

Forum Theater Can Improve Intergroup Attitudes, Sense of Community, and Collective Action Intentions: Evidence From Liberia

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After a civil war or other forms of mass violence, a society needs to reestablish trust between formerly conflicting groups and take peaceful collective actions to address the root causes of the conflict. We propose that one method of facilitating improved intergroup attitudes, a sense of community, and collective action intentions is Forum Theater (Boal, 1989); we tested this prediction in postwar Liberia. In 2 communities, 218 diverse Liberians participated in a field experiment evaluating 2 Forum Theater plays (one about rebuilding trust following intergroup conflict and one about a public health issue); we also included a control group that did not receive any intervention. Both Forum Theater interventions increased participants' sense of community and willingness to engage in collective action. Only the play about intergroup conflict increased intergroup trust and reduced social distance toward a disliked group. Specifically tailored Forum Theater thus has the potential to improve intergroup attitudes, sense of community, and collective action intentions in postconflict societies.

Public Significance Statement


In a postwar society, the community intervention method of Forum Theater strengthened participants' connection to their community and motivated them to collectively create change. When the content of the interactive intervention was tailored to address (rather than avoid) conflict between groups, participants' attitudes toward rival groups improved, such as becoming more trusting.

Keywords: Theater of the Oppressed, reconciliation, intergroup contact, postconflict, community intervention

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Mass violence dissolves the social fabric of a society, erodes social cohesion, and elicits intergroup mistrust (Kelman, 2005), which can contribute to further violence (Hameiri, Porat, Bar-Tal, Bieler, & Halperin, 2014). To break this vicious cycle, the society needs to reconcile. Reconciliation is both a process and an outcome that involves formerly adversarial groups trusting each other, enjoying secure social identities, and living in an equality-based environment (Nadler & Shnabel, 2015). Here, *intergroup trust* refers to a “willingness to become vulnerable to the behavior and actions of an outgroup, where the outgroup’s actions are outside of one’s control and the outgroup is perceived to be of questionable character” (Kappmeier, 2016, p. 135). To achieve an equality-based environment, people often have to engage in collective action to ensure (re)structuring of power in the society. However, little is known about which methods and contents of community interventions effectively promote reconciliatory attitudes and how they do so (Stephan, 2008). In this article, we propose that a specific theater-based community intervention method, Forum Theater, can strengthen some reconciliatory attitudes, specifically intergroup attitudes and collective action intentions, in a postwar context. We tested this with a field experiment in two Liberian communities.

Forum Theater

Inspired by Freire’s (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, the Brazilian theater practitioner Augusto Boal (1989) developed Theater of the Oppressed to strengthen people’s skills for achieving social justice. One of its methods is Forum Theater, in which actors portray an issue that culminates in a conflict (typically an act of oppression). Then a facilitator (the “joker”) asks the spectators for potential solutions and invites them on stage to become “spect-actors”—replacing an actor and replaying the scene to reach a more constructive and just outcome. This process repeats until all proposed solutions are enacted. Forum Theater thereby encourages mindful observation, critical thinking, questioning, and sensitive communication and uses role-play to practice skills for taking action. Forum Theater has helped promote social change in various settings (e.g., Amnesty International, 2006; Christensen, 2013; McMahon et al., 2015; Wernick, Kulick, Dessel, & Graham, 2016). Of most relevance, practitioners have used this method to promote peace in postconflict societies, including the Democratic Republic of Congo (Search for Common Ground, 2007), Bangladesh (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2006), the Maldives (United Nations Development Programme, 2012), and Kenya (Arendshorst, 2005). Although the Forum Theater method is widely used, no known research has investigated whether and how it and/or its specifically tailored contents influence psychological processes that are important for improving intergroup relations after a (civil) war.

Forum Theater’s Potential for Changing Attitudes and Intentions

Forum Theater has various characteristics that make it a promising method to improve intergroup attitudes and increase collective action intentions after intergroup conflicts. First, Forum Theater conducted with people from formerly adversarial groups facilitates intergroup contact in which audience members work

together to reach a solution for a conflict in the play. Being in contact and working toward a common goal can improve intergroup attitudes (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011), including increasing intergroup trust (De Tezanos-Pinto, Mazziotta, & Feuchte, 2017; Tam, Hewstone, Kenworthy, & Cairns, 2009), which can in turn decrease social distance (Tam et al., 2009). Second, the experience of watching, discussing, and changing a Forum Theater play could also increase participants’ sense of community, which increases support for social change (Neufeld, Gaucher, Starzyk, & Boese, 2019) and collective action behaviors (Mannarini, Talò, & Gelli, 2014; Talò, Mannarini, & Rochira, 2014); collective action is often an important part of achieving the societal equality needed for reconciliation (Shnabel & Ullrich, 2016). Third, Forum Theater can be tailored to an audience’s needs, situation, and language: It allows audience members to generate and role-play different solutions to a pressing community issue. Doing so can increase participants’ sense of self-efficacy to create change (Bandura, 1986) and, consequently, their collective-action intentions (van Zomeren, Postmes, & Spears, 2008). Fourth, Forum Theater provides a safe, nonthreatening environment to address different difficult topics and allows participants to develop empathy for others and clarify misunderstandings.

