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ABSTRACT

This study showed that war does have an appeal to both men and women, but that appeal is different and is related to the set of moral concerns that are unique to each gender. To assess the different aspects of men's and women's attitudes towards war, a 48-item Likert-type scale was constructed and administered to 148 students. Results showed that women will support war, at least as enthusiastically as men, when an appeal is made based on empathy for oppressed and vulnerable human beings, or an emphasis is placed on group cohesion and intensification of interpersonal relationships in the community during war. The data indicated that men are more prone than women to justify war according to rational and legal criteria, and that women find it more difficult than men to accept, condone, or justify any acts of violence, killing, and destruction during war. It was also found that men more than women accept stereotypical sex roles during war, e.g., men as warriors and protectors and women as caretakers. (Author/RM)

MEN, WOMEN AND WAR

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN ATTITUDES TOWARDS WAR*

Zur, O., Ph.D., Morrison, A., Ph.D., Zaretsky, E., Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

War has traditionally been seen as a male institution, one which carries little appeal for women. Research on attitudes toward war have consistently shown that men support war more readily than women. This study suggests that, in fact, there exists greater complexity in the differences between the attitudes of men and women towards war.

Gilligan's model of moral development and Chodorow's theory of psychosexual development both suggest that women's concerns and moral reasoning are defined in terms of interpersonal relationships, while men's morality is abstract and legalistic. Applying Gilligan's theory to the context of war, it was hypothesized that men are more likely to accept traditional appeals to war because these are based on legal criteria or in support of abstract principles (e.g. war is justified when treaties are violated or legal rights are abridged, both of which are

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congruent with men's pattern of moral reasoning. Traditional legalistic justifications for war will not appeal as readily to women because, according to Gilligan, women's morality tends to be interpersonally based.

A 48-item Likert-type scale was constructed in order to assess different aspects of men's and women's attitudes towards war. Data from this scale indicate that women will support war, at least as enthusiastically as men, when an appeal is made based on empathy for oppressed and vulnerable human beings, or an emphasis is placed on group cohesion and intensification of interpersonal relationships in the community during war. The data indicate further that: 1) Men are more prone than women to justify war according to rational and legal criteria; 2) Women find it more difficult than men to accept, condone, or justify any acts of violence, killing and destruction during war; 3) Men more than women accept stereotypical sex roles during war, e.g., men as warriors and protectors and women as caretakers.

The differences between men's and women's attitudes towards various aspects of war are examined; these findings and their implications for the differential sensitivity of men and woman to war propaganda are discussed.

Men, Women and War:

Gender Differences in Attitudes Towards War*

Zur, O., Ph.D., Morrison, A., Ph.D., Zaretsky, E., Ph.D.

This paper deals with one of the myths, or commonly held beliefs, about war. The myth is that war is a male institution which holds no appeal for women.

A subtitle to this paper is "What about Sarah" or, in other words, what was the role of Sarah when Abraham was ready to sacrifice Isaac. How does Sarah, as a passive bystander, stand in relation to the aggressive Abraham and the victim, Issac. The Old Testament sheds no light on Sarah's role.

Past research on attitudes towards war have consistently supported the myth, and have shown that men support war more readily than women (Droba, 1931; Greenstein, 1961; Lewis, 1975; Porterfield, 1937; Putney & Middleton, 1962).

Men, according to this myth, are drawn to war for several reasons. Physiologist, ethologists, and endocrinologists see this attraction as innate and hormonal (Frank, 1982; Konner, 1982; Lorenz, 1966); psychoanalysts link it to the oedipal phase (Fornari, 1974; Freud, 1920/1955); and sociologists, anthropologists and social psychologists see it as a result of rigid socialization patterns (Edelman, 1971; Elshtain, 1982; Stiehm, 1982).

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Like childbirth, war is a unique dynamic that cleaves the population along sex lines. This split intensifies traditional sex roles. Men in this context, are warriors, aggressors, and protectors; their rationality and competitiveness directly opposed to women's emotionality, intuition and passivity. A protector, however, implies a protected person, and to women, according to the myth, falls this role, that of the "beautiful soul", peaceful, loving and caring.

Clearly, these roles exist in relation to each other and the nature of this relationship is at the heart of the warrior myth.

It was personal observations I made during my military service in 1973 in the Middle East, that laid the foundation of this study. Many of the seasoned paratroopers in my unit which was kept in the rear away from the action devised any strategy possible to secure service at the front. When I questioned their motives, I discovered that the soldier's desire to return home with a glorious or grisly war story outweighed the fear of injury or death. The protected, waiting at home, are an invisible but potent force at the front.

Past researchers approached subjects with questions like are you "for" or "against" war. They consistently found that men are more likely to accept and justify war than women. This study suggests that in fact there is greater complexity to the phenomena of war and more complexity in the differences between attitudes of men and women towards war.

