

RUNNING HEAD: DIVERGENT EFFECTS OF EMPATHY VS. PERSPECTIVE-TAKING

Don't bring me down: Divergent effects of being the target of empathy versus perspective-taking  
on minority group members' perceptions of their group's social standing

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### Abstract

This experiment examined how being the target of one of two commonly recommended strategies for improving intergroup relations – empathy or perspective-taking – affects minority group members' sense of their group's power and status in society. The main hypothesis was that the distinct status hierarchies implied by each of these mindsets would be communicated across face-to-face intergroup exchanges. Specifically, because empathy targets are typically in lower power positions whereas perspective-taking targets are typically in higher power positions, minority group members who were targets of a dominant group member's empathy were expected to come away with a reduced sense of their group's social standing relative to those who were targets of a dominant group member's perspective-taking. Results were consistent with this prediction and further suggested that the mindset effect was partially mediated by a tendency for dominant group members' efforts to empathize with minority targets to foster heightened imbalance in the levels of various power-relevant behaviors exhibited by each person.

Don't bring me down: Divergent effects of being the target of empathy versus perspective-taking on minority group members' perceptions of their group's social standing

A desire for a positive social identity is one of individuals' most compelling and deeply entrenched motivations (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Ashburn-Nardo, Voils, & Monteith, 2001). In connection with the strength of this goal, individuals' perceptions of the status and respect accorded to the groups to which they belong have a host of far-reaching effects, being connected to outcomes such as their overall psychological well-being, task performance, and identification with different achievement domains (e.g., Crocker & Major, 1989; Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002; Steele, 1997; Verkuyten & Lay, 1998).

In light of the benefits attached to perceiving that one's group is held in high regard, questions regarding the malleability of these perceptions come to the forefront: How easy is it to change individuals' sense of their group's social standing? Currently little is known about the sources of these perceptions, apart from an implicit assumption that they constitute a form of cultural knowledge somewhat akin to stereotypes. The present study examines whether individuals' sense of their group's power and status can be affected by the nature of an intergroup interaction experience. It centers in particular on how two commonly recommended strategies for improving intergroup relations – empathy and perspective-taking – affect minority group members' perceptions regarding the social standing of their group in broader society.

#### *Power versus Positivity*

Although the research literature documenting how and when empathy and perspective-taking lead dominant group members to direct more positive attitudes and behavior toward minority group members is extensive (for reviews see Batson, Ahmad, & Lishner, 2009, Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005; Vorauer, 2013), the perceptions of the minority group members

who are the targets of these efforts have gone largely unexamined. Most typically, these mindsets have been instantiated outside of interaction contexts (e.g., via a photograph or transcript), such that the target does not actually experience their effects. When targets' perceptions have been examined, researchers have focused on outcomes such as targets' impressions of how positively dominant group members have behaved and how much targets enjoyed the interaction and feel happy (see, e.g., Todd, Bodenhausen, Galinsky, & Richeson, 2011; Vorauer, Martens, & Sasaki, 2009).

Yet, whereas being liked and having smooth and pleasant interactions may be a priority for dominant group members, minority group members' goals center on enhancing the extent to which they are regarded with respect and on increasing group-based power (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010; Saguy, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2008). Accordingly, the present study focused on how being the target of a dominant group member's empathy or perspective-taking efforts affects minority group members' sense of the power and status their group wields in society.

#### *Distinct Effects of Empathy versus Perspective-Taking?*

Empathy and perspective-taking are similar in many ways, and indeed there is evidence that each can give rise to the other (see Vorauer, 2013). Yet there are some potentially important differences. For one, perspective-taking is usually viewed as more cognitive in nature than empathy (see, e.g., Galinsky, Maddux, Glin, & White, 2008). Empathy is an other-focused emotional response that involves "feeling for" another (often suffering) person (Batson, Polycarpou, et al., 1997), or, more specifically, "an other-oriented emotional response congruent with another's perceived welfare" (Batson, Polycarpou, et al., 1997, p. 105). In contrast, perspective-taking involves trying to step into another person's shoes and see the world through

his or her eyes, imagining his or her point of view (e.g., Davis, 1983; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000).

In addition, perhaps as an antecedent to their differential tendency to center on affect versus cognition – and the focus of the present analysis – empathy and perspective-taking seem apt to be invoked by and imply distinct types of social hierarchy. Although any person can try to empathize with any other person or try to take his or her perspective, individuals are especially likely to empathize when they encounter others who are disadvantaged relative to themselves and who are in need of their help (e.g., Coke, Batson, & McDavis, 1978; Stotland, 1969). In contrast, lower power individuals are especially likely to engage in perspective-taking as a function of their desire to better understand how higher power others are likely to treat them (e.g., Galinsky, Magee, Inesi, & Gruenfeld, 2008; Lammers, Gordijn, & Otten, 2008; Vorauer, 2006). Thus, in the case of empathy the target is typically in a lower power position whereas in the case of perspective-taking the target is typically in a higher power position.

Accordingly, the main hypothesis driving the present study was that the distinct implied status hierarchies associated with empathy and perspective-taking would be communicated across intergroup exchanges. In essence, pursuing either of these mindsets should activate a script or relationship schema (Baldwin, 1992) that dictates the social position of each person relative to the other and that is transmitted to the target. Our specific prediction was that being the target of a dominant group member's efforts to empathize would reduce minority targets' sense of group-based power and respect relative to being the target of a dominant group member's perspective-taking efforts.

