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Exploring Motivations for Not Compromising in an Argument

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research is to explore motivations that cause people to not compromise in an argument. Interviewees (*n=4*) were selected from a general human population at Pittsburg State University, with no preference to age, race, gender, etc. An assortment of interview questions were asked to interviewees with the intention of discovering motivations for not compromising in an argument. Answers were recorded, compared, and analyzed to reveal any trends amongst our interviewees. Ultimately, it was found that 'values' play a major role in not compromising in an argument. Additionally, trends emerged that saw a discontent for American views on arguments, a value for diverse mindsets, differing opinions on how American argumentative culture can be improved, and an agreement that it is likely impossible to improve American argumentative culture.

<div align="center">Intro</div>

The purpose of this qualitative research is to explore motivations that cause people to not compromise in an argument. We found ourselves inspired by the current climate of American politics and increasingly polarized attitudes associated with it. Initially, we found ourselves stumped as to what to even hypothesize about, given the topics ambiguous and open-ended nature. However, pre-existing literature and key characteristics of published political articles guided us to a general ballpark of what to observe. With this guidance, we designed a series of interview questions to ask our subjects (*n=4*), in order to expand upon what we know about not compromising in an argument.

Our admittedly small group of participants gave a somewhat colorful range of answers that held variety, but led us to discover repeated themes amongst these individuals. We often found an underlying theme of values being associated with a lack of compromise, with more importance given to a value leading to less of a compromise when that value is argued over. Additionally, themes of pre-existing knowledge over a topic, morality, mediums for argument (specifically utilizing the internet), and attitudes presented themselves in our study. Future applications of this study may lead us to expand more upon these themes in a more focused manner in order to discover more specific details for these motivations. Additionally, this study could be repeated with the same methods, just with a larger group of people in order to create a more confident set of data. That being said, even with our limited participants, we were able to draw a solid conclusion that both our data and preexisting data supports.

<div align="center">Literature Review</div>

During this evaluation of motivations for not compromising in an argument, a number of resources were gathered to help create the questions used in the methods section. In addition,

they helped flesh out the overall topic and decide on a direction for the analysis. When delving into this question, the surface level thoughts we had coincided with the sources we found. For example, in relation to one of the questions we created, a hypothesis arose having to do with the defending of values. The question is 'Do you think you're more likely to argue about something you value more?' And our thoughts on this is that the subjects are all going to say yes because we feel that it is only logical that you would. (Nelson et al., 2011) Any outlier would be significant in saying so because that could lead to any number of reasons. It would seem that the humanistic nature of defending something you believe in has ingrained itself in our culture. Unfortunately, the theme of antagonistic rebuttal has been associated with debates and arguments for so long that it's practically one and the same. "Perhaps what is needed is a richer understanding of how values are discussed with respect to particular issues." (Nelson et al., 2011) But therein lies the two sided coin to this predicament. Disrespect, or more accurately - conflict. We can call it whatever we like, a discussion, a debate, an argument, but it all stems from one thing. How each of us handle conflict varies just as much as our communications patterns. We can hypothesize that those who don't know much about a topic or are simply uncomfortable with it, may result in higher instances of compromising. (Buysse & Ickes, 1999) And those who are more familiar with the topic and/or value the topic more, result in a higher chance of them having conflict.

However, on the subject of communication patterns and methods managing conflict, there was one that stuck when conducting the necessary research. In summary, it involves the implementation of humor. (Nir & Halperin, 2018) This spawned the interview question - 'When you find yourself in an argument, are you more of a humorist or casual goer, or a more intense person?' This question is meant to broaden our view of the ways people might go about

resolving conflict, understanding one another, and reaching a compromise. The use of humor and casual environments is proven to lessen someone's chance to outright ignore your stance. In the end, we hope to bring more methods to light.

Additionally, we found other outstanding factors of not compromising in an argument, such as the backing of 'values'. While the term 'values' is often used in modern speech and communications, it is important to unambiguously clarify the precise version of the word that we are using. As presented by acclaimed psychologist Daphna Oyserman, values are, "internalizes social representations or moral beliefs that people appeal as the ultimate rational for their actions" (Oyserman 16151). With values being cited as an 'ultimate rational', our research was directed in a way that made us analyze peoples' values and its effect on their compromising in an argument. Additionally, we were made to consider social and moral beliefs through multiple lenses, including culture. In American culture, issues are often framed in a method that appeals to morality and are not often compromised as a result (Tännsjö 330). Materials from the previously mentioned literature led us to consider cultural aspects and domestic mentalities as factors in peoples' lack of compromise.