In sum, Forum Theater plays can elicit specific psychological processes that are important for improving intergroup attitudes. They can bring together people from different groups and allow for content tailored to fit the targeted audience’s needs, situation, and language. However, no prior research has investigated whether tailoring the contents to a specific topic yields benefits beyond the effects of the interactive method. In addition, it is unknown whether Forum Theater can improve intergroup attitudes or increase collective action intentions through an increased sense of community and self-efficacy—let alone in a postconflict intergroup setting.

To Avoid or Address Intergroup Conflict in a Community Intervention?

Bringing together people from different groups can foster positive intergroup attitudes, including increased intergroup trust (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). However, intergroup encounters are not always successful. Positive intergroup interactions can leave disadvantaged groups with the false impression that race relations are fair, thus reducing their propensity to take the collective actions necessary to promote more just social relations (Dixon, Levine, Reicher, & Durrheim, 2012; Droogendyk, Louis, & Wright, 2016; Saguy, Schori-Eyal, Hasan-Aslih, Sobol, & Dovidio, 2017; Wright & Lubensky, 2009). Furthermore, under certain conditions, intergroup interactions can also heighten intergroup tensions (Guffler & Wagner, 2017; Saguy, 2018). It is still unclear how to structure and focus intergroup encounters so that they have the most positive impact.

For instance, one question is whether encounters should focus on or avoid the topic of intergroup conflict—both approaches are popular in intergroup encounters for reconciliation. Interventions that avoid the conflict typically highlight commonalities across groups (e.g., the coexistence model; Allport, 1954; Maoz, 2000), foster common goals (e.g., the common projects model; Aronson & Patnoe, 1997; Sherif, 1966), or center around emotion regulation or lay group theories (e.g., Čehajić-Clancy, Goldenberg, Gross, &

Halperin, 2016; Cohen-Chen, Crisp, & Halperin, 2015). These approaches are less prone to evoke painful feelings, verbal disagreements, and discomfort, all of which can arise when discussing controversial conflict issues (Bilali & Vollhardt, 2013; Bruneau & Saxe, 2012; Paluck, 2010). However, by shifting participants' attention away from the conflict, these strategies might only temporarily and superficially improve intergroup attitudes (Maoz, 2011; Shnabel & Ullrich, 2016). Thus, some intergroup encounters address the conflict directly, such as by allowing participants to hear from persons who helped adversarial groups (Čehajić-Clancy & Bilewicz, 2017) or through the sharing of personal and group stories about the conflict (e.g., the Narrative Model; Bar-On & Kassem, 2004; Maoz, 2011; Ugarriza & Nussio, 2017). Addressing intergroup conflict might be necessary to improve intergroup attitudes in a multiethnic community because the salience of social identities is important for intergroup attitude change (Brown & Hewstone, 2005). Also, specifically tailored interventions are more likely to be effective than nontailored ones (Stephan, 2008). In this study, we tested this assumption and, for the first time, compared the effectiveness of two theater-based interventions that differed in their approach: addressing versus avoiding intergroup conflict.

The Liberian Context

The West African Republic of Liberia was founded by former slaves brought from the United States back to Africa. These Americo-Liberians ruled the country for more than 100 years, suppressing the 16 ethnic groups that had been living there before their arrival. This changed in 1980, when Samuel Doe, belonging to the Krahn ethnic group, became president through a coup d'état. During his reign, people of the Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups were favored for state employment. After a failed coup, Doe massacred people who belonged to the Gio and Mano groups. In 1989, Charles Taylor and a small group of rebels recruited Gio and Mano adults and children to start civil wars. Soon, many Liberians in various factions, often along ethnic lines (e.g., Gio and Mano against Krahn and Mandingo), fought, killed, raped, tortured, and looted all over the country (Ellis, 1999). Two civil wars lasted until 2003. Of the approximately 2.5 million people living in Liberia before the wars, 85% were either killed, internally displaced, or fled the country (Cain, 1999). Resultant tensions between Liberia's 17 ethnic groups prevail today. Reconciliation is still high on the national agenda and is defined as a "process of overcoming social, political, and religious cleavages; mending and transforming relationships; healing the physical and psychological wounds from the civil war, as well as confronting and addressing historical wrongs including the structural root causes of conflicts in Liberia" (Ministry of Internal Affairs et al., 2012, p. 2).

The Present Research

The present research aimed to explore the potential of Forum Theater as a method for addressing conflict in postconflict communities and its mechanisms of influence. Specifically, we examined its effects on social distance, intergroup trust, sense of community, self-efficacy for change, and community-based collective action intentions. As per a qualitative survey of key informants, these concepts were relevant in the multiethnic Liberian communities of study. To

disentangle the effects of Forum Theater method and content, we designed and implemented a field experiment consisting of two Forum Theater interventions (one about intergroup conflict and trust, the other about hygiene); we also included a control group that did not receive any intervention.

