

The disempowering implications for members of marginalized groups of imposing a focus on  
personal experiences in discussions of intergroup issues

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*Abstract*

In contrast to when members of marginalized groups choose to share their personal experiences on their own terms and in service of their own goals, when outside forces impose a focus on personal experiences in discussions of intergroup policies there is instead the potential for disempowering implications: Being asked by someone else to approach intergroup issues through the specific lens of their personal experience may lead members of marginalized groups to sense that they are seen as the target of others' harmful (e.g., discrimination) or benevolent (e.g., empathy) moral actions. According to research and theory on moral typecasting, perceiving a person as a target is fundamentally incompatible with perceiving them as an agent and thus is linked to lower perceived competence. Extending this theory to self-perceptions, seven studies provide evidence for an *imposed experience focus effect*, whereby being prompted to talk about their personal experiences (versus reasoning) in discussions of intergroup issues reduces racialized individuals' momentary feelings of power and power-relevant behaviors such as exerting social influence over White individuals' opinions. Perceptions of being viewed as less competent by others or seeing themselves as less competent in the moment were consistently implicated in this effect, which was not evident for White individuals or in discussions of general topics. Asking members of marginalized groups for their opinions in an open manner, or asking about their reasoning or personal firsthand knowledge, all appear to constitute means of learning about their perspective on intergroup issues in a more empowering way.

Efforts to address the substantial inequities that continue to exist between social groups based on identities such as race, gender, and sexual orientation have taken many forms. These include, for example, multicultural education and diversity training in schools and workplaces to reduce discriminatory behavior and practices, as well as social programs and policies designed to address under-representation of marginalized groups in positions of power and influence.

On a more interpersonal level, in exchanges about issues and policies relevant to intergroup relations, efforts to empower members of marginalized groups can involve emphasizing that they are in a unique position to speak to the issues as a function of their personal experiences. In particular, focusing on how members of marginalized groups are directly affected by discrimination and policies designed to address it could seem to constitute a means of granting them psychological standing (Ratner & Miller, 2001): Acknowledging an individual's personal experiences relevant to the issues at hand may be presumed tantamount to acknowledging the person as a legitimate authority on those issues and as someone with special entitlement to speak their mind and be heard.

However, there are theoretical grounds for predicting that imposing a focus on personal experience in such contexts could instead have the opposite effect, serving to reduce rather than enhance how powerful members of marginalized groups feel in the moment. The present research examines this possibility, considering in particular the case where members of marginalized racial groups are prompted to approach discussions of race-relevant issues with White individuals through the specific lens of their personal experience.

*Feeling Like a Target, not an Agent: Moral Typecasting of the Self*

The key idea behind the current investigations is that, in contrast to when members of marginalized groups choose to share their personal experiences on their own initiative, on their

own terms, and in service of the goals that they themselves are pursuing, it can be disempowering when outside forces impose a focus on their experiences in discussions of intergroup issues. Why might this be? In contexts where issues relevant to intergroup relations are discussed, the specter of prejudice and discrimination is raised. Because of this, an outside call to draw on personal experience may lead members of marginalized groups to sense that they are seen more as targets of others' actions and less as active agents: Being asked to focus on the events that have happened *to* them may carry the implication that they are not currently seen as causal entities oriented toward achieving their own desired outcomes.

Beyond cueing construals of the self as a potential target of discrimination, experience focusing might lead members of marginalized groups to feel reduced to those experiences to the exclusion of other dimensions of their individual personhood, such as their thoughts and reasoning about the issues. Feeling depersonalized and disrespected may be the end result. At the very negative end of the spectrum a sense of exploitation could be involved, somewhat akin to the dynamics identified in analyses of "trauma porn" (e.g., Johnson, 2020). Notably, even if experience focusing leads individuals to imagine benevolent reactions from others, such as empathy, construals of the self as a passive target of external happenings and hardships are still apt to be communicated (Vorauer, Quesnel, & St. Germain, 2016). The unifying theme across these various possible implications is that they all involve the self as the target of others' actions.

