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 the prevalence of gender disparity in competitive debate, and how disparity affects how successful females are and their perception in comparison to men in professional forums. Debate simulates the transition from academia to the workforce to see if attributional rationalization 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 22 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 performance characteristics to each debater from a bank of gendered adjectives. They also filled out likert scales ranking each debater on professionalism, persuasiveness, and aggressiveness. A correlation between women and being attributed to more negative gender stereotyped words was found. Similarly, women received significantly lesser speaker points, wins, and were less likely to be hired. Female debaters self-ranked themselves as less confident. Aggressiveness and persuasiveness were correlated for male competitors whereas aggressive females were more likely to be ranked as less persuasive.

Awards Won: