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Seeing the other side Perspective taking and the moderation of extremity



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HIGHLIGHTS

- A novel form of perspective taking decreased attitude polarization among partisans.
- The approach worked even on strong attitudes about highly polarizing issues.
- Depolarization depended on accountability to the target of perspective taking.
- Depolarization also depended on personal contact with the perspective-taking target.

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ABSTRACT

Recognizing the reasonableness of others' positions is important for conflict reduction, but is notoriously hard. We tested a perspective-taking approach to decreasing attitude entrenchment. Participants were held accountable in a task in which they wrote about a controversial issue from the perspective of a partner with an opposing viewpoint. This approach was effective at changing views on controversial issues—in Study 1 on weight discrimination, an issue participants were unlikely to have thought much about, and in Study 2 on abortion, where beliefs tend to be more deeply held. Studies 3 and 4 showed this change only took place under conditions where participants met the individual with an opposing view in person, and where that individual would see the perspective-taking effort. These results suggest that it is possible to reduce attitude entrenchment by encouraging people to think about the opposing perspective of another, as long as there is real contact and accountability.

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Immeasurable harm has resulted from people's inability to appreciate that the views of those with whom they disagree can be reasonable and coherent. This inability is apparent in disagreements ranging from marital disputes to union negotiations to international conflicts.

One particularly pernicious instance of this failure is in the arena of American politics. Polarization has resulted in widespread legislative deadlock (Viser, 2013; Weisman, 2013; Wilson, 2014) and even complete shutdowns of the government (Steinhauer, 2013). Extreme political polarization also has negative consequences for civil society, including a souring of public discourse (Jamieson & Falk, 2000), reduced trust in government, and increasing political alienation (Layman, Carsey, & Horowitz, 2006).

Although there are numerous contributors to attitude polarization, including sociological (Bishop, 2008) and individual cognitive factors (Fernbach, Rogers, Fox, & Sloman, 2013), we suggest that a major cause is the failure of perspective taking—partisans become so

immersed in their own ways of thinking about issues that they lose touch with other points of view. This might seem to imply that simply exposing partisans to their opponents' point of view could ameliorate polarization. Previous theory and research, however, suggests that this approach is unlikely to be effective. Rather, people often dismiss the perspectives of people who disagree with them as foolish or biased. In part, this is because people fail to appreciate the extent to which their own opinion about an issue is dependent on their particular construal of that issue—their subjective understanding of what the relevant facts and background are—and that an alternative construal of the issue could lead a reasonable person to have a different opinion from theirs (Lord, Ross, & Lepper, 1979; Ross, Greene, & House, 1977; Ross & Nisbett, 1991; Ross & Ward, 1995, 1996; Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985). This failure to see opponents' positions as both potentially sincere and potentially reasonable can further entrench adversaries' positions (Ross & Ward, 1995, 1996).

To counter this, we propose a perspective-taking approach to help people move beyond facile dismissal of opposing viewpoints. We suggest that a variant of a perspective-taking exercise—attempting to articulate an individual opponent's argument in a way that opponent

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is expected to endorse as accurate—might prevent people from ignoring or glossing over the other side's valid arguments and push people to think through the set of underlying beliefs that could lead someone to a different opinion from theirs. In effect, it prompts people to try to construe the issue as the opponent would. This approach is not unrelated to a version of the speaker/listener technique for couples' empathy training (Markman, Floyd, Stanley, & Lewis, 1986), where one member of the couple paraphrases the content and feelings expressed by the other and the other then rates, on a bull's eye target, how well they feel their message was understood (Long, Angera, Carter, Nakamoto, & Kalso, 1999).

There is some evidence that taking into account the perspective of a known individual with divergent views can lead to shifts in political views. Tetlock, Skitka, and Boettger (1989) showed that when people know they will argue a position on a controversial issue with someone who disagrees with them before they write about their own position, they move their views toward those of the other person, compared to a situation in which they write without knowing the views of their opponent. In the present research, like Tetlock et al. (1989), we examine the effects of exposure to individuals who hold opposing views, but we examine the effects of explicit attempts to take the perspective of the other person, and to write from the perspective of one's opponent rather than writing from one's own perspective.

