

Tannen's argument culture



The article "The Argument Culture", written by Deborah Tannen, the tendency of the American culture to encourage aggressive two-sided debates over issues is examined. Tannen proposes that communication and effective listening in our society needs to be more productive. In the past, a conversation among people did not need to have a purpose other than to inform each other, but now conversations are presented as a standoff between two opposing parties. However when a conflict between parties occurs, it is shocking to see how badly people distort the tradition of debate.

During debates people find it necessary to attack each other instead of being open to each other's ideas. "The Argument Culture" states that in our society, winning is the ultimate goal. Tannen refers to the American culture as becoming an atmosphere of litigation where people square off against the other person attacking them. She elaborates on this idea by saying that technology and the media has added to this problem in our culture by people becoming less personable and more argumentative.

Technology has evolved to an extent that people prefer phone and computer communications over face to face interaction allowing for more anonymous and harsh communication. This behavior can be misinterpreted and can ensure arguments between parties. Our generation today has been educated and encouraged to think critically of other's views. By encouraging the need to be critical and argumentative, our culture is very biased. One example I have seen of this is watching presidential debates, when watching these so called debates it feels more like watching a boxing match.

Each opponent will take verbal jabs at each other without listening to the opposing viewpoint of another. During these presidential debates all rules

are out the window and each candidate has their own agenda. Their criticisms of each other are displayed when presented with a valid question; the two candidates would respond by ignoring the topic and instead utilizing the opportunity to attack each other's policies. As I have seen for years presidential debates have lost all integrity in our formal debate processes. Individuals that use a debate only to be critical of an opposing side have forgotten the entire purpose of debate in my opinion.

Tannen's essay refers to debate by saying " We must expand our notion of ' debate' to include more dialogue. " I am compelled to be of the same opinion. When I have debated with others I found that people have a tendency to be so narrow-minded that their primary focus is that they win. This causes the situation to become more of an argument than a debate. Tannen describes when people become so focused on winning a debate they are willing to violate a code of ethics.

Tannen states that the American argument culture will compel people to lie, alter the truth, reduce our thinking, and squander our time. People must remember that debate is structured to level the playing field for all the parties involved. When debating a subject is required and you are required to follow rules. The rules include that parties may only use factual information, a proctor is required, and each party gets equal amounts of time to state their case, as in our presidential debates. Since people have forgotten these basic rules, debate as a process has worn down to an unstable form of communication that is described best as the " argument culture".

Despite how people perceive debating in American culture, there will always be more than one view on a subject. The real issue is how we can change our culture's view on debating with an open mind versus always being critical. I believe that our society might actually take the time to look at all sides of the issue sometime in the future. Who knows maybe someone could experience an epiphany, simply from seeing a different side of the issue. Only time will tell if the efforts to change the way people debate is successful.