We expected that a tailored intervention that addressed the conflict and trust issues (rather than avoiding them) would be most effective. We thus hypothesized that only a Forum Theater play addressing intergroup conflict and intergroup trust would increase trust and reduce social distance (Hypotheses 1a and 1b [H1a and H1b]). In addition, we expected that the intergroup conflict play would indirectly decrease social distance by increasing intergroup trust (Hypothesis 1c [H1c]). Our second set of hypotheses related to collective action intentions. We hypothesized that both interventions would increase participants' sense of community, self-efficacy for change, and community-based collective action intentions (Hypotheses 2a–2c [H2a–H2c]) because both plays stimulated role-play of advocacy for behavioral change to improve the community. Further, we expected indirect effects of the interventions on collective action intentions through an increased sense of community and self-efficacy for change (Hypotheses 2d and 2e [H2d and H2e]).

Method

The design of this study was a pre-/posttest field experiment with three conditions: one Forum Theater play about intergroup conflict, one Forum Theater play about hygiene, and a control condition. All conditions occurred twice (once in each community).

The project team of 15 persons included all authors (except Katelin H. S. Neufeld), a second Liberian-based German researcher, and 11 Liberians: four research assistants who were University of Liberia conflict-transformation students; four professional actors of Flomo Theater; and three youth volunteers trained in Forum Theater, one of whom had special training in the joker/facilitator role, explained later in the article. When conducting this research, we considered ethical standards and "do no harm" principles. For instance, we did not name existing groups or specific events in the plays to avoid retraumatization, and we established a protocol to support participants if the intervention triggered painful memories. The Institutional Review Board of the University of Liberia approved this study.

Forum Theater Play Development

The project team jointly developed two Forum Theater plays around two community issues: intergroup conflict and hygiene. Building on a qualitative survey of 41 key informants in the selected communities, prior theory, research, and considerations of "do no harm" (e.g., Stephan & Stephan, 2013; Wessells, 2009), the actors and Friederike Feuchte brainstormed and decided on the key messages and the scenes for the plays. The actors improvised these scenes in several iterations, refining the scripts by integrating feedback from the whole project team.

The developed *intergroup conflict play* presents a discussion among a leader and members of a multiethnic community. The community leader and two members of his group (denoted by red cloths) discuss allocations of new jobs within the community. Two

uninvited members of a different group (denoted by green cloths) want to be part of this meeting to ensure that people from their group are considered for these job opportunities too. This leads to arguments within and between the groups, rooted in intergroup conflict and trust (e.g., one character mentions he cannot trust the outgroup because they killed his son during “the war” and never apologized for it; others emphasize that “trust is the way forward” and that “if we work together, we can trust each other”), obedience and dissent (e.g., the leader demands outgroup members apologize for uninvitedly entering the group discussion, and they refuse), and exclusion (e.g., the “red” group members claim that “now is our time” after having suffered at the hands of the outgroup).

The *hygiene play*’s key message is “cleanliness is everybody’s business” and consists of three scenes: After toileting, a man drops food that he touched without washing his hands. A child picks up the food and later falls ill. The child’s mother and others debate the cause of and remedy for his sickness. Some think that witchcraft caused the illness and that a traditional healer should be consulted; others argue that poor hygiene was the cause and advocate for medical treatment.

Participants

The experiment took place in two ethnically diverse communities, Logan Town and Jacob’s Town, located on the outskirts of Monrovia, the Liberian capital. The Liberian wars heavily affected both communities, which are characterized by poor housing conditions, poverty, conflict, and crime (e.g., Cole, 2011). In Jacob’s Town, violence had erupted after the wars between Muslims (mainly Mandingo and Vai) and Christians (most other groups). Research assistants recruited the convenience sample in public places and homes. Participants were 218 community members¹ (43.1% identified as women; mean age [M_{age}] = 27.14 years, standard deviation [SD] = 10.85) representing 14 of Liberia’s 17 official ethnic groups and two others. Nearly half had attended high school; Table 1 contains further demographics. Participants received a small remuneration as appreciation for their time and effort.

Implementation

Participants provided informed consent and completed a pretest questionnaire, either independently or, if illiterate, with the help of a researcher. Next, participants were randomly assigned to an experimental condition. They each drew a folded invitation from an envelope to one of three community events: a special community theater (either the intergroup conflict play or the hygiene play) or a small-group discussion about community issues (the control condition).