Although previous research has demonstrated the power of perspective taking to influence the views and behaviors of people who start from a neutral or third-party stance (e.g., Batson et al., 1997; Galinsky, Maddux, Gilin, & White, 2008; Regan & Totten, 1975; Shih, Wang, Bucher, & Stotzer, 2009; Todd, Bodenhausen, Richeson, & Galinsky, 2011; Toi & Batson, 1982), little is known about its potential in cases of conflicting viewpoints. Research in negotiation game contexts suggests that perspective taking can help overcome impasses in situations where individuals can achieve self-interested benefit from doing so (Epley, Caruso, & Bazerman, 2006; Galinsky et al., 2008; Galinsky & Mussweiler, 2001; Gilin, Maddux, Carpenter, & Galinsky, 2013; Trotschel, Huffmeier, Loschelder, Schwartz, & Gollwitzer, 2011).

In the present research we ask whether perspective taking might be effective in influencing real world beliefs where no easily discoverable mutually beneficial solution to the conflict exists and where participants do not stand to gain any personal advantage by taking the perspective of—or making a concession to—an opponent. As an initial test of this idea, we explored whether our perspective-taking manipulation could moderate views on an issue about which opinions were likely to be strong but not long-standing or deeply entrenched: weight discrimination.

Study 1

Method

Participants

In this and all subsequent studies, any participant who failed one of our attention checks or who failed to follow perspective-taking instructions was excluded from analysis. The stopping rule for data collection for all studies was to collect as many participants as possible before the end of the academic quarter. In only Study 1, data were analyzed after the first 10 participants to determine that the expected polarization of attitudes was occurring. The explicit, *a priori* plan was to discontinue data collection and adjust the procedure if the data from the first 10 participants were inconsistent with hypotheses and to continue to collect data for the remainder of the quarter if the data from those first 10 participants were directionally consistent with the hypothesis, regardless of the significance level. For additional details about attention checks and other exclusion criteria, and for study results without exclusions, please see the online [Supplementary material](#).

Participants were 85 undergraduates (67 female; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.0$ years; $SD_{\text{age}} = 1.6$ years; 62% Asian, 18% White, 14% Latino, 6% Other) at a large

public university who completed the experiment for course credit. In this study, 16 additional participants were excluded because they either failed to follow instructions properly or did not pass the attention check (see online [Supplementary material](#) for additional details).¹

Procedure

Participants came into the lab in pairs and, before beginning the session, experimenters verified that each pair had never met before. To help the pairs become superficially acquainted, they spent 10 min engaged in a task based on the control condition in Aron, Melinat, Aron, Vallone, and Bator's (1997) "fast friends" protocol. Participants took turns asking each other questions designed to promote superficial disclosures (e.g., "When was the last time you walked for more than an hour?"). Participants were then moved to separate rooms and asked to fill out a form entitled "Small Talk" in which they provided additional superficial information about themselves (e.g., favorite color), ostensibly to share with their partner. This form was actually used as a filler task to hide the true purpose of the study.

Participants were next led to believe that their partner held the opposing view to theirs on an important social issue. A form entitled "Issue for Discussion" was first used to determine the view of each participant. Participants read the following scenario:

Tori L. is a 32-year-old San Diego resident. She was not hired for a teaching job because the school she applied to has a policy against hiring teachers who are obese.

Participants were asked whether it should be legal for the school to have a policy against hiring obese teachers, providing a rating on a scale from 1 (definitely not) to 6 (definitely yes). Participants also rated how strongly they held their position from 1 (not strongly at all) to 6 (extremely strongly).

Participants were then given what they were told was their partner's printed responses to this question, along with responses from the "Small Talk" filler task.

