Organization Identity, Culture and Student Motivation Among Intercollegiate Forensics Competitors

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Webmaster's note: This version of the manuscript is different in two key ways from the original. First, as noted in the Fall 2006 *NFJ*, the second and third authors were left off the original manuscript. This has been corrected in this version. Additionally, the spelling of this journal and of *The Forensic* have been fixed in the bibliography.

Abstract

This study examines competitive intercollegiate speech and debate. Specifically, levels of communication apprehension, student motivation, organizational identification and organizational culture understanding were analyzed in regard to potential gender differences. Ultimately, males and females were found to have significantly different levels of apprehension, student motivation, identification and cultural understanding. Thus, this article makes arguments as to why these relationships exist and calls for future research into speech and debate competitors' personalities and traits.

Intercollegiate forensics competitions hold a long and venerable tradition in American liberal education (Cohen, 1994; Freeley & Steinberg, 2000). In contemporary times these competitions can be categorized into two types: debate events, and individual speaking (or platform) events. Although it is common for both activities to be taught at the same institution, it is equally common for one discipline to be taught to the exclusion of the other.

Limited research has studied the communicative characteristics of students who join forensics programs. Cambra and Klopf (1978) studied a small sample of oral interpretation students, and argued that this group had perceived characteristics that were entirely different from students in public speaking and debate. The authors noted that, although different verbal skills are required, debaters and public speakers seem to perceive themselves as similar in their predisposition toward verbal behavior. Furthermore, while research has examined inequity in how rounds are ranked based on gender (Friedly & Manchester, 1987; Murphy, 1989; White, 1997), under representation of gender in specific events (Greenstreet, 1997), and sexual harassment in intercollegiate debate (Stepp, Simerly & Logue, 1994) no research has addressed how the genders differ in their identification with a particular forensics program.

This article seeks to explore the degree to which gender potentially impacts a student's organizational identification and cultural understanding of a forensics program. This article also intends to examine the potential relationship(s) between gender and a competitor's motivation to succeed and self-reported level of communication apprehension.

Literature Review

The Organization of Forensics

Admittedly, there is only anecdotal evidence to guide the exploration of the organizational makeup of forensics programs. Still, coaches involved in intercollegiate forensics competitions have commented for years on an interesting phenomenon concerning self-identification among student forensics competitors. That is, students who compete in debate events think of themselves as quite different from students who compete in individual events, and vice versa. Both debate and individual events require similar forms of public speaking, research, critical thinking, and communication skills (Cohen, 1994). However, when a student is asked about the event in which he or she is to compete, the response is commonly quite intense. The student will respond emphatically, "I am a debater" or "I am an individual events speaker." Further, it is common to observe indignation in the student who feels he or she has been misidentified as being a member of the "wrong" group. In institutions where both debate and platform speaking are taught by different coaches, it is further common for some coaches to neglect or minimize the existence of the opposite program.

Organizational Culture and Identity

In order to understand the behavior among college and university forensics students, it is helpful to consider the established concept of culture and organizational identity.

Organizational culture comes to represent the glue that holds an organization/team together because it provides the organization's members with a frame of reference (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). Individuals who are assimilating to the team are introduced to the team's frame of reference through typical norms or behavior (Derryberry, 1994). Also, the norm of "this is the way it has always been done," is used to bring new members into the team. Through this process of organizational learning, management, mentoring and control become part of the team's culture (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). Sackmann (1990) explains how treating organizational culture as an external variable permits managers to alter cultural systems through a four-stage process.

Moreover, of particular importance in the development of organizational knowledge, which contributes to organizational culture are myths, stories or rumors (Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). These kinds of stories typically revolve around previous competitors and coaches, who make up the history of the team or circuit. Such stories bring members of the team together around fantasy themes (Brock, Scott, & Chesebro, 1990) and create a dramatic sense of community (Burke, 1945). The emphasis on the assimilation of new members into a team's culture results in organization leaders evaluating the organizational culture as either a "good" or "bad" culture (Kersten, 1993; Knuf, 1993; Sackmann, 1991). In the case of forensics programs, well developed and maintained team cultures, no matter what region in which the team resides, generally maintain team members longer and produce happier team members (Worthen, 1995; Miller, 2005).

Organizational Identity

The construct of organizational identity has been captured as "the degree to which a person defines himself or herself as having the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization" (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994). It is the position of this paper that the constructs of organizational identity and social identity offer the same conceptualizations of how individuals perceive themselves in relationship to groups. This position is consistent with Cheney's (1983) description of identity in the context of the group or organization, as "an active process by which individuals link themselves to elements in the social scene" (Cheney, 1983, p. X). Cheney linked the concept of individual and organization through Kenneth Burke's notion of identification as "consubstantiality," in essence, the sharing of substance (Burke, 1969). The shared substance between individuals and organizations creates identities.

Social identity research began in the 1970s with the work of Tajfel (1972) and with additional elaborations by Turner (1982). Social identity studies have explored why discriminatory behavior appears between groups (Tajfel, Flament, Billing, & Bundy, 1971). Tajfel et al. found that when groups interact, they prefer to compete and outperform other groups rather than work together to maximize their success as a unit. Tajfel et al. further reported that when social identity heightens, group members create differences and discriminate against others based on these differences.

Orbe (2004) observed first generation college students and reported they felt like they were entering into a foreign culture to which it was difficult to adapt. Orbe indicated that race, class, and gender might serve to predict the degree to which college life might influence a student's identity development. Orbe (2004) observed that culture often drove the process of social identification, where African American students were seen to shift from varying frames of reference, including their personal identity to others, identity emergence through interpersonal relationships, and communal relationships (Hecht, 1993). Orbe (2004) reported many students found their status as first generation college students to be contextual depending on where they were. For example, students felt they were treated differently at home versus school.

Tajfel (1972) hypothesized when a person categorizes oneself within a group, it gives their action meaning. Tajfel defined social identity as, "individual knowledge that he or she belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional value significance to him or her of this group membership" (as cited in Haslam, 2004, p. 21). Turner (1982) argued self-concept is a key part that makes up each person's social identity, and having a social identity makes group interaction possible. People self categorize groups in which to belong (Turner, 1991). Based on self-concept, people choose groups that fit their needs. Studies of how forensics coaches could best recruit potential forensic competitors have found that students tend to identify with debate in college mostly for social and educational opportunities (Williams & Hughes, 2003) and because they are drawn to a coach with whom they felt connected (Littlefield & Larson-Casselton, 2004).

Turner added when multiple people share the same social identity, this identity creates group norms and, thus, culture. Mankowski and Thomas (2000) and Johnson and Watson (2004) found students who identify with the institution tend to have higher retention rates because they fit with and engage the culture, and begin to form norms such as nicknames.

When a person doesn't fall within a specific social group in the office, for example, people in that group are less likely to respond to their demands or requests and quality communication is less likely to occur (Haslam, 2004). This example illustrates how identity relates to the function of communication in organizations (Mitchell, Dowling, Kabanoff, & Larson, 1988). People with similar social identities and groups tend to have increased communication over people outside of the group because of the way they have categorized themselves (Haslam, 2004). Haslam, Postmes, and Ellemers (2003) argue "organizational identity makes organizational behavior possible" (p. 365). Postmes (2003) summed up the relationship between organizational identity and communication: "perceptions of shared social identity provide people with multiple motivations for communicating and also with a shared cognitive framework that allows this communication to be mutually beneficial and productive" (Haslam, 2004, p. 86).

When identification begins to become permanent, groups begin to develop specific coded language that only they can understand (Zurcher, 1965, as cited in Haslam, 2004). Technical jargon is a good example of an identity marker (Levine & Moreland, 1991, p. 264; Montgomery, 1986, as cited in Haslam, 2004), which helps demonstrate the norms established and the identification people within the group want to be associated with. From the proceeding research, this paper poses:

> *H1:* The level of perceived organizational identification will be related to levels of perceived organizational culture.

Student Motivation

Additionally, anecdotal evidence guides an interest in the degree to which students who identify with intercollegiate forensics seem to express enthusiasm for their study. The concept of situation motivation first appeared in the communication literature in the mid 1980s with the establishment of the situational (state) motivation scale (Beatty & Payne, 1985). The authors defined state motivation as "a temporary condition in which individuals direct high levels of concentration and attention toward the competent completion of a task" (Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 1987, p. 343). Unlike trait motivation, in which individual propensities toward school or learning are considered, situational motivation focuses on "students' attitudes toward a particular class or subject" (p. 343). Motivated situation toward a particular class can be seen in student behavior regardless of the presence of others (Richmond, 1990). The appearance of motivation can be observed in student's choices to continue with a chosen study or activity. Among forensic students, higher rates of retention in forensic programs have been found among students who feel they fit with the culture (Johnson & Watson, 2004; Mankowski & Thomas, 2000). Therefore, this article poses a relationship between student motivation and organizational identification and culture because a student's level of motivation and commitment to a forensics activity would arguably be related to their organizational identification and cultural understanding of the organization:

H2: Levels of student motivation will be related to levels of organizational identification, in this case with a student's own forensics team.

H3: Levels of student motivation will be related to the levels of organizational culture understanding.

Gender and Ethnicity in Forensics

Stepp and Garner (2001) found women and minorities have been underrepresented in debate from 1991 to 2001, but they noted that the numbers have begun to rise, so more women and minorities are starting to participate in debate more often. Even with the increase in numbers, Frank (1997) proclaimed "[Stepp's] research should put to rest any notion that intercollegiate debate is an open activity, for her study indicates that women and minorities are significantly underrepresented and face significant barriers to participation" (p. 195). Freeley and Steinberg (2000) reported that "research and personal narrative indicate that bias against women and minorities exists in the community of intercollegiate debate" (p. 32).

There is some evidence to suggest women and ethnic minorities may find individual events more attractive than debate. Our survey had a greater response from women than men. Based on the results we found, as well as prior research from Allen, Trejo, Bartanen, Schroeder, and Ulrich (2004) women and ethnic minorities may be more attracted to individual events.

Based on this literature, this paper poses a number of research questions, including:

RQ la: Does the subject's reported gender relate to levels of perceived organizational identification?

RQlb: Does the subject's reported ethnicity relate to levels of perceived organizational identification?

RQ2a: Does the subject's reported gender relate to levels of perceived organizational culture?

RQ 2b: Does the subject's reported ethnicity relate to levels of perceived organizational culture?

RQ3a: Does the subject's reported gender relate to levels of perceived student motivation?

RQ 3b: Does the subject's reported ethnicity relate to levels of perceived student motivation?

Communication Apprehension

McCroskey (1976) defined communication apprehension (CA) as a person's fear or anxiety with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons. This disposition refers to an individual's predisposition to avoid communication if possible or suffer from anxiety. Beatty, McCroskey and Heisel (1998) called communication apprehension a blend of introversion and neuroticism. Communication apprehension has been found to have only a moderate correlation with a native speaker of a language's gender (Fayer, McCroskey, & Richmond, 1984). However, when analyzing the context of intercollegiate forensics, as coaches and observers of this activity we believe there will be a relationship between gender and CA. White (1997) asserted gender is a predictor of competitive success in extemporaneous speaking, and the success of one gender over another could be related to their overall apprehension. Furthermore, communication apprehension researchers have not looked at trained speakers, and since one of the fundamental purposes of forensics is to improve communicative abilities in students, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Levels of overall communication apprehension will be related to subject's reported gender.

Method

Participants

This study is based on a paper questionnaire of a convenience sample of 135 male and female college students who attended regional and national forensic competitions between February and April 2005. To avoid potential duplication students were asked if they had filled out a survey this year at a forensics tournament. If the student said yes they were shown the survey and asked if the survey being shown to them was similar to the one they took. If they did not know they did not take this survey. If they said it was not this survey, they were allowed to participate. The survey instrument was constructed to obtain socio-demographic data and assess perceptions of organizational culture, organizational identity, student motivation, and communication apprehension.

Measures

To operationalize the concept of organizational culture and ground it in empirical data, this analysis employed the Organizational Culture Survey (OCS) established by Glaser, Zamanou, and Hacker (1987). Subjects were asked to rate each of 36 statements about their organization on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "To a very little extent" to "To a very great extent" where little extent equaled 1 and a very great extent equaled 5. The 36 items can be grouped into five subscales measuring the sub-constructs of perceived teamwork, morale, information flow, involvement, supervision, and meetings. The subscales have historically achieved Cronbach alphas ranging from .63 and .91, which is acceptable for reliability (Glaser et al., 1987). In this study the OCS achieved an alpha rating of .964.

Although initial methods of capturing identity involve open-ended interviews (Hooper, 1976), this paper used a tool aimed at quantifying perceived identity as a way to test the potential existence of relationships between the variables organizational culture, student motivation, and communication apprehension. Employed is the Organizational Identity Questionnaire (OIQ), which was established by Cheney (1983). The OIQ attempts to measure the process in which people engage when linking to elements in the social scene, by asking subjects to rate each of 25 statements about their organization on a 7-point Likert scale from "No!, I disagree very strongly," to "Yes! I agree very strongly." Although there have been attempts to test the validity of the measure (Barge & Schlueter, 1988; Cheney, 1983; Potvin 1992), scholars have acknowledged that more could be done to establish validity of the questionnaire (Allen, et al., 2004; Downs, 1994). Still, the survey has acceptable scores of reliability between .94 and .96 (Cheney, 1983; Potvin, 1992). In this study, the OIQ's alpha rating was .948.

To assess respondent perceptions of motivation toward specific classes (parliamentary debate, speech or both), a 16-item semantic differential scale was used, and which was established by Beatty, Forst, and Stewart (1986) and refined by Richmond (1990) and Christophel (1990). The sets of bipolar adjectives included: motivated—unmotivated, interested—uninterested, involved—uninvolved, stimulated—not stimulated, want to study—don't want to study, inspired—uninspired, challenged—unchallenged, invigorated—uninvigorated, enthused—unenthused, excited—unexcited, aroused—not aroused, fascinated—not fascinated, not dreading it—dreading it, important—unimportant, useful—useless, helpful—harmful. Items within the semantic differential scale were reversed periodically to eliminate patterned responses. This measure has proven reliable in past studies with alpha coefficients ranging from .93 to .96 (Beatty & Payne, 1985; Christophel, 1990). In addition, the construct validity of this measure has been demonstrated (Beatty, McCroskey & Heisel, 1998). The alpha level for this particular study was .928.

