The Conceptualization and Operationalization of Cultural Tolerance: Adopting Positive Psychology Perspective

Mitshel Lino[a,*], Intan H.M. Hashim[b] & Ricky Ricardo[c]
School of Social Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 USM - Penang, Malaysia.
Email of corresponding author: mitshel.mitshel@gmail.com

Abstract
Tolerance is a concept commonly found in field of study such as sociology, political sociology, multiculturalism and liberalism, but not in positive psychology. This concept paper aims to conceptualize and operationalize cultural tolerance by adopting positive psychology perspective. It begins with reviewing past literatures on tolerance from various perspective and comparing the definitions, complexities, challenges and gaps. Through addressing the conceptual gaps of tolerance from various perspectives and taking into consideration the positive psychology philosophy and theories, a distinctive concept and operational definition of cultural tolerance from positive psychology are presented.

Keyword: cultural tolerance; positive psychology; intrinsic tolerance; autonomous tolerance.

1. Introduction

The definition of tolerance from psychology perspective is one's ability to look at different angles at issues, to empathize with other's perspectives, to be open and to accept divergent cultures and others (Pacino, 2015). A tolerant society is indicated by its members' willingness to be attentive and to create a continuous as well as steady relationship with people who are different (Ahmad, Salman, Rahim, Pawanteh and Ahmad, 2013). From the past literature, tolerance is an established concept in many fields, such as, but not limited to; sociology, political sociology, multiculturalism, liberalism, but not so in positive psychology perspective. Yet, tolerance has been suggested as part of positive institutions that can potentially contribute to well-being and flourishing society (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). To further examine the concept of tolerance and to explore its potential as a positive construct, there is a need to conceptualize and operationalize tolerance, particularly from positive psychology perspective. Thus, this paper intends to conceptualize and operationalize tolerance by adopting the positive psychology perspective. It begins with exploration, comparison and discussion of tolerance from different school of thoughts, followed by the philosophy of positive psychology.

2. Literature Review of Studying Tolerance from Various Perspectives

From sociological perspective, tolerance is defined as the link between tolerance subject and object, whereby the subjects are willing to accept the object's sociocultural differences in terms of visible and behavioral features, statements, and others (Matskovsky, 2004). In interethnic relations, tolerance constitutes two-pronged approaches whereby both ethnic minority and majority establish mutual understanding (Kuznetsov, 2003). Meanwhile, in political sociology, tolerance is defined as a submission to specific democratic principles (majority rule and minority rights) whereby both the proposing and opposing groups in the society coexist together regardless of contrasting goals and interest (Jackman, 1977). Both sociology and political sociology perspectives posit that tolerance to be viewed from external sources. In sociological perspective, tolerance is viewed from the connection among situational, societal, environmental,

social system and cooperation with subjective reality. From political sociology perspective, tolerance is seen from the degree of compliance to certain democratic principles especially from the opposing groups in a society. The two perspectives are looking at tolerance from the macro level and not taking into consideration the individual's perspective as a member of a society.

In multiculturalism, the act of tolerance is exemplified through accommodating different cultural communities and advocating fairness as well as equality (Kumar, 2011). However, one of the main challenges of this perspective is a misconception that everyone should be treated similarly due to perceived similarity in characteristics (Parekh, 2001). Human beings, despite sharing common identity, are differentiated by cultures. They are similar but different; the similarities and differences may cross (Parekh, 2001). It is an inaccurate assumption to think that all human beings are basically equal and only valuing a particular way of life. Those who do not live up to the prescribed value cannot be labelled as not merit equality or uncivilized. Therefore, the theory of equality based on the assumption of human uniformity is deemed philosophically incoherent and morally problematic (Parekh, 2001).

From multiculturalism perspective, toleration does not necessitate people to take in negative evaluation on different culture or belief and accept restraints in acting on that negative evaluation (Horton, 1996). There are no clearly defined choices of either a prohibition to criticize other cultures' practices ("multiculturalism") or acceptance on one's prejudices providing that they do not act on such behavior ("toleration") (Horton, 1996). Most importantly, the choices to implement toleration in multiculturalism must consider the actions that can be sensibly objected or the objectionable actions that can be tolerated. This indicates the complexities of tolerance from multiculturalism; firstly, the question of tolerance when people treat members of different cultures equally and disregard the specific customs and needs of the individual groups. Secondly, to what extent tolerant people can object certain cultures, allow others or restraint themselves to act out on the cultural practices/ beliefs that they disagree with.