In fact, the responses to both forms were standardized and pre-printed (though we did simulate the sound of a laser printer at the appropriate time to increase believability). All participants received the same printout for the filler task. On the issues for discussion task, they always received feedback indicating that their partner held the viewpoint at the opposite end of the continuum from their own. In almost all cases (82 of 85) the participant's view was in opposition to the weight discrimination and participants accordingly were informed that the partner had responded with a 6 (that the policy definitely should be legal). The 3 participants who favored weight discrimination were informed that their partners had selected a 1 (that the policy should definitely not be legal).

Participants were then randomly assigned to complete one of two writing tasks:

In the *partner-perspective condition*, participants were asked to articulate, in writing, the point of view of their partner (i.e., the opposite perspective to their own). The instructions for the task were designed to promote a sense of accountability by leading participants to believe that their partner would be reading what they wrote and also that the two would be seeing each other again.

In the *own-perspective condition*, participants were asked to articulate, in writing, their own perspective on the weight discrimination issue. Participants in this condition were told that they would be seeing their partners again, but there was no indication that their partners would be reading what they wrote.

¹ In this and all subsequent studies, the effects remain essentially unchanged when excluded subjects are included within the analyses.

Participants in both conditions were next asked to report their attitudes about the relevant instance of weight discrimination again, on the same scale they used initially. Our dependent variable of central interest was whether participants would change their position on the weight discrimination issue in the direction of their partner's opposing position.

Participants' subjective sense that they had taken the perspective of their partner was assessed using four items, averaged into a composite score, from a scale developed by Exline, Baumeister, Zell, Kraft, and Witvliet (2008). They were asked the extent to which they could "understand why [their] partner holds this position"; "see the issue from his/her perspective"; "see his/her position as making sense;" and "think of valid reasons why he/she holds this position." Ratings were from 1, indicating that they did not agree at all, to 7, indicating that they agreed completely.

Results and discussion

To address attitude change—our central theoretical question—we examined the difference between pre- and post-manipulation scores on the weight discrimination issue. We coded change as positive if it was in the direction of the partner's position, negative if it moved away from the partner's position, and zero if it did not change. Results revealed a significant effect of condition, $t(83) = 2.24, p = .027, d = .47$, with participants who wrote from their partner's perspective ($M = .61, SD = 1.14$) showing more attitude change toward the views of their partners than those who wrote from their own perspective ($M = .18, SD = .54$).

In order to tell whether the difference was due to people in the partner-perspective condition softening their position, or those in the own-perspective condition hardening theirs, we examined the change separately within each condition. A one-sample *t*-test in the partner-perspective condition showed significantly greater than zero softening of the position, $t(40) = 3.43, p = .0014, d = .68$. The control condition did show a small, but statistically significant change in the direction of moderation as well, $t(43) = 2.23, p = .03, d = .2$. This shift in the position of the control group is consistent with the accountability findings of Tetlock et al. (1989), which showed that knowledge of the audience's viewpoint leads to more cognitive processing and potential empathic efforts as one dwells on one's own position. But, of course, the central finding of Study 1 is that accountable perspective taking results in significantly *more* moderation of one's position than simply knowing one's audience has an opposing view.

There was no interaction between position strength and condition on attitude change, $F(1,81) = 1.00, p = .32$. This suggests that the effect was not limited only to people who initially held weak positions. In fact, there was no relationship overall between strength of the initial position and the degree of attitude change, $r(83) = .01, p = .93$.

The perspective-taking index demonstrated high internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .95. Despite the significant effect of the perspective-taking manipulation on actual issue positions, there was no significant condition effect on participants' subjective sense of having taken the perspective of their partners, $t(83) = .28, p = .78, d = .06$. That is, participants in both conditions reported, on average, feeling that they had done a reasonably good job of taking their partner's perspective ($M = 4.42, SD = 1.93$, and $M = 4.31, SD = 1.67$ in the partner perspective and own perspective conditions, respectively on the seven-point scale). Although there was no main effect of condition on this measure, self-reported perspective taking did show some relationship to the magnitude of attitude change within condition: $r(39) = .41, p = .007$ for the perspective-taking condition, and $r(42) = .31, p = .04$ for the own-perspective condition. One possible (albeit speculative) explanation for the lack of main effect despite these changes within conditions is that participants effectively normalized their reports for their condition. That is, they may have calibrated

their ratings on the subjective scale to what they intuited could be expected given the exercise they had completed.

