Leadership, Sexism and Equality in the Context of Collegiate Forensics

Caleb Webb  |Communication and Journalism

ABSTRACT
In the intercollegiate forensics community, gender inequality has become a topic of interest in the past few years with conversations ranging from why women do not participate in Limited Preparation events and the expectations for dress for women (Nadler, 2014). However, research to date has focused on forensics students and not the people who manage the forensics programs. Perhaps because of their underrepresentation within Forensics, women, in particular, have been overlooked (Greenstreet, Joash, Martin & Peircy, 1998). Although communication researchers have challenged claims that women communicate in less powerful ways, the gender norm of women as more nurturing than men has contributed to a continuing view of leadership as a masculine quality (Rogus-Pulia, Humbert, Kolehmainen & Carnes, 2018). This study aims to understand forensics students’ perceptions of female and male directors of forensics, using a survey to collect data from two Midwest programs, one directed by two women, another directed by two men. Results will aid in understanding potential differences in ratings of leadership and coaching effectiveness in the forensics community.

Scales

Instruments
All Scales used a Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, seven point response format.

Coaching effectiveness—measures the coaching abilities of the Director of Forensics and Assistant Director of Forensics, adapted from the Conversational Effectiveness Scale (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984)
Sample Question: Our coaching is effective.
The scale was reliable, α=.71

Individualized Trust Scale— (Wheeless & Grotz, 1977)
This measures the trust between the students and the Director of Forensics and Assistant Director of Forensics
Sample Question: Honest
The scale was reliable, α=.84

Teacher Credibility— (McCroskey, Holdridge, &Toomb, 1974) This measures if the student view the Director of Forensics and Assistant Director of Forensics as credible.
Sample Question: Trained
The scale was reliable, α=.72,

Table 1: Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Gender Nonconforming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year in School</th>
<th>1st year</th>
<th>2nd year</th>
<th>3rd year</th>
<th>4th year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex of Director and Assistant Director of Forensics</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Variable Means by Coach Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DIRECTOR OF FORENSICS</td>
<td>6.26</td>
<td>6.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COACHING EFFECTIVENESS</td>
<td>6.36</td>
<td>6.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACHER CREDIBILITY</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td>6.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRUSTWORTHINESS</td>
<td>6.46</td>
<td>6.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF FORENSICS</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>6.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COACHING EFFECTIVENESS</td>
<td>6.26</td>
<td>6.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACHER CREDIBILITY</td>
<td>6.66</td>
<td>6.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRUSTWORTHINESS</td>
<td>6.46</td>
<td>6.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RQ: Do forensics competitors' perceptions of leadership effectiveness vary based on the sex of the competitors’ Director of Forensics (DOF) and Assistant Director of Forensics (ADOF)?

RESULTS
There were eighteen students in total who took the survey, each school having nine students each. The study resulted in no significant findings, meaning that students did not find their Director of Forensics and Assistant Director of Forensics to be less capable in teacher credibility, coaching effectiveness, and trustworthiness, based on sex.

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS
Understanding how sexism plays into collegiate forensics is important because the community is continuously looking to equalize the playing field for all people. The results brought forward no significant findings; this may suggest that things have begun to change in the forensics culture. This study can serve as a map for future research to test for possible effects with a larger sample.

LIMITATIONS
The study only examines two Midwest programs, each only having nine students each, so results are not generalizable.

FACULTY ADVISORS
Dr. Martha Fay
Dr. Kristine Knuston
Professor Karen Morris