

## A World of Their Own: Acculturation and Views on War and Interpersonal Violence Among Adult Mennonites

ALLYSON MELONI

MARIE HELWEG-LARSEN\*

JACQUELYN M. MACDONALD

AYA INOUE

Dickinson College

*Research shows that the degree of acculturation may affect individuals' views within a given culture as more acculturated individuals may hold values that are consistent with those of the given culture. We examined acculturation and attitudes toward war and interpersonal conflict among adult Mennonites. Consistent with predictions, increased acculturation was associated with favorable views about the use of violence in interpersonal conflicts. Unexpectedly, acculturation was not associated with support of war, likely because the data were collected during Gulf War II. Future research on Mennonites and acculturation should consider views on all types of violence, especially use of corporal punishment.*

It seems that each day there are increasing media reports of violence. Sniper attacks, terrorism, murders, and war are a part of our everyday lives. Using violence in conflict resolution seems to be a worldwide epidemic. But not every culture in the world deems it necessary to use violence to resolve disputes. What factors predict which cultures are more likely to use violence while others remain peacekeepers?

It seems natural that cultures have varying views on how to resolve conflicts. Research shows that war is associated with higher rates of interpersonal violence, especially after the war has culminated (Archer & Gartner, 1984). That is, during a time of war there is an increase in interpersonal violence in the societies that are involved. Several factors shape an individual's attitudes toward the use of violence, especially the attitudes toward the use of war. These factors include religion, age, race, political views, education and gender (Gartner, Segura, & Wilkening, 1997). More specifically, people of liberal religions such as Judaism, younger individuals, minorities, those who have liberal political beliefs (i.e., Democrats), the highly educated, and women tend to view war and interpersonal conflict less favorably. Conversely, traditional religions such as Catholicism, older individ-

uals, those who are conservative in their political beliefs, the poorly educated, and men tend to be more accepting of the use of violence and war in resolution of conflicts (Gartner et al., 1997). It is notable that during a time of war, some predictors, especially gender and religion, have a less significant role in foretelling attitudes about war. For example, Bendyna, Finucane, and Kirby (1996) found that during a time of war, people in the U.S. shared a favorable view of the Gulf War, even though their personal beliefs during non-wartime were different. In other words, individuals who normally would oppose war due to their religious or other personal beliefs supported this action when their own country was involved in a conflict. Thus, during a war the predictors of attitudes toward war may have less power in shaping the attitudes of some individuals.

Of the aforementioned factors, religion is one of the strongest predictors of attitudes toward war and interpersonal conflict. In many cases, individuals who follow the beliefs of more conservative religions such as Catholicism tend to support violent means as an acceptable way to resolve interpersonal problems,

\*Faculty supervisor

while more liberal religions such as the Jewish and Protestant religions tend to value peaceful solutions to conflict (Baer & Mosele, 1971). Because many left wing movements adopt pacifism, pacifists and conservatives tend to fall at opposite ends of the political spectrum. Interestingly, Mennonites defy conventional wisdom by being politically conservative but generally strong on pacifism (Kaufmann, 1989).

The Mennonites are a religious minority in the United States. The Mennonite population is a little over 1 million worldwide with the U.S. population totaling around 320,000 (The Lutheran, 2004). Mennonites are largely present in rural areas in several parts of the U.S. including Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois, and also in several regions in Canada. Mennonites are traditionally a close knit, peaceful congregation who believe in leading a simple life, including wearing plain clothes, using little if any technology, and believing fundamentally in the teaching of Jesus Christ. They believe in personal spiritual responsibility and use service to others as a way to demonstrate their faith. Many Mennonites are missionaries, spreading their messages to the world. They share a belief in community and family (Kaufmann & Driedger, 1991). Though in many ways they do wish to remain a group that is separate from outside influence, Mennonites participate in their community in many different ways. For example, although they are pacifists, during wartime most Mennonites do not object to participating in alternative services although most reject service in the military (Kaufmann & Driedger, 1991).

Mennonites typically see their beliefs as setting them apart from others and also see many distractions from the broader world as interfering with the ability to live a simple Christian life. Thus, Mennonites have historically resisted acculturation (Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia, 1998) and value segregation from the rest of the American population and culture in their personal lives (Kaufmann, 1989). However, there is great diversity among Mennonites ranging from traditional to modern Mennonites. The most traditional Mennonites, like the more well known Amish groups, may not use electricity, telephones, or cars. They may drive buggies and usually attend a private religiously affiliated school only until they have received at most a high school education (Kaufmann & Driedger, 1991; Kurokawa, 1969). On the other hand, less traditional Mennonites, while still valuing a life of simplicity, use all forms of technology including the Internet and cars. Less traditional Mennonites find a college education acceptable and often encourage their children to continue with their education (Kaufmann & Driedger, 1991; Kurokawa, 1969).