#### *Intragroup versus Intergroup Interaction*

Although the study focused on the inferences that minority group members draw about their group's status from a dominant group member's treatment of them, individual-level measures of power and an intragroup interaction condition involving exchanges between two dominant group members were included to test the generality of the effects. Specifically, being the target of empathy or perspective-taking within intragroup interaction could conceivably affect individuals' sense of their personal level of power in a parallel manner as predicted for group-level inferences in intergroup interaction. Yet, issues related to power and status come to the forefront and are particularly salient during exchanges between members of different groups. For example, research confirms that dominant group members become highly attuned to the privileged status of their group in intergroup interaction contexts, activating trait constructs relevant to power (Vorauer, Hunter, Main, & Roy, 2000; Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998). Minority group members show a similar sensitivity. This sensitivity is perhaps underscored most clearly by research and theorizing suggesting that stereotypes are essentially statements about the relative status of different groups and that stereotype threat effects can thus be understood as a result of individuals' desire to maintain and enhance their social status (e.g., Henry & Pratto, 2010; Josephs, Newman, Brown, & Beer, 2003). In light of this heightened salience of power dynamics, individuals might be especially ready to construe their own and their interaction partner's behavior in power-relevant terms and to draw inferences about power in intergroup contexts. Notably, although minority targets' perceptions of their group's social standing were of primary interest in the present study, our reasoning also suggests that there should be complementary implications for dominant group members enacting the mindsets in intergroup interaction.

*Imbalance in Behavior Across the Dyad*

The present study also began to explore, in a very preliminary fashion, the particular behaviors through which empathy and perspective-taking might convey signals regarding status and power during face-to-face interaction. Although we assessed a variety of possibilities, of particular interest was whether dominant group members' empathy and perspective-taking efforts might affect balance across dyad members in terms of how much they exhibited a variety of interaction behaviors potentially relevant to power, namely loudness, time spent talking, interrupting, and initiating turns in conversation. Specifically, if empathy essentially instantiates a power hierarchy in which the target is on the bottom whereas perspective-taking frames the target as on top, dominant group members' efforts to empathize might heighten imbalance or inequity across the dyad in the extent to which they dominate in these behaviors over the target in intergroup contexts, whereas perspective-taking efforts could conceivably have the opposite effect of tempering inequity. Minority and dominant group members may then draw conclusions about their own individual-level or group-level power from the level of imbalance or inequity across the dyad in the level of power-relevant behaviors exhibited by each person.

It was of further interest to us to probe whether any effects of the mindsets on imbalance might vary across intergroup versus intragroup contexts. One possibility was that, by virtue of the heightened salience of power dynamics in intergroup exchanges, the mindsets would have distinct implications for imbalance in intergroup as compared to intragroup exchanges. An alternative possibility was that the effects of the mindsets on imbalance would be similar across intergroup and intragroup contexts.

Notably, examining how dominant group members' mindset influences interaction behavior sets the stage for better understanding any specificity of the effects of the mindsets on perceived power to intergroup interaction: If dominant group members' mindsets have stronger

effects on power perceptions in intergroup contexts, is this because their mindsets have distinct implications for interaction behavior in intergroup as compared to intragroup exchanges? Or is it because the interpretations attached to behavior vary across intergroup and intragroup contexts? Or both? Analyses are conducted to begin to answer these questions.

### *Overview*

Participants (“actors”) with a White/European ethnic background (hereafter referred to as White) were randomly assigned to be empathic, objective, or to engage in perspective-taking during a face-to-face discussion with another participant (“target”) who was also White or who had an Aboriginal ethnic background (hereafter referred to as Aboriginal). Targets did not receive any mindset manipulation and were blind to the fact that actors had received such a manipulation. Targets’ perceptions of the social standing of White and Aboriginal individuals in society were the primary dependent measures of interest. The main hypothesis was that Aboriginal targets would perceive their own group as having lower status in society when paired with a White actor who engaged in empathy rather than perspective-taking. No such effects were expected for White targets, for whom the interaction was of an intragroup nature. The control condition was one in which the White actor tried to be objective – a common comparison condition in research on empathy and perspective-taking. Individual-level measures of power in the form of participants' ratings of their own and their interaction partner’s power were also included. So that the effects on the power measures could be understood in the context of results for positivity, participants also rated how positively they felt toward their partner and how positively they thought that their partner felt toward them.

### *Method*

#### *Participants*



Participants were 93 same-sex pairs of previously unacquainted Canadian introductory psychology students (64.5% female) who completed the study in exchange for partial course credit.<sup>1</sup> Forty-seven pairs included two White students; forty-six included one White and one Aboriginal student. We ran as many pairs as we could given limited numbers of Aboriginal participants available. Students were assigned to pairs on the basis of scheduling convenience. All participants had previously completed a mass testing survey that included demographic questions. The White member of each White-Aboriginal pair and a randomly selected member of each White-White pair ("actors") were randomly assigned to the empathy, perspective-taking, or objective condition.

### *Procedure*

Pair members were assigned to wait for the White male experimenter in different locations and were kept separate from one another at all times except for the discussion and debriefing. As a cover story, the experimenter told participants that the researchers were interested in "how reasoning and judgment vary across social versus non-social contexts." Accordingly, they and their partner would discuss their thoughts, experiences, and opinions on a number of different topics and would also do some judgment and decision-making tasks on their own. Only after their arrival were participants told that the researchers were particularly interested in interactions involving members of similar versus different ethnic groups and specified whether they were paired with a White or Aboriginal student.

Actors then received the manipulation. They all received the same general preamble: "After the discussion you will be asked to answer a number of questions about it." Following Batson et al.'s (1997) classic procedure, the remaining instructions to those in the empathic condition were:

We have found that people are better able to answer these questions if, during the discussion, they try to imagine how the other participant feels about the events and experiences that he/she describes and to imagine how these events and experiences have affected his/her life. Try to feel the full impact of the experiences that he/she has had and how he/she feels as a result.

Following Vorauer and Sucharyna's (2013) script for prompting "imagine-other" perspective-taking, the remaining instructions to those in the perspective-taking condition were:

We have found that people are better able to answer these questions if they try to take the other participant's perspective during the discussion. So, please concentrate on trying to get inside the other participant's head and on looking at the discussion through his/her eyes. That is, imagine as clearly and vividly as possible what your reactions would be if you were the other participant, taking into account everything that you know about him/her and trying to adopt his/her own way of looking at things.

Following Batson et al. (1997), the remaining instructions to those in the objective control condition were:

We have found that people are better able to answer these questions if they try to take an objective perspective toward the other participant during the discussion. Try not to get caught up in how he/she feels. Just remain objective and detached.