We then chose to look at America as a whole, under the lens of conflict and compromise. How might other countries compare in the same points of contention? This approach comes with the expectation of analyzing how the subjects view their own country's predisposition to conflict. Conflict is something that is very prevalent in the political sphere and is something that everyone nowadays has an opinion on. When looking at the moral appeal strategies of European political elites, we can see that the American technique is not all that different. (Bos & Minihold, 2021) Both seem to use that strategy of labeling, in this case labeling one party or group as "pure" and the other "immoral". It is also the presence of bias, which plays a huge factor in the existence of

conflict. With the added factor of bias in the conflict, it can be hard for any or all involved to overcome said bias and reach a compromise.

Not only are morals a heavy factor in arguments, but the concept of political funding for organizations and regulations must be considered when analyzing an argument. One must consider why Americans are arguing in the first place. It is reasonable to infer that people do not argue for the sake of arguing, but rather have an ultimate goal in mind for arguing. In a politicized environment, organizations receive government funding and operate with a goal of profits in its economy. However, if the organization receives budget cuts or is outlawed through legislation, then the organization cannot operate properly. In a capitalist economy, a citizen's values are often associated with some sort of organization or company. For example, citizens who support having a strong defense force likely support funding to be allocated to the military, or those who value the ability for women to undergo abortions are likely to support Planned Parenthood. In order for a citizen to have their values progressed through organizations, they advocate for these groups in their arguments (Ryan 411). American citizens risk their organizations losing funding if they do not advocate for the values that they stand for. Additionally, people's jobs and source of living, which their values are likely based around, can be placed at risk if they are not advocated for. For example, farmers are likely to not compromise on their positions regarding the importance of agricultural funding, as doing so would inhibit their way of life. By considering political funding as a motivation in an argument, one can easily see why individuals are not likely to compromise on their positions in an argument, as doing so could potentially risk their way of life.

One counter question we thought of as a result of these issues was, "would compromise eventually balance out any concerns of budget or morality concerns". Compromising on issues

would still see society valuing both sides of an argument simultaneously, right? Well, not

exactly. Multiple pieces of literature suggest that American citizens do not trust that their

compromise will be met with equal compromise from adversaries. It has been found that, in the

last four decades, trust has fallen consistently in citizens' view of each other (Uslaner 581). For a

multitude of reasons, citizens do not often trust each other and are rarely willing to cooperate as a

result. For both the reasons of morality and funding mentioned above, American citizens lacking

trust will not compromise with adversaries, as they believe doing so will result in their own

values and funding being completely abolished. American culture finds that being radical may

be their only solution to this risk. Many individuals who advocate for their own positions in

society will rally support by claiming that compromise is 'submission' to any opposition, and

that those who support their values will likely lose their funding entirely because of a lack of

advocacy (Berry 2). By framing compromise as 'submission', the option of being radical is

therefore framed as the most effective solution to any issues regarding advocating values. Not

only do people frame compromise as 'submission', but citizens believe them. As mentioned

before, American citizens are the most divided in decades, and cooperating with others requires a

trust that they simply do not possess for each other. These issues motivated our research to

consider whether or not people's trust for each other motivates their compromising in an

argument. These trends in American trust and values led us to hypothesize that it is an aspect of

not compromising in an argument. Therefore, we designed our interview and its order of

questions to reveal any relation between these factors and not compromising.

  It seems this is something that all cultures have to deal with. Which brings us into the

other side of the spectrum. The average American would say that, as a culture, we tend to

approach conflict more often and compromise is something that is done selectively. Meanwhile,

Japanese culture sees "conflict as an inherently disruptive phenomenon." (SAFT, 2004) This results in them avoiding conflict as much as possible. It also results in them having a lot of compromise. This is because a lot of aspects in Japanese culture are hierarchical, making Japan a high power culture as well. It's seen as 'you should not cause conflict for others," and this is heavily reinforced throughout the country. However, a latency of conflict in Japanese settings has had positive results. Most notably, the non-avoidance of conflict means that they can realistically deal with it rather than putting blinders on and ignoring the issue. This has the potential for the creation of more critical questions in the data gathering phase.