In Study 1, we found, as predicted, that asking participants to articulate a political opponent's point of view in detail, and with the expectation that the accuracy of this rendering would be judged by that opponent, caused participants to moderate their positions on a contentious issue.

Study 2

In Study 2 we investigated whether the effect of our manipulation might extend to an issue about which participants were expected to have longer-standing, and more deeply entrenched views and for which they were expected to be more familiar with arguments on both sides: legalized abortion (Jelen & Wilcox, 2003).

Method

Participants

Participants were 94 undergraduates (68 female; $M_{age} = 20.9$ years; $SD_{age} = 1.8$ years; 62% Asian, 16% Latino, 13% White, 9% Other) who completed the experiment for course credit. Six additional participants were excluded from analysis because they either failed to follow instructions properly or did not pass the attention check (see online Supplementary material for additional details).

Procedure

The procedure was identical to that of Study 1 except that the weight discrimination scenario was replaced with the following:

Tori M., a 16-year-old high school student from San Diego, was raped by her mother's boyfriend. She discovered that she is 11-weeks pregnant and she does not want to have the baby.

Participants were asked whether, given Tori's circumstances, it should be legal for her to have an abortion. They responded from 1 (definitely not) to 4 (definitely yes). Again, almost all participants (89 of 94) took positions on one side of the issue—in this case, in favor of legalized abortion. Those participants were informed that their partner strongly opposed legalized abortion in this case, while the 5 participants who opposed legal abortion were given the opposite indication. As in Study 1 participants reported their position twice, once before the perspective-taking manipulation and once after, in order to assess any change. Subjective perspective taking was assessed as in Study 1.

Results and discussion

As the central reason for moving from the weight discrimination issue to the abortion issue was to test the effect of the perspective taking manipulation on more strongly-held issue positions, we first examined whether participants indeed reported feeling more strongly about the abortion issue than they had about the weight discrimination issue in Study 1. Results indicate that this was indeed the case, $t(177) = 2.38, p = .02, d = .35$ ($M = 3.1, SD = .82$ vs. $M = 2.8, SD = .84$ for abortion and weight discrimination respectively).

As predicted, and conceptually replicating the finding in Study 1, participants were more likely to shift their attitudes about legalized abortion in the direction of their opponent's position in the partner-perspective condition than in the own-perspective condition, $t(92) = 3.12, p = .002, d = .62$ ($M = .36, SD = .61$, vs. $M = .06, SD = .25$). As was the case with the issue of weight discrimination, the directional change in abortion attitudes in the partner-perspective condition was significantly greater than zero, $t(46) = 4.1, p = .0002, d = .75$. Also as in the first study, there was a slight (but this time only marginally significant) change in the same direction in the control condition $t(46) = 1.77, p = .08, d = .13$.

Despite the strength of the attitudes in the present study, there was only a small inverse relationship between the strength of the initial attitude and the amount of attitude change $r(92) = -.22$, $p = .04$, but this effect did not interact with perspective-taking condition, $F(1, 90) = .77$, $p = .38$. That is, again, we found no evidence that the effect of the perspective-taking manipulation was limited to participants with weaker attitudes about the issue.