The manipulation concluded with a condition-appropriate reinforcement of the instructions:

So please do everything you can during the discussion to *[imagine how the other participant feels/take the other participant's perspective/be objective]*. And remember to do this throughout the whole discussion. It will really help you in answering the questions that we will ask once the discussion is over.

The experimenter then brought the pair members together and gave them a list of possible discussion topics, which included positive and negative academic and social experiences, opinions about social issues (capital punishment and euthanasia), career goals, employment experiences, and relationships with family members. Participants were left alone for the 12-minute discussion that was audiotaped with their knowledge. Immediately after the

discussion pair members were separated to complete the dependent measures, having been assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

### *Perceived Group Standing*

The primary dependent measures of interest were a series of questions asking participants about how much power and status Aboriginal and European (White) Canadians are perceived to have in society. The instructions, which were taken from Major et al. (2002), read: "There are many people who believe that different groups enjoy different amounts of social status and power in this society. You may not believe this for yourself, but if you had to rate each of the following groups as such people see them, how would you do so?" They rated the status and power of each group in turn on 9-point scales on which higher numbers reflected stronger endorsement; power and status ratings were combined to create overall indices of the perceived standing of each group ( $\alpha_s = .76$  to  $.80$ ). The order in which the two groups and all other self-versus other-relevant judgments were presented was counterbalanced across participants.

### *Perceptions of Individual-Level Power and Interpersonal Positivity*

Participants indicated their perceptions of their own and their interaction partner's power on four 7-point scales (*powerful, strong, influential, effective*;  $\alpha_s = .78$  to  $.83$ ). They also used 7-point scales to indicate how positively they felt toward their partner (*like, felt warm toward, respect, admire*) and how positively they thought their partner felt toward them ("metaperceptions";  $\alpha_s = .77$  to  $.88$ ).

### *Interaction Behavior*

In an effort to tap into shifts in the power balance across pair members potentially triggered by the different mindsets, two White coders (one male, one female) who were not informed of the mindset or exchange type condition assignments listened to the audiotaped

discussions and rated the extent to which four different power-relevant behaviors (*time spent talking, loudness, initiating, and interruptions*) were balanced versus unbalanced across pair members. For example, for talking, the instructions read: “How balanced was the conversation in terms of talking? Specifically, was it unbalanced, with one participant doing most of the talking? Or was it more balanced, with each participant talking a similar amount?” The instructions were parallel for the other behaviors. Coders made their ratings on a 5-point scale that was scored so that higher numbers reflected greater perceptions of imbalance. Reliabilities for the behaviors ranged from  $\alpha = .85$  to  $.90$ .<sup>2</sup> Coders’ ratings for each behavior were standardized and averaged together and then these were combined to create an overall index of imbalance across the four behaviors ( $\alpha = .65$ ). Note that discussions were audiotaped rather than videotaped to minimize external self-presentational pressures and self-consciousness so that participants would stay focused on each other. One consequence was that actors and targets could not be reliably distinguished during coding, such that behaviors were necessarily coded at the pair level.

Three other White (female) coders counted the overall number of interruptions ( $\alpha = .90$ ) so that the overall frequency of this behavior could be controlled in analyses of imbalance (the meaningfulness of overall counts of the other behaviors at the pair level seemed questionable and hence they were not coded). These coders also rated a variety of further behaviors, including number of explicit expressions of agreement ( $\alpha = .67$ ) and disagreement ( $\alpha = .81$ ), intimacy ( $\alpha = .64$ ), and number of compliments ( $\alpha = .71$ ). As well, they rated the extent to which the discussions were focused on affective reactions (emotions and feelings;  $\alpha = .56$ ) and the extent to which the discussions were focused on cognitive reactions (judgments, thoughts, beliefs, and reasoning;  $\alpha = .77$ ). Coders’ ratings for each behavior were standardized and averaged together.<sup>3</sup>

There were no other measures apart from those assessing self-rated English language proficiency (which was consistently high), self-esteem, an open-ended thought-listing task, and several exploratory group- and individual-level implicit measures of power.<sup>4</sup>

### *Results*

As preliminary analyses revealed that sex was unrelated to responses on the key dependent measures, this variable is not considered further.

#### *Perceived Group Standing*

Actors' and targets' perceptions of the social standing of Aboriginal and White Canadians were analyzed in a 3 (Actor Mindset: Objective vs. Empathic vs. Perspective-Taking) X 2 (Exchange Type: Intragroup vs. Intergroup) X 2 (Role: Actor vs. Target) x 2 (Focus of Judgment: Aboriginal vs. White Canadians) repeated-measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Pairs were the unit of analysis; the first two factors were between-pairs and the second two factors were within-pairs. This analysis yielded a significant four-way Actor Mindset X Exchange Type X Role X Focus of Judgment interaction,  $F(2, 87) = 4.26, p = .017$ . Simple effects analyses revealed that a significant three-way Actor Mindset X Exchange Type X Role interaction was evident when Aboriginal Canadians were the focus of judgment,  $F(2, 87) = 4.82, p = .010$ , but not when White Canadians were the focus of judgment,  $F(2, 87) = 0.423, p = .657$ .<sup>5</sup> Indeed, there were no effects on judgments of White Canadians, all  $ps > .149$ , overall  $M = 7.59, SE = 0.08$ .

