

SPEECHLESS:

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Graphic by Jaidyn Holt

Junior Lillian Nguyen competed for the Speech and Debate team on February 13 at Harvard. As a petite person, Nguyen said it's hard to find suits that fit her, so at Harvard, she rolled up her skirt to ensure it wouldn't fall down. After being on her feet all day walking the campus, she decided to take off her high heels and put on flats before her next round. Like any speech and debate hopeful, Nguyen expected to receive concrete, professional feedback.

"Your skirt is ill-fitting and a little short," was the feedback Nguyen received. "It is unprofessional for a woman to wear flats."

Nguyen felt that her ballot, a sheet of paper used to judge, was anything but professional. According to Nguyen, this experience with exclusionary behavior was just one of many that other females like her have faced in speech events.

"I'm always happy when I get a female judge, but it doesn't mean that all male judges are bad," Nguyen said.

Trinity alumni and debater, Alexis Huang, thinks the problem goes beyond male judges.

"It's not just from male judges," Huang said. "Sometimes female judges can be super sexist. A lot of the comments that I got [were] about what I was wearing, or the way that my voice or tone sounded was actually from a

lot of mom judges. A lot of moms would be like, 'I would never let my daughter wear that in round.' or 'You don't look professional.'"

Competitions will ask parents of the competitors to volunteer as judges, so it is common to see older people judge. Parents can judge any event in speech and debate, and within speech and debate there are multiple events. Most speech events consist of at least one com-

petitor expressing their views on a topic and hoping to persuade, while most debate events consist of multiple competitors sharing their views and expecting a rebuttal.

"It's different for the speech side ... and the debate side of the circuit," Nguyen said. "Speech is all about inclusion. I think we've taken great strides in achieving equality to all races, all genders, all religions. Debate is a different scene. Judges' perspectives on how legitimate female debaters [are] ... is still antique."

Director of Forensics, Benjamin Gaddis said that some females feel more comfortable in certain events than in others.

"I would say they [females] find it easier to be rewarded [in speech]," Gaddis said. "In debate, females get talked over, and they have a lot of things happen to them that are inherently or what I would call structurally sexist, that occur all the time."

According to Shraddha Bhatia, a junior on the Speech and Debate team, there are improvements to be made in the speech community as well. Bhatia competes in extemporaneous speaking, an

event where competitors are given a topic and create a speech with limited preparation.

"[Extemporaneous speaking is] a very male-dominated event," Bhatia said. "People believe, especially in extemp, that women aren't as knowledgeable or as confident as

men. There's that stigma that women just can't be as good as men ... about current events."

Bhatia explains how she deals with the stigma around women in this event.

"I just do my own thing and give my own speeches," Bhatia said. "I don't try to get on the bad side of a lot of these guys. A lot of the time ... you have to have a constant smile ... to draw them in so they don't think you don't

He's so passionate!
Bravo!

You sound so competent!

Love the suit! It looks so professional!



Female competitors in forensics face double standards



She's way too hysterical! Calm down!

Try to have a deeper tone.

Flats are unprofessional! Women should wear heels.

know what you're saying."

Gaddis attributes some of the problem to social media, and he said competitors don't feel empowered to speak out about the unequal treatment they see.

"It's a social media generation," Gaddis said. "And we're good about calling out our friends, but we don't really like to point out when stuff affects us, when there feels like a power dynamic, when it feels like that person's more important."

Huang, Nguyen and Gaddis have all expressed that there are double standards in forensics. According to Gaddis, males and females may present themselves in a similar way, yet still be perceived very differently.

"I think what is considered flirty, in congressional debate, for instance, is considered good politics if a man does it," Gaddis said. "I think when a girl in debate really asserts herself, we say things about women that we wouldn't say for male debaters."

Huang has witnessed firsthand how this double standard ensues.

"When guys get louder and louder, people are like, 'ooh, yeah! That's really good. You sounded really competent,'" Huang said. "But when [women] do it, it's like, 'Can you stop raising your voice and being so emotional?'"

Nguyen said the hesitancy to speak out about inequalities in forensics is no different than other situations in society.

"We antagonize people who speak out, and that rings true with any situation," Nguyen said. "It's like we're not allowed to talk about it."

After witnessing these inequities herself, Huang started an organization to address the problem.

"We started the program Beyond Resolved at the end of my sophomore year," Huang said. "I met some girls at a debate camp, and

we were kind of just discussing the issues and started brainstorming."

Beyond Resolved is a student-led organization that advocates for all marginalized groups in high school speech and debate by raising awareness of often overlooked disparities, creating inclusive spaces and building resources for the debate community. Beyond Resolved also acts as a place for people to share their personal experiences with this double standard.

**- Benjamin Gaddis,
Director of Forensics**

Huang and her co-founders act as an advisory board for the organization and each take on different roles to maintain the website and resources.

"There would be girls that would set up stations [to spread the word about Beyond Resolved] at tournaments, and they would hand out flyers or give a little speech [talking about Beyond Resolved] at the end of tournaments ... and we started to expand more and more after," Huang said.

Throughout the summer, speech and debate camps are held all over the country. Huang said in the future, she would love to make that an addition to Beyond Resolved.

"A lot of the issues that occur in debate come from the inequity of resources," Huang said. "I wish that Beyond Resolved had larger camps. By bringing more people to camps like these, I think it helps us to create a more inclusive community."

By spreading awareness and suggesting resources, Nguyen thinks she and others have the potential to overcome such disparities that have gone on for far too long.

"We're getting there, slowly," Nguyen said. "But we're getting there."

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