The interventions took place 2–5 days after the pretest. In both theater interventions, community members of various ethnic groups attended the 20-min Forum Theater play, followed by 40 min of discussion and audience reenactment. Both plays used the same actors and general introduction and ending. They started with the joker setting the stage by describing a community similar to the participants’ community, followed by the play. When the play’s heated argument was about to turn violent, the joker reentered the stage, said “freeze,” and all actors stopped their movements. The

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Nationality		
Liberian	168	77.06
Other	6	2.75
Missing	44	20.2
Highest level of education		
Never went to school	14	6.4
Primary school	21	9.6
High school	104	47.7
Vocational school	5	2.3
University	34	15.6
Missing	40	18.3
Religion		
Christian	141	64.7
Muslim	29	13.3
Traditionalist	1	0.5
Missing	74	21.6
Ethnic group		
Americo-Liberian/Congo	4	1.9
Bassa	42	19.3
Gbandi	7	3.2
Gio	11	5.0
Gola	14	6.4
Grebo	12	5.5
Kpelle	24	11.0
Kissi	7	3.2
Krahn	8	3.7
Kru	15	6.9
Lorma	7	3.2
Mano	4	1.8
Mandingo	14	6.4
Mende	3	1.4
Vai	10	4.6
Mixed	2	0.9
Missing	34	15.6

Note. Demographic data were missing for 34 participants.

joker then started a discussion with the audience about the disagreement, asking for solutions to prevent the conflict. When someone suggested a solution, the joker invited the individual onto the stage to replace an actor and act out the solution. The key messages of each play were said by an actor during the play and repeated by the joker during the discussion. Around 1 hr following the start of the play, the joker summarized the play, discussion, and reenactment; thanked the audience; and ended the intervention.

Participants in the two Forum Theater intervention conditions completed the posttest measures immediately after the play. Participants in the control condition completed the posttest measures as soon as they arrived at the location of the group-discussion event. The discussions happened after participants completed the questionnaires; therefore, the discussions could not have affected the results. For more details about intervention design and imple-

¹ The majority of participants completed the survey at both the pretest (Time 1) and the posttest (Time 2). In 33 cases, however, we did not have data at both time points from the same participant, either due to the participant completing only one survey or not having enough demographic information to confidently match the participant’s Time 1 and 2 surveys. In those instances, we retained only the Time 2 data because Time 2 scores were our outcomes of primary interest. We also excluded from the analyses participants whose experimental condition was not recorded ($n = 45$).

mentation, see Feuchte, Mazziotto, Bilali, Pietsch-Cooper, and Rohmann (2020).

Measures

Except where otherwise noted, the measures used a 5-point scale anchored at 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*; participants completed all measures at both time points.

Attitudes toward the least-liked outgroup. Participants completed the following two measures while considering the group they liked the least (Paluck, 2010).

Social distance. To assess participants' desired social distance from members of their least-liked outgroup, we presented them with a graphic depicting a row of nine homes. The home on one end was colored black, whereas the rest were white. We instructed participants, "Imagine that you live in the black house below in the picture and that people of the group that you like the least move into your neighborhood. Decide into which house the people of this group should move by marking the house with a cross." There were eight possible response options, with coded values ranging from 1 = *most proximal* to 8 = *most distal*. Thus, higher scores indicate a greater desired social distance from the least-liked group. This measure was adapted from Valk (2000).

Intergroup trust. Participants reported their trust toward their least-liked outgroup by stating their agreement with four items adapted from past research (Andrighetto, Mari, Volpato, & Behluli, 2012; Čehajić, Brown, & Castano, 2008; Hewstone et al., 2004): "Members of that group will exploit or harm me if I trust them" (reverse-scored), "Even after everything that happened during the war, I trust persons from that group," "After everything what has happened during the war, it is better not to trust persons from that group" (reverse-scored), and "Most persons from that group cannot be trusted" (reverse-scored; $\alpha_{\text{Time 1}} = .68$ and $\alpha_{\text{Time 2}} = .68$).

Sense of community. We used five items from the Brief Sense of Community Scale (Peterson, Speer, & McMillan, 2008): "I can get what I need in this community," "This community helps me fulfill my needs," "I feel like a member of this community," "I have a say about what goes on in my community," and "I feel connected to this community" ($\alpha_{\text{Time 1}} = .63$; $\alpha_{\text{Time 2}} = .66$). In Monrovia, the term *community* typically connotes neighborhoods, so here it refers to participants' multiethnic geographic and administrative community.

Self-efficacy. Three items evaluated the extent to which participants felt capable of enacting community change: "I can influence the community in which I live," "I want to get more involved in my community," and "I am able to impact my community in important ways" ($\alpha_{\text{Time 1}} = .59$; $\alpha_{\text{Time 2}} = .64$).

Collective action intentions. Two items adapted from Bilali, Vollhardt, and Rarick (2017) gauged participants' intentions to engage in collective action to address community problems: "I would participate in a demonstration against the difficulties in my community," and "I would like to organize an event together with other community members against the difficulties here." We chose these items for their generality: they were relevant in all three experimental conditions. We analyzed these items separately because they were not strongly correlated, $r(171)_{\text{Time 1}} = .40$, $r(213)_{\text{Time 2}} = .34$.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for this study's variables. We also conducted one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to test for condition differences among the pretest (Time 1) dependent measures (see the online supplemental materials). Because there were some differences, we controlled for Time 1 scores in subsequent analyses.