Our subsequent simple effects analyses accordingly focused on judgments of Aboriginal Canadians. The means for these judgments across all cells of the design are displayed in Figure 1. These analyses revealed a significant Actor Mindset X Exchange Type interaction for targets,  $F(2, 87) = 5.48, p = .006$ , that was not evident for actors,  $F(2, 87) = 1.25, p = .292$ . Although

there was no overall effect of actor mindset on targets in intragroup pairs (who were White),  $F(2, 44) = 1.90, p = .162$ , there was a significant overall effect of actor mindset for targets in intergroup pairs (who were Aboriginal),  $F(2, 43) = 3.83, p = .030$ : In line with predictions, these targets viewed Aboriginal Canadians as having lower social standing when the actor was pursuing an empathic ( $M = 3.77, SE = 0.47$ ) rather than a perspective-taking mindset ( $M = 5.53, SE = 0.47$ ),  $F(1, 28) = 9.21, p = .005$ ; neither of the comparisons with the objective condition ( $M = 4.69, SE = 0.45$ ) reached conventional levels of statistical significance, for empathy  $F(1, 29) = 1.75, p = .196$ , and for perspective-taking  $F(1, 29) = 1.93, p = .175$ . In sum, consistent with our hypotheses, the implications of actors' mindset centered on Aboriginal targets' sense of their own group's social standing: Relative to being the target of perspective-taking, being the target of empathy reduced these individuals' sense of the power and status their ethnic group wields in society.

Further simple effects analyses probing the effect of exchange type within each of the actor mindset conditions revealed a nonsignificant negative effect (whereby ratings were lower in intergroup than intragroup exchanges) in the empathic condition,  $F(1, 29) = 2.42, p = .131$ , a positive effect in the perspective-taking condition,  $F(1, 28) = 11.15, p = .002$ , and no effect in the objective condition,  $F(1, 30) = 0.261, p = .613$ . Close inspection of the means involved in these comparisons reveal a complementary, albeit weaker and nonsignificant, pattern across the mindset conditions in intragroup as compared to intergroup exchanges. The nonsignificant tendency for White targets to rate Aboriginal Canadians as having lower status in the perspective-taking as compared to the empathic condition ( $F(1, 29) = 3.08, p = .090$ , for this specific comparison) could reflect that, like Aboriginal targets, these targets felt relatively elevated in the perspective-taking compared to the empathic condition, with the pattern being

evident in the more variable and malleable judgments of the lower status group. However, this account is speculative.

The overall analysis also yielded a main effect for focus of judgment whereby White Canadians were generally seen as having higher standing ( $M = 7.59$ ,  $SE = 0.08$ ) than Aboriginal Canadians ( $M = 4.66$ ,  $SE = 0.14$ ),  $F(1, 87) = 291.96$ ,  $p < .001$ . This main effect was qualified by a two-way Exchange Type X Focus of Judgment interaction,  $F(1, 87) = 3.93$ ,  $p = .051$ , whereby the perceived difference in standing was higher in the intragroup condition ( $M = 7.71$ ,  $SE = 0.11$  and  $M = 4.44$ ,  $SE = 0.19$ , respectively,  $F(1, 44) = 160.17$ ,  $p < .001$ ) than in the intergroup condition ( $M = 7.47$ ,  $SE = 0.12$  and  $M = 4.88$ ,  $SE = 0.20$ , respectively,  $F(1, 43) = 132.92$ ,  $p < .001$ ); neither of the simple effects of exchange type was significant or marginal. There were no other effects.

#### *Perceptions of Individual-Level Power and Interpersonal Positivity*

A directly parallel analysis of actors' and targets' perceptions of their own and their interaction partner's individual-level power yielded no significant effects, all  $ps > .144$ .

The analysis of actors' and targets' feelings toward their partner and metaperceptions regarding their partner's feelings toward them yielded an overall main effect for judgment type whereby impressions were generally more positive ( $M = 5.71$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ) than metaperceptions ( $M = 4.81$ ,  $SE = 0.07$ ),  $F(1, 87) = 251.51$ ,  $p < .001$ , as well as an Exchange Type x Judgment Type interaction,  $F(1, 87) = 10.08$ ,  $p = .002$ . Simple effects analyses here indicated that although impressions were comparable across intergroup and intragroup interaction,  $M_s = 5.73$  ( $SE = 0.10$ ) and  $5.68$  ( $SE = 0.10$ ) respectively,  $F(1, 135.40) = 0.130$ ,  $p = .719$ , metaperceptions were less positive in intergroup than in intragroup exchanges,  $M_s = 4.66$  ( $SE = 0.10$ ) and  $4.97$  ( $SE = 0.10$ ) respectively,  $F(1, 135.40) = 4.95$ ,  $p = .028$ .

*Interaction Behavior: Imbalance*

Unlike our other measures, the coding of interaction behavior was (necessarily) conducted at the pair level and as such did not require a repeated-measures approach. Accordingly, we analyzed these measures in multiple regression. Further, to specifically probe the significant negative effect of White actors' empathy relative to perspective-taking that was evident on Aboriginal targets' perceptions of their group's social standing, we computed two dummy-coded contrasts to enter as predictors in which the empathy condition was the reference category (i.e., always coded 0). The first, *empathy vs. perspective-taking*, contrast compared the empathy and perspective-taking conditions (i.e., empathy = 0, perspective-taking = 1, and objective = 0) and the second, *empathy vs. objective*, contrast compared the empathy and objective conditions (i.e., empathy = 0, perspective-taking = 0, and objective = 1). The other predictors were a contrast vector representing exchange type (intragroup = 0 and intergroup = 1), and the interactions between exchange type and the *empathy vs. perspective-taking* and *empathy vs. objective* contrasts. In the analysis of the overall index of imbalance, the number of interruptions was included as a covariate. Main effects were entered on the first step and interactions were entered on the second step.

The analysis of imbalance yielded a main effect of exchange type,  $b = 0.28$ ,  $\beta = .21$ ,  $t(84) = 2.02$ ,  $p = .047$ , whereby imbalance was greater in intergroup than intragroup exchanges,  $\hat{Y}$ s = 0.14 and -0.14 respectively. As well, there was a marginal interaction between exchange type and *empathy vs. perspective-taking* contrast,  $b = -0.59$ ,  $\beta = -.32$ ,  $t(82) = 1.70$ ,  $p = .094$ . Simple effects analyses revealed that the greater imbalance in intergroup relative to intragroup exchanges was evident only when actors were trying to be empathic,  $b = 0.66$ ,  $t(82) = 2.65$ ,  $p = .010$ , and not when they were trying to take the target's perspective or be objective,  $b = 0.07$ ,



$t(82) = 0.29, p = .773$ , and  $b = 0.15, t(82) = 0.66, p = .511$ , respectively. The predicted values are displayed in Figure 2.

