

Free argumentative essay on gender and conflict resolution

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D. W. Augsburger found that women and men do have fundamental differences in how they regard violence and conflict resolution, with women preferring methods of negotiation and nonviolent resistance to the use of physical force and coercion. Because of differences in culture and socialization, women simply lacked political, economic and military power in the public sphere while they wielded considerable influence in the private and domestic world, especially as the 'power behind the throne'. As societies become more urban and industrialized, though, with more educational and economic opportunities for women, these distinctions may change. After all, there is no realm biological or genetic basis for women to be less violent and aggressive than men, but only a cultural basis that may change over time.

A) Analyze the themes in Augsburger regarding the differences in conflict styles between women and men. What does this have to do with culture? Augsburger asserts that throughout most of human history, men have controlled the major institutions of society and most of the political and military power while women were domestically oriented and possessed private power. In traditional and patriarchal societies, women were often the power behind the throne, particularly in their influence over sons and husbands, and their informal associations and networks with other women. Gender roles have always been defined as part of economics and the division of labor, as biology and reproduction, or through religion and the distinction of public and private spheres of life. Those culturally defined roles change very slowly, such as during periods of industrialization when more women begin working outside the home. One important feature of urban, industrial

society has been more resistance to male domination of the public sphere, demands for equal citizenship rights and educational and economic opportunities, and increased opposition to men “ actively imposing injustice, violence, and exploitation” (Augsburger, 1992, p. 181). Women opposed violence, warfare and aggression because their traditional role had centered on pregnancy and the care and nurturing of children far more than men, also in industrial society this has been changing as they gained more control over reproduction and had more opportunities to live independently of families. Even in the present, though, “ women show a negative orientation toward the use of violent aggression in social, relational, or political matters” and this is why there are always far more men in prison for violent crimes (Augsburger, p. 185). Women prefer negotiation and nonviolent methods to conflict resolution rather than reliance of power, intimidation and coercion. In a world where technology has advanced to the point where weapons of mass destruction can destroy all life on earth, “ female patterns of conflict management are in fact often superior to male styles” (Augsburger, p. 172).

As Kevin Avruch points out, in the past these gender role differences were considered to be hereditary or biological, or at least part of the natural order of society, with women confined to domestic work and men assigned the usual duties of warriors and soldiers. Certainly this was true when warfare was mostly a matter of brute strength rather than using weapons that destroy enemies at long distance. In the modern social sciences, though, explanations rooted in biology and genetics began to fall out of favor over a century ago due to the rise of pluralist and relativist

anthropologists like Franz Boas. They pointed to “ the many and varied cultures of different peoples or societies” and refused to make value judgments between supposedly inferior and superior cultures or those that were more evolved and less evolved according to Western standards (Avruch, 1998, p. 7). Avruch carried this concept even further by declaring that cultures are “ much less stable or homogenous” than proposed by theorists like Samuel Huntington in political science and international relations (Avruch, p. 5). Culture is transmitted to individuals by social groups, and pure cultures no longer exist given the widespread contact between these groups. They are not a timeless set of traditions and customs that are never modified, and individuals are not simply influenced by one culture. Within any modern society, there are many choices of subcultures, religions, ideologies and worldviews that can often be in conflict with those of the mainstream or the ruling elites. For example, the Branch Davidians at Waco had a very authoritarian, apocalyptic and patriarchal worldview that brought them into violent conflict with the ruling institutions of American society, and the methods that law enforcement used to negotiate and end the conflict peacefully were ineffective. Because of the radical difference in worldviews, “ tools and techniques of conflict resolution were culturally biased and of limited use”, since their basic assumptions were based on white, male, middle class assumptions (Docherty, 2001, p. 11).

B. Explain and discuss how your personal experience conforms or differs with the descriptions presented by Augsburger and in the lecture notes regarding differences in conflict styles in women and men. Evaluate Augsburger's stance on how gender affects conflict. Do you agree or disagree with what he

says?

I certainly cannot claim to be an expert on the various cultures that Augsburger discusses, and I think Avruch and Docherty are correct that there are a tremendous variety of local cultures and worldviews of which white Westerners may understand very little. It does seem to me that the distinctions between these must necessarily be diminishing because of mass communications and the influence of global capitalism, at least at the elite levels. In the Western world, capitalism long ago destroyed the really traditional family with arranged marriages, women and children treated as the property of their husbands, dowries and no divorce, and its influence had been spreading to the rest of the world for quite some time (Coontz, 2005, p. 5). Simply because of these economic changes in the world, there is no longer any valid reason to assume that women will always be confined to their traditional private and household sphere or that their worldviews on subjects like war and violence will be dramatically different from those of men. Obviously there are also traditionalists like Al Qaeda and the conservative Islamists who are hostile to Western consumer culture or the idea of men and women having equal rights. I do tend to think that traditional societies really were more patriarchal and authoritarian, and they simply assumed that women should remain in the domestic sphere. Women generally did not have political and military power, except of course for the famous female monarchs of history, although history shows that they could be as brutal and aggressive as men. Until very recently, women did not fight on the battlefield as soldiers, although I know that in situations where they did, such as in Russia during World War II, they were just as capable of killing

as men. Similarly, the SS women who served as concentration camp guards in Nazi Germany committed exactly the same kinds of war crimes and atrocities as their male counterparts. I would say that as culture changes and women have more rights and opportunities, the more traditional ideas that they are less violent and aggressive than men may no longer apply at all.

C. Which side would you take in the debate mentioned in the lecture notes over whether or not gender is a significant influence on conflict and peacemaking behavior? What have you found in your experience and what do you think? Is gender a significant variable and if so how?

There are enough examples in history—or at least in recent history—to prove that women can indeed be violent and warlike, and that there is no natural or biological factor that really prevents them from fighting and killing. They can end up absorbing nationalist and racist views, or the same type of religious and political ideologies that have always justified male violence. There is certainly no biological or physical factor that prevents them from using the same types of modern weapons that are available to men. In my opinion, the more traditional societies and cultures just relegated them to domestic situations where their main concern was housework and taking care of children, so they simply lacked the opportunities to be violent that men have always had. All of this began to change in urban, industrial society, when it was no longer a given that women would be denied equal rights and opportunities for education or to obtain economic and political power. In very recent times, even the old barriers that prevented them from serving in combat as soldiers have begun to fall by the wayside. This change in culture, laws and assumptions that a woman's place was in the home will

probably have the result that women will be less nonviolent and opposed to warfare and aggression than was once assumed. In the modern world, where women have more political, military and economic power, gender differences may become less and less significant on issues of conflict and peacemaking.

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