Developing Student Voices in Academic Debate
through a Feminist Perspective of Learning, Knowing, and Arguing

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Voice is an issue of critical concern to contemporary rhetoricians. For example, Ann Gill (1994) argues: "If society is to embrace and to value all of its members, it must break the silence of women, ethnic minorities, and others in the margins of society. We must learn to listen to all the voices, and individuals must find an authentic voice of their own" (p. 215). In order to learn how students develop their voices as debaters, and whether students can find authentic voices in academic debate, we must understand more clearly the intellectual development of all students, both women and men.

While forensics educators are attempting to assess how effectively academic debate improves students' critical thinking ability (M. Bartanen, 1994; Greenstreet, 1993; Hill, 1993), the forensics community has paid scant attention to literature on student development as knowers and reasoners. Educators have explored participation and success rates of men and women debaters for nearly three decades (Hensley and Strother, 1968; Hayes and McAdoo, 1972; Rosen, Dean and Willis, 1978; Friedley and Manchester, 1985; Nadler, 1985; Logue, 1986; Stepp, 1994; Bruschke and Johnson, 1994). More recently, journal forums have discussed how debate practice is reductionist in its treatment of feminist perspectives (Crenshaw, 1993; Rowland, 1993; and Tuman, 1993) and have raised important concerns about sexual harassment in intercollegiate debate (Bjork and Trapp, 1994; Stepp, Simerly and Logue, 1994; Szwapa, 1994). While Larson and Vreeland (1985) began to explore gender differences in cross-examination, Murphy (1989) suggested that evaluation of speaking styles in public address events favors a masculine style, and Johnson and Bruschke (1993) set forth a research agenda for women in debate, few papers (e.g., Haffey, 1993; Luinstra, 1994) have attempted to inform debate practice through an examination of epistemological research.

This essay reviews important scholarship on the intellectual and moral development of students, raises questions about debate education in light of that research, and offers suggestions for ways in which debate practice can be more welcoming of men and women students. While the essay does not pretend to offer a fully developed feminist model of debate, it does seek to enrich the ongoing conversation about gender equity by suggesting how students' development as knowers, reasoners, and decision-makers can be enhanced in academic debate.

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DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENT VOICES

Intellectual Development

Research which can assist our understanding of students as knowers was begun forty years ago by William Perry (1970) of Harvard University. Perry and his colleagues interviewed (mostly) male students each spring of their undergraduate years and formulated a sequence of "epistemological perspectives" or "positions" through which students make sense of their educational experience. Concerned that Perry's template might mask "those themes that might be more prominent among women," Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule (1986) interviewed (mostly) female students' from nine institutions in the 1980s and suggested that women's "perspectives on knowing" move through five stages parallel to Perry's positions.

Noting gender similarities and differences between Perry et al. and Belenky et al., as well as gaps in existing research, Marcia Baxter Magolda, professor of educational leadership at Miami University, sought "to create a more comprehensive picture of students' ways of knowing" (p. 8). In a five year longitudinal study of college students, she found more similarity than difference in men and women students' ways of knowing (p. 13). She identified four ways of knowing used by both women and men: absolute knowing, transitional knowing, independent knowing, and contextual knowing. These four patterns of knowing provide a framework, the Epistemological Reflection Model, for understanding how college students make sense of their educational experiences as they move through their undergraduate years.

Most students enter college as *absolute knowers*, believing that knowledge is certain and that firm answers exist in all fields. When students begin to see some authorities as less than all-knowing, they become *transitional knowers*. They begin to view knowledge as falling into two categories--certain and uncertain--and their emphasis shifts from simply acquiring knowledge to understanding it. As *independent knowers*, students come to see knowledge as mostly uncertain. During this stage, students not only see authorities as representing a range of possible views, but see their own opinions as equally valid in discussions about an uncertain world. Coming to understand that "some knowledge claims are better than others in a particular context" (p. 69) marks the achievement of *contextual knowing*. Here, students still view knowledge as uncertain, but make judgments about what to believe and what point of view to defend based on a review of evidence integrated and applied in context.