### *Other Interaction Behaviors*

Parallel analyses (without the covariate) of the other interaction behaviors assessed by coders yielded no significant or marginal effects involving the empathy vs. perspective-taking contrast apart from a main effect for the empathy vs. perspective-taking contrast on explicit expressions of agreement,  $b = -0.48, \beta = -.29, t(85) = 2.39, p = .019$ , whereby there were more expressions of agreement in the empathy than in the perspective-taking condition,  $\hat{Y}_s = 0.24$  and  $-0.24$  respectively ( $\hat{Y} = 0.01$  for the objective condition). This effect held regardless of exchange type, interaction  $b = -0.04, \beta = -.02, t(83) = -0.11, p = .916$ .

The only other significant effect to emerge was an Empathy vs. Objective X Exchange Type interaction on feelings focus,  $b = -0.89, \beta = -.47, t(83) = 2.40, p = .019$ . Simple effects analyses indicated that whereas the effect of the empathy vs. objective contrast was not significant in intragroup exchanges,  $b = 0.23, t(83) = 0.87, p = .385$ , it was significant in intergroup exchanges,  $b = -0.66, t(83) = 2.55, p = .013$ . Although this contrast did not involve the perspective-taking condition, perusal of the predicted values reveals that in intergroup exchanges the empathy condition stood out in terms of the elevated focus on feelings that tended to be evident. The predicted values are presented in Table 1.

### *Mediation*

*Imbalance.* As a first step in probing whether imbalance in interaction behavior prompted by actors' mindset contributed to the effects that were evident on Aboriginal targets' sense of their own group's social standing, we first entered targets' perceptions of the social standing of Aboriginal Canadians to the same regression analysis used to analyze imbalance. As would be

expected on the basis of the results of the repeated-measures ANOVA originally conducted on these data, this analysis yielded a significant interaction between exchange type and *empathy vs. perspective-taking* contrast,  $b = 3.09$ ,  $\beta = .60$ ,  $t(82) = 3.20$ ,  $p = .002$ . A partial correlational analysis (controlling for the covariate) further confirmed that for targets greater imbalance was associated with lower perceptions of Aboriginal Canadians' social standing,  $r(86) = -0.23$ ,  $p = .035$ .

Accordingly, we proceeded to test mediation by using the bootstrapping procedures suggested by Shrout and Bolger (2002) to compute a confidence interval around the indirect effect (i.e., the path through the mediator). If zero falls outside this interval, mediation can be said to be present. The SPSS macros that Preacher and Hayes (2004) provide for this procedure (updated in 2011) were used. The Empathy vs. Perspective-Taking X Exchange Type interaction was the independent variable, targets' perceptions regarding the social standing of Aboriginal Canadians was the dependent variable, and overall imbalance in interaction behavior was the mediator; all other terms from the regression analysis were included as covariates. Results of this procedure revealed a 94% confidence interval ranging from 0.002 to 1.133 (see Figure 3). The fact that zero fell outside this interval indicates a marginally significant mediation effect ( $p < .06$ ). The residual direct effect was significant ( $p = .006$ ).

*Other Behaviors.* Given that only a main effect of mindset (not qualified by exchange type) was evident on agreement, and the correlation between feelings focus and targets' perceptions of the social standing of Aboriginal Canadians was not significant overall or within the intergroup condition only, respective  $r_s = -0.11$  ( $p = .309$ ) and  $-0.10$  ( $p = .522$ ), neither of these other behaviors was a candidate for mediation.

Overall these results suggest that heightened imbalance introduced by actor empathy in intergroup relative to intragroup exchanges contributed to Aboriginal targets' reduced perceptions of their group's social standing. Notably, although there was tentative evidence of mediation at the level of the overall Empathy vs. Perspective-Taking X Exchange Type interaction, from the pattern of simple effects on imbalance (with no significant exchange type effect evident on imbalance in the perspective-taking condition) it is clear that any mediational role of imbalance centered on the empathy condition in particular. As suggested by the significant residual direct effect, the forces contributing to Aboriginal targets' elevated perceptions of their group's social standing in the perspective-taking condition remain to be identified.

### *Discussion*

The current findings illuminate that empathy and perspective-taking, two seemingly similar mindsets, can instantiate different beliefs about their ingroup's social standing in the minds of minority targets during intergroup interaction. Specifically, minority group members who were targets of a dominant group member's empathy perceived their group as having less power and status than did those who were targets of a dominant group member's perspective-taking. Dominant group members' mindset did not significantly affect any of the individual- or group-level power perception measures in intragroup interaction. Thus it appears that the distinct status hierarchies typically implied by empathy versus perspective-taking most clearly affect judgments of social standing when these mindsets are adopted in intergroup interaction, in which readiness to draw inferences about power might be particularly acute, as compared to when these mindsets are adopted during exchanges between individuals belonging to the same group.

Critically, although it may not be surprising that dominant group members who were the targets of the mindsets did not make group-level inferences in the context of intragroup interaction, dominant group members doing the empathizing and perspective-taking in intergroup interaction (i.e., the “actors”) did not either. Thus the results may suggest a special sensitivity and readiness of minority group members to interpret interaction behavior as indicative of group power and status, perhaps reflecting heightened importance they attach to these issues relative to dominant group members (e.g., Saguy et al., 2008). The complete lack of effects on perceptions of dominant group members' power and status and concomitant low variability in these judgments may further point to greater sensitivity of minority group members.

However, it is also possible that individuals are generally more confident in their judgments of the standing of high status groups regardless of whether they belong to those groups. In line with this idea, there was some weak indication that White targets in the intragroup exchanges were sensitive to the power implications of the mindset that their interaction partner was pursuing, with this sensitivity being evident in their ratings of the minority group rather than their own. This is suggestive of the possibility of effects within intragroup interaction as well that might be evident on different types of outcome measures.

