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Lay Beliefs and Intergroup Contact: Examining the Serial Mediating Roles of Forgiveness and Perceived Conciliatory Attitudes in Individuals Exposed to Armed Conflict

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ABSTRACT

In an increasingly globalized and multicultural world, understanding people's views regarding cultural diversity, often referred to as lay theories of culture or lay beliefs, is essential for improving intergroup relationships. This study focuses on four prevalent lay theories: assimilation, colorblindness, multiculturalism, and polyculturalism, which influence how individuals perceive and interact with other cultural groups (Rosenthal & Levy, 2012). Although previous work has examined the ways in which these lay theories influence prejudice reduction, tolerance, and cultural adaptation, the way in which such beliefs influence forgiveness and perceived conciliatory attitudes remains underexplored. This study specifically examines whether these beliefs affect the processes of forgiveness and perceived conciliatory attitudes, hence enhancing intergroup communication. A sample of 990 armed-conflict exposed individuals answered a packet of scales measuring lay beliefs (polyculturalism, multiculturalism, colorblindness, & assimilation), forgiveness, perceived conciliatory attitudes, and intergroup contact. The results revealed that forgiveness and perceived conciliatory attitudes serially mediate the relationship between lay beliefs, particularly polyculturalism and multiculturalism, and intergroup contact. This suggests that individuals who embrace polycultural and multicultural beliefs are more likely to exhibit forgiveness and display conciliatory behaviors, which, in turn, contribute to improved intergroup relations. Overall, this study highlights the importance of understanding lay theories of culture, particularly polyculturalism and multiculturalism, in shaping individuals' perspective and influencing intergroup relations. Keywords: Lay theories of culture, forgiveness, perceived conciliatory attitudes, intergroup contact, armed conflict

BACKGROUND

In an increasingly globalized and multicultural world, understanding individuals' beliefs about cultural diversity, referred to as lay theories of culture, is essential for improving intergroup relations. This study focuses on four prominent lay theories: polyculturalism, multiculturalism, colorblindness, and assimilation, which influence how people perceive and interact with other cultural groups (Rosenthal & Levy, 2012). Polyculturalism emphasizes the interconnectedness and historical exchange between cultures, while multiculturalism advocates for the recognition and respect of cultural differences. In contrast, colorblindness downplays racial differences, and assimilation promotes the integration of minority cultures into the dominant culture. These ideologies have distinct consequences for intergroup dynamics, with polyculturalism being associated with greater comfort and engagement with diverse groups, promoting positive intergroup contact (Rosenthal & Levy, 2010, 2012; Pedersen et al., 2015). Research has shown that these beliefs impact behaviors such as prejudice reduction, intergroup tolerance, and cultural adaptation (Bernardo et al., 2013; Pedersen et al., 2015; Verkuyten, 2009). However, the role of these lay theories in processes like forgiveness and perceived conciliatory attitudes, particularly in post-conflict settings, remains underexplored. This study posits that individuals' cultural beliefs influence their capacity for forgiveness, which subsequently enhances perceived conciliatory attitudes and fosters better intergroup relations. Understanding this relationship could contribute to peace-building efforts, particularly in politically charged environments where intergroup hostility exists (McCullough, 2000; Auerbach, 2004). From this perspective, the research seeks to emphasize the role of lay

theories in fostering positive psychological outcomes and facilitating stable, harmonious intergroup relations following conflict.

METHODS

This study employed a cross-sectional design to examine a serial mediation model in which forgiveness and perceived conciliatory attitudes mediated the relationship between lay beliefs and intergroup contact among survivors of the 2017 Marawi siege in Lanao del Sur. Data were collected using a paper-and-pencil survey, translated from English into Tagalog and Maranao via a forward-backward translation process to ensure linguistic accuracy. Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball sampling, targeting individuals directly affected by the siege, with emphasis on those from the most impacted areas.

Sociodemographic data were collected alongside established scales measuring cultural ideologies, forgiveness, perceived conciliatory attitudes, and intergroup contact. Instruments included the Polyculturalism Scale, Multiculturalism Scale, Colorblindness Scale, and Support for Assimilation Scale; the Forgiveness Scale; the Transgression and Reconciliation Checklist; and the Intergroup Contact Scale. These measures provided reliable assessments of participants' beliefs, emotional responses, and intergroup experiences.

Data were analyzed using serial mediation analysis via the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 6) (Hayes, 2012). Missing values were addressed through the expectation-maximization method, and indirect effects were estimated using nonparametric bootstrapping (10,000 samples), controlling for age and gender. This approach allowed for testing whether forgiveness and perceived conciliatory attitudes sequentially explained the effects of lay beliefs on intergroup contact.