To measure communication apprehension, the 24-item Personal Report of Communication Apprehension was used. This measure was established by McCroskey et al. (1985) to measure an individual's level of communication apprehension. The measure's 24-items are based on a 5-point Likert scale from "strongly agree," which equaled (1) to "Strongly disagree," which equaled (5). The 24-items are grouped/divided into four categories of apprehension: group, meeting, dyadic and public. These four categories are added together to represent an individual's overall communication apprehension. The measure has strong alpha reliability levels ranging from .93 to .95 (McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney, & Plax, 1985). The alpha level for this measure in this particular study was .938.

Finally, to establish the socio-demographic parameters of our sample, we asked each respondent to indicate their gender (either male or female), their age, ethnicity, total number of years competing in speech or debate events, their college major and their overall grade point average.

Statistical Analysis

In order to ascertain the potential relationships or correlations between variables posed in hypotheses one, two, three, and four, two-way correlations were performed. Two-way ANOVAS were also conducted using ethnicity as an independent variable to determine any correlations between this independent variable and the dependent variables posed in research questions 1B, 2B, and 3B. Independent samples t-tests were performed to ascertain relationships between gender and the dependent variables posed in research questions 1B, 2B, and 3B.

Results

Hypothesis one posed that the level of perceived organizational identification and the perceived level of organizational culture understanding would be related. Student's scores on the organizational identity questionnaire were positively correlated with their overall evaluation of their team's organizational culture: ($r = .779$; $p < .01$). The more a student identifies with their team, the more they will probably know about the team's norms, rituals and history (organizational culture).

Hypothesis two predicted a competitor's overall organizational identification with a specific team will relate to their overall motivation to succeed. Organizational identity was found to be positively correlated with the level of a student's motivation: $r = .419$; $p < .01$. The more motivated students are to succeed, the more likely they are to identify with their team, and vice versa. These results affirm that more motivated students will typically relate or identify more with their chosen or designated organization (Richmond, 1990).

Hypothesis three postulated that the level of a student's motivation will relate to that student's understanding of their team's culture. A student's level of motivation was found to be positively correlated with their understanding of their team's culture: $r = .331$; $p < .01$. Once again, this result is consistent with the results found in hypothesis one and two.

Hypothesis four dealt with the potential relationship between a student's gender and his/her level of speech apprehension. We hypothesized that there would be differences between the level of communication apprehension of male and female competitors. After running an independent samples t-test, we discovered that females scored significantly higher on the overall PRCA than their male counterparts: $t(132) = -2.525$; $p < .05$; $M_m = 46.06$; $SD_m = 18.19$; $M_f = 54.46$; $SD_f = 19.14$. When analyzing the four individual dimensions of communication diagnosed within the PRCA: group, meeting, dyadic and public, we found significant differences for three of the four dimensions. Females scored significantly higher on group apprehension: $t(132) = -3.254$; $p < .001$; $M_m = 10.87$; $SD_m = 5.70$; $M_f = 14.38$; $SD_f = 6.32$, meeting apprehension: 7(132) = -2.458; $p < .015$; $M_m = 11.08$; $SD_m = 4.8$; $M = 13.33$; $SD = 5.4$, and public communication apprehension: $t(132) = -2.011$; $p < .05$; $M_m = 12.23$; $SD_m = 6.26$; $M_f = 14.46$; $SD_f = 6.26$.

Research question 1A asked if gender predicts organizational identification. Independent samples t-tests reveal that female competitors identify more strongly with their teams than male competitors: $t(132) = -3.259$; $p < .01$; $M_m = 63.01$; $SD_m = 15.64$; $M_f = 73.67$; $SD_f = 19.25$. The fact that females seem to identify more with their respective teams than males will require further analysis.

Research questions IB, 2B, and 3B all asked whether or not ethnicity would be related to organizational identification, organizational culture, and student motivation. With each of these three variables, ethnicity was not found to be a significant indicator. One would assert the primary reason for this is the lack of a representative sample of diverse ethnicities. Out of the 135 people surveyed, 104 identified themselves as Caucasian, nine as Southeast-Asian, and the remaining 22 were from seven other categories. Ultimately, there was not enough of a representation of different ethnic groups to generalize ethnicity as an indicator of the three dependent variables mentioned above.

Research question 2A examined whether or not gender related to how well an individual perceives their team's overall culture. Males scored significantly higher on this overall measure, revealing their heightened understanding of their team's culture: $t(132) = 2.25$; $p < .05$; $M_m = 140.4$; $SD_m = 17.92$; $M_f = 130.85$; $SD_f = 27.02$. As for the six individual dimensions of organizational culture, males scored significantly higher on three: (1) teamwork: $t(132) = 3.423$; $p < .001$; $M_m = 29.65$; $SD_m = 3.67$; $M_f = 27.21$; $SD_f = 4.24$, (2) involvement: $t(132) = 2.164$; p < .032; $M_m = 16.54$; $SD_m = 2.8$; $M_f = 15.27$; $SD_f = 3.6$, and (3) supervision: $t(132) = 2.343$; p < .021; $M_m = 34.23$; $SD_m = 5.23$; $M_f = 31.2$; $SD_f = 8.36$. This result, which has not been addressed in the forensics literature, warrants more attention since there is no precedent as to why males understand their team's overall culture more than females.

Finally, research question 3A addressed the potential relationship between gender and a student's motivation. There was no significant difference between male and female competitors' level of motivation.

Discussion

The following section poses a limitation and postulates areas of future research. The main limitation in this study deals with our sample. Our population was not very diverse in its ethnicity, or type of speaker identification. The overwhelming majority of our respondents chose Caucasian as their ethnicity (n=103, 76.9%). This however is not a legitimate limitation of our study for the following reason. While this sample is not ethnically diverse when compared to the population of the United States, we suggest it still represents the forensics community at large, which is the community population we are analyzing in this study. Thus, since the overwhelming majority of forensics speakers are Caucasian (Valdivia & Simon, 1997), the results of this study are generalizable to this specific population.

The lack of students who strongly identified as primarily parliamentary debaters (n=12) is a limitation of this study. The original purpose of this study was to examine the potential differences in how individual events speakers and parliamentary debaters identify and understand the cultures of their programs. Unfortunately, with only 12 students exclusively identifying themselves as parliamentary debaters we were unable to make statements about the potential relationships between speaker type and identification, and organizational cultural understanding. A future study could seek out more parliamentary debaters (and debaters using other formats) and attempt to ascertain the data we initially attempted to collect.

As for additional future research, we believe social identity theory could be applied to forensics students to figure out why they identify with one group over the other. Our research questions ask similar questions about the forensics community as Tajfel et al. (1971) and Turner (1982) asked of their groups, which is: Why do students identify with one event/group so strongly? Perhaps another valid question might be, despite the fact that these students are similar in most respects, why do they join one forensics group over the other? For example, some students identify with the Cross Examination Debate Association - National Debate Tournament (CEDA-NDT) style, over many other debate options including: National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA), International Public Debate Association (IPDA), International Debate Education Association (IDEA), the National Forensics Association (NFA), or the American Debate Association (ADA). This doesn't even include separating themselves from the various individual events groups across the country. But once a student has identified with the CEDA - NDT group of debaters, that becomes their in-group and all other groups become out groups that can be discriminated against. Often times most students don't even realize they are identifying so strongly with a particular group. They rarely recognize the discrimination they are creating against other forensics groups (debate and individual events). In fact, they are so caught up in being better than other groups that the discrimination becomes inherent in an activity that claims to break down such discrimination within the debate community and among society at large.

A question emerging from this study is, does identity with a successful team, which can be measured in different ways, make students feel better about themselves, which in turn gives them a better-perceived positive social image? Does identifying with a successful team make students more apt to discriminate against other teams? More research is needed among forensics students to begin to answer this question. Organizational communication concepts may provide needed answers.

Furthermore, future research needs to explore communication apprehension in forensics students. Our study reveals female competitors score higher on overall communication apprehension than male competitors. Future research could attempt to explain this phenomenon. Moreover, we assert the level of apprehension felt by female competitors in comparison to male competitors may be operationalized not as apprehension but perfection. Forensics students are known for their desire for perfection in the performance of their events (Schroeder, 1982). Therefore we believe the apprehension felt by speakers (primarily in public settings) may more precisely be perfectionism within the activity of forensics, and not apprehension as defined by McCroskey (1976).

Ultimately, while our study reveals differences in identification, cultural understanding, student motivation and communication apprehension based on gender, there is still work to be done. Why do students identify with different forensics programs and why do certain students feel like they are more a part of the culture than other students? The forensics community remains a wide-open field for study. We would encourage more research in organizational identification and culture. As we pointed out previously, this phenomenon (identifying with a team and culture) does seem to exist, but has yet to be fully studied. We would also encourage more discussion on women and minorities to make the research more inclusive and create increased participation by these underrepresented groups.

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"Bowel Quaking Pessimism": An Ethnographic Examination of Competence and Complaining in The Forensics Community

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Abstract

Previous literature indicates that complaining is a negative form of speech. While the forensics community does not value constant complaints they do not avoid them either. Perhaps, being immersed in a culture devoted to argument makes them more likely to embrace complaints' potential for building trusting relationships. Forensics team members from a Midwestern university told us that complaining is a common and open occurrence in their culture. Yet, complaints generally occur in a humorous tone. We conclude that complaining behaviors are so important to the forensics culture we examined that one cannot be a competent communicator without complaining competently. We also suggest that competent complaining may help negotiate life in a society that thrives on competing thoughts.

Forensics teams spend a great deal of time together over the course of a season. Team members meet for work sessions, provide each other with feedback, and they rely on others to complete part of the team's work (working with a partner in the case of duo, preparing files for extemporaneous speaking, and doing debate research). Individual events teams also spend hours traveling together in cramped vans and team members struggle to determine what restaurant the team should dine at. What we are arguing is that forensics students face conditions where they are likely to spend a great deal of time complaining about travel conditions, each other, feedback from judges, and other topics. Those complaints demand attention from other students on the team, coaches, and the Director of Forensics. In the forensics community, students not only complain, but the training the activity provides in critical thinking skills likely expands the complexity of the complaint itself.

Our concern is with whether complaining is always negative. When forensics students complain, does it create a negative atmosphere, expose differences, and make people feel bad? Or, are the complaints productive because they bring issues that students feel strongly about out into the open, generate discussion, and allow coaches and directors to solve problems?

In the most general sense, we see the act of complaining as expressing discontent. Alberts (1988) defined complaints as "statements of dissatisfaction with the actions (or lack of action) of another" (p. 185). Our broad view expands the more focused definition Alberts (1988) had of complaining. For the purposes of this study, we find it useful to broaden the scope of what complaining is because we consider complaining to also be an expression of dissatisfaction about one's circumstances. Moreover, it becomes useful to allow those in the community to define complaining themselves. It is our belief that in an argument culture, such as a forensics team, there will be much dissatisfaction with both the people in the speech community and the circumstances in which people in the community find themselves. We begin by reviewing previous research regarding complaining.

Much of the body of literature regarding complaining is centered on two themes: couples' relationships and business communication. Among the research on complaining couples, Gottman (1982) found that unhappy marriages are positively related to the seriousness of domestic grievances; or one partner being perceived as too critical of the other. Additionally, Gottman argued that complaints could spiral, or escalate. Thus, Alberts (1988) concluded that complaining is problematic for married couples and that studies have focused almost exclusively on strategies for responding to complaints. Finally, Alberts (1989) reacted to the lack of research regarding couples' complaint topics, by creating a typology of what couples complain about and a typology for how partners respond to those complaints. In this typology, Alberts argued that couples complain about: behavior, personal characteristics, performance, complaining, and personal appearance. Part of our exploration includes both a detailed look at one particular context where complaining exists and complaint topics.

Generally, existing research has focused on relationships among intimates. The nature of complaining in other interpersonal relationships remains relatively unexplored. Thus, we expand existing research by exploring another context for complaining.

The second line of research on complaints, involves complaining to businesses (Day & Landon, 1977; Garrett & Meyers, 1996; Martin & Smart, 1994). Krapfel (1988) examined the influence that customer interaction style and appearance had on retail sales employees' willingness to comply. This research revealed that both style and appearance influence compliance.

In two areas related to complaining, Soritin (2000) wrote about "bitching" and Burchard (1999) examined "venting." Soritin examined female bitching in an office context, and explained that bitching is unjustified complaining which is indirect and goes on for a more extended time period than complaining. Burchard conducted an ethnographic study of resident assistants' venting behaviors. He noted that venting is sometimes used interchangeably with complaining, but it is different because venting focuses on framing the problem more than on the specific nature of the problem.

There is also disagreement regarding the impact of complaints. Researchers indicate that while complaining can be problematic, it also has potential benefits. Johnson and Roloff (1998) noted that Gottman identified complaining and criticism as a factor in leading to divorce. Alberts (1988) argued that complaining behavior is problematic for married couples, "Complaint behavior was chosen as the area of examination because complaints are pervasive, problematic and likely to be connected to a couple's relational satisfaction or adjustment" (p. 184). Newell and Stutman (1991) examined social confrontation and argued that among the problematic situations which might arise, were complaints. Moreover, they suggested that, "The bulk of research on problematic situations investigates how an individual will respond to being reproached" (p. 362).

However, the research also indicated that there might be some positive outcomes of complaining. One possible positive outcome of complaining might be to clarify a problematic area and improve it (Johnson & Roloff, 1998; Newell & Stutman, 1991). Alberts (1989) suggested that in relationships, people must negotiate ways to handle their differences, and complaining is often a means to that end. Second, complaining might help to reduce hostilities in a relationship as people have a chance to vent. According to Johnson and Roloff (1998), "Presumably, engaging one another over a topic of disagreement could allow intimates to vent hostility, clarify perceptions, create change, and improve their relationship" (p. 327). Another reason to examine complaining is to determine whether its' impact is positive, negative, or both.

Finally, there have also been ethnographic studies of complaining behavior. Rosenberg (1990) conducted field observation of the complaint discourse of the !Kung Sun of Botswana. The elderly there are well cared for and respected according to western standards, Rosenberg argues. Yet, it is the norm for elderly !Kung Sun to complain that their families neglect them. The elderly rarely express appreciation, but they do complain, even when it is not justified. However, complaining does not have the negative stigma it has in American culture. Although they take a serious tone when complaining, it is considered humorous. Rosenberg concluded that the !Kung Sun live in a culture where the ideal is that "every person is directly obligated to meet the needs of every other person all the time. Because this is an unattainable ideal, they have much to complain about" (p. 36).