Acculturation can be ascertained through values and behavior but also through social categorization. The theory of social categorization suggests that the way in which people classify themselves as part of a group or society has a large influence on the views that they adopt. This theory contends that the extent to which people think of themselves as belonging to the in-group ("us") or to the out-group ("them") affects their emotions and attitudes toward themselves and the group. In two experiments among individuals from the Netherlands and Belgium; Dumont, Yzerbyt, Wigoboldus, and Gordijn (2003) found that when individuals focused on an inclusive identity that included American victims of the September 11, 2001, attacks into their in-group, they were more likely to feel fearful compared with individuals who did not include American victims in their in-group. Therefore, if individuals perceive themselves to be a member of an in-group, it may affect their emotions, attitudes, and behaviors such that their beliefs become stronger and consistent with the beliefs of the group. Some research on Mennonites suggests that as they become more acculturated, they align themselves less with the Mennonite identity. Specifically, Kaufmann and Driedger (1991) found in a sample of over 3,000 Mennonites that ingroup identity and peacemaking (pacifism) were positively correlated ( $r = .33$ ).

Despite the diversity inherent among the different Mennonite groups, the fundamental common ground is the importance of a simple life, focusing on the teachings of Jesus. However, as groups of Mennonites become more different from each other because of acculturation, their views become more diverse as well. Kaufmann and Driedger (1991) found that participants who had attended church-affiliated colleges were more likely to endorse pacifistic values (36% scored high on a measure of pacifism) compared with participants who attended a non-Mennonite college (only 15% scored high in pacifism). Similarly, they found that the greater the agreement was with aspects of Mennonite values, the greater their belief in peacemaking.

The purpose of this present study was to assess the relationship between the degree of acculturation to the American culture that Mennonites express and their favorableness toward violent means as a way of ending both international and interpersonal conflict. There is a paucity of research on Mennonites in general and these attitudes specifically. A sample of sixty-four Mennonites mainly from the Lancaster, PA area was surveyed. The survey measured the relationship between acculturation and attitudes toward war and interpersonal conflict. Consistent with previous research (Kaufmann, 1989; Kaufman & Driedger, 1991), it was

expected that as acculturation toward American culture increased, favorable views about the use of war and interpersonal violence would also increase.

## Method

### Participants

Sixty-four adult Mennonites from four Pennsylvania locations and one Virginia location participated. The locations where participants were surveyed included the River Brethren Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania; the Pennsylvania Relief sale in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; the Millwood Mennonite Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, a retirement community in Lancaster, Pennsylvania; and the Eastern Mennonite Seminary in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Of the total sample, 34% was male, while 61% was female. Two participants did not indicate their gender. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 93 ( $M = 62$  years,  $SD = 22$ ).

### Materials

The research group designed a four-page survey that assessed a relationship between acculturation and several variables such as sexism, body image, family relationships, and attitudes toward war and violence in interpersonal conflict. For the purpose of this study, only a subset of questions was analyzed. These addressed attitudes toward peace and interpersonal conflict in conjunction with the questions on acculturation. Participants rated their answers to all questions on a 5-point scale, which ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

**Acculturation.** Eight acculturation questions were used to assess the degree to which Mennonites felt that their identity was tied to being a Mennonite individual. The four questions that showed an acceptable Cronbach's alpha were as follows: "I feel my beliefs and values separate me from non-Mennonites," "When I am with non-Mennonites, I feel out of place," "I shop for most of my clothes at a Mennonites store," and "Nearly all my friends are Mennonite." The Cronbach's alpha for these four items was .45. Items were reversed scored and combined into a single measure ( $M = 2.56$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ) in which higher scores indicated a greater degree of acculturation.

**Attitudes toward the Gulf War II.** Three questions were concerned with attitudes toward using war to resolve conflicts. These questions included "I am satisfied with the current attempts at peace with other countries," "I believe the U.S should fight terrorism through warfare," and "I support a U.S. war with Iraq." The Cronbach's alpha for these items was .79. Items were combined into a single measure ( $M = 2.44$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ) in which the higher the score, the more favorably the participant's view was toward this war.

**Attitudes toward interpersonal conflict.** Three questions assessed Mennonites' attitudes toward using violence to resolve interpersonal conflict. These questions were "There are situations (such as self defense) where it is appropriate to hit another adult," "Sometimes it is acceptable for adults to yell at other adults to get their point across," and "Protecting your family from harm might at times require violent action." The Cronbach's alpha was .68 for these three items. Again, items were combined to a single measure ( $M = 2.13$ ,  $SD = 0.72$ ) in which the higher the score, the more favorably the participants viewed violence in interpersonal conflict.

