

WHAT PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES CAN OFFER TO SOCIAL CHANGE MOVEMENTS

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In Canada and many other countries, voices from across the political spectrum are using the metaphor of “war” to describe contentious debates on a diverse range of topics. While the so-called culture wars are poorly defined, there is certainly evidence of increasing affective polarization (strong negative feelings toward out-group members). Many conflicts prominently feature destructive approaches based on ineffective theories of change. Even social change movements fighting for goals that are closely aligned with those of peace workers—achieving more egalitarian societies that respect the dignity and human rights of all and overcome systemic discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and other identity characteristics—appear to urgently need the knowledge that exists in fields like peace and conflict studies. The reasons for this, and the particular insights that peace and conflict experts have to offer to those seeking to achieve positive interpersonal and intergroup peace (i.e. peace grounded in justice), will be explored.

INTRODUCTION

This article explores several of the drivers behind the poorly defined phenomena metaphorically referred to as “culture wars,” offering examples of the dynamics at play in destructive and affectively polarized conflicts.

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