Aleman (2001) did an ethnographic study of complaining among the elderly. She argued that complaining is central in revealing the identities of the elderly she spent time with. This is because through complaining, people connect with some and separate from others. Aleman also noted that complaints function as a means of exerting control over the environment that the elderly find themselves in. Finally, complaints are used to express the loss of control the elderly are experiencing and an awareness of the conditions in which they find themselves.

Katriel (1991) wrote about Israeli griping rituals. Griping, in Israeli culture, is disavowed. At the same time, it seems to be an expression of national character. Katriel noted that Israelis gripe about problems. Griping can be about national or local topics. It is generally not personal, however. Katriel stated, "Personal problems can be the topic of griping only insofar as they are incorporated into the discussion of some aspect of the current situation (e.g. as 'an example of or 'as evidence for')..." (p. 39). Additionally, a justified complaint does not constitute griping. Katriel pointed out that people gripe in order to relieve tensions and frustrations. Griping tends to produce a sense of solidarity. Yet, it is viewed as unproductive in terms of seeking solutions. However, Katriel is forced to compare Israeli griping to communication in America. This suggests that there should be more specific research on Americans' griping or complaining behavior. The existence of the empirical data about complaining couples and consumers can be expanded to interpersonal relationships versus those of intimates or strangers.

Our argument is that by examining complaining behavior on one particular team, coaches and directors can learn about the role and function of complaining behavior. Instead of attempting to suppress complaints, perhaps complaining can contribute positively to the team's identity. Second, by exploring the behavior of a team that dealt with complaints positively, perhaps we can learn something about how to deal with complaints in a healthy manner. Finally, we think that being a member of a forensics team, which exists for the purpose of creating artistic messages that are brought into competitive formats can help to teach students how to complain competently.

Why Forensics?

One context in which to examine complaining is within a forensics, or speech team. Democracy is founded on an assumption that allows for dissent, a marketplace where ideas compete. A forensics team is a group of people whose identity revolves around communication and debate. Because argumentation is so important in this culture, this is an interesting context in which to examine complaining.

Thus, we will examine what it means for a member of the forensics team to be a competent complainer. What is the nature of complaining among members of a forensics team? What, if anything, makes complaining in this speech community unique? How do people complain in this context? What purpose does complaining serve for them?

The nature of the forensics activity seems to make complaining likely for at least four reasons: First, complaining seems likely to occur because of the nature of travel arrangements. Generally, on this team, fifteen to twenty people travel to a tournament each weekend. This means that there needs to be a common departure time, which is bound to inconvenience someone. The departure time is often at four or five o'clock in the morning, which is much earlier than most college students are used to getting up. Moreover, all fifteen to twenty people on the team must eat at the same restaurant, travel in confined van space, and make stops whenever someone needs to. Finally, the accommodations at the Super 8 Hotel, or other similar establishment where four students share a room, inevitably provides further propensity to complain.

Second, students may sometimes disagree with each other. The nature of the activity as one in which a team earns points, means that competitors must rely on each other. If someone does not attend practice, does not put in enough time working on events, or fails to memorize a speech, other members of the team may face a situation in which disappointment reigns supreme. Possible contexts for complaints about other students include: students who may not listen attentively in the audience, some tournaments may make mistakes in tab rooms, they may feel that other teams overstate their accomplishments, or they may feel that a judge dislikes their work.

Third, coaches set performance requirements that students have to meet in order to travel to tournaments. Students may occasionally feel that the demands of those requirements compete with their ability to have free time or to work on their courses. This certainly could create frustration. Additionally, coaches occasionally argue for changes in students' performances, which students may dislike. After all, the speeches are students' ideas. Given students' ownership of ideas, it seems likely that suggested changes to their speeches might result in complaints. Sometimes questioning those ideas may seem somewhat personal.

Finally, students receiving written critiques on a regular basis may be another possible cause of complaints. Rice and McGowan (1997) argued, "Learning to accept criticism and negotiate defeat can be a painful, albeit rich experience" (p. 72). Trimble (1994) suggests that "students do receive the dreaded 'Nice job, tough round, 6/70' ballot" (p. 12). Ross (1984) suggests, "'Good job-tough round' - hardly assists a student in improving his or her performance. Worse, weakly-articulated reasons for a judging decision can prompt unjustified student attitudes about competition" (p. 35). Consequently, students may complain. According to Mills (1991) "complaints about (judges') comments or a lack of comments are not unusual" (p. 31).

Method

Descriptive theoretical framework

The framework that we used in order to code complaints is Hymes' (1972) speaking mnemonic. This framework was used by Katriel (1991) to examine Israeli griping rituals: topic, purpose, channel, participants, setting, key, and act sequence. We also used Hymes' category of norms. Hymes' framework is appropriate for assessing all speech events because all speech events have these components. According to Braithwaite (1997) "this framework is the investigative tool used by ethnographers of speaking to organize the ongoing interaction that they observe. SPEAKING is understood here as a system that can be viewed using the ethnography of speaking descriptive framework as the 'lens'" (p. 430).

There are five benefits to using Hymes' framework. First, this is an adequate framework to use because it addresses the issue of what makes a member of the forensics team a competent complainer. Questions such as: What do forensics students complain about? Why do people complain? Does complaining have both positive and negative impacts? How do others feel about witnessing complaints? How do they react? When people complain, do they do it in e-mail, phone calls, writing, or in person? Where do people complain? Is there a routine/ritual to complaining? Second, the categories specified in this framework are observable. One can record the topic of complaints, the reasons for complaining, the communication channels through which participants complain, the setting, the tone of the conversations, and the sequence of the exchanges. Additionally, competitors can be asked about their complaining behaviors in interviews. Third, there are a relatively small number of categories, which makes recording them a relatively manageable task. Fourth, this framework has been used to examine a similar phenomenon, such as griping rituals. Because this framework was used to examine a similar phenomenon in another culture, our findings could be compared to Katriel's concerning the use of complaints.

Context

A Midwestern University forensics team was observed in this research project. The team was in its one hundred and third year of competition. There are twenty-four competitors on the team, and there are five coaches. Coaches act as guides and mentors for the students participating in forensics. They help the students select and prepare the various speech and debate events in which they compete. Four of the coaches are graduate students and there is also a full time director of forensics. Eight (of the twenty-four) students participate in Parliamentary debate and four students participate in Lincoln-Douglas debate. There are twelve returning members of the team and there are twelve freshmen. The team's class standing breaks down as: four seniors, one junior, seven sophomores, and twelve freshmen. Over the course of the year, the forensics team attends approximately fifteen invitational speech competitions, two national individual events tournaments, and Parliamentary Debate Nationals. The average tournament is four to six hours away, and competitors frequently stay in hotels while competing at tournaments.

Data Gathering

The data for the study was compiled from five sources: seventy-five hours of observation, eight formal interviews, eight informal interviews, minutes from team meetings, and messages posted on the team listserv.

Observations. We have approximately 75 hours of observation. The observations at tournaments and during travel were dictated to a tape recorder and transcribed after the observation (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). This technique was used so that the observer could be in the moment and interact. Also, it was used to avoid having the observer look odd with a pad and pen in situations where such behavior was not warranted. However, the observations of the team meeting and squad room were transcribed in context. People observed writing notes during a meeting is commonplace. Also, the writing while participating made it less likely that we would miss something important or significant.

Interviews. Each researcher conducted four formal interviews with a semi-structured interview approach. We devised a list of topics (questions) around our descriptive framework, and from the data found during the observations, that guided the interview discussion. The semi-structured interview format was purposeful in that it allowed us the freedom to ask numerous probing questions. The interviews were conducted in a neutral setting, and were audio recorded for accurate quoting. The interviews were approximately 35 to 45 minutes in length. In addition to the formal interviews, we also conducted about the same number of informal interviews. These interviews ranged from simple in-passing conversations to small-talk about school. The informal interviews operated primarily as perception checks.

Documents. The team elected a member of the team to serve as secretary. That individual took minutes at team meetings and then made them available to all team members and coaches by posting them to the listserv. Because one of us was a member of the coaching staff of the team, it was easy to print off the minutes for 16 team meetings. In addition to the minutes, we also printed off relevant communication exchanged through the listserv. Moreover, we had access to ballot sheets from the various tournaments that the team had attended.

Data Analysis

Once we gathered our data, we followed an analytical pattern similar to that of Bogdan and Biklen (1992). We first *jotted down ideas* independently on every transcript and document. We looked through each other's transcripts and provided notations and highlighted themes that emerged from the data. This process provided the foundation for when we collaborated to *try out the themes.* We met several times to discuss and compare the themes that surfaced in our independent analyses. We then *played with the concepts* in order to construct categories of analysis. Independent modified Q-sorts were helpful in breaking down the larger sections of our framework into manageable and understandable subcategories.

Verification Strategies

Philipsen (1982) suggested that validity equals the adequacy of a description as a representation on an observed situation. From this perspective, validity is a continuum, not an absolute. We must talk about validity in terms of the *degree* of validity. In this section, we discuss how we attempt to achieve the highest possible levels of validity and reliability.

We made sure that our observations were valid by triangulating data gathering and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We drew from observations, interviews and documents. Throughout this project, we met to discuss the various things we had discovered independently. This helped shape the outcome of this study in addition to increasing our confidence in our results because we were able to check each other's perceptions.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested thinking about the "dependability" or "consistency" of the results obtained from the data. Thus, we were careful in choosing informants. Miles and Huberman (1994) proffered numerous types of sampling. We located informants that complied with the five characteristics of good informants established by Spradley (1979): a good informant (a) is thoroughly enculturated, (b) is currently involved, (c) is from an unfamiliar cultural scene, (d) has adequate available time, and (e) is unanalytic. Although a few of our informants were first year members of the team, each person we spoke with claimed to have enough previous forensic experience to be aware of the customs and courtesies of the forensic speech community. All of the informants were indeed currently active in forensics as either a participant or a coach.

Although one of us was familiar (and currently involved) with the cultural scene, the other provided enough cultural un-awareness to provide an un-assuming perspective. The fact that we both "saw" the same thing meant that it was likely there. Finally, we created clear analytical constructs and categories for coding. Through the meetings we had, we came up with clearly identifiable themes and codes for each theme.

According to LeCompte and Goetz (1982), our first concern with internal reliability was to use low-level descriptors. We used multiple verbatim examples from our observation and interview notes and transcripts as well as the team documents and correspondence. We focused our analysis on the terms used by the participants. Another way of improving internal validity is having multiple researchers. Having two researchers allowed us to perform peer examinations as well. As stated in a previous section, we peer reviewed independent theme constructions and examined each other's writing. Finally, we had each interview taped so that we could revisit the original data if needed.

Insider/Outsider

When observing a group, there are advantages and disadvantages to being either an "Insider" (member of the group) or an "outsider." We will first discuss the role of the insider. Because one of us is a coach on a forensics team, she can get access for us to observe a variety of behind the scenes" or "backstage" contexts as Goffman (1959) would suggest. Complaining might be observed: in vans, at work sessions, at official team meetings, at tournaments, and when students are talking in the team room in between coaching sessions and classes. Because she is a normal part of that context members of the team would be less likely to alter their normal behavior around her. In addition, member status gave us access to the listserv documents with relative ease. We also feel that the members of the team may confide in her because of familiarity. Moreover, her coach stature might have made the participants feel important from the attention.

However, being an insider also presents potential challenges or limitations. Although the insider status gave us benefits of access and trust, the informants may have assumed that she already knew about the information we sought. Also, a coach might unknowingly come across a situation where informants tell her what they think she wants to hear.

The outsider of us provided several benefits as well. He had the ability to *play dumb*, giving the unstated push for the informants to fully explain issue in their responses. Because the outsider is perceived as knowing little about the speech community, the informants may also have told him something that he or she may have assumed that an insider would have known. In addition, the outsider provided insight for questions that the insider overlooked. However, outsider status also poses some potential challenges. The informants might have withheld information from the outsider for fear of giving out team secrets. Moreover, the outsider may not know the pertinent or relevant questions to ask or the terminology in order to communicate in the speech community.

As an ethnographic researcher, it is impossible to avoid both of these role challenges because one would seem to be either an insider or an outsider, by definition. Allen (2004) noted:

> Advocates of the "insider" view argue that it is only those who are closely immersed in the field of study who can ensure an authentic account. Others make the counter claim, that the "outsider" position is a preferable stance as it is free from the potential for bias that arises from too close an affiliation with the research subjects or "going native" (p. 15).

We feel that we limited perceptual difficulties by working together as an outsider and an insider. According to Fitch (1994) "for qualitative data to be admissible as evidence for claims about social life: (a) The researcher should have been deeply involved and closely connected to the scene, activity, or group studied" (p.36). Clearly, as an insider, one of us was. Fitch (1994) continues, "(b) The researcher should achieve enough distance from the phenomenon to allow for recording of action and interpretations relatively uncolored by what she or he might have at stake" (p.36). This, we are arguing, is the outsider advantage. Working as a research pair allowed us to "triangulate" or perception check each other's observations. Indeed, LeCompte and Goetz (1982) suggested, "Ethnographic conclusions are qualified by the investigator's social role within the research site. Other researchers will fail to obtain comparable findings unless they develop corresponding social positions or have *research partners* who can do so" (p.37).

Finally, we took as many precautions possible in order to protect the people who were involved with this study. We were candid in the voluntary nature of their participation with the observations and interviews. Names were changed in the transcription of each of the observations and interviews. The audiotapes of the interviews are secured.

Findings

Participants

Complaining takes place among team members: students and coaches. There seems to be a bit of a hierarchy for determining which members of the team can speak generally, and complain more specifically. Thus, at formal team meetings complaints about members' needing to work harder, prepare more, and work with coaches more are frequently heard. Those complaints come primarily from the director of forensics who conducts the meeting. Other coaches occasionally add comments, and people on the team who are more experienced members or who have achieved a particular status, such as competing in a final round at the national tournament are allowed to add comments. It is not as though there is a formal rule dictating that freshmen cannot complain at team meetings, they just tend not to.

If a student has a complaint with a coach, it is typically not dealt with in public out of respect for that coach. Sabrina, a new coach to the team, pointed this out, "Complaints about the coaches are totally taboo. I've never heard, ever, a complaint about another coach... The strongest complaint I've ever heard about another coach is, 'they're taking a long time to find a piece [of literature for a student to perform]'" (Interview 4). This could be because she is a coach, but we also observed that no students complained about coaches publicly. However, they may well do so in private. Further evidences for the existence of a hierarchy can be found in the steps that the students discussed to deal with their complaints. They said that they would talk to the person one on one, and if that did not work, they would seek advice from a more experienced team member, and then, they would go to the coaches (See act sequence). Clearly, this indicates that a hierarchy exists.