On the other hand, liberalism argued that it stresses the relationship between individuals and their memberships in the society. An individual is seen as the foundation of a society, with autonomy and free will to act; including freedom of expression and conscience as well as association. Tolerance and respect for the rights of others are part of the required features liberalism (Kymlicka, 1995).

The concept of liberalism has promoted tolerance as one of its merits (Horton, 1996). However, the non-liberal critics argued that the liberals are tolerant solely on the subjects that they do not object. Consequently, the concept of ideal tolerance from liberalism is narrower than the liberals are willing to admit (Horton, 1996). Another argument to liberalism is that it has central argument around the neutrality concepts of the good (Horton, 1996). It is not possible to be tolerant with a negatively valued concept. While tolerance is viewed as part of the liberalism, the concept of tolerance is still not clearly defined and operationalized. In addition, the complexity of tolerance from liberalism is that whether people can be tolerant with cultural practices/ beliefs that they perceived to be negative or disagreed with. Moreover, there is also a question on whether people with tolerance from liberalism can be tolerant with others who are not tolerant (i.e., people who hold prejudice or discrimination towards particular cultural practices/ beliefs).

As for social psychology, Verkuyten (2010) proposed that tolerance can be conceptualized in multiple ways, such as; appreciating difference, adopting favorable attitude toward outgroups, demonstrating a lack of prejudice, enduring with something that one disagrees or is prejudiced against (Verkuyten, 2010). The term toleration implies that there is a group with unequal power

status in society to withhold a particular behavior. Thus, the majority's reaction to multiculturalism poses a significant impact on group relations (Verkuyten, 2010). Social psychology provides the clearest conceptualization of tolerance, yet it is still looking at it not as part of the positive constructs that can potentially contribute to societal and individual's well-being.

Tolerance is a complex concept in a culturally diverse society due to its highly debatable and multifaceted natures. For instance, a positive attitude towards an out-group does not necessarily mean acceptance towards the out-group's rights and practices (Verkuyten, 2010). Conversely, prejudice towards a specific group does not imply the rejection of specific rights and actions. In addition, one's positive affect does not automatically translate into unconditional acceptance of the culture of that group (Verkuyten, 2010). Furthermore, accepting different cultural beliefs in abstract does not automatically result in tolerating the public expression of the said belief or the actual cultural acts / practices (Vogt, 1997). Generally, the complexity of tolerance from social psychology is such that to tolerate is to allow, but it does not necessarily translate into refusal to judge or an unconditional acceptance of different cultural practices/ acts. This highlights how the conceptualization of tolerance must be carefully defined to address all of the above complexities.

The field of psychology has been putting a strong emphasis on the pathology model on humanity, i.e. the healing and repairing damage since the Second World War (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Martin Seligman reintroduced positive psychology by trying to steer the focus of psychology into more positive development such as research on strength and well-being. It is normal for human beings to experience the ups and downs at any particular point of their life as both positive and negative experience are relevant aspects of humans' life. Thus, positive psychology aims to provide a balanced view in a way that it provides the positive aspects and simultaneously, does not negate the negative aspects of human life. Against this backdrop, tolerance can be viewed as part of the positive constructs that can potentially lead to well-being and flourishing individuals and societies.

Similarly, in the field of cross-cultural psychology, many focus have been given to the negative aspects of intercultural relationship such as prejudice, discrimination and racism but rarely on positive aspects such as tolerance (Lopez, Snyder, and Rasmussen, 2003). Due to the all-encompassing nature of human's nature, focusing and validating the issues alone without considering the strengths is not complete. The field of positive psychology has limited exploration on the cross-cultural field let alone tolerance. Thus, this paper intends to conceptualize tolerance adopting the philosophy of positive psychology.

4. Summary of Research Gaps in Studying Tolerance

From the above discussion, we summarize and argue that overall, the current perspectives of studying tolerance are not satisfactory because:
1. They do not address tolerance from individual's perspective.
2. Tolerance is not viewed as part of the positive construct.
3. Tolerance is still not clearly defined and operationalized.
4. Current approach of studying tolerance in positive psychology, especially in cross cultural context is still limited.
5. It is important to address all complexities that can be part of conceptualizing and addressing tolerance.