#### *Behavioral Mediation of the Distinct Effects of Empathy versus Perspective-Taking*

Preliminary mediation analyses examining specific behaviors through which empathy and perspective-taking mindsets might convey signals regarding status and power during face-to-face intergroup interaction revealed an intriguing pattern. Dominant group members' efforts to empathize introduced heightened imbalance in the levels of power-relevant behaviors exhibited by each member of the interacting dyad in intergroup relative to intragroup exchanges. Greater

imbalance was in turn associated with targets perceiving the minority group as occupying a lower position in society, such that the negative effect of being the target of dominant group members' efforts to empathize versus perspective-take on targets' perceptions of their group's social standing and power was partially mediated by imbalance. However, the evidence for the mediational role of imbalance was marginal and centered on the empathy condition in particular, with the forces contributing to minority group targets' elevated perceptions of their group's social standing in the perspective-taking condition remaining unclear.

Notably, our interpretation of imbalance to this point has assumed that in intergroup exchanges it reflected higher levels of the power-relevant behaviors exhibited by the dominant group member. The fact that imbalance as coded by outside judges was negatively correlated with minority targets' perceptions of the social standing of their group is consistent with this interpretation. However, questions arise as to the appropriate interpretation of imbalance in the intragroup case, and, in particular, why the relation of imbalance to perceptions of minority group social standing was similar across intergroup ( $r = -.23$ ) and intragroup ( $r = -.28$ ) exchanges. We consider a key possibility to be that imbalance in *any* direction is coded differently by minority versus dominant group members. That is, perhaps minority group members are ready to interpret any type of imbalance as reflecting negatively on their group's social standing – whether it be that the other person is "running the show" or they themselves are having to "do all of the work." In contrast, dominant group members may show a complementary tendency to interpret imbalance as reflecting positively on their group's standing. To the extent that perceptions of higher status groups are less variable and malleable, this tendency might be expressed in perceptions of the minority group as having (implicitly relative) lower social standing.

To return to the questions we posed earlier, then, in the present study it seemed to be the case both that dominant group members' mindsets had distinct implications for interaction behavior in intergroup as compared to intragroup exchanges and that the interpretations attached to behavior varied across intergroup and intragroup exchanges. However, our analysis is clearly speculative. Further research is needed to more precisely unpack the locus of imbalance in interaction behavior that arises across intragroup and intergroup contexts, such that its relations to perceptions of dominant and minority groups' social standing can more confidently be delineated. It will be of particular interest to probe the differential implications of empathy for behavior imbalance across intergroup versus intragroup interaction. The present data tentatively suggest that empathy might have equalizing effect on behavior in exchanges between similar individuals who share the same group membership but take a different turn when enacted in the context of a chronic group-based status difference. Additional research is also needed to identify mechanisms behind the positive implications of dominant group members' perspective-taking efforts for minority targets' perceptions of their group's social standing.

*What about Positivity?*

At first it may seem surprising that the effects that were evident in the current study with respect to targets' sense of their group's power and social standing occurred alongside null effects on measures assessing interpersonal positivity. The failure to replicate previous findings suggesting that empathy and perspective-taking both foster more positive perceptions becomes less surprising, however, in light of recent research and theory highlighting that such positive effects often evaporate (and indeed, sometimes reverse) in the context of back-and-forth exchanges characterized by the potential for evaluation, such as the interaction context involved in the current study (see Vorauer, 2013, for a review). In brief, when there is the potential for

evaluation empathy and perspective-taking can lead individuals toward an unproductive egocentric focus on their own evaluation instead of the kinds of self-other merging or projection processes that underlie positive effects of these mindsets in other contexts.

The results of this study represent a key advance in that they reveal how two commonly recommended strategies for improving intergroup relations affect minority group members' sense of their group's power and status. Although warmth and positivity are undeniably important, it seems critical to know how efforts to benefit minority group members – which these mindsets often represent – affect outcomes that are highly valued by the recipients of those efforts.

#### *Future Research Directions*

In connection with the novel nature of this research, numerous questions remain. For example, the perceived status difference between White and Aboriginal Canadians is especially great (see, e.g., Vorauer & Sakamoto, 2008), and issues related to current and historical injustice and discrimination in connection with these groups figure prominently in the media in the location where the study was conducted. These points make this relationship an important one to understand, yet raise questions about the extent to which the present findings generalize to other intergroup relations. For example, perhaps when the perceived likelihood of group-based prejudice and discrimination is lower, effects on individual-level power measures might be more evident because behavior is apt to be viewed less exclusively through the lens of group membership. The strength of individuals' ingroup identification or collectivist orientation may also guide the extent to which effects on group-level power outcomes are echoed at the personal level.

Further, the central analyses in this paper involved comparing the effects of empathy and perspective-taking to one another. It is reasonable to ask how each mindset fares in comparison to other mindsets that individuals might adopt in social and intergroup interaction situations. Results for the neutral control condition in the present study, in which dominant group members tried to be objective rather than get inside their partner's head, were generally in between the two extremes instantiated by empathy versus perspective-taking. Mindsets centering on learning about an interaction partner (e.g., Sasaki & Vorauer, 2010; Trawalter & Richeson, 2006) might be more empowering for targets than both empathy and perspective-taking by virtue of the attention they invoke to actively looking outward. Regardless of the comparison point or baseline, however, it is clear that the effects of empathy versus perspective-taking are distinct.

Although the present findings all center on minority group members' sense of the status and power that others in society consider their group to hold rather than on dominant group members' perceptions or actual power wielded during interaction, considerable research suggests that individuals' subjective sense of power is more important than their objective level of power in guiding their behavior (e.g., Bugental, Lyon, Krantz, & Cortez, 1997; Skinner, 1996; see Smith & Galinsky, 2010, for a review). Still, one can certainly ask whether a heightened sense of group power, in and of itself, is as desirable an outcome as it first seems. Indeed, instantiating a false sense of power could conceivably undermine progress toward equality in much in the same way as feeling warmly regarded can reduce disadvantaged group members' attention to intergroup inequality (Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009) and readiness to engage in collective action on behalf of their group (Becker & Wright, 2011). Although this remains an intriguing issue for future research, the well-documented link from power to goal focus and



effective goal pursuit would seem to run against this possibility (e.g., Guinote, 2007; Smith, Jostmann, Galinsky, & van Dijk, 2008).

