Learning about moral exemplars and intergroup reconciliation

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Psychological understanding of intergroup reconciliation processes

- Identity change
- Emotional change
- Needs satisfaction
- Cooperation
Psychological barriers to intergroup reconciliation

- Evaluation of out-groups
- Lack of intergroup trust and presence of negative emotions
- Lack of meaningful contact
- Moral disengagement
Evaluation of social groups

• Warmth and competence \((Fiske \ & \ Cuddy, 2006)\)

• Warmth = sociability and morality \((Leach \ et \ al., \ 2007)\)

• Morality judgements as a fundamental dimension determining evaluations and behavioral tendencies towards others (e.g., \(Brambilla \ et \ al., \ 2012\))
Research on *moral exemplars*

- **Assumption**: perceptions of morality are vital for understanding and regulating intergroup relations

- **Question**: what are the effects (implications) of learning about moral behavior on intergroup reconciliation processes in post-conflict societies?

- **Hypothesis**: learning about moral exemplars (individuals who have displayed strong prosocial (e.g., heroic) behavior at the risk of their own life) will positively facilitate reconciliation processes
What have we done so far?

• Eight experimental studies
• Five clusters of intergroup relations
• Three contexts (Armenian and Bosnian genocide; WWII)
• Focus on both historical perpetrator and victim groups
• Main dependent variables: openness to contact; intergroup forgiveness; and belief in reconciliation (self-reported measures)
The role of intergroup contact for intergroup reconciliation processes

• Improves intergroup relations (e.g., Allport, 1954; Hewstone & Brown, 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006)

• Facilitates perspective-taking and intergroup trust (Hewstone et al., 2006); acknowledgment of ingroup responsibility (Čehajić & Brown, 2010); and forgiveness (Čehajić et al., 2008)

• However (in reality) we face both structural and psychological barriers to intergroup contact making contact either rare or superficial
Psychological barriers to intergroup contact

• Attribution of ‘evil’ nature to former perpetrator group (Bar-Tal, 2013) by victim group members leading to negative essentialized representations of ‘others’

• Absence of intergroup trust (Kelman, 2005; Noor et al., 2008)

• Beliefs about ‘evil’ nature of former victim group (Bandura, 1999) leading to higher levels of justifications of misdeeds committed in the past
Eliciting contact through moral exemplars

- Tested the moral exemplars hypothesis in two contexts (genocide committed against Armenians by Turks in 1915 and WWII context understanding Polish-German relationships)

- Examined both the effects of ingroup and outgroup moral exemplars on openness to contact

- Employed an experimental design (reading a story on heroic acts performed by an ingroup or outgroup member vs. an unrelated/irrelevant group)
Contact interventions in post-conflict societies

• Effectiveness of contact intervention is affected by the content of conversations (e.g., discussion related to the past) and consequently might be reduced in historical contexts of conflict (e.g., Bilewicz, 2007; Paluck et al., 2018)

• Can the effectiveness of contact interventions be improved through moral exemplars?
Making contact more effective through moral exemplars

• Evaluated two contact intervention studies (conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina)

• Design: pre/post test design including a contact intervention (including exposure to moral exemplars) between members of former perpetrator and victim group
Intergroup forgiveness

- Forgiveness is regarded as an essential pillar of sustainable intergroup reconciliation (Čehajić et al., 2008; Hewstone et al., 2008; Noor et al., 2008)
Eliciting forgiveness through moral exemplars

• Context: Armenian genocide

• Design: exposure of Armenian participants to examples of Turkish people rescuing Armenians during the 1915 genocide (two studies)

• Three conditions: manipulation of frequency of moral exemplars (rare vs. more frequent)

• Dependent variables: perception of outgroup morality and intergroup forgiveness
Moral Exemplars Model of Intergroup Reconciliation


Ingroup Moral Exemplars

- sense of moral acceptance
- positive emotions
- contact intentions

Outgroup Moral Exemplars

- perceived outgroup morality
- positive emotions
- contact intentions
- belief in Reconciliation
- intergroup forgiveness

Moral Exemplars
Open questions

• What are the underlying mechanisms of the moral exemplars effects on intergroup reconciliation correlates?
  • Work by Hein et al., (2015) suggests violation of expectations as a potential underlying mechanism of learning about outgroups’ morality

• What specific emotion is regulated in this process and how?
  • positive affect through cognitive re-appraisal of shared morality

• What type/content/conditions of moral behavior (historic relevant heroism?) is driving these effects
  • recent study by Janković & Čehajić-Clancy (in press) on media representation/reporting of disliked outgroups using moral exemplars from the present (vs. historic)
Social and policy implications

• **Contact intervention programs** for peace and reconciliation ought to focus on messages of shared morality through stories or encounters with heroic helpers from the past

• **History education** ought to introduce factual stories of humanity and morality (*Psaltis, Carretero, & Ćehajić-Clancy, 2017*)

• Representations of others as equally moral across **mass media** including the entertainment industry
Thank you for your attention.

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