Main Analytic Procedures

We ran two types of analyses. To examine the effects of condition on the dependent measures, we conducted analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) in which the condition group (intergroup conflict play, hygiene play, or control) was the independent variable, the Time 2 measurement was the dependent variable, and its corresponding Time 1 measurement was the covariate (see Tables 3 and 4 for all omnibus and comparison effects, respectively). To test our hypothesized mechanisms, we conducted mediation analyses using Model 4 of Hayes's (2013) PROCESS macro (v. 2.16); we specified 10,000 bootstrapped samples and the percentile method for bootstrapped confidence intervals. Note that because we did not use a longitudinal design, any observed indirect effects cannot speak to causality (Schoemann, Boul-

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Dependent Variables

Variable	Time 1		Time 2	
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Intergroup trust	169	2.85 (1.11)	210	2.82 (1.15)
Social distance	163	5.42 (2.62)	196	5.45 (2.41)
Sense of community	197	3.62 (0.92)	218	3.98 (0.88)
Self-efficacy	181	4.52 (0.69)	217	4.54 (0.72)
Collective action intentions: Participate in demonstration	173	3.68 (1.56)	215	3.61 (1.61)
Collective action intentions: Organize community event	175	4.05 (1.35)	215	4.23 (1.29)

Note. There were no Time 1 data for 33 participants, which explains the majority of the discrepancies in *n* between Times 1 and 2. All constructs were measured on scales of 1–5, except social distance, which was measured on a 8-point scale.

Table 3
Omnibus ANCOVA Results for Time 2 Treatment Effects

Variables	<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
Social distance	2, 153	2.11	.13	.03
Intergroup trust	2, 161	5.52	.01	.06
Sense of community	2, 193	8.62	<.001	.08
Self-efficacy	2, 177	1.05	.35	.01
Collective action intentions: Participate in demonstration	2, 167	6.85	<.001	.08
Collective action intentions: Organize community event	2, 169	3.95	.02	.05

Note. ANCOVA = analysis of covariance; *df* = degrees of freedom. For each ANCOVA, the corresponding Time 1 measurement was entered as a covariate. Differences in degrees of freedom are due to missing values.

ton, & Short, 2017). In the following sections, we present the results in the order of the hypotheses.

H1a and H1b: Does only the intergroup conflict play improve social distance and intergroup trust?

Social distance. Compared with control participants, participants who watched the intergroup conflict play wanted to live significantly closer to their least-liked group ($M_{\text{Control}} = 5.76$, standard error [*SE*] = 0.28; $M_{\text{Conflict}} = 4.95$, *SE* = 0.29). The social distance scores reported by participants in the hygiene play condition did not significantly differ from those reported in the other two conditions ($M_{\text{Hygiene}} = 5.49$, *SE* = 0.26).

Intergroup trust. Participants in the intergroup conflict play condition reported significantly higher levels of intergroup trust than did participants in the hygiene play and control conditions ($M_{\text{Conflict}} = 3.31$, *SE* = 0.15; $M_{\text{Control}} = 2.77$, *SE* = 0.14; $M_{\text{Hygiene}} = 2.70$, *SE* = 0.14).

Thus, Forum Theater intergroup encounters best improved intergroup attitudes when the play contents were specifically designed to do so.

H1c: Does the intergroup conflict play decrease social distance by increasing intergroup trust? We specified a mediation model with intervention as the independent variable, Time 2

trust as a mediator, Time 2 social distance as the outcome, and Time 1 trust and social distance as covariates (see Figure 1). There emerged an indirect effect on social distance through trust for the intergroup conflict group versus the control group, $b = -0.30$, *SE* = 0.16, 95% confidence interval (CI) [−0.64, −0.04], but not for the hygiene group versus the control group, $b = 0.06$, *SE* = 0.14, 95% CI [−0.25, 0.34]. Thus, as expected, the intergroup conflict play decreased social distance by increasing trust.

H2a–H2c: Can Forum Theater interventions improve sense of community, self-efficacy beliefs, and collective action intentions?

Sense of community. The Forum Theater plays significantly affected participants' sense of community. Pairwise comparisons revealed that sense of community was higher for Forum Theater participants ($M_{\text{Conflict}} = 4.18$, *SE* = 0.10; $M_{\text{Hygiene}} = 4.03$, *SE* = 0.10) than for control participants ($M_{\text{Control}} = 3.63$, *SE* = 0.10). There was no difference in participants' sense of community across the two interventions.

Self-efficacy. The interventions did not significantly affect participants' self-efficacy beliefs.