Method

Four individuals were chosen to be interviewed for this analysis. The individuals were not chosen on any basis other than the fact that they were readily available to the interviewers and knew them in any capacity. Each interview was a one-on-one question and response session, ranging from 10-27 minutes, all while the audio was being recorded for transcribing afterwards. The questions in the interview are relating to the topic question and nothing else. The questions were created by the two interviewers previously to the interview through deliberate thought. Some questions were created by themselves and others were thought up after searching for references. The interviewees were free to not answer any questions they did not feel comfortable answering and could choose not to have any data used. The questions are as follows: 1. How often do you find yourself in an argument or a debate? 2. Do you ever find yourself willing to compromise with the other person? Why or why not? 3. Do you find yourself wanting to win or to learn? 4. When you do find yourself in an argument, are you more of a humorist or casual goer, or more intense? 5. Do you think you're more likely to argue about something you value more? 6. If presented with proven facts that go against your value, are you more likely to defend

your value or look into it? Why or why not? 7. Do you think it's healthy the way Americans view

conflict currently? 8. Do you think this issue can be realistically resolved? 9. Would you prefer it

if everyone thought the same as you or do you think that would be a bad idea? 10. Do you think

as a country, are we compromising too much or not enough? After interviews concluded, the

answers were transcribed both in audio and visual form where answers were written down. Data

was initially read through as a process of open coding. Upon first analysis, we discovered themes

of values, application of the internet, conflict management style, and depth of pre-collected data

being sources for not compromising. Additionally, data was re-read through during a process of

axial coding in order for interviewers to either confirm initial themes or discover potentially new

themes.

<div align="center">Results</div>

This section will be divided into four pieces, consisting of a summary of each of our

interviews answers to the questions. The answers provided here are simply shortened versions,

meaning the response to the questions will be the same as before. They're were a couple of extra

questions that were brought up in some interviews.

Interviewee #1: Q1. They don't really find themselves in arguments or debates that often.

Although they are exposed to some debate because of their circumstances, they don't generally

engage in it unless it is something they really care about. Q2. They said that they aren't really

that confrontational when it comes to needing to find a compromise, however they do like to find

gray areas in people's arguments. In the end, they would rather save their sanity and find a

compromise than to die on any given hill. It also may just depend on the topic like in the

previous question. Q3. They expressed the want to learn rather than to win. They never want to

see it as a competition. Q4. They identified more as a humorist and that it helps emotions level,

and if they escalate it can bring them down. They put themselves at about 90% humorist and that the other 10% would be if the topic was more serious. Q5. 100% yes they would argue more about something they value. "I would make my voice heard." They said if they're indifferent about the subject or it doesn't affect them, then they're not gonna do much about it. Q6. They said that because of their profession as a college professor, they would look into it. They said they're always willing to look into it further and research it because they find it interesting. Q7. They do not believe it is healthy the way Americans view conflict currently. They mentioned how nowadays, simply posing a question can get people to argue with you about something, especially when it's political. "Some people just love poking the bear." They also mentioned how here in America it's almost like there are certain topics that you're not even supposed to bring up. "I would be so scared to be an international person on the receiving end of an argument, even faced with two Americans arguing just for the sheer fact of the lack of understanding that sometimes it's not even about the issue." Q8. "In theory, yes. In reality, I don't think it's ever going to be." They said that there is something about some people's human nature that there are those who just thrive off of conflict and how some just don't ever compromise. "If we took turns and actually listened to each other and understood what they were saying, I don't have to agree with you, I can disagree with you, it's fine, and we can still be friends, we can still move forward." Also touched on the possibility that humans just don't like change. Q9. They think it would be a bad idea. Diversity in views and ideas is good. 10. They think we are compromising too much as a country. Q11. Bonus question on the topic of the internet playing a hand in hot debates and arguments. They think that the internet has perpetuated a culture of toxic online arguments. They said that it's a problem where you just selectively expose yourself to what aligns with your beliefs and nothing else.

Interviewee #2: Q1. They said not too often but when they do it's pretty confined to things like on Facebook. Q2. They said it depends on what it is, if they value it more then they probably won't. Q3. They said they definitely want to learn and that debate should be more for learning, not about saying who's the right one and who's wrong. Q4. They said they're more casual, although they can be more defensive on topics they value more. Q5. An obvious conclusion based on the previous answers but they would be more likely to. Q6. They said if it's something that they know for certain then don't really see a need to go back to it. However, if it's something that they're not quite sure about then they'd be open to looking further into it. Q7. They said they don't think it's healthy. They mentioned how it would be good if we could avoid the culture of Americans being more argumentative and confrontational. Q8. They said it would be hard to fix. They mentioned perhaps in certain companies or organizations they could set an example of how we should discuss things. It was a process called Tone at the Top. They said it was a process where people in higher positions at a company should give an example of how one should interact during a debate. Q9. They said that would probably be a bad idea. Getting as many ideas out to help accomplish things is good. Q10. Feels like we are compromising too much. Q11. Absolutely believes that the internet helps feed the argumentative nature.