RESULTS

The study investigated the significant intercorrelations among lay beliefs, forgiveness, perceived conciliatory attitudes, and intergroup contact, as well as the serial mediating roles of forgiveness and perceived conciliatory attitudes across four cultural belief systems: assimilation, colorblindness, multiculturalism, and polyculturalism.

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations among the independent variables - lay beliefs (support for assimilation, colorblindness, multiculturalism, and polyculturalism) and the dependent variables, including intergroup contact, forgiveness, and perceived conciliatory attitude. Significant positive correlations were observed between intergroup contact and the lay beliefs of colorblindness, multiculturalism, and polyculturalism. In terms of forgiveness, significant positive correlations were found with support for assimilation, multiculturalism, and polyculturalism.

Table 2. Path Analysis Result of Serial Mediation in terms of Intergroup Contact

Path Indirect Effects SE BC 95% CI

LL UL

Support for Assimilation → Forgiveness → Perceived conciliatory attitude → Intergroup Contact
.0045 .0033 -.0003 .0125

Colorblindness → Forgiveness → Perceived conciliatory attitude → Intergroup Contact
.0007 .0007 -.0003 .0025

Note: All coefficients are unstandardized; * $p \leq 0.01$; $p \leq 0.05$; significant indirect effects are indicated in boldface. Abbreviations: SE, Standard Error; LL, Lower Limit; UL, Upper Limit

Figure 1. Serial mediation of forgiveness and perceived conciliatory attitude in the relationship between support for assimilation and intergroup contact with standardized beta values. $p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$.

Figure 2. Serial mediation of forgiveness and perceived conciliatory attitude in the relationship between colorblindness and intergroup contact with standardized beta values. $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Serial mediation analyses using PROCESS macro showed that forgiveness and perceived conciliatory attitudes did not significantly mediate the relationships between support for assimilation or colorblindness and intergroup contact. These findings suggested that although these belief systems emphasize unity and sameness, they may not necessarily foster the emotional or perceptual processes (forgiveness and recognition of conciliatory gestures) that lead to meaningful intergroup contact.

Table 3. Path Analysis Result of Serial Mediation in terms of Intergroup Contact

Path Indirect Effects SE BC 95% CI

LL UL

Multiculturalism → Forgiveness → Perceived conciliatory attitude → Intergroup Contact
.0010 .0008 .0000 .0030

Polyculturalism → Forgiveness → Perceived conciliatory attitude → Intergroup Contact
.0017 .0012 .0001 .0046

Note: All coefficients are unstandardized; * $p \leq 0.01$; $p \leq 0.05$; significant indirect effects are indicated in boldface. Abbreviations: SE, Standard Error; LL, Lower Limit; UL, Upper Limit

Figure 3. Serial mediation of forgiveness and perceived conciliatory attitude in the relationship between multiculturalism and intergroup contact with standardized beta values. $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.01$.

Figure 4. Serial mediation of forgiveness and perceived conciliatory attitude in the relationship between polyculturalism and intergroup contact with standardized beta values. $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.01$.

Conversely, the analyses revealed significant serial mediation effects for both multiculturalism and polyculturalism. Specifically, individuals endorsing these beliefs were more likely to experience greater forgiveness, which subsequently heightened their sensitivity to perceived conciliatory attitudes from outgroup members. This sequential process ultimately facilitated more frequent, positive, and meaningful intergroup contact. These findings highlight that valuing cultural diversity and recognizing the mutual influence between cultural groups not only promotes emotional reconciliation but also encourages constructive and cooperative intergroup behaviors. The results underscore the important role of inclusive cultural ideologies in shaping attitudes and behaviors that strengthen social cohesion, reduce intergroup tensions, and support harmonious interactions across diverse communities.

CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to explore the relationship between lay beliefs (i.e., polyculturalism, multiculturalism, colorblindness, and assimilation), and intergroup contact, as serially mediated by forgiveness and perceived conciliatory attitudes. The findings provide valuable insights into the psychological and social processes that promote positive intergroup relations. Results showed that individuals endorsing polycultural and multicultural beliefs were more likely to demonstrate forgiveness and perceive higher conciliatory attitudes from outgroup members. These processes, in turn, facilitated more frequent and constructive intergroup contact. In particular, belief in the interconnectedness of cultures (polyculturalism) or the recognition and respect for cultural diversity (multiculturalism) appeared to foster emotional healing and reconciliation, which are crucial for building bridges between groups. Conversely, colorblindness and support for assimilation did not produce similar patterns, suggesting that minimizing or ignoring cultural differences may limit the development of meaningful intergroup relationships. Overall, these findings underscore the importance of inclusive cultural beliefs in fostering emotional and relational pathways that enhance intergroup understanding, cooperation, and social harmony.

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