Chapter 20

Exploring Peace Perspectives Through the Lens of Gender Inequality:
Using Intersectionality to Examine Inclusiveness

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the relationship between peace processes, gender equality, and communication by introducing feminist and intersectional approaches as tools to assess and deconstruct underlying power structures. The author argues for a human rights-based approach to gender equality and a deconstruction of essentialist understandings of "women," calling for a perspective on peace that is responsive to the experiences of minorities and the marginalized. The chapter seeks to outline ways for individuals and groups to engage around the topics of power, oppression, and marginalization, and to create space for a more inclusive dialogue as the basis for a peace culture. Coeducation, the media, and a change in discussion culture are established as essential in creating a peace culture that allows all individuals to live empowered and fulfilling lives in a peaceful society void of structural violence, regardless of their gender, race, class, or sexual orientation.

INTRODUCTION

The connection between women's human rights, gender equality, socioeconomic development and peace is increasingly apparent – Mahnaz Afkhami (2000), founder and president of the Women's Learning Partnership, former minister for Women's Affairs in Iran and lifetime advocate for the rights of women.

This chapter explores the relationship between promoting peace and fostering dialogue on the individual, communal and societal levels. It focuses on how feminist and intersectional perspectives can provide a valuable tool for examining power structures as well as promoting more peaceful forms of social interaction.

In order to promote equality and peace within and among societies, listening and caring are introduced as human values constituting the foundation of all peace building efforts as it is these practices that lead to an improved understanding of each other's needs and challenges. Furthermore, listening and communication are believed to help identify which actions should be taken to allow all individuals of a society to live just and fulfilling lives and to maintain healthy and sustainable institutional and ecological systems.

The objective of the chapter is to outline a way for individuals and groups to engage with each other around the heated topics of power, oppression and marginalization. It argues that there is a relationship between the lack of understanding of the processes of marginalization as well as the lived experiences of marginalized people and the (re)production of social differences on the individual and systemic levels. It argues, further, that the dialogue around peace is largely male-dominated and blind to the experiences of minorities and all those who are marginalized. By contrast, this chapter builds its line of argumentation on a human-rights based approach that seeks to be more inclusive in all processes. This is not because this inclusion fulfils an opportunistic role by adding minorities to improve an institution's image. Nor is this approach being taken out of a narrowly functionalist belief that all women are 'naturally better at peace negotiation', but because women make up half of the population and are directly and naturally affected by all social, economic and political decisions and should therefore be included in all processes leading up to the outcomes. This is believed to also have a significant impact on gender roles and stereotypes, including introducing care as a human, rather than "just" a female, value.

Three potential opportunities to create a more inclusive dialogue around peace perspectives and promotion are introduced, namely:

1. **Coeducation:** Introducing coeducation, here referring to education seeking to eliminate gender hierarchies, which is mindful of and specifically teaches about privilege, social exclusion, and power structures, into the official school curriculum. This also includes teaching about caring and listening as human instead of gender values.
2. **Media:** Establishing media that is representative of and inclusive to all members of society, which includes inviting individuals, authors, activists and experts with different viewpoints, opinions and backgrounds regarding gender, ethnicity, social class and sexual orientation among others. This also implies rejecting misrepresentations of minorities, particularly those that perpetuate harmful stereotypes.
3. **Establishing a Culture of Discussion:** Fostering a discussion culture that creates space for all voices to be heard, including voices that offer viewpoints contrary to the status quo and introducing an intersectional approach to all discussion, including discussions around peace and security.

The obstacles to achieving gender equality and promoting peace can be daunting, given that inequality is entrenched at all levels of society and therefore requires changing both institutional structures and individual behaviours in order to change the system that continues to systematically provide some groups with fewer resources and opportunities than others (Ram, Strohschein & Gaur, 2014, p.1). The author acknowledges that educating each other on personal experiences, privilege, and bias is not easy, nor does this alone directly produce equality and a peaceful society. However, it is still worth pursuing because peace within and among societies is unlikely to be achieved or sustained without first improving our understanding of how we interact and communicate as individuals and as groups. This includes everybody needing to do their part to identify and challenge the underlying oppressive power structures that impede individuals from living a just, fulfilled and peaceful life.

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