Interviewee #3: Q1. They find themselves in a debate "relatively often". When asked to quantify this, they claimed at least once a day. Q2. They find themselves willing to compromise on certain topics. Admittedly, they were "not willing to compromise on issues of morality and oftentimes (their) political beliefs". However, on "silly" topics, they expressed that they were willing to compromise. Q3. They stated that it depends on the topic of debate. When confronted with arguments of morality or strong values, "(they) want to learn why that person thinks that way, but in the end (they) want to be correct". Q4. They find themselves taking arguments

relatively seriously. Oftentimes, they will still use sarcasm and snarky remarks, but would still describe themselves as having an "overarching serious tone". Q5. Yes, especially when it is over moral issues that they value. Q6. They would be more inclined to "look into that subject more". However, if an issue goes beyond science and circles back to morality, then they would not compromise their morals for the argument. For example, this participant is an education major and utilized issues of education funding and policy to explain how they would not compromise on their standpoint regarding this issue. Q7. No. They believe that most Americans, even themself, are unhealthily obsessed with winning an argument and only having things seen from their own perspective. Additionally, they vocalized discontent for the polarized environment of our current political climate, which they state made them feel uncomfortable talking with individuals that they know have differing morals. Q8. "No, absolutely not". Because people are inclined to feel correct, these issues will not be resolved unless everyone has the same viewpoint on topics, which no one will ever see eye to eye 100%. Q9. No. If all people thought the same, then it would be painfully boring, and nothing would get done because there would be no progression in the way that people think. Q10. They don't believe that compromise should occur all the time but do believe that people in our culture should be more open to understanding each other. If we consider circumstances that we have lived through in order to reach an opinion or position in an argument, then we would be more understanding and therefore accepting as a societal whole.

Interviewee #4: Q1. "A few times a month. It could be over any current relevant political issue or anything like that.". Q2. Yes. Because they're not all knowing. People have different perspectives and different sources of knowledge than they do so they're willing to compromise on that fact. However, if an argument is not backed up by facts, then they are less likely to

compromise on it. Q3. "I'm going to say learn, though I will say that sometimes I come from a point of where I think I'm right. I'm trying to understand why their views are different or maybe wrong, but ultimately, it's learning". Q4: It really depends on the topic at hand. If the topic is serious and the argument can have serious repercussions, then they will be more serious when arguing. Q5: Yes. If they value something more, there is a reason they have given it a level of importance. Compromising on that valuable stance feels like disregarding that importance assigned to the given topic. Q6: More likely to look into the facts presented. If they have formed a view or stance based on information gathered before the argument, then they will be willing to further develop that opinion if new or contrary information is presented. If they have not researched a topic before arguing over it, then they are likely to accept the presented information as fact before looking into it. Q7: No. They view the current culture as having a lot of hostility and people are expecting one side to prevail. Ultimately, the best solution could be a mix of the views and maybe an alternative third view could be presented, but even if it is the most effective, people would not accept it due to their polarized attitudes. Q8: If people were willing to edit their stance on subjects, then maybe. They feel as if people solidify into certain ideas and values and are not willing to compromise on them. Q9: No. That would be really boring. They believe that the differences that people have are what define us as people, and therefore taking away our differences would be to strip us of humanity. Q10: Not nearly enough compromise. People are constantly arguing with each other for the sake of proving their own views as right. With everyone acting like this, there is little room left for compromise.

Discussion

Multiple trends emerged when we analyzed our data. Least shocking of all was the common answer for question 5, with all interviewees establishing that they are more likely to

argue over issues that involve their personal values. This outstanding trend came as no surprise to either of us. However, this question did open the door for us to discuss the application of values in an argument. All interviewees stated that values had some form of dictation over their views on arguments. Interviewee #3 continuously circled back to values as a motivating factor in multiple aspects of an argument, including lack of compromise and willingness to do further research on contrary data. While that particular interviewee continuously mentioned the concept of values, all interviewees mentioned values in a lesser context but still identified values as a motivating factor.

It was also notable that all interviewees vocalized a value for diverse mindsets. Question #9 extracted the opinion of whether or not our interviewees would prefer it if all people thought the same. Unanimously, our interviewees answered 'no' for a multitude of reasons. Interviewees #3 and #4 believed that a uniformly thinking society would be 'boring', and vocalized an approval for diverse perspectives in society. Interviewees #1 and #2 also believe that diverse minds in society are 'good' for society. Multiple answers allude towards diverse mindsets being a cause for societal progression and gives society the ability to 'get things done'. Interviewee #4 even went as far as to claim diversity as a core trait of humanity, stating that, "taking away our differences would be to strip us of humanity". It is easy then to draw a conclusion that people overall value diverse thinking in society. That being said, it is also notable that despite valuing diverse thinking, they all vocalized a disapproval for how Americans view conflict.