Collective action intentions. Forum Theater participants reported statistically similar levels of willingness to demonstrate

Table 4
Pairwise Comparisons Controlling for Time 1 Measurements

Dependent variable	Comparisons		Mean difference (<i>i</i> − <i>j</i>)	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	95% CI	
	<i>i</i>	<i>j</i>				Lower bound	Upper bound
Social distance	Intergroup	Hygiene	−0.54	0.39	.16	−1.31	0.22
		Control	−0.81	0.40	.05	−1.61	−0.02
	Hygiene	Control	−0.27	0.39	.49	−1.03	0.49
Trust	Intergroup	Hygiene	0.61	0.20	.00	0.22	1.01
		Control	0.54	0.20	.01	0.14	0.94
	Hygiene	Control	−0.08	0.20	.70	−0.46	0.31
Sense of community	Intergroup	Hygiene	0.15	0.14	.28	−0.13	0.43
		Control	0.55	0.14	.00	0.28	0.82
	Hygiene	Control	0.40	0.14	.01	0.12	0.67
Efficacy beliefs	Intergroup	Hygiene	−0.06	0.13	.63	−0.32	0.20
		Control	0.12	0.13	.36	−0.14	0.38
	Hygiene	Control	0.18	0.13	.16	−0.07	0.43
Collective action intention: Participate in demonstration	Intergroup	Hygiene	−0.10	0.28	.72	−0.65	0.45
		Control	0.79	0.27	<.01	0.26	1.31
	Hygiene	Control	0.89	0.28	<.01	0.36	1.41
Collective action intention: Organize community event	Intergroup	Hygiene	−0.15	0.23	.51	−0.61	0.31
		Control	0.45	0.23	.05	0.00	0.90
	Hygiene	Control	0.60	0.22	.01	0.16	1.04

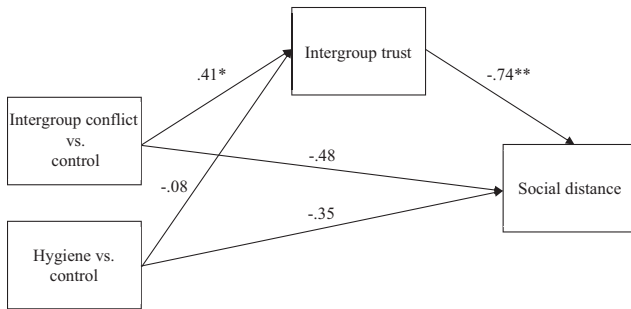


Figure 1. Effects of condition on social distance through intergroup trust. Values represent unstandardized regression coefficients. The mediator and outcome were Time 2 variables; their Time 1 counterparts were entered as covariates but are not pictured for simplicity. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

($M_{\text{Conflict}} = 3.90$, $SE = 0.20$; $M_{\text{Hygiene}} = 4.00$, $SE = 0.19$), which were stronger than those in the control condition ($M_{\text{Control}} = 3.11$, $SE = 0.18$). A similar pattern held for the willingness to organize a community event, the only difference being that participants in the intergroup conflict play group were marginally more willing to organize a community event than were participants in the control group ($M_{\text{Conflict}} = 4.34$, $SE = 0.16$; $M_{\text{Hygiene}} = 4.49$, $SE = 0.16$; $M_{\text{Control}} = 3.89$, $SE = 0.15$).

H2d and H2e: Do Forum Theater interventions increase collective action intentions through increasing sense of community and self-efficacy? We conducted four mediation analyses: We tested the indirect effects of the interventions on the two collective action intention items through sense of community (see Figures 2 and 3) and through self-efficacy beliefs. In each mediation analysis, Time 2 outcomes were the dependent variables and the mediators, whereas their Time 1 counterparts were covariates.

Sense of community did not explain the effects of either intervention on participants' willingness to participate in a demonstration (for intergroup conflict vs. control, $b = 0.18$, $SE = 0.11$, 95% CI $[-0.01, 0.41]$; for hygiene vs. control, $b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.09$, 95% CI $[-0.01, 0.32]$; see Figure 2). However, sense of community did indirectly affect the relationship between both interven-

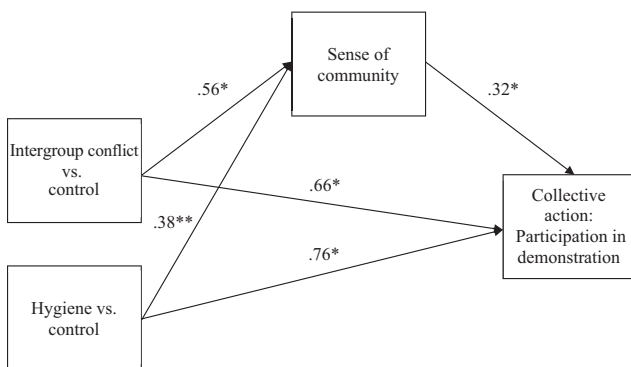


Figure 2. Effects of condition on participation in community demonstration through sense of community. Values represent unstandardized regression coefficients. The mediator and outcome were Time 2 variables; their Time 1 counterparts were entered as covariates but are not pictured for simplicity. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