While these four patterns of knowing were used by both men and women in the study, gender-related themes emerged as well. Baxter Magolda writes, "These themes took the form of reasoning patterns, or ways that students justified their thoughts" (p. 13). It is important to note that gender did not determine the reasoning patterns, but that the women tended to use one pattern more than did the men and vice versa. In order to understand fully the development of male and female voices, we need to review these reasoning patterns.

Absolute knowers used patterns labeled "receiving" and "mastery." The first was used more often by women and the latter was used more often by men (Baxter Magolda, pp. 37-38). Receiving-pattern students are careful listeners who are intent on acquiring information from authorities. They assign themselves no role in knowledge construction and only react privately to information they gather, perhaps for fear that speaking up will damage their relationships with others (pp. 90-92). In contrast, mastery-pattern students use a more public approach; they expect to demonstrate their control over information in interactions with teachers and peers. Writes Baxter Magolda, "The challenge inherent in words like *debate*, *drill*, and *quizzing* was not threatening to their view of themselves or their relationships with each other" (emphasis in original, p. 99). In sum, "[t]hough there was no real student voice in absolute knowing, mastery-pattern students attempted to express themselves, whereas their receiving-pattern counterparts remained essentially silent" (p. 101).

Transitional knowers, those who view knowledge as both certain and uncertain, used two reasoning patterns labeled "interpersonal" and "impersonal." The former was used more often by women and the latter was used more often by men (Baxter Magolda, p. 48). Emerging from the protective cocoon of silence, interpersonal-pattern students enjoy learning through peer interaction, try to enhance their self-expression by developing good relationships with instructors, and use personal judgment to resolve uncertainty. Discovering one's own and others' personal experiences is a dominant theme for interpersonal-pattern knowers, as is self-expression of original thoughts in a supportive atmosphere such as a familiar classroom or peer group (pp. 48, 122). In contrast, impersonal-pattern students like to debate with peers and instructors as a way of mastering the process of knowing, want to be challenged by others, and use logic and research to resolve uncertainty (p. 48). Their pattern of behavior is labeled "impersonal" because while they enjoy the climate of peer debate, they are primarily interested in their own opinions and learning, not in connecting with their classmates' ideas (p. 129). Thus, as transitional knowers, students develop their voices more than was the case in absolute knowing, but the interpersonal pattern students show greater independence of voice while impersonal-pattern students show greater reliance on authority-figures in their discourse (p. 134).

Independent knowers as a whole feel much more free than transitional knowers to express their new-found voices. Coming to view knowledge as uncertain validates their own voices and encourages them to think for themselves (Baxter Magolda, p. 140). Again, two gender-related patterns of reasoning were apparent in this group. The "interindividual" pattern was used more often by women and emphasizes a connection between the knower and others that maintains the integrity of both. At this stage, students for the first time perceive themselves as equal members of the intellectual community. Having earlier held their opinions quietly while they collected the ideas of others, interindividual independent knowers now expect others to accept their views or no longer feel constrained by what others' reactions might be.

The "individual" pattern, used more often by men, also emphasizes independent thinking and free exchange of ideas. Students following this pattern, however, focus primarily on their own thinking and often have a hard time listening carefully to other voices. When talking about conversations involving differences of opinion, individual pattern students emphasize the dominant role of their ideas (pp. 155-156).

Finally, as students move from being independent knowers to contextual knowers, they retain the value of thinking for themselves but modify this perspective to include "thinking for oneself within the context of knowledge generated by others" (p. 168). Baxter Magolda indicates that the small numbers of college students in the study who emerged as contextual knowers made identification of gender-related patterns impossible. She suggests, however, that "[b]ecause contextual knowers integrated thinking for themselves with genuine consideration of others' views, it is possible that the gender-related patterns of earlier ways of knowing converged in contextual knowing" (p. 189).

Moral Development

The psycho-social development of children has been of interest to researchers at least since the time of Sigmund Freud. Studies of early and middle childhood games, such as those by Jean Piaget, George Herbert Mead, and Lawrence Kohlberg, have suggested that moral development of girls "lags" behind that of boys because their play focuses less on respect for rules. Boys are seen to play more large-group competitive games in which occasions occur frequently for dispute resolution. Girls' more intimate, private, and indirectly competitive play, it has been argued, provides them less opportunity to learn how to elaborate and apply rule systems for the resolution of conflict; they tend to end the game when a quarrel breaks out in order to preserve the relationship among the play group. The focus on relationship concerns was corroborated in research by Nancy Chodorow (1978). She argued that "processes of identification and role learning for girls" which tend to be "particularistic and affective" (p. 177) result in "assymetries in the relationship experiences of girls and boys as they grow up, which account for crucial differences in feminine and masculine personality, and the relationship capacities and modes which these entail" (p. 169). The masculine personality, she argues, comes to be defined "more in terms of denial of relation and connection" while the feminine personality "comes to include a fundamental definition of self in relationship" (pp. 174-178).