In addition, we also summarize the specific challenges and complexities of the concept of tolerance from each perspective:

6. In sociology, tolerance is viewed from macro perspectives; i.e. situational, societal, environmental and social system. In political sociology, to tolerate means to comply and submit to specific democratic principle, usually ruled by the majority group. In addition, it also means whether both the proponents and oppositions can live together and put up with differences in goals and interests.

7. In multiculturalism, the question is whether it is tolerance when people treat members of different cultures equally without considering the distinctive needs as well as the customs of individual's cultures.

8. In liberalism, the challenge is if people are tolerant with pluralistic cultural practices, whether they can still be considered tolerant if they cannot accept others who are prejudice/ intolerant of the said cultural practices.

9. In both multiculturalism and liberalism, the question is whether people are considered tolerant if they ignore, deny, refuse to judge or allow the manifestation of cultural beliefs/ practices that they deem unacceptable.

10. In social psychology, the question is if people have positive attitude towards any cultural beliefs, whether they can be tolerant of the real-life acts of the said cultural practices.

For example, if people have a generalized positive attitude towards a controversial cultural practice such as circumcision, can they still tolerate the real-life act of circumcision carried out by certain group?

This is also applicable vice versa, as in when people have generalized negative affect/ hold prejudice towards certain cultural beliefs, whether they will not allow that particular cultural practices in real life.

The overall arguments regarding the complexities of tolerance from different perspectives surrounds the question of unconditional acceptance of one's cultural beliefs versus practices. The present paper looks at tolerance from positive psychology perspective with an aim to achieve an intrinsic and autonomous tolerance. Below is the discussion of theoretical framework of positive psychology, followed by the conceptualization and operationalization tolerance adopting positive psychology perspective.

4. Positive Psychology Theoretical Framework

Albeit positive psychology has been mainly focusing on individual well-being, positive institution is a vital aspect in positive psychology such that there has been growing interest in community and organization (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The theories related to the examination of positive psychology in community settings are model of sustainable happiness and self-determination theory.

The model of sustainable happiness suggests a possibility of creating sustainable increase in happiness. It is a hybrid model that incorporates six categories of well-being theories by Diener and Ryan (2009), including; telic (achievement or goal), top-down vs bottom-up, cognitive, evolutionary, temperament and personality, relative standards (comparison of other's and one's past and present standards) (Diener and Ryan, 2009). A person's happiness at a particular point in life, or chronic happiness, can be influenced by three factors; set point (nature/ genetic), life circumstances (nurture) and engagement in intentional activities (personal choice) (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon and Sckade, 2005). Both set point and life circumstances are fairly fixed and do not contribute to improvement in sustainable happiness. It is only the engagement in intentional activity that may affect chronic happiness (Boehm and Lyubomirsky, 2009).

Set point accounts for about 50% of individual differences in chronic happiness (Boehm and Lyubomirsky, 2009). However, due to its fairly fixed nature, it has no contribution to change the level of one's happiness. Life circumstances, contrary to popular belief of well-being, only contribute to around 10% of variance in chronic happiness (Diener and Ryan, 2009). Examples of one's life circumstances are; nationality, demographics, personal experiences, life status, among others.

One's engagement in intentional activity, therefore, offers the most hopeful element in changing chronic happiness, for up to 40% (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon and Sckade, 2005). Intentional activities comprise of committed and effortful acts which may be behavioral, cognitive, or motivational. Next, Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is a theory of motivation that is interested in supporting human's natural or intrinsic orientation in behaving effectively and healthily (Deci and Ryan, 1985; 2000, Ryan and Deci, 2000). Deci and Ryan proposed that SDT is an organismic dialectical approach; the word dialectic here refers to the interrelationship between humans and their social contexts. It means that humans are active organisms with evolved initiatives in growing, overcoming challenges, and learning and integrating from experiences. These human's senses of volition and initiative, well-being and performance quality, however, requires supports and interplay of social and cultural factors in assisting or hampering (Deci and Ryan, 1985; 2000, Ryan and Deci, 2000). The three important conditions in SDT are: (i) Autonomy: having choice and control over behavior that is intrinsically oriented, (ii) Competence: feeling of effectiveness in accomplishing a task, and (iii) Relatedness: sense of belonging with other people.

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By integrating the abovementioned theories and addressing the research gaps no. 1-5 (see section 3), the concept of cultural tolerance in the present paper is most appropriately derived from the combination of Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and model of sustainable happiness. The individuals are in control of their motivation to tolerate in order to interact effectively with their communities and to form connections and positive relationship. The final goal is to achieve sustainable happiness and to achieve a sense of communal well-being.