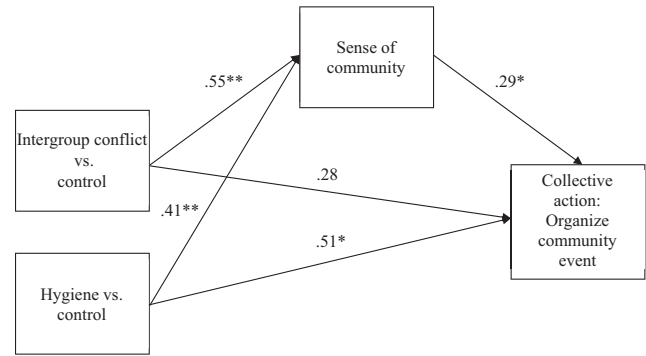


Figure 3. Effects of condition on organizing a community event through sense of community. Values represent unstandardized regression coefficients. The mediator and outcome were Time 2 variables; their Time 1 counterparts were entered as covariates but are not pictured for simplicity. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

tions (vs. control) on participants' intentions to organize a community event (intergroup conflict vs. control: $b = 0.16$, $SE = 0.09$, 95% CI $[0.01, 0.37]$; hygiene vs. control: $b = 0.12$, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI $[0.01, 0.29]$). As per Figure 3, participating in either intervention increased participants' sense of community, which in turn increased their intentions to organize a community event.

Self-efficacy did not mediate the relationship between the interventions and either collective action intention item. All of the following confidence intervals contain 0; thus, there was no indirect effect of the interventions on motivation for organizing a community event through self-efficacy (intergroup conflict vs. control: $b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI $[-0.10, 0.17]$; hygiene vs. control: $b = 0.09$, $SE = 0.07$, 95% CI $[-0.04, 0.25]$) or on willingness to participate in a demonstration through self-efficacy (intergroup conflict vs. control: $b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.05$, 95% CI $[-0.09, 0.13]$; hygiene vs. control: $b = 0.05$, $SE = 0.06$, 95% CI $[-0.05, 0.18]$).

Discussion

The current research evaluated whether and how Forum Theater interventions can change attitudes in the aftermath of civil war in multiethnic Liberia. Only the intergroup conflict Forum Theater intervention was effective in improving intergroup attitudes. Participants in this intervention reported more intergroup trust toward and less social distance from members of their least-liked out-group; the reduction in social distance was in part due to the increased intergroup trust. Both Forum Theater interventions strengthened participants' sense of community and collective-action intentions. Compared with community members who did not participate in any intervention, the intergroup encounters with Forum Theater increased participants' sense of community as well as their intentions to join a community demonstration and organize a community event. The increased intentions to organize a community event were partially explained by the strengthened sense of community. Contrary to our hypotheses, self-efficacy was not significantly affected by the interventions and was not a mechanism through which the interventions increased collective action intentions.

The fact that using intergroup conflict in a Forum Theater play improved intergroup attitudes and collective action intentions has implications for theory and practice. First, it provides a novel bridge between Forum Theater, social psychological theory, and experimental design: Although Forum Theater is widely used to promote peace in postconflict settings (e.g., Arendshorst, 2005; UNESCO, 2006), no prior work has investigated how and why tailoring its contents can improve postconflict intergroup attitudes. Further, past social psychological research has found that intergroup harmony and collective action are often conflicting pathways to social change (e.g., Dixon et al., 2012). However, it seems that with the right approach—such as Forum Theater—it is possible to promote both outcomes simultaneously. Whereas both interactive intergroup encounters with Forum Theater strengthened participants' sense of community and activated them for collective action, only the play tailored to address intergroup conflict improved intergroup attitudes. This finding provides additional evidence that collaborative intergroup contact alone will not always suffice to improve intergroup attitudes. Further research should investigate the critical ingredient(s) for attitude change, with possibilities including making intergroup relations salient, addressing intergroup conflict, or encouraging intergroup trust—or any combination of these three.

Several features of Forum Theater may contribute to its effectiveness for promoting positive attitudes in an intergroup encounter, especially when tailored to address intergroup conflict. First, Forum Theater creates a safe space to minimize defensiveness. For instance, in our play, we discussed intergroup conflict by avoiding referrals to specific conflicting groups and instead used cloth colors to signal different group memberships. By not naming or blaming actual groups as perpetrators, the intergroup conflict play likely minimized the defensiveness and denial (see also Bilali & Vollhardt, 2013; Paluck, 2009) that are typical in postconflict/conflict contexts (Staub & Pearlman, 2006; Vollhardt, 2015). Also, the play encouraged critical reflection on the nature of intergroup interactions and was action oriented, encouraging community members to role-play constructive solutions. Importantly, Forum Theater is context sensitive. The plays were designed in the language of the target group and gave them space to discuss, transfer, and apply behavior from/in their own lives. In addition, the joker (facilitator) could invite and appreciate audience contributions, guide the discussions toward key messages, create a safe space, and reinforce learning.