Fueled by Chodorow's efforts to overcome the masculine bias of psychoanalytic theory and the tendency of psychological and literary texts to see differences between male and female experiences as pointing to a weakness in women's development, Carol Gilligan (1982) sought to reveal dominant themes in men's and women's moral decision-making. Like Baxter

Magolda, Gilligan reported gender-related rather than gender-determined themes.[1] From three interview based studies--one a longitudinal study of a small group of college sophomores, interviewed as seniors and five years following graduation; one a study of pregnant women ages 15 to 33 during and one year following their making of a choice about abortion; and one a study of 72 pairs of males and females ages 6 to 60--Gilligan synthesized the moral perspectives people bring to choices in their lives.

An "ethic of justice," articulated mostly by men, perceives moral problems as arising from competing rights. These conflicts are resolved through formal and abstract applications of rights and rules such that fairness and equality are preserved. Discussion of hypothetical situations and abstract questions is possible within this perspective because one can apply the appropriate rule or right to the given case. An "ethic of care," articulated mostly by women, perceives moral problems as arising from conflicting responsibilities. These dilemmas are resolved through contextual and narrative considerations of relationships such that others are cared for with equity. Discussion of hypothetical situations and abstract questions is difficult within this perspective because decisions must be made contextually and are tied to feelings of empathy and compassion for the needs of persons involved (pp. 19, 30, 69, 73, 100-101). Subsequent research by Gilligan and other scholars has shown that concern for care was the predominant focus of women and used less frequently by men, while concern for justice was the predominant focus of men and used less frequently by women (Lyons, 1983; Flanagan and Jackson, 1987).

The Pace of Student Development

While understanding more fully the similarities and differences in men and women's intellectual and moral development can enrich our teaching of argumentation and debate, our picture remains incomplete without some sense of how and when students move through the developmental stages identified above. While characterizing student movement into and

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[1] Gilligan and other feminist theorists have been criticized for being essentialist, for suggesting that being male or female defines one's modes of knowing or reasoning. Gilligan reports, however, that "[t]he different voice I describe is characterized not by gender but theme. Its association with women is an empirical observation, and it is primarily through women's voices that I trace its development. But this association is not absolute, and the contrasts between male and female voices . . . [do not] represent a generalization about either sex" (p. 2). Baxter-Magolda writes that "no pattern was used exclusively by women or men. . . . Some students combined the two approaches in different domains of their thinking or used one pattern within one way of knowing and another during the next. . . . Mixed use of the patterns shows that women are capable of an objective approach and men of a narrative approach" (pp. 369-370). Furthermore, this work should not be read as suggesting that a single perspective characterizes all men or all women. Learning, knowing, and arguing take place in complicated historical settings of class, race, culture and gender. Empowering a greater range of student voices in academic debate does not mean substituting a female way of knowing for a male one, but welcoming a diversity of voices in theory and in practice (see for example, Harding, 1987; hooks, 1994).

through the four patterns of knowing as somewhat fluid, Baxter Magolda (pp. 70-72) reports the following distribution:

Table 1
Ways of Knowing by Year

	Absolute	Transitional	Independent	Contextual
1st year	68%	32%	0%	0%
2nd year	46	53	1	0
3rd year	11	83	5	1
4th year	2	80	16	2
5th year	0	31	57	12

Just as both men and women experienced the four ways of knowing, it was also the case that there was more similarity than difference in the pace of women and men students' movement through the ways of knowing.