Topic

Where the team sits. We found that members of the forensics team complain about issues of commitment to the team, relational concerns, and the activity. First, team members complain about other team members' commitment to the activity and to the team. Topics ranged from others' work ethics, the importance of the team in people's lives, failure to work on events as much as is the expected norm, and keeping appointments. Within this category we also placed complaints about personal sacrifice, such as: some weeks spending forty-five hours on team related tasks, giving up sleep and food while at tournaments, leaving early for tournaments, and hands aching from carrying debate boxes. When asked if there were other things that team members complain about, Monica responded, "... events and stuff... just sometimes how you approach the team, umm, where it sits in people's lives, priorities and stuff can cause a little bit of conflict..." (Interview 6). Every respondent interviewed indicated that people complain about issues of preparation.

Relational. Second, members of the forensics team complain about relational aspects of interaction. They talk about these topics much like others make small talk. Monica said in her interview,

> Uhh, well there are sort of topical arguments, usually those aren't so, they are conflict, but I don't see that as being really deep since we do debate on the team a lot, and you know, it's kinds of accepted that you're supposed to get in arguments about stuff like that at some point in time (Interview 6).

I asked her what these arguments were about, and she replied, "... usually it has to do something more with like religion, or you know, something that strikes at people's own beliefs and values" (Interview 6). While some might perceive these types of spirited discussions as threatening, this is something that members of the forensics team do for amusement. As she said, it is expected. Thus, relationships seem to be less affected by statements of disagreement, than the literature would suggest is the norm (See norms section). In interviews with members of the team, they indicated that people complain about others' personalities, such as someone talking too much or using off color humor.

That judge hates me. Finally, members also voice activity related complaints. Among the greatest of these complaints were focused on judges and judging. Sabrina told us that she frequently hears complaints about judging, "They often say, this judge must hate me. I hear this all the time, this judge hates me, when clearly, the judge doesn't hate them, they don't even know who they are" (Interview 4). Bev complained, for example, that she wished the judges would offer more suggestions for how to make her speech better, rather than just pointing out what was wrong with it (Field notes, October 27, 2001). Ross was asked if there was anything about forensics that he did not like. He explained that he disliked the subjectivity in judging sometimes,

> I think that a lot of the need for change within forensics is like, getting away from a paradigm, especially a judging paradigm, based on physical appearance... Uhh, and, I remember last year, seeing some of ahh, the awards at AFA it was very rare that you would see someone who was large in build, up there in the final round.... I don't know if it's blatant, or if it's just ahh, you know the natural human attractiveness cycle or style or whatever, but it just seems that, with all the different things that go into a judging paradigm, that appearance has to be one of the things that naturally falls in there, whether you realize it as an adjudicator or not (Interview 5).

Other activity related topics include: making judges judge too many rounds, harsh evaluations from lay judges, tournaments running long, the travel schedule, hotel and restaurant choices, and the budget disparity between teams.

Typology of complaining. Our findings confirm Alberts' (1989) findings. Alberts argued that couples complained about: behavior, personal characteristics, performance, complaining, and personal appearance. Forensics team members too, complain about behavior. For example, when they complain that a team member is not working hard enough, or someone is late, these are behaviors. Second, complaints about people using off color humor, talking too much, or trying to exert too much power are aspects of personality. Complaints about performance involve complaining about how something is done. When team members complain about the level of commitment or "where the team sits" in others' lives, these are performance complaints. Is there complaining about complaints in this culture? Yes, there are metacomplaints. For example, we observed a coach in the judges' lounge complaining about her team's complaining. She indicated that the students "think they have the right to vocalize what they want for lunch" (Field notes, November 10, 2001). She commented that students' say they are sick of McDonald's and Burger King and then they drag that stuff into her office all the time. She suggested that she was frustrated because on a team, it is impossible for everyone to have what is desired. This, metacomplaining also occurs in forensics. Finally, team members do not, as couples do, complain about personal appearance. However, they do complain about topics related to the forensics activity. Thus, it seems that some complaint topics may be similar across cultures, while there are also some distinct topic choices related to the relationships of the people involved.

Purpose

Me me me

We identified three categories of purpose: self, relational, and task. Members of the forensics team complain in order to fulfill personal needs, in order to enhance a relationship, or to get something accomplished. The kinds of personal needs we found were venting/releasing tension, to be heard, and to get reinforcement or boost self-esteem. First, team members complain to fulfill their personal needs. At one tournament, a student approached the author who was coaching, with a ballot. She had received a ranking of fourth in the round, after the coaches had praised this speech for the previous week. She marched up to the author who was coaching and said, "You've seen my speech, read this," and handed off her ballot. It seems as if she just wanted positive reinforcement here. In spite of the fact that this one judge disliked the speech, she wanted to hear that it was a good speech (Field notes, September, 29, 2001). This served her personal esteem needs. Alberts (1989) suggested that most complainers want acknowledgment that their feelings are valid. This seems to be the case here as well.

In order to confirm that people complain for a specific purpose, we asked the interviewees why people complain? Ross said,

> Well, because they are dissatisfied. Because they feel like the situation isn't such that, that they can stand without either first expressing their dissatisfaction, meaning like they have to make their feelings known or else they'll feel like they're just keeping it bottled up inside... (Interview 5).

Our research concurs with Burchard (1999) who argued that venting is a verbal outlet for distress; expression makes people feel better. This seems to also be the case with complaining.

Relational maintenance

Second, we found that complaints serve relational needs. Among the relational aspects of interaction that we identified were: establishing trust, maintaining relationships, getting emotional support, and building trust. Part of the culture of the team is to enjoy arguing about philosophical issues. When asked why people on the forensics team complain, Steve commented, "Trust is what we get out of it. We can trust people who are honest and will tell us" [when something is bothering them] (Interview 7). Burchard (1999) says that venting can help develop bonds, maintain close relationships, and provide a sense of control. In this sense, the same is true of complaining.

Get it done

The third reason that people on a forensics team seem to complain is to accomplish a task. Members told us that they complain to get things done, to motivate people to work, and to make people aware of concerns. For example, two debaters tried to convince the author who was coaching at the time to take them to a tournament in Ohio (Field Notes, September 29, 2001). They made arguments such as: "we will not see these teams at the other tournaments we go to," and "we need to know what cases people are running so that we can stay up to date with our research." When they were told that the team could not afford to send them, because three national tournaments create a lot of expense, they dropped the topic. They were trying to accomplish change, and when it became obvious that they could not achieve this goal, they let it go. Additionally, every interviewee noted that coaches complain when expectations are not being met. Steve stated in his interview, "Coaches kind of have an obligation to say we're falling behind on events and we need to pick it up now" (Interview 7). Monica seconded that perspective. She was talking about the Director of Forensics and she said, "... he's a coach, he needs to express the dissatisfaction because his goal is to make sure that we're living up to our potential" (Interview 6).

Channel. Members of the team use immediate and non-immediate channels for communicating with each other. Immediate channels include speaking in person at team meetings and talking on the phone. Face-to-face oral communication takes place in coaching sessions, at coaches' meetings, in the squad room, in the van on the way to tournaments, and at tournaments. Non-immediate communication channels include: e-mail, use of the listserv, written messages placed in competitors' mail boxes in the team room, answering machines, and written notes left for people on the team's bulletin board.

Sometimes the topic dictates the form of channel that is utilized. For example, one competitor wanted to vent about the lack of cooperation she was getting from a member of the coaching staff, and at the same time to request the assistance of another coach. She obviously e-mailed the coach directly instead of posting this message on the listserv (Interview 4). There seems to be an awareness that using the listserv can promote more intense language choices and thus, a greater reaction. Marc posted this comment as a response to something written on the listserv, "If anyone has a personal problem with someone else, that is just fine, but deal with them one on one. 'Calling people out' on the listserv is just going to make everyone defensive" (Listserv Document, December 12, 2001).

Additionally, it seems that students are more likely to voice complaints about team decisions over the listserv. Often, coaches do not even read the debates that occur on the list serve. Coaches are more inclined to use this channel in order to make the entire team aware of a decision, such as where the team is meeting to leave for a tournament, departure times, and assignments.

Scene

Alberts (1989) noted that couples tend to complain privately or in front of only the couple or immediate family members. Members of the forensics team, too alter their complaining behavior based upon where they are. In team meetings, the coaches complain, but students rarely do so. Perhaps this is because the coaches control this context. They called the meeting and they determine how it progresses. Additionally, the room is a fairly formal room. It is a large conference room with a series of big tables and fairly new office chairs. The dissertations that fill the room's shelves, give it an academic feel. Moreover, a dedication plaque to a successful departmental alumnus from the 1950s, and former team member, who returning students met at last year's forensics banquet, hangs on the wall to signify the success to which they all aspire. This formal environment reinforces the existence of a hierarchy.

In the squad room, anyone may freely complain. This room is not unlike a clubhouse. Frequently, coaches and students hang out in the team room when they are not in classes, and chat with whom ever is around. Coaches and students frequently hang out in the squad room when they are not in classes. Thus, people speak informally and freely there. The author who coached this team was helping a student do some research on the computer in the team room one day, and she got out a critique from a tournament and told me that she thought her judge was really irritated with her. Roscoe was working in his office with the door open, so he joined in the discussion.

She went and got the ballot and showed us and the three of them all chatted about it (Field notes, October 17, 2001).

However, if a student was upset with a coach, she or he would probably speak with that coach privately. For example, one day the author who was coaching was working in her office and Chris came in and asked to speak with her. He said that he thought the requirements that debaters had to meet in order to justify spending money for them to travel to tournaments, were too much. Chris said that he was having trouble finding time for his classes and the work he did for the team. The author who was coaching assured him that eventually, the coaches would reduce those requirements, but that initially the team had a great deal of work to do to get ready for the early tournaments. Chris would not have criticized the coaches' decisions publicly; but privately he felt free to talk openly. He may have been afraid of how his coach would react to being questioned publicly. This could be considered a challenge of sorts, were it public.

When the team attends tournaments, coaches and hired judges evaluate their speeches and rank order them. Thus, there are people from a variety of schools around at the tournaments. The team sees some of the same teams/people every week. So, there is a need to be careful of what people say. Coaches warn their team before the first tournament never to complain in public at a tournament. Sabrina stated, "We have a rule that (at tournaments) they complain in the van, and not in public" (Interview 4). The last thing a competitor would want to do is to complain about a judge to a member of his or her team and have that judge find out. Even complaining about another competitor could be problematic if coaches or competitors who take offense hear it. Thus, no complaints about people should be stated at tournaments. In fact, coaches even warn their teams not to complain in the bathroom, so that no one overhears.

Finally, a context can yield certain kinds of complaints. Activity related complaints (about tournaments running long, restaurant choices, lack of sleep, hotel accommodations, and judging) occur more when competitors are at tournaments (Field notes September 29, 2001; October 17, 2001; October 27, 2001; November 10, 2001). This is intuitive, because it makes no sense to complain about travel related topics when one is not traveling. Conversely, commitment related complaints, do not tend to occur at tournaments. Once the team gets to a tournament, they are a team. These types of complaints were observed primarily in the team room or at team meetings, when coaches are trying to push students to work harder (Field notes September 29, 2001; October 17, 2001; October 27, 2001; November 10, 2001).

Key

Complaints seem to begin with a humorous tone. In the team minutes from October 9, 2001, Chris complains about a team member talking too much in a team meeting, "Ross talked, & talked, & talked, & talked, & talked, talked, & talked, & talked, & talked (Sylvester began to cry here) & talked, & talked, & talked, & talked, & talked (shoot me!), & talked, & talked, & talked, & talked, & on the 7th day he rested (Ross you are still a stud, & we love you too... just not as much as Steve.)"

This is a way of complaining, which is also entertaining. It lets the person know what he has done right up front, but in pleasant way. In a second example, the Director of Forensics was explaining to the team that they needed to work harder and be more productive (Field Notes, November 6, 2001). Instead of expressing his disappointment in the current effort, he said, "Right now, we need to be feeling bowel quaking pessimism." Clearly, this is a humorous way of phrasing the request for greater effort.

A third example comes from the team minutes October 16, 2001, Students were told that they needed to work harder. This is how it was reflected in the minutes, "We are the same as last year right now, and that is not good. As of now we are getting slapped around like red headed stepchildren and we are not even getting close to our potential. The time to work is NOW!!! We all have high potential and we just need to get our heads out of our asses and get to work!" The red headed stepchildren comment was included for humor value.

In order to confirm this use of humor, we asked about it in interviews with team members. When asked if this tone is something she frequently sees, Bev replied, "Yes. I do. Totally" (Interview 8). Every interviewee said this was typical of initial complaints. Sabrina reported, "Usually when we complain about other team members, it's usually done in a joking way, and usually that person is present" (Interview 4). Ross indicated that a humorous approach is more likely to gain compliance from students. He said that at the college level, competitors have many demands on their time. If the coaches and others who complain were too demanding, the response might be negative. He said that someone might reply, "You're making all these demands and yet, you don't seem to understand, like what demands I have in my own personal life" (Interview 5)? He pointed out that he has seen competitors on other teams "flatly refuse" to do what is asked of them, due to a less jovial tone. Steve also said in his interview that because team members do not receive scholarships and the kinds of rewards that college athletes get, a humorous tone initially is better received than a more serious tone might be. He states, "Yelling might work in the Army, but the type of personalities that do forensics react better to not taking things so seriously. (He then refers to the director's comment about bowel quaking pessimism.) He said, "Like even though he did that in a joking fashion, I think we all understand" (Interview 7).