### *Conclusion*

The present results suggest that dominant group members who want to approach intergroup interaction with a mindset that will support and perhaps bolster a minority interaction partner's sense of power in some way would be well-served to try to adopt their partner's unique perspective and see the world through his or her eyes rather than try to identify and connect with his or her inner feelings.

## Footnotes

1. These numbers do not include two pairs in which pair members already knew one another or one pair that included a very recent immigrant to Canada; these facts were not known at the time of recruitment.
2. Overall imbalance in agreement was also assessed ( $\alpha = .84$ ). The basic and mediational results for imbalance were very similar when agreement imbalance was included in the overall index, with or without number of agreement expressions as a covariate. We excluded agreement imbalance from the analyses reported in the text in view of the mindset effect that was evident on overall number of agreement expressions, which potentially complicates interpretation.
3. The amount of time that pairs spent on each discussion topic was also assessed, but did not vary significantly according to mindset or exchange type.
4. Details are available from the first author.
5. O'Brien's test (1981) revealed that variance was heterogeneous across judgments of White ( $M = 1.25, SE = 0.12$ ) versus Aboriginal ( $M = 3.53, SE = 0.30$ ) Canadians,  $F(1, 92) = 44.00, p < .001$ . As well, interaction effects revealed that variance was heterogeneous across intragroup versus intergroup pairs both for judgments of Aboriginal Canadians, respective  $M$ s = 3.94 ( $SE = 0.42$ ) and 2.77 ( $SE = 0.42$ ),  $F(1, 87) = 3.95, p = .05$ , and for actors' judgments in general, respective  $M$ s = 2.77 ( $SE = 0.35$ ) and 1.64 ( $SE = 0.35$ ),  $F(1, 87) = 5.17, p = .025$ . Accordingly, we did not compute pooled error terms and degrees of freedom when testing simple effects here. In analyses of other measures overall error terms and degrees of freedom for simple effects analyses were computed according to Howell's (1987) formulae for between-within designs.

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Figure 1

*Actors' and Targets' Judgments Regarding the Social Standing of Aboriginal Canadians as a Function of Actor Mindset Condition and Exchange Type (White versus Aboriginal Targets)*

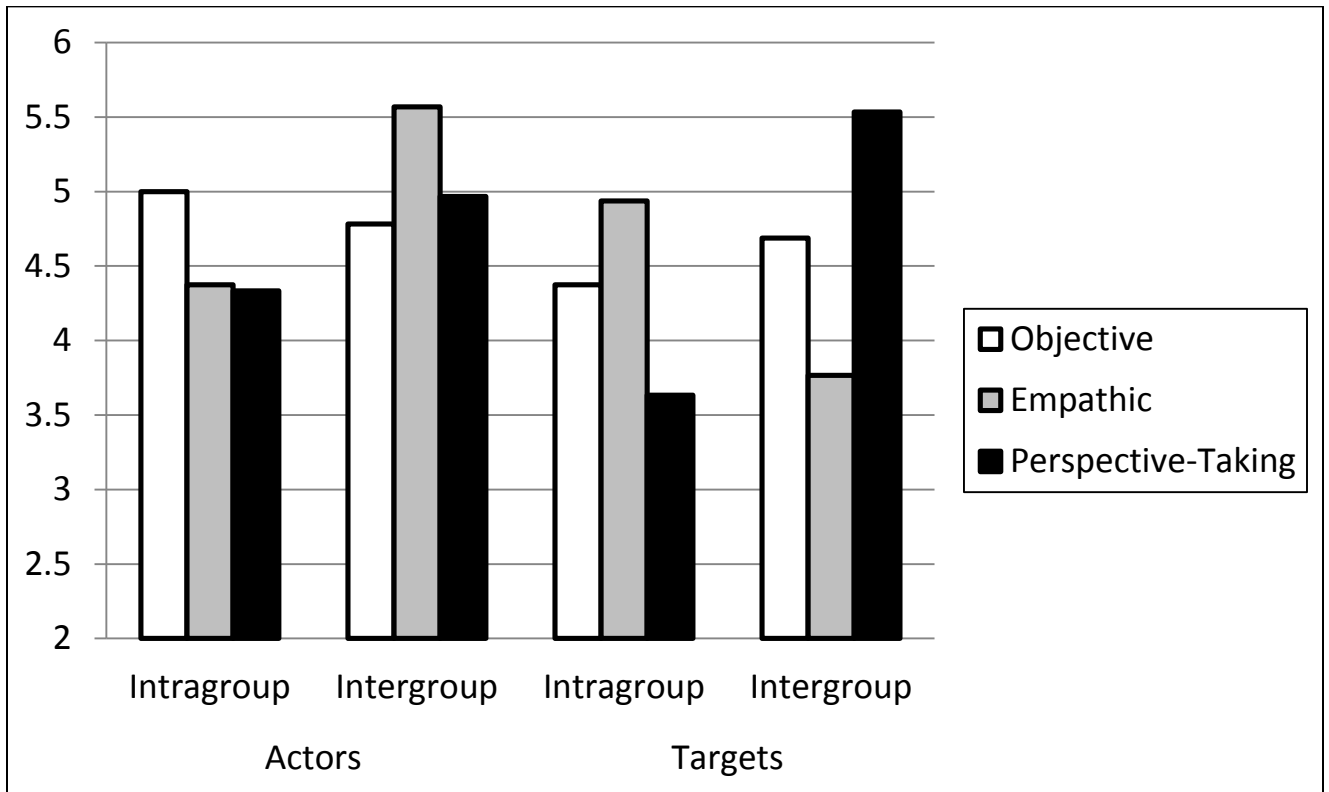


Figure 2

*Predicted Values for Overall Index of Imbalance in Interaction Behavior as a Function of Actor Mindset Condition and Exchange Type (White versus Aboriginal Targets)*