While students undergo these significant changes in intellectual development during their college years, Gilligan's research shows that these same years when students are moving from adolescence into young adulthood are also when "identity and intimacy converge in dilemmas of conflicting commitments" and when "the relationship between self and other is exposed" (p. 156). The dilemma faced by men and women students during this time is the same: how to resolve the conflict between personal integrity and care for others. That two divergent moral perspectives are voiced by some men and women as they attempt to resolve this dilemma is the reality of which debate educators need take note.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF INTERCOLLEGIATE DEBATE

The years in which forensics educators have an opportunity to work with students are certainly complex and exciting ones. What, then, does the research on student development suggest for the improvement of debate education? I will argue that we need to incorporate more ways of knowing into our activity, to re-evaluate our use of authority, and to supplement research on debaters' critical thinking ability with investigations of their intellectual development.

Inclusion of Voices

First, if the debate community is to become more inclusive of a full range of student voices, recognition of all the patterns of intellectual and moral development must be

incorporated into the activity. Three conclusions in the body of research on student development are important to highlight here. One is that students use two parallel but equally complex and equally valuable reasoning patterns which cut across three of the four ways of knowing. The mastery-, impersonal-, and individual- reasoning patterns, which coincide with positions described in Perry's research, feature an "objective" view of learning. This approach, which has traditionally been associated with men, has been the predominant paradigm for college education in general, and debate education in particular. For example, debaters are taught to remain detached from the positions they argue and to offer evidence from authoritative experts to support claims. The receiving-, interpersonal-, and interindividual-reasoning patterns, which align closely with the Belenky et al. descriptions of women's ways of knowing, reflect a "connected" view of learning. This approach has traditionally been devalued in college education generally and is largely absent from debate education. Debaters are not encouraged to use narratives of their experience or judgments based on intuition as evidence in debate, Jamie Gertz's character's speech in *Listen to Me* notwithstanding (Luinstra, p. 1). For example, a student from Port Angeles, Washington, who has first-hand knowledge of the economic and environmental debates in her community over removing the Elwah River dam will only be heard on this issue in a debate round if she finds authoritative quotations to speak for her.

A second conclusion is that the objective and connected patterns of reasoning discerned in the Perry, Belenky et al., and Baxter Magolda research are similar to the distinctions in moral development found by Gilligan and Lyons. Connected knowers tend to be those who make moral decisions based on the ethic of care. Objective knowers tend to be those who make moral decisions based on the ethic of justice. Current practice in academic debate would appear to privelege the latter perspective, given common use of hypothetical scenarios, value hierarchies based in rights, and applications of rule-systems. For example, debaters rarely discuss how a proposed action might hurt real people in a given context, including themselves. While debaters may make global claims like "you can't develop the ocean if you're dead," such assertions only ask participants to "see others thinly," to view consequences abstractly, rather than requiring that we "see others thickly, as constituted by their particular human face, their particular psychological and social self" (Flanagan and Jackson, p. 625).

A third conclusion is that integration of both objective and connected knowing, as well as convergence of the ideologies of care and justice, are requisite for student development as mature thinkers and decision-makers. Baxter Magolda summarizes that contextual knowing incorporates both objective and narrative ways of thinking (p. 373). Similarly, Gilligan depicts adult decision-making as recognizing the importance of both justice and care and the contexts in which it is appropriate to apply each perspective (pp. 166-167). If debate education, then, is to maximize the development of students as knowers, reasoners, and decision-makers, the

community needs to become more welcoming of both objective and connected modes of knowing and of both perspectives of justice and of care.

One step toward this goal is to give greater attention both to the content of topics debated and to the form in which resolutions are stated. One of the key principles of feminist education is that students, both men and women, learn best by making connections between unfamiliar material and themes and their own experiences. This does not mean that debate topics must be limited to the drinking age, universal military or civilian service, or fraternity hazing practices. However, "situated pedagogy" (Shor and Freire, 1987) calls for critical examination of themes perceived as important by students in their larger global, historical, political, or social contexts. This suggests that topic proposers and topic selection committees add to their list of criteria for good resolutions questions which ask: Is this topic area one with which students will be able to make connections? Are major issues of the resolution related to important themes in their own lives? Is this topic area one which both women and men will be able to connect equally? Is this topic area one which men and women of various cultural backgrounds will be able to connect equally?