The fact that this is a group of people who enjoy writing speeches, developing arguments, and playing with language may make them more likely to use a joking tone. In fact, Berry (2001) found that the high school forensics team he examined used a lot of humor in their interaction. The examples of joking above often include some clever use of language. Additionally, such jokes might not be perceived as being nearly so threatening to people existing in an argument culture, such as forensics. During his interview, Steve told us that it seems as though people in the world beyond forensics usually perceive constructive criticism as an attack, but people on the forensics team do not (Interview 7). Perhaps this is a result of the constant critiquing process that forensics competitors go through. They get frequent critiques from coaches, peers, and judges. According to Sabrina, "In real life, when we want to complain, we go to a source that we know won't tell that person. But that doesn't really exist on the team, because everyone's so close. And so, typically people will get complained to face to face, and it's usually done in more of a good natured joking way" (Interview 4). Thus, while the literature on married couples indicates that complaints can often spiral out of control and be problematic for the relationship, there might be less perceived threat here. Even so, some team members believe that there is a fine line between joking and seriousness. Monica says, for example, "... there is a fine line between joking and being serious. Some students joke more than others" (Interview 6). However, Roscoe, one of the coaches, suggests that sarcasm is a way of sugar coating the truth (Interview 1). Instead of yelling at someone, the point is gently but directly made.

Alberts (1989) found that couples claimed that they strongly disliked complaints "delivered in hostile ways, with yelling, criticizing and ridicule" (p. 140). Moreover, Boxer (1996) argued that indirect complaining serves an affiliative function; it can create camaraderie. Within the context of the forensics community, it certainly creates a sense of who the group is. Freshmen enter the group and sit quietly and listen to such comments, until the end of the first semester. Sabrina pointed this out, "freshmen are often shocked by the ways that we talk to each other and are often dumb-founded that we are able to be so open with each other" (Interview 4). Once they become enculturated, the freshmen often begin to join in. Thus, a competent complainer in this community usually begins his or her complaining with a humorous tone.

Should this approach not work, however, complaints can also be more intense in tone. Monica stated, "Well sometimes, since we are on a speech team with big personalities, it gets direct.... But there have been tournaments where I have seen fights, well not physical fights, but yelling at each other and feelings hurt directly and not just in a joking manner" (Interview 6). This, however, does not seem to be the dominant approach to expressing complaints. Burchard (1999) argues that the tone of venting was dictated by the importance or depth of what was bothering the venter. This may be the case here as well. We assume that relational complaints might be more likely to escalate, than complaints about judging, or carrying debate boxes.

Act Sequence

As was indicated above, complaints begin with a humorous tone.

If that approach does not work, then the complaining can get more direct. For example, Steve discussed a situation in his interview, where students were failing to show up for peer coaching, and initially people kidded each other about their failure to attend. But this did not get the desired results, attendance. Thus, Chris became frustrated with this situation and sent out an e-mail letting people know that the lack of effort was noticed and not appreciated (Interview 7).

If there was a personal conflict with another person on the team, which was more than simply finding someone annoying, team members indicate that instead of humor, they would approach the other person directly. Steve suggests that he would go to the other person one on one. If that did not work, he would ask the advice of more experienced team members who knew the personalities involved. He suggests that they might have a better idea of how to deal with that person. Finally, if that approach did not work, he might ask a member of the coaching staff for advice (Interview 7). Ross offered similar advice in his interview,

> ... they might consider going to the student and having a frank and open discussion with them, to try to resolve it. Or, to have, ah, the student officers possibly talk with this person, or, ah, having the director of forensics possibly becomes involved with that as well. Ahh, like my own perspective is that, if you can deal with the problem in a civil manner yourself, that that's probably preferable, because, the more people you involve, first the more risk that it's gonna get blown out of proportion, and then second, that there's just not gonna be the most favorable solution... (Interview 5)

Norms

Interaction. Philipsen (1992) indicated that a rule is a prescription for how one should act. There are some prescriptions for what counts as competent complaining behavior on a forensics team. We noted complaining needs to follow guidelines set up by coaches, and it should appear to be justified. First, different coaches set up different guidelines. Roscoe said in his interview, that he has what he terms a "ten minute rule" for complaining (Interview 1). This rule specifies that students can review their ballots in the van. Once they have done so, they have ten minutes to voice complaints. However, they must avoid personal attacks on judges. Another coach, indicated that she allowed students to look at their ballots in the restaurant, but applied the rules that if anyone from another team entered the restaurant, the ballots went back in the envelope immediately and without further comment. A third coach was observed telling students that they were each allowed to express one complaint after viewing ballots. (Some students exercised the right not to complain) [Field notes, October 27, 2001]. The normal approach for prescribing expression of complaints in response to judges' ballots, is varied based on who the coach in charge is.

Hymes (1972) identified two types of norms. The first is norms of interaction. Hymes described it as, "What is intended here are the specific behaviors and proprieties that attach to speaking - that one must not interrupt, for example..." (p. 63). The norms that coaches establish regarding complaining are behavioral norms. For example, students may not complain about judges where people from other teams or the judges may hear that. Or, students may not complain all the way home. Instead, they are afforded ten minutes for such talk.

Interpretation. Second, there seems to be a norm regarding perceived legitimacy of complaints. Hymes (1972) also talked of norms of interpretation. Hymes pointed out that norms of interaction "may still leave open the interpretation to be placed upon them... Norms of interpretation implicate the belief system of the community" (p.64). We are interpreting that the team's negative response to certain complaints implies a requirement for complaints that they perceive to be legitimate. First, teammates get irritated when people complain about things that cannot be changed. For example, field notes from October 27, 2001 indicate that one student complained about the roads being too hilly. He suggested that the group take another route home, but the coach knew no other way home. He said, "Well I'm going to vomit, and I'm not going to clean it up because this road is too hilly." This was not well received. Members of the team groaned and booed him because this complaint seemed unreasonable to them. It seems unlikely that anyone could easily change the landscape or chart a new course without a map of the state.

Second, complaints must be related to a serious concern. For example, Ross was complaining in a team meeting, that people had been taking pop from the team room without paying. He went into a long explanation about how the team makes money from the pop. The team minutes from October 9, 2001 represent this event, "Big Ross is pissed about pop, don't anger him or else you will be wearing cement shoes sleeping with the fishes. Yes, his mafia WILL kill you and make you into a bloody, icky mess. So pay or DIE!!!" The mafia comment is a humorous way of making the point that perhaps Ross is taking the pop sales too seriously. Day and Landon (1977) suggested that perceived legitimacy of the complaint is vital to whether or not the complaint is expressed. Thus, our observations confirm this finding and suggest that when a complaint is not legitimate, the response is to react negatively to it; in this case complaining about the complaint.

Alberts (1989) argued, that our culture (American) has strong sanctions against complaining publicly. This also seems to be true for members of the forensics team. The above examples indicate that coaches place limits on complaints, and try to keep team members' complaints from being heard by others in the speech community. Additionally, as we indicated in scene, there are some places where complaining is discouraged, such as public gatherings, when people from other universities are gathered around. Finally, the fact that people complain in vans, in hotels, in team meetings, and in the team room, indicates that they complain when they are "backstage" as Goffman would say.

Discussion

In this section, we will address limitations to the study and insights for the forensics community. First, we do tend to cite fairly heavily from interviews number five and six. However, these are seasoned members of the team, who have competed for at least three years at the college level. They have experienced many different combinations of coaching staffs and students. These two informants have been on the team longer than any other team members or coaches who are presently associated with the team. At the same time, we consulted with a fair mix of people with various attributes, in order to gain a greater perspective. For example, we interviewed six students and two coaches. We interviewed two people who have been associated with the team for three years, four people who have been associated with the team for two years, and two people who are new to the team this year. It is possible, that more experienced members of the team are aware of some things that new people are not. At the same time, it is also possible that people who are very experienced, are less aware of some behaviors because they are so much a matter of their every day lives that they cease to notice them anymore. Thus, this mix of experience levels is beneficial.

Future Research

Future research might examine judges' complaining behaviors specifically. In reviewing documents for this paper, we examined judges' ballots. We thought we saw judges sometimes using their ballots as an outlet to complain. However, when we asked informants in interviews who in the community expressed dissatisfaction and where they expressed it, we did not get a response that judges complain on ballots. However, it is possible that informants were just thinking about their teams, and thought that they were not really in a position to observe judges in a context where they might complain.

Insights for the Community

Alberts (1989) presented a typology of topics couples complain about. We also found that the forensics community complains about: behavior, personal characteristics, performance, and complaining. However, we did not find that personal appearance was a topic of complaints. We did find, however, that people on the forensics team frequently voiced activity related complaints to the group and usually in front of others (unless the situation was really growing serious). This leads us to conclude that there are some topics that people tend to complain about, in general. In addition, we suggest that there are topics that are also shaped by the unique situations of a particular speech community. For example, forensics students are more likely to complain about "where the team sits" in each other's lives or judges who "hate" them than previous research on couples' complaints.

Knowing what students are most likely to complain about is useful. Coaches, directors and students alike can use this information to prevent a need for complaints or to establish means of dealing with them. For example, the team we observed seemed to have clear ways for dealing with complaints about judges. Some coaches allowed one complaint from each competitor, some allowed ten minutes of complaining, and most of the coaches in this program put some limitations on the context where students were allowed to complain. If there are teams who have not considered these types of guidelines, doing so might be helpful.

It is useful to know that forensics students like to argue and complain about a vast array of topics. Many teams find themselves arguing about topics such as: religion, current events, and philosophy. Thus, people who are new to a team may feel alienated at first because they do not yet enjoy such banter. Additionally, our informants said that members of their team appeared to be more up front. That is, if they find someone on the team's behavior problematic, they tell them. This too, might make new team members feel out of place. If coaches are aware of this behavior, they can address that the team addresses complaints so that they do not grow into major problems.

None of the literature that we reviewed on complaining made a direct link between communication competence and complaining. While the literature did note potential benefits of venting and raising issues for negotiation, the literature on couples' complaints indicated that complaining is an overwhelmingly negative form of speech. However, while the forensics team did not value constant complaints; they did not avoid them either. Perhaps, the fact that this is a culture devoted to argument and debate makes them more likely to embrace complaints as offering potential for building trusting relationships. Interviewees told us that complaining is more common, and in a sense a more open occurrence in this culture. It is open in the sense that people generally do not say things behind each other's backs that they would not say to each other's faces. Yet, complaints begin in and generally occur in a joking or humorous tone. It is our conclusion, that complaining behavior is so important in this culture, that one cannot be a competent communicator without complaining competently. This may result from the fact that students in this culture are constantly critiqued. Students write draft after draft of speeches, and judges, peers, and coaches constantly critique their ideas.

Our findings concur with the previous research on the positive effect of venting and the importance of privacy in complaining. Previous research (Alberts, 1989; Burchard, 1999; Johnson & Roloff, 1998) indicated that expressing dissatisfaction about a situation could function positively as an emotional release. In our discussion of purpose, informants told us too, that complaining made them feel better. Moreover, Alberts (1989) argued that privacy was a key aspect of complaining. Our research also revealed that team members complained primarily in private contexts, such as the squad room or the van. At tournaments, which are very open public contexts, complaints are less likely to occur.

Coaches might be inclined to perceive complaining as problematic or frustrating behavior. However, since conducting these observations, the author who coaches has viewed team complaints more positively. When students feel free to complain there must be some degree of comfort and trust among them. In many ways it means that the individuals are forming a team when students and coaches feel free to tease each other about being late or making unreasonable demands when ordering at a restaurant. The author who coaches forensics, for example, now has a competitor on her team that everyone refers to as "princess" because when she joined the team she was a little spoiled. Not only is this student not threatened by this complaint, she signs emails and notes to team members "princess." Moreover, she seems to be altering her behavior in positive ways because she is aware that people notice it. Thus, we might learn to embrace the positive potential of complaints and defuse some conflict spirals.

Additionally, knowing that a joking tone increases compliance and is considered to be more understanding by some students is useful because it can help us relate to our students. As one informant told us, students have incredible demands on their time. When you add to that the fact that students often do not receive scholarships, work really hard (doing draft after draft of speeches), travel long distances and return home tired and with school work to complete for the week, go without sleep, etc. the tone of coaches' complaints matters. If there is a joking tone, as the informant told us, students are more receptive to changing their behaviors.

Finally, our findings might be used to extend our knowledge of communication competence. Perhaps complaining is not primarily a negative factor. Rather, it's appropriate expression might make a communicator more competent. Thus, if an individual is having problems fitting in a context, it may not be that he or she complains too much, but rather she or he may inappropriately voice complaints.

Because complaining is so pervasive in the forensics community, knowing what team members are likely to complain about, considering strategies for dealing with complaints, and embracing the idea that complaining can be a positive sign can make travel and time spent together a better. For these reasons we encourage coaches, students, and directors of forensics programs to consider complaining in a new light.

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Interpreting Interpretation: The Future of the Art of Oral Interpretation in its Most Popular Venue-Forensics Competition

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Abstract

Much like any other activity, oral interpretation in forensics continues to evolve. This article suggests that the current evolutionary path of oral interpretation in forensics strays far from the traditional art of oral interpretation as practiced and taught in college classrooms. Explored within this essay are what the ideals of traditional oral interpretation are and how these are obscured in current forensics practice. Finally, the authors suggest potential future paths for oral interpretation in forensics competition.

In weekends throughout the school year, hundreds of high school and college students will enter forensics competitions and engage in the art of oral interpretation. Or, do they? An observer, watching a round of competitive poetry reading, for example, might see a performance of 10 or 12 poems in one ten-minute time frame. The viewer might not know which poem is which, where one poem ends and another begins, whether the words are of one author or another, and the mandatory script may function more as a prop since the text is generally rarely referenced. The question arises: did the observer witness "oral interpretation" or a distinctly different performance form?

In this paper, we contend that oral interpretation as practiced in competitive forensics has strayed far from the original definition, purpose, and product of the study of oral interpretation. To facilitate our discussion we will first define oral interpretation and then discuss the contemporary conventions of competitive forensics performance. With these basic understandings we will then evaluate the state of competitive oral interpretation in regard to the traditional understanding of the art. Finally, we will examine some of the potential causes of the shift from traditional oral interpretation and the implications of the shift for both forensics competition and the practice of oral interpretation itself.

Literature Review

That oral interpretation and its purposes are controversial is an understatement. As early as 1964, *The Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta* aired both sides of the issue of whether oral interpretation even belonged in forensics competition (Fouts, 1964; Williams, 1964). In the years following much attention was paid to how one judges oral interpretation (Hershey, 1987; Lewis, Williams, Keaveney, & Leigh, 1984; Mills, 1991; Trimble, 1994) in addition to advice on how oral interpretation should be performed (Aspdal, 1997; Sellnow & Sellnow, 1986; Whillock, 1984).

