

Welcome to *our* debate.

Women and non cis men in the debate space are told that they compete in the same arena as their cis male colleagues. But acting as though we all exist at a common, static level just isn't true. Because the kinds of abuse, assault, and harassment that are faced by some of us in this space doesn't just qualify as a hardship - it qualifies as an entirely different kind of debate space. Now, we, as an anonymous collective, are telling our stories.

This is the reality of the space. *Our* debate space. And as you're about to learn, nothing about this space is safe.

Who Do You Want In The Back Of The Room?

What do you think about when you're considering constraints, strikes, or prefs? For non cis men in the debate community, the consideration goes far beyond how critics feel about conditionality. Remember: there isn't a specific "approved" reason for a constraint that includes sexual harassment. And critics can't prevent themselves from having to be on panels with people who have harassed them, either.

"I received countless late night drunk messages from influential judges telling me how sexy I am when I debate and trying to initiate sexual messages with me. I was sent unsolicited dick pics from this individual and felt like I couldn't do or say anything because he had power over me as a judge."

"You only win rounds because judges want to sleep with you."

And what do you do if judges make inappropriate comments towards you in round? Or on the ballot?

"You should be wearing panty hose, and you girls need to invest in some higher quality suits."

"You seem too emotional when you talk about this topic, it makes you come across as irrational."

"In round, I have been called the "queer police" for trying to talk about heteronormativity. A two male team walked out on us, furious, because we said they were using masculinist rhetoric while trying to defend fem IR and they didn't believe this was a good enough reason to lose the round. It's just "silly language" after all."

"Your voice is so high and strident. Stop gasping for air when you talk. Annoying to

listen to!"

*"At Mile High, *name redacted* (who has also sent me multiple awkward messages including "My own bed. It feels SO. GOOD." This was after sending me messages earlier in the day asking why I was not at the after party the night before and said I was missed. I hadn't even met him before NPTE and our interactions were minimal) followed me up from the hotel restaurant after hanging out with friends. He and I were not talking or hanging out, but we both just happened to be around the same group of people. He chose to go back to his room right when I did and went up in the elevator with me. Naturally we were staying on the same floor. As I was standing in front of my door, I realized that he was standing right behind me. I turned around and looked at him confused as to why he was standing at my door with me late at night. He says "Oh oops I guess I am lost and need to find my room." Then proceeded to stand there for 10 seconds looking at me before walking away. Needless to say, I hurried into my room and locked the door."*

What Do You Think About In Round?

You can't constrain yourself from having to debate someone who has harassed or assaulted you. What do you think of when you look at pairings - do you wonder if you're going to have to battle for a ballot with someone who assaulted you? And what if your teammates have victimized you - would you ever feel safe in a practice round? That's a reality for some of us.

"If one of the top debaters in the nation decides to sleep with you when you're black out drunk... I mean, well, do you really wanna call that rape?"

"During my first year of debate at our team Christmas party, one of the teammates had me stand in front of everyone while she presented me with a horribly graphic photoshopped picture of me performing head on another teammate."

"I (as many other people in debate who do not identify as traditionally masculine) belong to an extremely masculine/patriarchal team. Although, at least since I have been on the team, we have began to make progress in being more inclusive..unfortunately this doesn't always include microaggressions. One of my former teammates, who has decided to no longer participate in part due to this incident, took my computer at NPDA for hours in order to complete a "virus scan" on it. Later, when my computer was acting slower and more finicky than ever, the joke was made that I should probably cover my webcam when using my laptop. It became apparent, in August many months after NPDA, that he had installed a remote control computer program onto my laptop to access my webcam without the light turning on. I had to take it to multiple IT people to remove it and eventually had to have my hard drive wiped clean. I don't know how many times it was accessed or if it was intentional, and of course that makes me feel

violated. What I think might be worse is that it is a consistent joke on our team now, and I even laugh along with it/provoke it sometimes in order to deflect the feelings that come along with it."

"I submit this story being highly aware that I will likely receive backlash if anyone is able to recognize who I am and who I am talking about, but I think the backlash is worth it. My first two years of collegiate debate were filled with sexual harassment. I joined a team with two of my ex boyfriends as members of the squad. The first year wasn't so bad, but the second year I was the only returning woman to the squad. I was consistently silenced in debate practice if I tried to throw out ideas. Silenced by not only my ex, but by all of the other male members of the squad who didn't believe that my opinion mattered. I was often called a "bitch" just because I would disagree with arguments or statements that the men on the squad had made. And multiple times I would be creepily hit on by men on the squad. Four instances particularly resonated with me. The first instance was in an elevator in the hotel at nationals where two of the men on the squad "jokingly" tried to get me to makeout with them for money. The second instance was after I had ended a relationship with someone and I was upset about it so one of the guys on the squad tried to get me to hook-up with him because he "knew he could make me feel better". The third instance was during nationals when one of the male coaches was drinking and he continued to comment on the way I was dressed and how I looked. And the fourth instance was when a joke was made by my ex about me not being useful to the squad at all because I "didn't know anything". Sure it is possible that some of this is just hatefulness, but most of these comments were based around my gender. Additionally, many attempts were made by members of the squad to get me kicked off of the team and all of these attempts were facilitated by my ex boyfriend.