Wording of resolutions should also take into account issues of responsibility and care. Topic writers can ask: Does the wording of the resolution focus attention only on abstract principles or hypothetical scenarios or does it foster consideration of contextual issues and implications on real people? Haffey suggests, for example, that the Spring 1992 topic concerning advertising allowed for cases which focused less on legal rules or norms and more on the consequences of advertising on individuals (1993, p. 11). In addition, topics which narrow the range of case examples--for example, considering the appropriateness of military intervention in Bosnia or North Korea rather than military intervention generally, or considering lengthening prison terms for a particular set of crimes rather than in general--may allow students greater ability to conduct informed contextual analysis rather than relying on more abstract, generic positions. Maintaining the opportunity to debate both value topics and policy resolutions allows the moral ideologies of care and justice, of equity and equality, to be discussed as criteria.

Authority

A second implication in the student development research for the theory and practice of academic debate is that we need to reexamine our use of authority in this field of argument. One reason is that "students who are subordinated are less likely to value their own abilities and express their voices freely" (Baxter Magolda, p. 192). There are at least three kinds of authority relationships within education generally, and debate education in particular, that deserve mention. First, we know that the educator-student relationship is a dominant-subordinate one. While there are many ways in which the collaborative learning environment of the debate squad differs from the traditionally teacher-centered classroom, forensics educators need to examine

the space they make for student voices in their coaching philosophy and in their instructional sessions with students. Do our teaching methods incorporate the small, soft voices or rely too much on the louder, more aggressive ones?[2] Do we listen both to those who assert "I have a right to my opinion" and to those who modestly suggest that "It's just my opinion"? Especially in the face of many demands on our time and efficiency, do we retain high control over our programs or offer leadership opportunities on our squads only to those who have already found validation for their voices in prior co-curricular projects? Do we provide opportunities for a variety of men and women students to take responsibility in our co-curricular debate organizations? I am not advocating that forensics educators turn over all decision-making responsibility to debaters or maintain no professional distance between themselves and their students (Frank, pp. 76-77), but only that educators nurture and empower all student voices in their forensics programs.

A second dominant-subordinate relationship in academic debate that hinders the development of authentic student voices is our priveleging of the objectivist or positivist tradition over the social constructionist perspective. When we urge students to use more and more authoritative evidence from "objective observers" in debate speeches and less of their own narrative, we give them reason to doubt their abilities to think and speak for themselves. When judges rely on rereading uncontested evidence at the end of the debate round in making their decision, they privilege the voices of "authoritative sources" over the voices of the student advocates (Luinstra, p. 7). One source for models of argumentation which incorporate voices of real people into abstract debates about principles is the legal arena. Debaters can, for example, learn from feminist litigators, such as Ruth Colker (1990) and Sarah Burns (1990), and from "women's voices briefs" forwarded in the 1986 *Thornburgh* and 1989 *Webster* abortion cases.

In addition to challenging prevailing practices of evidence use, concern with students' ways of knowing will also ask us to review our coaching practices. For example, when "prep" sessions before each round are thirty minutes in which coaches tell students how to adapt to judges and what arguments to run, rather than collaborative discussions of strategy, we may well be saying that we do not trust the students' abilities to formulate and adapt winning arguments. And, certainly, students are not validated as knowers and decision-makers when briefs and positions are written by coaches and only mouthed by competitors.

A third dominant-subordinate relationship in the debate community is a majority-minority one. As long as women and students of color remain a minority in the activity, we must be cognizant of providing validation of their voices and their contributions in the face of

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[2]As a small case in point, one reviewer of this article suggested that my overuse of the question construction detracted from the directness of my argument. I have chosen to retain the use of questions in this section to reinforce the idea that questions can argue effectively.

natural tendencies to privelege the majority group. Efforts must continue to incorporate a more diverse student population into the debate community.

Research

A third implication of the development research is that we need to supplement studies which compare student scores on the Watson Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (Greenstreet, 1993; Hill, 1993) with interview and/or questionnaire research which charts the progress of debaters' patterns of knowing.[3] The former approach is objective, while the latter is qualitative study based on student narratives. Such research will be useful for at least two reasons. On one hand, understanding where our students are as knowers allows for adaptations in our teaching; our educational efforts as coaches should be more meaningful if we make appropriate connections with our students as learners. We need to understand, for example, whether our novice squad members are largely absolute knowers in order to know how we, who probably have long forgotten our struggle with the dualism of "right" and "wrong" authority, might adapt our teaching of evidence gathering and evidence use in debate to this audience.