In 1988, real questions about the nature of oral interpretation and its purpose began to arise as coaches, national organizations, and scholars struggled with the idea of original material in the interpretation events. In April 1984, the AFA-NIET voted to allow original material into the interpretation events. While the other national organizations didn't immediately follow suit, the move did start to raise questions about the very nature of oral interpretation. Lewis (1988) and Green (1988) squared off on the topic of original material. Lewis writes, "The primary commitment of forensics educators who coach the performance of literature should always be to the analysis of literary intent and the integrity of a text" (p. 63). Lewis then argues that original material can "enhance the education and insights of our students "(p. 66). On the opposing side, Green contends original material "violates the pedagogical integrity of the event" (p. 70). Green's concerns deal with the purpose of oral interpretation in teaching the analysis of literature and performing an interpretation of that analysis, the difficulty in judging original work, and the ethics involved in performing original material. In sum, Green calls into question what the purpose of interpretation is if original material is allowed.

More recently, Cronn-Mills and Golden (1997) have enumerated a humorous, albeit, realistic list of the unwritten rules in oral interpretation. Interestingly, these rules help one to achieve the goal of winning in forensics competition rather than necessarily learning from oral interpretation. The question of whether students actually learn anything in oral interpretation was posed by Gernant in 1991. Her unfortunate answer is maybe.

Perhaps the questions the above authors have grappled with are the same ones with which we grapple. While our particular lament may be unique to the present customs of oral interpretation in forensics, it is clear that for coaches and competitors alike, the questions of "What is oral interpretation?" and "How should it be practiced?" beg careful consideration. Perhaps the best way to begin is to define the term.

Defining Oral Interpretation

One of the most authoritative texts on oral interpretation is Lee and Gura's (2005) *Oral Interpretation.* This book has long been a standard in interpretation pedagogy and practice. In the text's 11th and most recent edition (2005), Lee and Gura define oral interpretation as "the art of communicating to an audience a work of literary art in its intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic entirety" (p. 4). The authors then spend considerable time explaining what they mean by this definition. Put simply, for these authors communicating the meaning as well as the aesthetic qualities of the literature is a primary function of oral interpretation. The text is everything. While training in the art of oral interpretation is necessary to a successful performance, Lee and Gura write, "technical display is not an art" (p. 5). In short, for Lee and Gura oral interpretation involves the communication of text and textual meaning.

They, of course, are not alone in this postulation. Another commonly used classroom text in the last twenty years has been and is Yordon's (2002) *Roles in Interpretation.* Yordon's text expands the definitions of both literature and performance while maintaining that interpretation is ". . . an artistic process of studying literature through performance and sharing that study with an audience" (p. 14). She goes on to indicate that, while these essential elements in the interpretation process (the performer, the literature, and the audience) are in many ways more fluidly amorphous than ever, all three variables create and validate the performance. In her words "… neither the analysis nor the performance is an end in itself (p. 15).

This attitude, that performance is only one component of the art of interpretation, has been for many years a standard one in oral interpretation pedagogy. Numerous scholars and texts have emphasized the vital role of the text in the oral interpretation process and product, according performance elements and technique at the most a co-equal, and in some cases, secondary status. Bacon in the third and final edition of *The Art of Interpretation* (1979) makes a very telling comparison and argument:

> Experience has shown, however, that too narrow a focus on [delivery] matters often produces an interpreter more concerned with his instrument than with his music. Such a single interest in the techniques of delivery led to the worst excesses of the elocutionary movement, to too much emphasis on the *way* things were said and too little emphasis on the things themselves. As a result, readings were often "brilliant" but hollow and shallow. Long ago Aristotle pointed out the dangers of too great an interest in delivery, and experience has constantly reaffirmed his point of view. Delivery is important as a tool, but it is not (in its ordinary sense) the center of the study of interpretation. (pp. 5 - 6)

For Bacon the technical considerations of the speaker's delivery and their effectiveness in presentation are inextricably tied to and derived from the text. This connection is emphasized to some degree or another in almost all classroom texts designed to introduce students to the rudiments of the art and its objectives. Bowen, Aggertt, and Rickert (1978) define interpretive reading as "… the communication of the reader's experience of the author's ideas and feelings to the eyes and ears of an audience, so that both the reader and the audience experience and appreciate the author's literary creation" (p. 8). Bowen et al. unequivocally state that the result of an interpretive performance is the audience's experience and appreciation of the text's content and authorial design. The process leading to this communicative act is delineated clearly in yet another classroom text, *A Guide to Oral Interpretation: Solo* *and Group Performance* (Scrivner & Robinette, 1980):

> Interpretive reading can be seen as a process, a fusion of creative acts on five levels: (1) you respond to an author's recorded experience during your initial reading; (2) you analyze the author's created work of art for understanding; (3) you relate this experience to your own experience; (4) you assimilate the total experience, the essence of its intellectual and emotional meaning; and (5) you make effective use of your mind, voice, and body to communicate the selection's meaning during a reading performance, to get a creative response. (p. 4)

Scrivner and Robinette's (1980) description of the interpreter's basic process, while emphasizing again the essential task of communicating textual content, also suggests the vital role that personal understanding and experience plays in the practice of oral interpretation. Their stress on the interpreter's response to the literary work as a guide for analysis and preparation identifies a recurring fundamental tension in oral interpretation theory: finding a relationship or balance between the vital, some would argue inherent, qualities of a piece of literature, and the reader's necessarily selective interpretation and presentation of them. Put simply, oral interpreters, like all artists, make choices reflective of individual experience as well as aesthetic understanding, technical training, and personal goals. Their artistic renderings must necessarily grow out of who they are and what they want. Unlike many other artists, however, the very nature of "interpretation" charges practitioners with the added responsibility of filtering and connecting those inclinations through their insights into another autonomous artwork.

The levels and depths of these connections, but rarely their necessity, have been discussed and debated repeatedly throughout the last century and even earlier. Haas and Williams (1975) provide a solid outline of these shifting perspectives and varying attitudes from the elocutionary period onward, with occasional references from even earlier periods. Haas and Williams include a variety of essays and attendant commentary that reflect in microcosm the development of oral interpretation theory and pedagogy through the mid-nineteen-seventies. Included in these discussions is an assortment of comments regarding the interpreter's responsibility with regard to the treatment and sharing of textual content and form. Without re-hashing all the points made by the text's many contributors and its editors, the essence of their varied and often subtle positions remains unequivocal if not entirely univocal: the communication of textual content and form is a central aspect of the interpreter's art.

Haas and Williams begin with an article by Bacon (1975). In it Bacon articulates the tendency of oral interpretation teachers and practitioners to sail too closely to the opposed and seemingly safe shores of "interpretation" (literary) or "elocutionary" (performance) foci while ignoring the more complex and compelling artistic seas that lie between them. Bacon indicates that in his day interpretation seemed "... to be moving in the direction of the thing read, not in the direction of the person reading," his way of noting a growing over-emphasis on textual primacy at the expense of the performative contributions of the reader (p. 5). Slightly earlier in the essay he posits a very clear condemnation of the opposite extreme:

> Unless the text in oral performance is both audible and alive, the reader has not learned what oral interpretation is meant to teach him. There are three things involved - not just audibility and life, but the text which is meant to be audible and alive. The thing read is, on the whole, the interpreter's excuse for being, (p. 5)

In illuminating, as he does throughout the essay, the dangers of the artistic extremes of overemphasis on performance or literature Bacon (1975) ultimately asks for an aesthetic balance between the two as both the function and goal of oral interpretation. And places the responsibility for guiding students through the abundant waters between those opposite shores squarely on the shoulders of educators:

> The teachers who pay lip service to performance but really care only about discussion of literary texts are not properly meeting their obligations as teachers of interpretation. The teachers who pay lip service to literature but really think of it only as something to perform are not meeting their obligations - and there are many such teachers. (pp. 8-9)

While Bacon originally noted this dichotomy of interests and foci in oral interpretation in the 1960 paper that Haas and Williams have reprinted, he put into words an underlying conflict that characterized oral interpretation pedagogy and practice to that point and does to this day: the primacy of the text or the performer. Since then, manners of reconciling the extremes have varied widely. Even in 1975, in their editorial response to Bacon's influential article, Haas and Williams note the response of students who dismiss Bacon's distinctions and view the oral reader as an artist for whom the text is only a component of a much larger creative process and whole. In later examining the specifics of oral interpretation in forensics venues we will explore this shift and its ramifications.

The interpretation teachers and theorists who value acknowledgement of, and orientation toward, text in their pedagogy and practice are many and varied. Almost all, on at least some level, demand an awareness of the text and its content as the beginning—and, some would say, end—of the interpreter's art. Richard Haas, in an essay included in the volume noted above that he and David A. Williams edited, "To Say in Words ... To Read Aloud," states the relationship and connection between artwork read and artist reading precisely and clearly: "The oral interpreter, after all, must express up to the level of the poem's performance, not force the poem through his own expressive abilities" (pp. 200-201). Slightly later in the essay he clarifies this link between reader and literature in somewhat more detail:

> The expressive techniques of oral interpretation should be equal to the expression of the poem's performing voice as indicated by the poem's own performance of language. This literary responsibility does not diminish the importance of the performer when the oral form is appreciated and understood, but it does make him subservient to the poem. The oral interpreter is like an instrument that plays the literary score. (p. 201)

Horton (1968) is equally frank: "the oral interpreter's function is that of re-embodying a literary work" (p. 67).

This emphasis on the primacy of the literature in the oral interpreter's process and art extends into entire chapters as evidenced in almost all interpretation textbooks and even into entire texts exploring the varied theories and approaches behind it (Sloan, 1966). The value, necessity, and power of an awareness of literary content and form, as well as a credible attempt at honoring the two, is almost a given for most theorists, particularly through the mid-seventies, and in most current textbooks. The values expressed in the many multiple editions of Lee and Gura (2005) as well as Yordon (2002) suggest something of their active presence in, and influence on, current oral interpretation pedagogy in the classroom. These same attitudes permeate other recent textbooks as well (Gamble & Gamble, 1994; Gray & VanOosting, 1996). How then does contemporary forensics deviate from these values and why?

Forensics Oral Interpretation

There are four primary areas in which forensics oral interpretation differs from traditional oral interpretation: the literature, the process, the performance, and the evaluation. Each area offers ample indications of how interpretation in the forensics format strays far from the art's original conception and traditional pedagogy.

The Literature

While in traditional oral interpretation the text is paramount, in forensics the text is merely a starting point and often incidental to the finished product. Consider the previously cited definition from Lee and Gura (2005). It states that a work of literary art is communicated " . . .in its intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic entirety" (p. 4). In contemporary forensics, however, the interpreter often presents the audience with only a small part of the text or bits of several texts. In many, if not most, cases, this is not a matter of meeting the logistics of time constraints or thematic connections (interpreters have always been forced to select and/or edit their texts with an eye to time or connection in terms of meaning) but rather an attempt to impress the audience with individual creativity or a forced ingenuity. Rather than understand and present a single text or clearly related material the interpreter cuts and pastes poems, prose, and drama with little regard to their native structure or content. In this fashion, then, several selections may be spliced together to form one—sometimes—comprehensive whole. This newly formed work may bear no resemblance to any of the original texts; it is its own artistic entity, with a body and substance stemming from the interpreter's creative act, not the original author's. In addition, these newly formed pieces may be manipulated even more for additional effect. For example, key phrases may be repeated where no such repetition occurred in the original text, or an interpreter may link the final words of one text with the first of another with no break or indication of having changed pieces. At the very least this has the effect of placing emphases where the original author did not place them and/or confusing the auditor as to the literary source as well as textual meaning. A good example of this occurred in the finals of an interpretation event at a recent national championship.[1] Two students chose to work from the same selection of literature. However, the cuttings were vastly different, allowing each student to derive meaning from the piece that aided their overall message. It was clear from the performances that, indeed, similar parts of the piece had been selected for presentation. However, the cuttings were so markedly different that the piece might as well have been two distinct selections of literature. The problem arose for judges and audience members: which cutting was more faithful to the original literature? While the postmodern aesthetic in part derives from and champions the efficacy of pastiche as a tool for artistic creation, traditional oral interpretation pedagogy and practice, as seen earlier, tends to eschew performative choices that diminish the intent and integrity of the literary original. In contrast to this ideal, the literature of oral interpretation in contemporary forensics functions something like the content of a painter's palette: the author(s) of the work(s) provide the colored media that the oral interpreter mixes and applies as he or she sees fit in the rendering of an original artwork. The literature has been reduced to the same level and value of a tube of paint and is, unfortunately, treated by many interpreters with the same respect as a tube of cadmium blue.[2]

A second aspect of forensics oral interpretation at odds with traditional practice and pedagogy is the idea of literature itself. Untold numbers of theoretical works have discussed the nature of what makes something "literary," the role of the author, the death of the author, the creative act of the reader in constituting meaning, the lack of definitive meaning in a text, the lack of any meaning in a text, and so on. These are of course valid, even vital

[1] The specifics of these and other competitive examples have been left out so as to preserve their anonymity. These are, however, actual events as the author(s) observed them.

[2] We choose here not to dwell on the obvious infringement such a process inherently has on copyright issues and the other legalrights of the author and publisher; we imagine that if most writers and publishing houses knew how their works were being altered, adapted, and generally misused for public performance that these concerns would not be long ignored.

[3] We also choose not to dwell on the postmodern lament that the author is dead. For a discussion of performance studies and oral interpretation see John Perlich's "The Impact of Intertcxtuality, Textual Layering, and Performance Studies: Does the Text have any Integrity Left?" in *The Forensic of Pi Kappa Delia* 84 (Summer 1999), pp. 1-11.

questions with a complexity of thought and answers outside the scope and intent of this article.[3] Suffice it to say that what constitutes "literature" is a much more complex question than once it was, and the distinctions once valued and clear (recognized author or not, published or unpublished, etc.) are in flux and debatable. The theoretical questions, however complex, have directly impacted oral interpretation practice. Several years ago the national organizations that govern the rules of competitive oral interpretation rescinded the rule that the literature used in competition had to be published. As a result students regularly began to perform not only work that had not been published (not necessarily a bad thing in these authors' estimation) but pieces they had written themselves. The obvious question of "What is meant by 'interpretation'?" arises when one encounters a reader performing his or her own work. Is it really "interpretation" if the performer is also the author? While some might argue that the multi-faceted nature of the creative act allows for a valuable interplay between speaker-as-author and speaker-as-reader, we suggest that the student is ultimately better served with exploring literature and lives outside his or her own experience. The process of oral interpretation in and of itself fosters a great deal of personal exploration, reflection, and involvement. It also enhances our ability to connect with, understand, and empathize with the lives of others when the material utilized stems from a source other than our own experiences. Reading one's own material is like painting nothing but self-portraits; valuable, absorbing, sometimes brilliantly done and fascinating, but after a while you really need to look somewhere besides the mirror.