Gilligan's (1982) model of moral development, and Chodorow's (1978) theory of psychosexual development both suggest that women's concern and moral reasoning unlike men's are defined in terms of interpersonal relation

ships; men's morality is abstract and legalistic. Men are concerned with boundaries between individuals and between men and women. Women have a more fluid sense of boundaries, they focus on the inter-relatedness of human beings (Chodorow, 1978). Men fear intimacy, women fear isolation (Pollock & Gilligan, 1982). Applying Gilligan's theory to the context of war, it was hypothesized that men and women might perceive aspects of war differently because of their different views of morality and their different sets of moral concerns.

A 41 item Likert type scale was constructed in order to assess different aspects of men and women's attitudes towards war. The following four hypotheses were investigated.

The first hypothesis is that men are more likely than women to justify war according to rational or legal criteria. It is hypothesized that due to the abstract and legalistic nature of men's morality, they will respond more favorably to items such as:

Wars are justified when they are fought for defensive purposes

or

War is justified when treaties are violated

The second hypothesis is that women find it more difficult than men to accept, condone, or justify any act of violence, killing, and destruction. Based on Chodorow's model of the differences in men and women's sense of boundaries between human beings, it was predicted that women's greater sense of connections, or empathy, would make them less likely to endorse items like:

Torture of the enemy prisoners can be justified in order to elicite

important information

or

Source of food for the enemy, like crops and domestic animals, should be destroyed during war

The third hypothesis is that men more than women accept the gender-specific sex roles which are related to wartime and war dynamics, e.g., men as warrior, aggressor, and protectors and women as passive, protected, emotional and peaceful beings. Because keeping boundaries clear is more of a priority for men than women, men would be more likely to endorse items such as:

Men are less emotional and therefore better soldiers.

or

Women are too emotional to fight but they are better at taking care of children and the home during war.

The fourth hypothesis is that women will be more likely to endorse war when the cohesion of the community is threatened or the lives of oppressed minorities and helpless children are in jeopardy. Women's concerns for promoting closeness between people and their sense of relatedness to the weak and helpless make them more likely to endorse items like:

Aiding an attacked weak ally justifies war

or

One of the benefits of war is that it intensifies the connection among civilians

or

Any country which violates the right of innocent children should be invaded.

Method

Initially, 200 Likert type items were collected from the literature about war and peace. After initial screening and evaluation of the items, five graduate students were selected to judge the face validity of these items. Finally, 95 items were administered to 198 Community College and University students from which "the best" 41 items were chosen according to the statistical differences in men and women's responses. These 41 items were administered to 148 more students.

The 41 items were divided into four sub-scales, one to test each of the four hypotheses described above.

The reliability of the sub-scales was calculated in two different ways: first, part whole correlations, and second, split half reliability using the Spearman Brown correlation. All items on the four scales correlated within the range of .7304 to .2407 with the total sub- scale score.

Results

The results are presented in Table 1. *t*-tests were performed to evaluate the differences in men and womens responses to each of the four hypotheses. The results from Scale 1 indicate that men are more likely than women to justify war according to rational or legal criteria. Scale 2 results indicate that men are more likely than women to condone or justify acts of violence during war. Results from Scale 3 indicate that men are more likely than women to endorse the notion of traditional sex roles during war. Finally the results from Scale 4 indicate that women are more likely than men to endorse war when the appeal is consistent with female moral concerns.

Table 1

Summary Analysis of the Scale T-test

Variable	Number of cases	Mean	Standard deviation	Pooled Variance Estimate		
				T value	Degree of freedom	2-tail prob
Scale 1						
Female	79	26.2405	7.479	-5.93	148	0.000
Male	71	33.5211	7.531			
Scale 2						
Female	79	29.5190	8.187	-6.43	148	0.000
Male	71	38.9718	9.814			
Scale 3						
Female	79	28.4937	7.022	-5.74	148	0.000
Male	71	35.2958	7,499			
Scale 4						
Female	79	34.6076	7.438	2.11	148	0.037
Male	71	32.0141	7.628			

Discussion

The data from this study support this attempt to debunk the myth that men are for and women are against war. Further, the data support this attempt to extend Carol Gilligan's theory of moral development and Nancy Chodorow's theory of psychosexual development to the context of war. It appears that war does have an appeal to both men and women, but that appeal is different and is related to the set of moral concerns which are unigue to each gender. The literature is filled with studies of attitudes towards war that show men are in favor of war and women are against war (Droba, 1931; Droba & Quackenbush, 1942; Lewis, 1975; Porterfield, 1937). Examination of these studies indicate that the attitude scales used are made up of items which appeal to men's set of moral concerns, i.e., legalistic abstract justifications of violence against some impersonal well-defined "other." These attitude scales are almost totally devoid of items which tap into female moral concerns, items which would reveal the nature of the appeal of war to women. The data of this study indicate that women will endorse war efforts even more enthusiastically than men, when an appeal is made which taps women's sense of inter-relatedness to others and their identification with the weak and oppressed.

This study was inspired by the personal observation that though it is men who actually do the fighting and who actually engage in acts of violence, war itself would be impossible without the collusion of an entire society. In this nuclear age it may be too dangerous to continue to uncritically accept the naive belief that war is an institution which appeals only to men and not to women.

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