On the other hand, research which compares debaters' pace in moving through the patterns of knowing with the broader undergraduate population should prove useful (perhaps more useful than critical thinking scores) in documenting the value of debate training. We would benefit from knowing, for example, whether the statistics contained in Table 1 accurately describe the debate population. It seems a reasonable hypothesis that participation in debate--given the requirement that debaters defend both sides of a resolution and find qualified authoritative testimony to support their positions--would move students quickly past the belief that authorities have absolute yes-no answers to issues and into the greater uncertainty of transitional knowing. Can we assume that students who come to college debate with high school debate experience have moved past the absolute knowing stage? When does the move to transitional knowing occur for students who begin their debate careers as first- or second-year college students? Does participation in debate move students more quickly than their non-debate peers to the level of independent knowing? Does current practice of evidence use in debate, where sources are deemed credible by virtue of being published (rather independently of their substantive qualifications), encourage students to remain too long at the level of independent knowers? Finding answers to questions such as these would give forensics educators a more detailed picture of the contribution to student learning provided by academic debate experience.

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[3]For interview protocols and sample questions on intellectual development, see Baxter Magolda, pp. 411-426. For interview protocols and sample questions on moral development, see Lyons, pp. 143-145.

In addition, we need to study the development of contextual knowing among the population ending their competitive debate careers, given the increasingly common use of undergraduate and "just out" judges at forensics tournaments. If the Baxter Magolda statistics are representative of the debate population, those ready to judge as contextual knowers may comprise a very small group. Her description of independent knowers inadvertently captures some of the flavor of the ongoing "generation gap" debate about tournament judging pools:

> The word *openness* captures the essence of the core assumptions of independent knowers. They believed that knowledge was open to many interpretations, that people should be receptive to others' ideas, that instructors should be open to students' ideas, and that many possibilities existed in the choices confronting them. . . . Because knowledge could be seen in so many ways, there was also no obligation to make judgments about various views. Although independent knowers did make decisions about what to believe, they rarely identified criteria upon which these should be based (p. 146).

Perhaps the "anything goes" mentality among younger judges and coaching assistants which so troubles the "old guard" of the community is largely a contrast between independent and contextual knowers. Perhaps the community should spend less effort bemoaning those who are not evil in intent or devoid of merit, but are simply not yet the contextual knowers that more seasoned forensics educators have likely managed to become. More effort could be directed to building a community of contextual knowers through judge-educator training for students making the transition from competitor to coach, through expanded graduate education in forensics, or through direct mentoring of new judges by established critic-educators.

CONCLUSION

For some students, who unfortunately live in situations where discussion of ideas is unwelcome and female voices are discounted, debating can provide the protected space in which to break imposed silence; in most minimalist terms, the debate format allows for at least twelve minutes in which a woman or a man can speak and be listened to by two or four other people equally. For some, the school debate team and then the debate community can provide the familiar classroom and peer group needed to validate their developing transitional voices. In particular, when debate education is truly collaborative--when coaches and students are engaged in direct dialogue with one another, when teachers think aloud with their students--it is an empowering learning environment very different from the traditional lecture classroom. If they are encouraged to continue in the activity as independent and contextual

knowers, women and men can find acceptance for their ideas in the public world, a step critical to real knowing (Belenky et al., p. 220).

Can women find an authentic voice in debate? Johnson and Bruschke (1993), in raising the important research question of whether the masculine format of debate serves to liberate women or alienate them, suggest that "[t]he debate situation clearly calls for women to take what has traditionally been the role of the male and speak in assertive and aggressive tones. . . . In a sense, debate might just teach women to speak like men" (p. 57). I would encourage us to imagine another possibility, that being authentication of all voices, which would make this research question irrelevant. Just as Dow and Tonn suggest that contemporary women politicians are eliding the boundaries between private/female and public/male discourse, thereby making room for alternative rhetorical styles and political ideologies (pp. 288-289), the debate community can incorporate masculine and feminine ways of knowing and speaking. By understanding better how women and men students from a variety of backgrounds learn and reason and make decisions, we can modify our teaching practices and reform our debating norms to be more amenable to the development of authentic student voices.

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