches. Jamieson also notes that women who "invade the linguistic domain of men
must overcome their own sense of the inadequacies of a woman's speech" (1988, p. 85). In a sense, in order to succeed, women must speak a foreign tongue. And these adaptations also extend to nonverbal attributes. Women are encouraged to speak more slowly, to lower the pitch of their voices, and, in many ways, to appear in the proper suit, imitating a man, in public address. Such changes create distinct discomfort on the part of many women, who are then also told that they need a more "natural" delivery style. Given such circumstances, women are unlikely to reach their potential in the activity.

In fact, few forensics contestants can achieve and learn all that they might under the present system. We recognize that forensics is not the "real world," but we assume that the skills that we teach transfer readily into other contexts. By limiting the students to the rational world paradigm, however, the skills they learn may be inadequate to cope with the situations they face. The kind of argumentative, evidence-filled, authoritative speech required in forensics is not as in demand in the real world.

With the advent of mass media and television, that may be more true than in the past. Jamieson makes a persuasive argument that the feminine style is more suited for television than the masculine style. The intimate nature of the medium encourages self-disclosure and narrative (1988, pp. 82-84). For that matter, the burst of interest in narrative and story-telling as rhetorical strategies or even as a paradigm for human communication, should encourage coaches and participants to take more interest in such traditionally "effeminate" tactics. Certainly, if we wish to teach our students to be effective rhetoricians, we need to end the rule of the rational world paradigm as a unitary system.

Such an assertion is easy to make but very difficult to implement. It would be facile to suggest that these attitudes can be turned around immediately or that rule changes can be enacted that would eradicate the problems. Judges can, however, change their attitudes about "effeminate" tactics. As Sellnow and Zeigelmueeller argue, we need to make room for personal experience and narrative strategies. That would at least be a start toward rectifying the current situation. In addition, the overall standards proposed at the 1984 conference need to be modified in practice to allow students to explore alternative rhetorical strategies. For instance, students should be encouraged to use personal experience in events that seem hospitable to such efforts already, such as impromptu, persuasion, and informative. Finally, considerably more research needs to be conducted in this area. This analysis
has limited itself to public address; interpretation should also come under scrutiny. As indicated in the introduction to this paper, some work has been done on the patterns of success and participation by men and women. Yet more work, particularly research aimed at discerning the perceived reasons for the bias, would help the activity.

In short, this brief essay can offer no panacea. It is intended to spark discussion about these problems and begin the process that could lead to change. The difficulties of prejudice in forensics are as deep-rooted as they are in the real world. As Jamieson argues, however, the communication styles in that world have already begun to change. If we truly see forensics as an educational laboratory for understanding, explaining, and testing various rhetorical strategies, we need to expand the range of those tactics beyond the rational world paradigm.

NOTES

1 See, for instance, the special issue of the National Forensic Journal on gender and forensics, Spring, 1985.
2 "Consciousness-raising" is, of course, a term that has been used to describe the interactions of women in therapy groups. Campbell uses the term in a broader sense to refer to the characteristic rhetoric of the feminist movement.

REFERENCES