A strength of this study is its unique sample from an underresearched multigroup context. Most research on intergroup contact and collective action focuses on the relations and interactions of two salient groups of different status. Less is known about post-civil war societies, such as Liberia, in which various groups suffered and perpetrated violence or otherwise felt the impact of the war. In these underresearched contexts, several relevant outgroups exist; in our case, participants belonged to 14 of Liberia's 17 official ethnic groups and two others. As in other complex multigroup contexts, it would be unfeasible to design an intervention addressing all possible group memberships and conflicts. We found that putting two unspecific groups on stage sufficiently triggered attitude change toward participants' different "least-liked" groups. The unspecific groups also allowed participants of any group to see their experiences reflected on the stage and not feel blamed.

Our finding that the interventions increased collective action intentions by increasing participants' sense of community within a multiethnic community is encouraging. This is in line with evidence that intergroup contact will not always demobilize collective action behavior or intentions (e.g., Becker, Wright, Lubensky, & Zhou, 2013; Vezzali, Andrighetto, Capozza, Di Bernardo, & Saguy, 2017). Given that we assessed relatively vague collective action intentions (i.e., to improve "difficulties" in the multigroup community by organizing an event or participating in a demonstration), future research should examine whether Forum Theater interventions can also increase more specific collective action intentions and behaviors to resolve intergroup inequality.

Unexpectedly, self-efficacy was unaffected by the plays and did not contribute to increased collective action tendencies. Possibly our self-efficacy measure was too broad or unclear, or the effects were too small to be detected with our small sample. However, our findings might also indicate that in a collectivistic culture such as Liberia, a sense of community is a more relevant mechanism for action than self-efficacy. When aiming to mobilize for collective action in such contexts, it may therefore be better to appeal to communities rather than individuals. Strengthened collective efficacy might also increase self-efficacy (Jugert et al., 2016). Further research should test these possibilities.

Of course, improved collective action intentions and intergroup attitudes are only useful if they manifest as actual behavior. Prior work finds that attitudes do not necessarily translate into behavior (Wicker, 1969), and this relationship may be especially tenuous in unstable or changing political contexts. Because we did not measure behaviors, the effects of the intervention on behaviors are unknown, which represents a limitation of this work. We are nonetheless (cautiously) optimistic about the importance of our findings for two reasons. First, intentions are a good predictor of actual behavior (Ajzen, 1985); as such, it is possible that participants' collective action intentions might translate into actual collective action behavior. Second, attitudes and behavior are more strongly linked when matched in specificity (Fabrigar & Wegener, 2012). Compared with a general measure of attitudes about participants' least-liked outgroups, our attitude measures were quite specific and may thus predict actual social distance and behavioral manifestations of trust.

The current research has other limitations. As with any single intervention, it is difficult to disentangle which of the processes triggered are universal and which depend on the context; multiple high-powered interventions in different contexts would be needed for that. Contextual characteristics, such as ripeness (Coleman, 1997), may have been crucial for the intervention's success. Future research should test Forum Theater in different contexts, such as in ongoing conflict, the immediate aftermath of violence, or the beginning of the societal reconciliation process. Another limitation pertains to statistical power: The sample size provided statistical power to detect medium effects but not small effects. Given the budgetary constraints of this field experiment, a much higher-powered study was unfeasible. Nonetheless, when possible, future research should aim for higher-powered replications. Further, although we took precautions to minimize potential risks when designing and implementing the interventions, we did not assess any possible negative side effects that can occur during community interventions (e.g., Cilliers, Dube, & Siddiqi, 2016).

Our study had a short-term focus on the potential of Forum Theater, examining outcomes immediately following the interventions. Thus, we cannot make claims about whether or how the observed attitude changes translate into behavior or the causality of our tested mechanisms. We also cannot know whether the changes endure over time; unfortunately, positive changes in intergroup attitudes sometimes fade away (e.g., Guffler & Wagner, 2017). It is possible, however, that the effects of a participatory community-based intervention such as Forum Theater might last and be reinforced by consequent actions. As anecdotal evidence, after our interventions, one of the communities held a community meeting where they discussed how to change their leadership structure, which they perceived as unequal and dysfunctional. Notably, one of the leaders in this meeting cited the intergroup play as the group's motivation to change their community for the better (R. W. Nimley, personal communication, June 2014). Future research should test how long the effects of Forum Theater last by adding assessments several weeks or months after an intervention.

Conclusion

In multiethnic communities of postwar Liberia, we found that the method of Forum Theater (Boal, 1989) increased participants' sense of community and collective action intentions. When specifically tailored to address intergroup conflict, the interactive community intervention also increased intergroup trust and reduced social distance. Thus, Forum Theater addressing intergroup conflict has the potential to support postconflict communities in their reconciliation process by increasing collective action intentions and sense of community, as well as improving intergroup attitudes.

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