Additionally, it was also notable how subject matter influenced our interviewee's attitudes towards arguments. All of our interviewees, in response to question 4, mentioned that the topic of an argument would determine their attitude during an argument. Specifically, we

discovered trends of attitudes reflecting the severity of an argument's topic. For example, Interviewees #1, #2, and #4 all disclosed that their attitude would change with certain subject matter, with Interviewees #1 and #4 specifically mentioning a change in attitude if a topic was more "serious". Interviewee #4 indicates that they would change their attitude to be more serious if discussing or arguing over a serious topic. That being said, one can conclude that people's attitudes and behaviors change to adapt to content that they are focusing on. One may find this claim to be superficial. However, we can first handedly account that (outside of this study) not all people behave this way. Future studies may be possible to explore adaptations for behaviors in arguments, but this was not the intended area of research for this study.

On the topic of whether or not they thought that the way Americans viewed conflict was healthy, all of the interviewees stated that it was not healthy. The various points brought up orbited around the fact that Americans have perpetuated a stereotype of being very argumentative, confrontational, and having an overall sense of hostility when debating. Each interviewee stated certain discomforts relating to popular American topics like politics and polarization. Due to the fact that every subject said they think that America views conflict and debating wrong, it goes to show that people in America feel almost intimidated by our own culture. We also seem to have those in society who love to argue, but not certain topics because that would be going too far. Meanwhile we have a constant urge to close the gap and reach a compromise on how we go about debating.

Despite a unanimous discontent for American views on conflict, the interviewees' view on American compromise was split 50/50. Interviewees #1 and #2 both vocalized a view that American arguments see too much compromise, whereas Interviewees #3 and #4 believe that not enough compromise occurs in American argumentative culture. Interviewees #3 and #4 point to

increasingly polarized attitudes being the cause for a lack of compromise, vocalizing that people should be willing to understand each other. Interviewees #1 and #2 based their answers on personal experiences of compromising their own morals in order to appease a greater societal view of morality. One can conclude that, despite having common opinions that a problem exists in American argumentative culture, that there are differing opinions on how we as a nation should respond to this problem.

When being asked about whether or not it would be possible to realistically solve the problem of how Americans view conflict, 3 out of the 4 said that it would be impossible. And even then, the final interviewee who said it was a possibility, brought up a change in human nature that a couple of the previous interviewees said would be unrealistic to occur. Several of the subjects brought up a concern of it being impossible for any given person to see the same as each other. This is interesting when compared to the results of question #9, seeing as how all the subjects thought it would be bad if everyone thought the same thing, on top of viewing it in a negative way. Two of the interviewees expressed a want for civil discussion in debates and they gave short examples of how it would be framed. It is clear that we yearn for a form of argument where we are civil in our methods and are able to have calm human interactions. Although it seems the only thing we can compromise on is the fact that we can not compromise as a country. And blowing it up into a global scale, it was brought up that most of the arguments in the world happen online rather than in person. This would be another point that would be beneficial to returning to.

In regards to question #6, the question about being presented with proven facts that go against their values, and being more likely to defend it outright versus looking into it, each interviewee stated they look into it but with different caveats. For example, interviewee #1 said

that they would look into it gladly simply because that's the kind of person they are and that they love to learn. And interviewee #4 was very open to accepting that they are not all-knowing and would archive the information for later development. Meanwhile, interviewees #2, and #3 both said that they would not see a reason to go back and look into it if it was something that they had already looked into. But if it was something they were not familiar with then they would be more likely to look into it. It is possible that this might confirm the popular thoughts that no matter what, if you go into an argument about a topic you value, you are less likely to change your stance despite being given proven facts. This division in viewpoints may show a difference in personality rather than looking at the topic matter in question. It would be beneficial to look at this point in the context of psychology rather than communicative evaluation.

<div align="center">Limitations & Implications</div>

Limitations is this qualitative analysis starts with the number of four interviewees. It is impossible to extrapolate a full conclusion for the entirety of argumentative American culture in just four individuals from southeast Kansas. Another limitation is the number of questions asked. More questions could have been asked to gather a larger set of data to analyze. The implications of this study will hopefully be beneficial in further investigation of debate culture. Additionally, you could blow this study up into a national or even global scale. One could do a similar study focusing on the political sphere of America. As well as taking this same procedure to other countries and analyzing how different cultures might go about answering the same questions. In the end, our evaluation here is only a small substrat of not just the nation but of the world as a whole. And further investigation would be constructive in understanding arguments and motivations for a larger, more diverse group.

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