My second story is something that has happened to me at my current university. After ending a relationship here I was met with extreme violence. Some may argue that I ended the relationship badly because I cheated, but hey I'm aware that cheating is wrong to many people and I completely understand that I lost the trust of many of my friends. However, the reaction from my ex-partner was completely unjustified and caused me extreme terror. The day after the relationship ended I told my ex that I didn't want any contact with him and I politely asked for him to leave me alone. He continued to call and text me daily and wouldn't stop harassing me. This all reached its peak when my friend visited me early in the morning to pick up something that they had left at my apartment. My friend told me that my ex was sitting outside in my parking lot waiting for me to come outside and sure enough...there he was...waiting for me. The horror that I felt from being functionally stalked was enough to make me hesitate attending classes that I had with my ex-partner. He also wasn't on my debate team anymore since he was out of eligibility, but yet he still would attempt to show up in our debate practice room (it wasn't until I begged the coaches to keep him away that he stopped showing up). For the next several months he continued to tell people things about our sexual relationship that was private, he would tell others that I had sexually

transmitted diseases, and he would purposefully isolate me from people that had been my friends by having any and all social gatherings in his apartment (where I was not allowed), he also was roommates with several of my friends which he used to turn them against me and now whenever they hear me talking about how I feel harassed they merely respond with "well you should have thought about that before you cheated. You deserve to be treated that way". Just as I mentioned above, some of this may be drama related, but a lot of this is the result of sexual harassment where my ex partner became my stalker because he felt entitled to talk to me and he felt entitled to keep tabs on me because we had dated for years."

"A family member of mine died last year. A flight back from a tournament was delayed to the point that I missed the funeral. I broke down and cried in the airport. Without knowing the circumstances, men on my team just assumed I was being "dramatic" and "overly emotional" because I'm a girl. They were openly cold and mean to me, making it clear that I was being a silly and selfish little girl in their eyes. Because of this perception. I didn't go to the next 3 tournaments and had to be convinced to come back by my coach before NPDA."

"I literally got asked to leave my team in high school because I accidentally wore a red bra under a white shirt and looked "easy."

Where Do You Go If Your Program Isn't Safe?

Not even teams themselves are safe from the structural issues of patriarchy in the debate space. Coaches harass and assault their students and colleagues, contributing to an unfortunate reality that for victims of harassment, there's no safe place to go and no "authority figure" that can help them.

"I was in an emotionally and sexually abusive relationship with my coach. When it was discovered, my other coaches encouraged me to silence other women from the team from coming forward with similar complaints, implying we'd no longer be able to travel or would lose our scholarships "just like Whitman did." When I was eventually successfully coerced into silencing them, one of those coaches laughed in my face and tauntingly asked me what had happened to my feminist values."

"If I have a few drinks in me I apologize for a lot of flirting...I will cock block your man because I can offer a better D" - Texts from my coach, to me."

"I'm not going to lie, I really struggle with even contributing to this, I write this under the auspice that these words won't be used to win someone a round, but to FINALLY better a community that really needs it. I started forensics in HS, the comment card I received back said, "you'd probably debate better if your skirt was longer." My entrance into college forensics as a competitor was being referred to as someone's side

*piece from the local community college. When I started coaching, hardly any coaches talked to me until they realized I was dating one of the writers of "Empire." When I finally started coaching at *University Redacted* (truly a dream of mine from the time I was in HS) a student came to me feeling sexually harassed, when I brought that to our DOF's attention he said he would pass it along to our Title IX officer. Weeks later, I ended up telling the Title IX officer in a meeting about how my job had been altered when I became pregnant--he'd never heard of the issue (to this day, I still have the emails and it turns my stomach when I scroll past them). In a coaches meeting, our staff discussed hiring one of our coaches ex-girlfriends, when I mentioned it might be awkward for our students the question was posed, "why, did you fuck her?" from our DOF. When I told my DOF I was pregnant (as early as I knew, so I wouldn't affect our team schedule any more than possible, I was asked, "how could you do this to me?" When I heard that something sexual might have happened between one of our students and a coach, I was told to not tell anyone. When I asked questions about it, I was threatened and it contributed (along with my "disability") to my DOF taking me off of "coaching duty" to do "paperwork." When I, like so many before me, tried to speak up and got shut down by members of this community. When I failed to speak up for those who I thought needed it, but wasn't quite sure about. Finally, when I had enough and walked away from a full ride scholarship, my identity for more than 1/3 of my life, and everyone I had thought cared about me this community said it was because I had sex with one of my fellow coaches and didn't know who the father of my child was because they will do anything to discredit those who do not stick to the norms and have been for years. This is bigger than everyone's petty bull shit and here's to hoping it finally gets fixed."*

"You should just go into this round and be as big of a bitch as possible." - my coach's only coaching advice to me during prep before a late outround at the NPTE."

And this is only the beginning.

We are tired of being oppressed. We are tired of this being our reality. And it's time to change.

Many more stories will be coming forward – and we'll be in solidarity with each other to make real, tangible change in the community. Stay tuned.