### Procedure

A survey was used to measure participants' degree of acculturation as well as attitudes about war and interpersonal violence in solving conflict. Participants from several different locations were asked to take part in the study. At the Pennsylvania Relief sale, surveys were handed to participants directly by a member of the research team. In the other three locations, contacts were made with leaders or members of that particular community who distributed the surveys directly to participants. The surveys were anonymous and participants were not compensated for their participation.

## Results

In order to have better understanding of this sample, preliminary analyses were performed. *T* tests revealed that men and women in this sample did not differ on their acculturation attitudes, attitudes toward war, or attitudes toward interpersonal violence ( $ps > .52$ ). Descriptive statistics presented in the method section showed that mean attitudes toward acculturation, interpersonal violence, and war were below the midpoint of the scale. That is, generally this sample was not acculturated and not in favor of using violence to resolve interpersonal nor international conflict.

To test the hypotheses, Pearson product moment correlations were conducted. The first correlation showed a significant relationship between attitudes about interpersonal conflict and degree of acculturation,  $r(64) = .37$ ,  $p = .003$ , two-tailed. In other words, Mennonites who were more acculturated toward American culture were more favorable toward using violent means to end interpersonal conflict. However, the second correlation between degree of acculturation and attitudes about war was not significant,  $r(64) = .08$ ,  $p = .54$ , two-tailed. That is, there was no significant relationship between acculturation and favorable views toward war.

## Discussion

Consistent with the hypothesis, there was a significant relationship between degree of acculturation among Mennonites and attitudes toward interpersonal conflict such that as acculturation increased, favorableness toward using violence in interpersonal conflict also increased. However, contrary to predictions, more acculturated Mennonites did not hold more favorable views of war.

Thus, we found acculturation related to a favorable attitude toward interpersonal violence but not related to attitudes toward war. Although no literature exists specifically on the associations with acculturation for Mennonites, we predicted (and found) that increased acculturation was associated with increased positive attitudes toward using violence to resolve interpersonal conflict. Presumably, as Mennonites define themselves to a greater extent as belonging to the in-group of Americans, they are less likely to adhere to central Mennonite beliefs of pacifism.

Acculturation might not have been related to attitudes toward war because people's views of war change during the actual time of war. Data collection on this study occurred from April 1, 2003, until April 6, 2003. Since the Second Gulf War commenced on March 23, 2003, we collected our data in the midst of this war. As previously discussed, during wartime, the predictors of attitudes toward war are no longer significant, because individuals usually adopt a favorable view toward war during these conflicts (Bendyna et al., 1996). Similarly, research during WWII revealed that before the war had started, women tended to have a more pacifist attitude than men. However, during the actual war, women's attitudes changed to less pacifist attitudes (Barkley, 1950). Thus, the war minimizes pre-war gender differences in attitudes toward war general. It is also possible that pacifist views are so strongly held in the Mennonite community that these views do not change as a function of acculturation. However, Kaufman and Driedger (1991) found in-group identity among Mennonites significantly related to pacifism; lending support to our explanation that the ongoing war suppressed the relationship between acculturation and attitudes toward war. Further research will have to examine these explanations.

One important limitation of this study concerns the sample representation. Although the data were collected from a variety of settings, the sample was small and was comprised mainly of older, female participants. In addition, not all Mennonite individuals who were approached agreed to participate. Although there is no particular reason to believe that those participants who did not respond were different from

those who did respond, it is important to note that some participants might have refused to participate because they did not fully understand the study's purpose or were suspicious of the researchers' intent.

Further research on this topic could include how the effects of September 11, 2001, have affected people's attitudes toward war. It is possible that Mennonites have become more acceptable of war following the terrorist attacks on 9/11, thus making it more likely for them to abandon their peaceful views. Additional survey research could address this question. Another interesting variable to examine is the use of technology, such as television and the Internet, to communicate about the war. In general, individuals' views are greatly affected by the amount of media coverage (e.g., Gartner et al., 1997). Mennonites do vary on their use of media, since they have long resisted the use of technology. However, variation on use of media is common since not every individual watches the same amount of television or reads the newspaper everyday. It still remains very important to consider media because it has been shown that exposure to the media in particular can shape individuals views about violence and even cause future violent behavior because it is perceived as acceptable (Eth, 2002). Yet another area of interest would be to examine views about corporal punishment and domestic violence. Some research suggests that family violence is associated with approval of other kinds of violence (Erchak & Rosenfeld, 1994; Levinson, 1989), although other research suggests that some types of violence (such as domestic violence) are not necessarily seen a form of interpersonal conflict and therefore is more generally accepted than other types of violence (Barker & Lowenstein, 1997; Falchikov, 1996).

Thus, future research is needed about attitudes toward war and interpersonal conflict, especially, among the Mennonite community. Though the Mennonite community is increasing in size throughout the world, there is a surprising dearth of research about this group. Perhaps the results of this study will help to further interest, not only about the topic of war, but also about Mennonites acculturation into American society.

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