The Process

In traditional oral interpretation, literature is filtered through the speaker and interpreted through his or her experience to give one view or take on a greater multiplicity of meanings and variety of content. Connections to audience, as well as the speaker, are emphasized; the messages of the text are extended and enhanced for performance. As Scrivener and Robinette (1980) point out in their discussion of the interpretive process quoted earlier, individual response to and analysis of the literature precedes and guides the personalized, performative choices of the reader, creating a balance between textual content and the particularized work of the presentation. In other words, an individual performance grows out of and enhances aspects of a specific piece of material in relationship to the reader and audience, with the goal of, at least in part, of communicating that content.

In forensics, innovative and unique performances are valued above the need for serious treatment of and respect for the text; analysis and literary understanding are often ignored or placed at a level far down the hierarchy of concerns. The end product of performance is the goal of the interpretive process in forensics. In other words, an interpreter looks at a piece to consider what they can do in performance, rather than what the literature asks them to say with their performance. Understanding the material, exploring its structure, its intent, and its values and linking these concerns to the artistic choices of rendering it in performance has, for many, given way to the desire to innovate and impress simply for the sake of doing so (and the chance to bring home a pretty chunk of metal and plastic). The "thing read" is no longer "the interpreter's excuse for being," as noted by Bacon earlier, but merely a handy rocket upon which the performer loads vocal pyrotechnics, explosions of physical and emotional straining, and occasional shiny pinwheels of clever bookwork - all of which create a pallid smoke of performance that obscures and obfuscates the sky of a text rather than illuminating it. While there are occasional exceptions to this tendency, in contemporary forensics the process of understanding and presenting literature has become secondary to the needs of the performance venue and the competitive goals of the performer. Indeed, performers who write their own work escape the interpretation process entirely and learn little but performance technique and how to manipulate an audience for effect.

The Performance

Oral interpretation has traditionally had an offstage focus. This involves the audience through the use of their imagination in that they are tacitly encouraged to become immersed in the scene rather than to simply view it from the outside. Along those same lines, movement has traditionally been designed to give the impression of doing rather than the recreation of a specific act actually done. This in part arises from the limitations of the performance situation (e.g., no properties, no set, no lights) but more as another invitation to the audience to become drawn into the world through the use of their imagination. This imaginative immersion on the part of the auditors, we would argue, deepens the potential connection between speaker, listener, and text. The gaps that each member of the audience fills in with their own specific imagined element(s) are more vivid and concrete since they are truly unique and particularized. That is, what we imagine will or is happening is often far more compelling and affective than what someone else provides. (The scariest parts of horror films and thrillers are usually the moments when we are mentally picturing what is going to happen, not when something actually does.)

In traditional oral interpretation a bound or in some way prepared text ("book"), when present, functions as a visual reference to the original literary text, for both the performer and audience. Functionally, performers have an actual text to refer to when needed. Maybe more importantly the book provides a visual foregrounding or reminder for the audience that what they are witnessing originated as a discrete piece of written literature. We have a book in most oral interpretation situations not so much because the reader needs it but because the convention highlights the traditional value placed on the literary sources from which the art derives. That is, the basic convention of having a text ostends the theoretical significance traditionally accorded the literary source of the performance content. Similarly, traditional oral interpretation contains an introduction and transitions between multiple selections, highlighting textual sources and their authors as well as orienting listeners to meaning and essential elements of content. This enables the audience to understand the works in their entirety even as they are performed in truncated, edited versions or brought together from disparate sources.

Oral interpretation in the forensics realm is moving away from many of these standard performance conventions. Offstage focus is no longer a requisite or respected standard. Duo partners will look at each other, touch each other, exchange books, and employ other similar techniques indicating that offstage focus is not understood, valued, or necessary. In Dramatic Duo at a recent national tournament, a successful duo had one partner kicking the other partner (while we cannot be sure that one was actually making physical contact, it was clear that the one partner was facing the prone body of the other and the foot was put in a motion to be extremely close to the other partner's ribs - clearly not an offstage focus). In addition, competitive interpreters often pantomime specific actions for which the text calls, leaving little to the imagination of the audience. The required binder is often used as a multi-purpose prop, serving a variety of imaginative purposes unrelated to its original theoretical and practical intent. Cleverness and cunning in "bookwork" has relegated the literal and figurative presence of the text in competitive forensics interpretation to that of the status of a stage property. Some performers ignore the text altogether, choosing to have the book closed even when speaking from the text they are presenting. Further, the use of the binder as prop has become expected under the term "bookwork." One duo coached by one of this article's authors was a conversation between two women. The performance by the students called for them to rap on the binder, use it as a door, and then simply function as a binder. Four ballots from a recent national championship tournament told them they needed more bookwork. In looking at the literature the students used, the only reason for more bookwork was the expectation of performative ingenuity by the judges. Rather than looking at the literature and what was called for, we believe the judges were comparing this duo to other duos that rely on bookwork for an eye-catching interpretation. While competitive readers have for many years seemed to refer to the book only as an expected element of performance (not really needing, necessarily, to check in with it) the very act of doing so reinforced for the audience an awareness and appreciation of sources for the performance beyond that of the speaker. Again, the text in competitive oral interpretation has become incidental to the performance.

Perhaps the most drastic change in the last twenty years is what is called "interweaving of texts." Short passages of various literary pieces are taken and woven together to form a new artistic whole. There are no transitions between pieces and there is no way to delineate one selection from the next. In this manner, individual selections are delivered in parts, without context, often robbed of their original content, and thoroughly in the abstract. The original texts function merely to serve the performance choices of the speaker and with little or no regard to their initial authorial intent.

The audience rarely experiences the material with a sense of its totality or artistic integrity. Rather, they see and hear language and emotion divorced from literary design and reconstituted with regard solely for the desires of the performer and the competitive speaking situation. The need to display technical acumen and personal creativity has supplanted not only the awareness, understanding, and interpretation of text but in many cases the actual texts themselves. Perhaps this is seen most vividly in competitive Poetry Interpretation where it is not uncommon to see upwards of ten different selections in a single program. In a ten-minute event, that equals less than one minute per poem. While poetry can often be composed of a single stanza, the point here is that the audience is unaware if they are experiencing the entirety of the poem because the poems are used for the overall theme and not performed as discrete entities.

The Evaluation

Traditionally, speakers have been rewarded for their understanding of and sensitivity to the text. Their ability to make the text come alive in performance was understood and honored as part of a greater and more meaningful process. Put simply, performance was judged, in substantial part, according to the speaker's ability to convey the text. In contemporary forensics competition, content is still a standard. However, the basis of that standard has changed from a concentration on the text to an evaluation of how various texts convey a theme. In this case the theme supersedes any one literary selection. In addition, performance elements are often evaluated with non-traditional standards in mind. One of our students was continually told they needed more "bookwork" to be competitive in open division. However, an assessment of the literature revealed that "bookwork" had nothing to offer the content and, in fact, would detract from the meaning of the literature. Such comments indicate a lack of understanding of any traditional notions of oral interpretation while they reveal an expectation created by market forces. Even though evidence here is merely anecdotal, this would be an area ripe for further research. Oral interpretation as practiced in competitive forensics has foundered hard upon the shoals of one of Bacon's "dangerous shores."

Implications

These differences in theory and practice between competitive forensics oral interpretation and traditional oral interpretation suggest significant potential harms to oral interpretation as an art form and, more importantly, to the learning experiences of forensics practitioners. These harms go beyond the lamenting of a loss of traditional values and a nostalgic longing for the past. We discuss here several implications of these recent shifts in intent and practice.

Oral interpretation is losing its uniqueness within the realm of performance arts and studies. The very thing that made oral interpretation unusual - its regard for and emphasis on the value of literature as the basis for a communication event - is being subsumed by the increasing emphasis on performance skills. Performance technique and applications are taught and available through a huge variety of venues and institutions. The training of performers is a massive industry in the United States, peopled with highly trained and skilled teachers and a multiplicity of educational and performance opportunities. To think that somehow we are providing a service to students by supplying them with another setting to practice performance skills ignores a basic reality: that training, in often more complete and sophisticated systems, is available elsewhere and in connection to other "real world" applications. In contrast, what is not readily available to them is training in how to connect those same skills to the analysis, appreciation, and presentation of literature. What makes oral interpretation in its traditional sense truly valuable is that it fills an educational void with a unique body of knowledge and skills and the opportunity for the student to use it. Remove the emphasis on the literary end and oral interpretation becomes simply a poor substitute for the practice of performance technique.

In addition, the audience loses out in contemporary oral interpretation practice in forensics. In traditional oral interpretation the audience uses its imagination to conjure images that the text draws upon. The text comes alive for them not just because of the work of the performer or even the author but because they are asked to participate actively through the use of their own creative abilities. In the current manifestation of competitive forensics, however, the imagination of the audience is rarely and barely stretched, because the performer fills in so much of what the audience used to provide in traditional oral interpretation. In denying the auditors this opportunity to become part of the process we limit the learning experience of all connected to the process. Some students may wish as audience members at an 8:00 a.m. Saturday morning round that they be asked to do as little as possible; as educators we need to make sure they have the opportunity to do more.

Competitive speakers are being taught that presentation is more valuable than message. Lack of regard for the text in competitive oral interpretation translates to a lack of concern for what is being communicated and/or the process of communication. Certainly, another study might attempt to make connections between this trend in oral interpretation and other trends in our society (i.e. the declining interest in substantive political issues, the reliance on television as an entertainment medium). We suggest here, however, that in the context of the educational sphere, we must be concerned with what we are communicating to competitors. If what forensics practices is not oral interpretation in the traditional sense, as educators we do students a disservice by telling them that they have mastered oral interpretation, when, in fact, they have mastered a different performance form. Would we provide a more thorough educational experience to admit that what we do now is not "oral interpretation" in the traditional sense, rather, that we do an evolved form that resonates with where performance is at in the overall educational status quo? Performance and performance studies certainly have their own unique values and applications as does traditional oral interpretation. The problem in forensics seems to be that we have been and are unclear in what we are asking students to do and the values for which we reward them.

Additionally, the de-emphasis on quality introductions and transitions in many oral interpretation events has nearly eliminated the need for the student to be a good speaker with his or her own well-organized and well-written thoughts. They need only "perform" and need not worry about crucial considerations such as clarity of personal thought and expression. The assumption is that the student's "voice" is heard through the interplay of text. How a student arranges the selections that she or he has chosen is assumed to reveal the message they want to convey. While there is an artistic validity to this rationale, such an approach still does not test the student's own cogency of thought and expression. Oral interpretation as originally developed and connected to competitive forensics was considered another unique manifestation of the public speaking process, not simply as a venue for performance. A greater emphasis on the student's own communicative abilities and acts deserves consideration; his or her thought and words need to be an expected and accepted part of the communication event.

Similarly, the great increase in the sheer number of competitive oral interpretation events in the last forty years (from a single event in many tournaments of the nineteen-sixties to five distinct events at the current NIET) has now made it possible for students to be highly successful individual events "speakers" with minimal organizational, writing or speaking skills. It is now possible, given the shift away from introductions and transitions noted above, for a student to win not just an interpretation event but all-around outstanding speaker awards and to have not thought through, written, or delivered more than a page of their own truly original statements. This influx of event categories has helped create another problem; a confusion on the part of the audience in discerning what literary genre is being performed, as prose, poetry, and drama have all come to sound alike and the interweaving of text disables the whole of the piece from helping an audience see its individual parts and their purpose.

Finally, we teach students one set of values in the classroom and require another set in competition. We as educators have been equally misled by the desire to succeed competitively and that confusion is reflected by a dual set of standards. In fact, some colleagues who teach oral interpretation warn forensics students that what they will be doing in class is foreign to what they will do in forensics. Students then become frustrated by the disparity in their learning experiences in regard to oral interpretation, hearing "this is what is good, this is what we strive for" and seeing "this is what is rewarded, this is what wins." Equally frustrating is the necessary paradigm shift required on the part of traditionally trained coaches. To help students do well in contemporary forensics, coaches must often eschew any traditional training they have had in oral interpretation, or at least work hard to reconcile the two. In essence, traditionally trained coaches may have multiple sets of shifting beliefs about what makes for good oral interpretation, depending their goals and the venue. Such shifting can be seen as both selling out for trophies and pedagogically dishonest.

These harms are but the tip of the iceberg. Yet, simple solutions may help ease the dilemma for educators and students alike.

Possible Solutions

There are two basic options when looking at how to reconcile the traditional oral interpretation of the classroom with that of competitive forensics: change the former or guide more firmly the development of the latter. In addition, we propose a third solution that seeks not to reconcile interpretation in the classroom with forensics competition, but rather to embrace the difference, while recognizing and honoring the developments in forensics as a discrete, valid form.

As noted above certain core elements of traditional oral interpretation create both its character and value in an educational, as well as, competitive setting: the value of text, the role of the speaker in processing and interpreting that text, the connection between audience, text, and reader in presenting and understanding the literature through the communication event. Altering entirely, or even in part, the pedagogical goals and processes of teaching oral interpretation to meet the constantly shifting needs of forensics competition diminishes the art form and its educational potential. One can argue that this shift is merely the evolution of the artistic form as it changes and develops in our contemporary society. The authors understand and appreciate that art, in its myriad of forms, constantly shifts in form, content, and intent; the world would be a pretty boring place if music had never moved beyond the eighteenth century. However, for us a more compelling contention is that traditional oral interpretation, with its emphasis on text, analysis, and performance, provides performers with a unique, often otherwise unavailable form through which students can develop and share their own voices. The chance to develop performance skills exists in a wide array of formats and venues; training for theatre, film, television, stand-up, performance art, to name a few. The opportunity to combine those performance skills with literary analysis, personal reflection, artistic creation, and public speaking is almost solely the realm of traditional oral interpretation.

Controlling and guiding the development of competitive oral interpretation is not only much more practically feasible (smaller student numbers, limited competition venues, winners/awards determined by educators and educator groups) but much more beneficial educationally. Core values such as content over style, respect for author/text, understanding of the communication process, the value of organized thought and expression, as well as performance skills, can be maintained and advanced. Forensics exists as a forum to develop, apply, share, and reward the principles that we as educators deem essential and valuable for our students. Let us say it candidly: students and coaches hard on the trail of recognition and trophies should not determine the core essence and values of a thousands year old art form as it develops in the twenty-first century. We as educators must do so.