Finally, as in [Study 1](#), we did not find a significant difference in self-reported perspective taking between the partner-perspective condition ($M = 5.65$, $SD = 1.11$) and the own-perspective condition ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 1.48$), $t(92) = 1.76$, $p = .08$, $d = .36$, although this time the difference approached significance. (The scale again showed high internal consistency: Cronbach's alpha = .91.) In this study, there was no significant relationship between the reported levels of perspective taking and the actual degree to which participants shifted viewpoints within condition: $r(45) = .21$, $p = .15$ for the perspective-taking condition, and $r(45) = .15$, $p = .33$ for the own-perspective condition. We will return to the interpretation of the relationship of these self-reports to the degree of attitude change in the [General discussion](#).

Across two studies, inducing people to articulate the perspective of someone who disagrees with them about a controversial issue made them more amenable to compromise. Although [Study 2](#) was not strictly an exact replication of [Study 1](#), it was very close—the only substantive change being the issue under consideration. The results in these two studies were remarkably consistent.

We have suggested that the moderation of partisans' positions on the two issues was a result of taking the perspective of a person with the opposite opinion with whom they had established at least a superficial personal connection and to whom they were held accountable for the accuracy of their perspective-taking effort. Next we briefly report the results of two additional studies that test the assumption that at least a brief acquaintance with the person is necessary, and that it is also necessary to be directly accountable to that person for the accuracy of the rendering of the opposing perspective. The two studies also help to rule out plausible alternative explanations for the observed effect. In [Study 3](#), we examine whether the accountability element is necessary or whether any effort, with some incentive to do a good job, would be sufficient.

Study 3

Method

In this experiment, we sought to create a situation where the same perspective taking would occur, but instead of telling participants that this information would be shown to their opponents, we told them that it would be evaluated by experts. Participants were exposed to the same sort of difference of opinions as in [Studies 1 and 2](#), and engaged in essentially the same perspective-taking exercise, but in this study, their accountability for producing a high-quality and accurate articulation of their putative opponent's perspective was to abstract evaluators.

The experiment used the same basic method as [Study 2](#), but with the following twist: participants were run alone instead of in pairs and were asked to articulate either their own perspective or the perspective of a putative past participant (“Subject A059”) with the opposite opinion to theirs on the abortion issue. Participants completed an analogue of the relationship-formation stage of the earlier studies in which they were given the ostensible previous participant's answers to the discussion questions that participants in the prior studies had taken turns answering in person with their partners. Participants then filled out the same “Small Talk” and “Issue for Discussion” forms as in the previous experiments, and the responses to these questions they received from Subject A059 were the same as the ones provided in [Study 2](#) as the partner's responses.

Participants were 101 undergraduates (73 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.8$ years; $SD_{\text{age}} = 3.1$ years; 56% Asian, 23% White, 14% Latino, 7% Other) from the same population used in [Studies 1 and 2](#). Fifteen additional participants were excluded because they either failed to follow instructions properly or did not pass the attention check (see online [Supplementary material](#) for additional details).

Participants were randomly assigned either to an *own-perspective* condition that mimicked the one employed in [Study 2](#) or to a *skill-based perspective-taking condition*, which was designed to motivate participants to write thoughtful and fair arguments by stressing the importance of perspective taking as a life skill:

Perspective taking is the ability to inhabit another person's mind, to make predictions about that person's thoughts, motivations, and feelings, and to come up with a realistic representation of his or her internal world. This is an important element of successful social interaction. Perspective taking is a skill and some people are better at it than others. A great deal of past research has found that people who are better at perspective taking tend to become more successful in life.

Participants in this condition were asked to articulate Subject A059's point of view about the legalized abortion issue and were told that independent raters would assess the quality of their response in terms of this crucial skill.

Results

In contrast to the findings of the first two studies, here this perspective-taking condition produced no change in participants' issue positions compared to the *own-perspective condition*, $t(99) = -.91$, $p = .363$, $d = .19$ ($M = .08$, $SD = .48$, vs. $M = 0$, $SD = .35$). These results make it clear that, in the absence of a sense of accountability to the person whose perspective one is being asked to take, engaging in perspective taking is unlikely to be effective in producing attitude change, even when there is some incentive to do well.