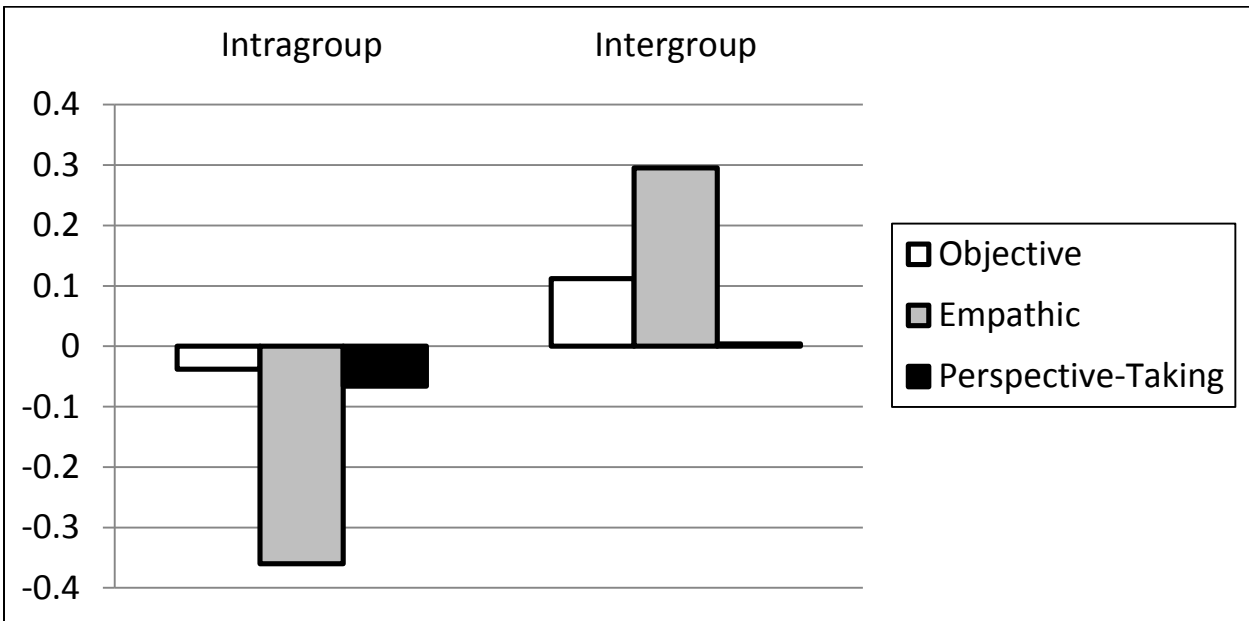
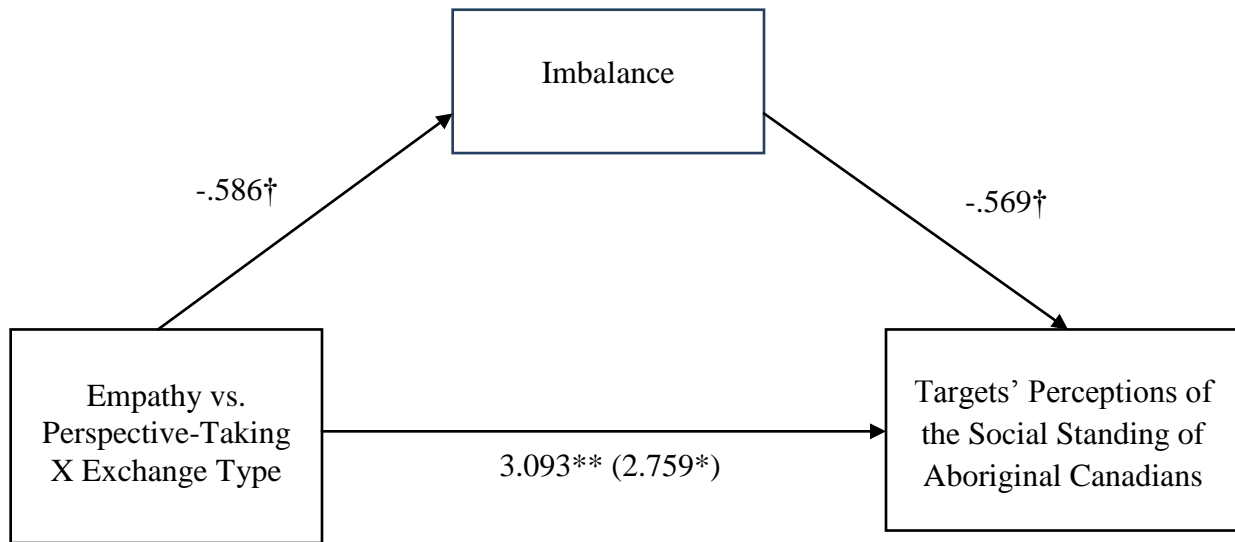


Figure 3

*Unstandardized Regression Coefficients for the Effect of the Empathy vs. Perspective-Taking X Exchange Type Interaction on Targets' Perceptions of the Social Standing of Aboriginal Canadians, as Mediated by Imbalance in the Exchange*



*Notes.* The unstandardized regression coefficient for the effect of the Empathy vs. Perspective-Taking X Exchange Type interaction on targets' perceptions of the social standing of Aboriginal Canadians controlling for imbalance (i.e., the residual direct effect), is reported in parentheses.

† p < .10. \*p < .01. \*\*p < .005

Table 1

*Predicted Values for Ratings of Feelings Focus as a Function of Actor Mindset Condition and Exchange Type (White versus Aboriginal Targets)*

|                        | Actor Mindset Condition |          |                    |
|------------------------|-------------------------|----------|--------------------|
|                        | Objective               | Empathic | Perspective-Taking |
| Intragroup Interaction | 0.19                    | -0.04    | -0.17              |
| Intergroup Interaction | -0.28                   | 0.38     | -0.09              |