A third solution is probably the easiest and most honest; forensics organizations can recognize the performance style currently practiced and change the name of events to reflect this style. We would propose renaming events to the oral *performance* of literature. The cat seems to be out of the bag in terms of where the "interpretation" events are headed. In addition, as fewer and fewer coaches have training in traditional oral interpretation, the hopes of returning the forensics activity to its more traditional roots seems remote. Consequently, as coaches and organizers of forensics events we can choose to be honest about what our students are doing. Instead of misdirecting students into thinking they have mastered oral interpretation, we can rightly identify their mastery of oral performance. While clearly this solution does nothing to reinvigorate the study of oral interpretation, renaming events may enable oral interpretation to retain its identity as a discrete art form.

Conclusion

As one of the largest venues for the performance of oral interpretation, forensics competition has a huge influence on how oral interpretation is defined and perceived as an art form. This essay has shown how competitive oral interpretation no longer embodies the core values of the traditional art form of oral interpretation by considering the differences in the literature, the process, the performance, and the evaluation. Given these differences, we have suggested three possible solutions for easing this tension: change the traditional form, guide more firmly the development of competitive oral interpretation, and/or distinguish oral interpretation of literature from oral performance. Without informed decision making and thoughtful direction on the part of coaches, judges, and other forensics leaders, we may allow the art of oral interpretation to become just another foray into performance for performance's sake and not the communication forum and form we need it to be.

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Gender Bias in NFA-LD: An Examination of Participation Rates and a Content Analysis of NFA-LD Ballots

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Webmaster's note: An obvious typo was corrected on p. 65, table 2. The original printed page listed 5 teams twice with 5-1 records for 2000. It's clear that the second reference was meant to be 1-5.

Abstract

Past forensic research indicates a disparity in participation rates of women in forensics. This study examines these issues through a comparison of results and ballots from the 2000 and 2005 NFA National Championship in NFA-Lincoln Douglas debate. Participation rates are examined along with a content analysis of the 1,210 ballots from the two national tournaments. Results indicate that participation by and success of women in NFA -Lincoln Douglas debate has significantly increased. The content analysis reveals no statements that would reveal a bias towards gender in the judges' decision-making.

For the past three decades the forensics community has been concerned with the issue of diversity in intercollegiate forensic competition. A call from the 1974 National Developmental Conference on Forensics (McBath, 1975) jointly sponsored by the American Forensic Association and the National Communication Association (then called the Speech Communication Association) for research to determine specifically why women and minority group members are not proportionately represented in forensic activities resulted in significant research confirming that females, and minorities are underrepresented in participation rates and in success in the competitive aspects of forensics (Bruschke & Johnson, 1994; Friedley & Manchester, 1985; Logue, 1986; Manchester & Friedley, 2003; Stepp & Gardner, 2001). Stepp and Gardner (2001) found in their study of the 2000 CEDA National Tournament that 64% of the competitors were male and only 36% female, which is a slight increase from 71% male and 20% female at the 1990 CEDA National Tournament. But this "is still not representative of the collegiate body in which women comprise 55.8% of students" (p. 74). Manchester and Friedley (2003) found that females were significantly under represented at the National Debate Tournament over a 17-year period of gathering data. In the same study the evidence reveals that some strides have been made in the participation of women and minorities in individual events participation. While Manchester and Friedley found no difference in the levels of participation between male and female participation at the 2001 AFA-NIET preliminary rounds they did find a gender gap in the semi-final and final rounds. Thus while individual events appears to have made some progress in shrinking the gender gap few strides have been made in debate, and little research has been done on why these students do not participate or succeed.

In an effort to address why students participate in forensics Nadler (1985) conducted a survey of student motivations for forensic participation. Nadler found that males in forensics value extra-curricular activities relevant to their careers and friends' involvement in the activity more highly than females in forensics. And those students not in forensics were found to value involvement in several activities as opposed to just focusing on one. While these results focus on extra-curricular activity choice in general they do not address the specific nature of forensics or issues dealing with retention of students. Greenstreet (1997) begins to address this issue with a taxonomy of women's gender based experiences in forensics which suggests that "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" (p. 59). While Greenstreet reports that within the negative matrix of his taxonomy there were reports of verbal abuse within rounds and two incidents of sexists statements made on ballots there has been no systematic research on whether comments on ballots, the main communication instrument of judge to competitor, reveals any gender bias. The research that has been done on debate ballots has focused on decision-making paradigms (Betz, 1940; Birkholt & Diers, 2004; Burgoon, 1975; Colbert, 1983).

In examining the NFA-LD ballot one must first recognize the somewhat unique position that it holds within the debate community. In most debate organizations the ballot is used to indicate a winner and assign speaker points as well as briefly identify the voting issues that the judge used to base his or her decision. A more thorough explanation or reason for decision is frequently given in an oral critique at the conclusion of the round. In NFA-LD, however, many judges are also individual events judges. In individual events the culture demands a written ballot with some indication on the reason for a student's ranking in the round. While some individual events ballots are also brief, individual events judges are used to writing their comments and not giving oral critiques. Thus NFA-LD ballots remain the main channel of communication between the judge and debater and thus worthy of examination. When examining the participation of women in debate it follows that comments on NFA-LD ballots may reveal gender based comments that might in turn influence participation in NFA-LD. Sexist language is frequently seen as a subtle form of sexism in that "it consists of speech that reinforces and perpetuates gender stereotypes and status differences between women and men" (Swim, Mallet, & Stangor, 2004, p. 117). Since the words we use reinforce reality the presence of sexist language on the debate ballot could have a direct impact on female participation.

When the National Forensic Association added policy Lincoln Douglas debate to its national tournament schedule in 1990 the organizers felt that the Lincoln Douglas format worked best in adding the argumentative and dialectical form of persuasion within an individually persuasive format

(Millsap, 2001). Because of the newness of Lincoln Douglas debate in NFA, scholars are just starting to gather enough data to draw conclusions on the success and nature of the activity. This study will begin the examination of participation rates in NFA-LD. We hypothesize that we will see the same gender disparity that exists in NDT/CEDA debate. We completed a content analysis of ballots in order to investigate if this bias is evident in remarks made by judges on their ballots to determine a possible cause for disparity in participation.

Method

In order to get a significant number of ballots to analyze, the authors chose to compare the 2000 and 2005 NFA National Championship Tournaments, which were made available from the Chair of the Lincoln Douglas Debate Committee. These two years were chosen because of the availability of ballots and the hope that the beginnings of a trend would be indicated. One thousand two hundred ten Lincoln Douglas Debate ballots were examined for participation rates as well as for win-loss decisions and speaker points. Instances in which the sex of the debater was undeterminable based on the name, coaches were contacted to verify sex. The comments on the ballots were then examined for sexist statements. In order to complete this content analysis three readers were trained in the types of comments that could indicate a sexist or racial bias as discussed by Swim, Mallett, and Stangor (2004) in the previously cited article. They each read all the ballots. The content analysis of the ballots for comments that would indicate a gender bias was completed by the three trained coders with a 1.0 intercoder reliability score.

Results

Participation rates for the 2000 and 2005 NFA-LD Championship Tournaments are reflected in Table 1. Overall we see an increase in female participation and in success at the national tournaments. In 2000 of the 85 total debaters 24 were female (28%) while in 2005 of the 88 total debaters 37 were female (42%) representing a 14% increase in female participation. The NFA-LD Championship breaks to a double-octa final as the first elimination round. Table 1 reveals a 16% increase in females making it to the elimination rounds in 2005.

Table 1

Participation Rates

Rounds	Gender	No. of debaters	%
		2000	
Preliminary		(*n* = 85)	
	Male	61	72%
	Female	24	28%
Double octa-finals		(*n* = 32)	
	Male	23	72%
	Female	9	28%
		2005	
Preliminary		(*n* = 88)	
	Male	51	58
	Female	37	42
Double octa-finals	Male	18	56
	Female	14	44

The win-loss percentage for female debaters also increased from the 2000 to the 2005 national tournaments. In 2000 female debaters won 73 rounds out of a possible 255 (29%). In 2005 female debaters won 118 rounds out of a possible 264 (45%) representing a 16% increase in female win-loss records as indicated in Table 2. Further examination of the table reveals that in 2005 there were fourteen women above a 3-3 record as compared to nine in 2000. Males on the other hand, went from 21 debaters above a 3-3 record in 2000 to 17 above a 3-3 record in 2005. This would seem to indicate not only an improvement in participation of females in debate but in their performance as well.

Another indicator of success in debate is speaker points. As Table 3 indicates the average of speaker points per round for females was significantly higher than for males at the 2000 NFA Nationals. In 2005, however, this average became almost equal. The top ten speakers for 2000 included 7 males and 3 females while in 2005 there were 5 males and 5 females.

Table 2
Preliminary Round Win-Loss Records

Gender	2000 Total Wins	Win/Loss Breakdown	2005 Total Wins	Win/Loss Breakdown
Males	182 – 71%	1 – 6/0 5 – 5/1 15 – 4/2 21 – 3/3 13 – 2/4 5 – 1/5 1 – 0/6	146 – 55%	0 – 6/0 3 – 5/1 14 – 4/2 14 – 3/3 14 – 2/4 5 – 1/5 1 – 0/6
Females	75 – 29%	1 – 6/0 3 – 5/1 5 – 4/2 6 – 3/3 6 – 2/4 3 – 1/5 0 – 0/6	119 – 45%	2 – 6/0 6 – 5/1 6 – 4/2 11 – 3/3 8 – 2/4 3 – 1/5 1 – 0/6

Table 3
Speaker Points

Gender	2000 Avg. per round	2005 Avg. per round
Males	28.62	25.75
Females	24.03	25.82

The content analysis revealed that of the 1,210 ballots only four ballots were found to have comments that indicated a possible gender bias. Of the four ballots with gender related issues three were from the 2000 National Tournament and one was from 2005 National Tournament. Two of these ballots, one male judge and one female judge, were in reference to a male debater's dress. Comments included, "Call me old-school, but a tie and jacket could increase your credibility and make me more inclined to believe you" (2005) and "this is a national final round DUDE get the suit coat on and the tie tightened up!" (2000). In 2000 a male judge made the comment to a male debater in reference to cross examination, "Knock it off with the testosterone!!! There is no need to be so aggressive with a novice debater who is only asking for clarification." The only comment to female debaters came from a female judge in 2000, "Wow -- I thought a cat fight was about to break loose. Settle down (both) in the cross ex." There were no other comments that would indicate the gender of the debaters in the rounds. Debate judges tend to refrain from using the "he" "she" pronouns. On ballots debaters are referred to by side, affirmative or negative, by their name, or in the second person "you".

Discussion

In this study participation and success has been measured by examining the LD ballots from the 2000 and 2005 NFA National Tournaments. An initial comparison of the participation rates in NFA-LD shows that females are increasing not only in participation but in success based on win-loss records at the national tournament. Females are also receiving more recognition for their speaking ability based on the increased number of women receiving top ten speaker awards. An initial comparison between the national tournaments of NDT, NFA-IE and NFA-LD suggest that as of 2005 women have found more successful participation in NFA-LD than in other national forensic events (see Table 4). The most recent data available from 2001 (Manchester & Friedley, 2003) shows that at forensics' highest-level males recorded higher levels of success.

Table 4

Published Participation/Success Rates (% participation/% success)

Gender	NDT-2001	NFA-IE 2001	AFA-NIET2001	NFA-LD 2000	NFA-LD 2005
Male	56/69	47/57	52/58	72/72	58/56
Female	44/31	53/43	48/42	28/28	42/44

In NDT, AFA, and NFA-LD 2000 men had higher participation and success. More men competed and were successful than their female counterparts. The 2001 NFA-IE Tournament had the most marked disparity between participation and success with more women participants but a 10% disparity in success by those participants. NFA-LD in 2000 showed females' success at the same percentage as participation while in 2005 women were more successful than their participation rate and showed an increase in the number of speaker awards won by women. The fact that the overall average of speaker points for females decreased can be attributed to the fact that more women are participating and so the natural tendency is for the average to decline.

The content analysis of ballots revealed that of the few sexist remarks recorded most were directed at males and dealt with sportsmanship and respect issues. The one remark aimed at females was written by a female judge limiting aggressive behavior which could be considered sportsmanship. Given the extremely low number of sexist remarks directed at female debaters on any of the NFA-LD ballots as well as the increased success rate by female debaters, the officially sanctioned response to debaters from judges does not seem to reflect gender bias. Any dissatisfaction with the LD activity may not be tied to a perception of gender bias in picking winning and losing but of other more subtle forms of sexist behavior. Stepp, Simerly, & Logue (1994) completed a study on sexual harassment in CEDA debate and Szwapa (1994) completed a study on sexual harassment in NDT debate. Both studies revealed high levels of gender harassment, seductive behaviors and sexual imposition. These results led both organizations to develop sexual harassment policies and worked to increase awareness of the problem. Other forensic organizations have followed with their own policies. While it would be nice to assume that this has improved the culture within the forensics community over the past ten years a deeper probe of the issues would be beneficial for all forensic organizations to pursue. It would be imprudent to assume that there is no problem within NFA-LD based on a single study of the language on ballots. Most of the sexist behavior described in the CEDA and NDT studies happened outside the debate rounds. To insure that NFA-LD is not suffering from the same issues a study of perceived behaviors by debaters and coaches would be appropriate.

This study was a snapshot of two years at the NFA-LD National Tournament. For the results to be more definitive a longitudinal study needs to be done looking at each year. The fact that this study only looked at the national tournament does not indicate whether female participation is increasing throughout NFA member schools or whether females are having more success throughout the NFA-LD community. As indicated by the 1974 Developmental Conference (McBath, 1975) ethnic bias also needs to be more deeply investigated. To more thoroughly address the ethnicity issue researchers would need to know the ethnicity of debaters which is not available from debate ballots. This type of research would require contacting coaches and/or debaters to gather the appropriate demographic information or include a voluntary demographic information sheet at the NFA National Championship Tournament as is currently done at the CEDA National Championship Tournament.

We continue as a community to care about the diversity of our participants in forensic competition and the health of the activity itself. The only way to address these issues is to gain accurate data on who is involved in the activity and whether that involvement was a positive or negative experience. While this study finds that females are enjoying progress in NFA-LD debate, more research will tell us if this is an anomaly or a trend.

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