In [Study 4](#), we test a potential boundary condition: whether the accountability must be to a person participants have met. Accountability to an opponent one has never met might be expected to weaken any perspective-taking effects because people might feel less compelled by the imagined perspective of a person who is only an abstraction to them.

Study 4

Method

To test whether the perspective-taking exercise would be effective at moderating participants' issue positions even if they have never met the opponent whose position they took, we recruited 103 participants (81 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.6$ years; $SD_{\text{age}} = 3.0$ years; 54% Asian, 21% White, 15% Latino, 10% Other) from the same population as the previous studies. In this follow-up study, 7 additional participants were excluded from analysis because they either failed to follow instructions properly or did not pass the attention check (see online [Supplementary material](#) for additional details).

Participants were randomly assigned to the *disclosure-based perspective-taking condition* or to the *own-perspective condition*. In the disclosure-based perspective-taking condition participants were asked to articulate Subject A059's point of view about the legalized abortion issue, and were led to believe that their response would be sent to Subject A059 for a rating of its accuracy, which would in turn be emailed to the participant. As in previous studies, in the own-perspective condition, participants articulated their own point of view about legalized abortion.

Results

Results confirmed the importance of meeting the opponent whose perspective one is being asked to articulate. There was no difference between the two conditions in terms of attitude change about legalized abortion, $t(101) = .08, p = .932, d = .02$ ($M = .15, SD = .5$, vs. $M = .16, SD = .58$). Thus, taking the perspective of an abstract other was not enough to produce the depolarizing effect, even when participants were made to believe that others would review and evaluate the accuracy of what they had written.

Supplemental analysis

Studies 3 and 4 suggest that taking another's perspective without having met that person is not effective in moderating political opinions, even when there is an incentive to do a good job. To further probe for any differences in participants' motivation to do a good job between our follow-up treatments (the skill-based and the disclosure-based perspective-taking conditions) and the partner-perspective-taking condition in Study 2, we recruited 88 independent coders² (66 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 20.0$ years; $SD_{\text{age}} = 1.7$ years; 49% Asian, 20% White, 17% Latino, 14% Other) to rate the quality of the written arguments in each of those three conditions. Each participant rated 13 arguments chosen at random from the combined pool of 152 perspective-taking arguments from the 3 studies. To measure the quality of each argument, participants were asked to indicate how satisfied the perspective-taking target would be with the way his/her side of the story was described. We found no evidence of any difference in the quality of the arguments articulated comparing the follow-up incentive condition and the follow-up abstract-other condition to the original condition from Study 2 where actual attitude change was observed, $F(1,149) = 0.62, p > .4$. Thus, it appears that the effect on participants' own political opinions of taking their partner's opposing perspective on the relevant issue is not driven simply by motivation to write a coherent, or plausible, account of that person's perspective. Rather, the ability to vividly imagine a specific other person whom one has met and whose perspective one is articulating appears to afford the perspective-taking experience a degree of emotional resonance that it otherwise lacks.

General discussion

In two studies, we found that it was possible to decrease polarization of even strongly-held attitudes about important real-world political issues by instructing people to consider the perspective of a specific person with an opposing viewpoint, whom they had met, and by holding them accountable to this person for an accurate rendering of their perspective.

In Study 1 we found evidence of decreased political polarization on the issue of weight discrimination, an issue selected because participants were not expected to hold long-entrenched beliefs about it. Participants writing from the perspective of the opponent they had met, and under the impression that he or she would be judging the success of this effort, softened their attitudes and did so independently of how strongly they held their initial position.

In Study 2, we explored whether this manipulation could also depolarize positions on an issue about which attitudes are notoriously emotion-laden and deeply entrenched: abortion. We again found that participants moderated their views in response to the perspective-taking exercise, suggesting the potential usefulness of such a technique in easing even highly contentious political disagreements.

It is notable that our perspective-taking exercise had an effect on partisans' issue positions even in the absence of a significant effect on their self-reported success in understanding their opponent's perspective.