In this study, tolerance is examined from individual's perspective. Although it sets to examine tolerance as a practice within a particular society, the main source of analysis is individual's perspective. This is to address the current research gaps within sociological approach to studying tolerance that tends to focus on societies and groups. This is also consistent with the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) that suggests "human's natural or intrinsic orientation in behaving effectively and healthily".

This paper also views tolerance as part of societal strengths. This is consistent with positive psychological approach that puts more emphasis on the strengths of the individuals and the societies.
The operational definition of tolerance from positive psychology perspective is individuals are viewed as in control of their motivation to accept people who have different cultural background and practices in order to interact effectively with their communities and to form positive relationships. This helps refined the definition of tolerance further by focusing on specific kind of tolerance (i.e. tolerance of cultural practices)

Positive relationships, in turn, contributes to sustainable happiness and to lead to a sense of communal well-being. In this way, tolerance further operationalized in a way that it can predict

future positive outcomes. The two main outcomes here are positive relationships in the society and individual and societal well-being.

Discussion and Conclusion

The present concept and operational definition of cultural tolerance adopting positive psychology perspectives is quite distinctive from that of other perspectives. In addition to the implementation of positive psychology theoretical framework, the distinction is also derived from addressing the conceptual challenges and complexities of tolerance from other perspectives (see section 3). Cultural tolerance adopting positive psychology has addressed the conceptual complexities of tolerance (see section 3). To address no. 6 and 7, in contrast to tolerance from sociology, political sociology and multiculturalism, it is not a tool of compliance to the majority's rules and racial color blindness. Subsequently, to address no. 9, as opposed to tolerance from both multiculturalism and liberalism, the intrinsic nature of tolerance from positive psychology indicates an effort to accept that arises from motivation to understand the different ethnic values. It is not to accept due to ignorance, indifference, refusal to judge or allowing unacceptable acts or acceptance of objectionable behaviors so long as not imposing on them. Lastly, to address no. 10, unlike tolerance from social psychology, the attitude and action of the person practicing tolerance from positive psychology are parallel with each other, because the act of tolerance is stemmed from autonomy and understanding, not due to societal pressure.

However, there is a limitation to the present concept of cultural tolerance in addressing conceptual complexities of tolerance (see section 3). As for no. 8, when compared with tolerance from liberalism, there is no such indication of whether people are still considered tolerant if they cannot accept others who are intolerant. This indicates the limitation of the conceptualization and operationalization of cultural tolerance in positive psychology in the present paper.

Cultural tolerance adopting positive psychology perspective shares certain similarities with its counterpart from different school of thoughts. It is similar with that of sociology and political sociology perspectives such that it shares the element of mutual acceptance and understanding between two groups of people from different ethnicities. It is also comparable with that of liberal multiculturalism in a way that it recognizes the individual's unique identity while simultaneously acknowledges the shared ethnic group values. This is achieved through understanding individual's standing in their membership within an ethnic group. Aligned with Lopez's, Snyder's and Rasmussen's (2003) suggestion on the examination of human strength, a person with tolerance in positive psychology also considers the interaction among the person, environment and culture.

On the other hand, there are differences between cultural tolerance in positive psychology from that of other perspectives. Unlike tolerance from political sociology perspective, it does not mean putting up with the shared civil rights regardless of conflicting individual's interest. It neither complies with the liberalists' notion of overemphasizing on individualism and tolerating only subjects that they do not object, nor the multiculturalists' stance on treating all human beings equally due to perceived similarities. Cultural tolerance in positive psychology is a display of inherent human's behavior resulting from understanding, not forbearance, conditional tolerance or indiscrimination.

As a novel attempt to conceptualize cultural tolerance, it has both similarities and differences from the established concept of tolerance from different disciplines. Moreover, it is a unique but definitely not an all-encompassing concept; it possesses both the strengths and limitations in

addressing the conceptual gaps from the past literatures and various school of thoughts. Nevertheless, the ultimate aim of the present conceptualization and operationalization of cultural tolerance is to align with positive psychology emphasis on achieving a well-rounded mission on not just focusing on the illness or prevention, but also the strength aspect. In the end, we argue that our proposed conceptualization of tolerance is clearer, has predictive power and addresses most of the existing research gaps.

Acknowledgement

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