Although participants' ratings of their understanding of the opposing perspective did not differ numerically, the assessments may well have different bases in the two conditions. Participants' assessments of their perspective-taking success in the own-perspective condition may have been influenced more by overconfidence than those of participants in the other-perspective condition whose experience attempting to articulate their opponent's perspective may have helped to calibrate them better (Lichtenstein & Fischhoff, 1980). That is, taking the perspective of an opponent could have dual effects that would be expected to influence self-reported success at perspective taking in opposite directions: it immerses one in the opponent's perspective but it also gives one first-hand experience with how difficult it is to take the perspective of a person one disagrees with. Our first study did suggest that degree of attitude change was associated with reports of perspective taking in both the experimental and control condition. However, the lack of any such main effects, along with the lack of main effect of reports of perspective taking, suggest that awareness of taking another's perspective—at least insofar as it is in evidence in people's self-reports of their success at it—is not crucial for the effectiveness of our manipulation.

It does not seem that our perspective-taking exercise was effective simply because, in the process of arguing for the other side, participants partially convinced themselves without really considering their opponent's perspective. Our follow-up studies, Studies 3 and 4, showed no evidence of depolarization when participants had to make arguments for the other side without being held accountable to the specific individual whose perspective they thought they were taking. It also does not seem that the effect is driven simply by any incentive to do a good job at the task given the ineffectiveness of the incentive in Study 4 at producing any opinion change.

We have seen the powerful effects of our perspective-taking approach on attitude depolarization, even with such a highly contentious issue as legalized abortion, but there are, as always, limits on the conclusions possible. Because our assessment was done shortly after the perspective taking exercise, our data do not address how long the attitude depolarization might last. This is certainly worthy of further study. However, even if the attitude softening is relatively short-lived, there are many instances, such as contractual or even hostage situations, when meaningful decisions are based on the state immediately following negotiations.

Crisp and Turner (2009) have shown that just imagining a member of an outgroup can decrease negative attitudes about that group. However, our data suggest that writing from the perspective of an unmet other, even with accountability, does not have the same effect as real interaction. Future work could usefully explore just what aspects of an interaction are critical, and whether changing attitudes about a group operate via a different mechanism than moderating differences of opinion between individuals. It will also be important to examine how the results would compare if individuals' political affiliations were made salient at the outset (Crawford, 2014) and when individuals hold prior hostile views of their opponents or have unpleasant interactions with them.

Taken together the results of our research provide evidence of the potential to reduce attitude entrenchment by encouraging individuals to take the perspective of their opponents. Our work goes beyond previous findings suggesting the potential value of contact with others with conflicting views (Tetlock et al., 1989). Our control groups show that writing from one's own perspective, knowing the other person holds the opposite view, is enough to create some slight attitude moderation. But our experimental groups show that the effort to take the perspective of a person who holds a very different view can create significantly more attitude change than just knowing about that view. Additionally, our work suggests that the success of this approach may depend on both personalization and accountability. Without these factors, individuals seem to treat reasoning from another perspective as merely a cognitive exercise. However, with these factors in place,

² See online Supplementary material for exclusions and data collection stopping rule.

they appear to be able to do more than just go through the motions: when people are held accountable to specific individuals they have met, they may be more likely to vividly imagine how another person could, in good faith, hold a view different from theirs and, as a result, come to see that view as more reasonable than they had previously.

The need for accountability rather than just incentives, and for real contact, rather than just knowledge of the other, has implications for any effort to apply this finding. Such approaches may prove useful in a wide range of interpersonal situations. Conflict mediators could ask disputants to attempt to write from each other's perspectives and then share these efforts.

For the issues that attract serious debate, from the equitable allotment of chores to the legitimacy of international borders, it is rare that people hold positions that are completely without merit. A technique that encourages people to take seriously the viewpoint of another and to recognize its value may help reduce the harm caused by conflict and polarization.

Appendix A. Supplementary material

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2015.02.003>.

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