The literature on moral typecasting (Gray & Wegner, 2009) provides a theoretical framework for considering the psychological implications of being prompted to view the self as a target of others' actions, and is particularly relevant in discussions of intergroup issues by virtue of the clear immoral or moral connotations attached to different behaviors in these contexts. In the moral typecasting perspective, the term moral patiency refers to the capacity to be the target

of right and wrong. Critically, moral patiency is conceptualized as, and empirically demonstrated to be, inversely related to moral agency, which refers to the capacity to *do* right or wrong and is associated with perceptions of causality and intentionality. Gray and Wegner's analysis highlights that seeing someone as a moral patient detracts from seeing them as a moral agent: "...The moral patient is hard to see as a moral agent. Someone we view as having been hurt or helped, or even as being sensitive to hurt or help, does not readily transform in our minds to become one who causes hurt or renders help" (p. 507).

In a recent examination of the stereotypes associated with moral agency versus patiency, Oldmeadow (2018) found that perceptions of moral agency are intertwined with perceptions of competence, whereas perceptions of moral patiency are intertwined with perceptions of warmth. The net implication here is that by suggesting a construal of self as target of others' harmful or benevolent actions, experience focusing can detract from individuals' sense of agency and reduce the extent to which they see themselves as competent and capable in the moment. By virtue of the connection between perceived competence and power (e.g., Wang, Guinote, & Krumhuber, 2018), individuals' psychological sense of power should be undermined as a result.

Notably, the literature on moral typecasting has generally centered on people's perceptions of others. In the present work we build on these ideas and extend the framework to understand the implications of experience focusing for people's sense of how others view them and how they think of themselves. In applying the framework to self-perceptions we focus on the competence more than the warmth dimension, both because of the centrality of competence perceptions to self-evaluation (see, e.g., Abele & Wojciszke, 2014) and because competence perceptions are most clearly related to the core outcome of interest, psychological feelings of power.

In sum, our overarching hypothesis was that an externally imposed focus on personal experience would have disempowering implications for members of marginalized groups in exchanges with members of dominant groups about intergroup issues, at least in part as a function of momentarily reduced perceptions of their own competence and capability triggered by being asked to approach the issues specifically through the lens of their personal experience. Our main comparison for experience focus was reasoning focus, which characterizes, at least implicitly, the expected content of many everyday discussions of intergroup issues and clearly contrasts with experience focus by virtue of emphasizing cognition, objectivity, and intellect.

*Experience Focusing and Power Dynamics in Intergroup Interaction*

An analysis of the power implications of experience focusing for members of marginalized groups has the potential to make a number of significant theoretical contributions to our understanding of the power dynamics of intergroup interaction. Consider, first, that members of disadvantaged groups have a stronger desire than members of advantaged groups to have discussions about group-based power (Saguy, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2008), Black individuals find interracial discussions of race-relevant topics relatively less stressful than do White individuals (Trawalter & Richeson, 2008), and in general dialogues about intergroup issues are important for progress toward greater social justice (see, e.g., Trawalter & Richeson, 2008). Yet, at the same time recent work suggests that relative to White individuals, Black individuals expect more negative outcomes – some involving feelings of constraint (i.e., “one or both of us would feel forced to act as a ‘spokesperson’ for our race”) – to arise from intergroup discussions of issues such as White individuals displaying the Confederate flag (Appiah, Eveland, Bullock, & Coduto, 2021). Although these various findings are not necessarily in conflict with one another,

they nonetheless suggest the potential for a more fine-grained analysis to provide greater insight into the power dynamics of discussions of intergroup issues.

In particular, the power implications of such dialogues for members of marginalized groups undoubtedly hinge critically on how the discussions are approached and on how others behave. The extent to which members of dominant groups hold prejudiced attitudes might seem to constitute an obvious potential determining factor. However, the path from individuals' privately held attitudes to their interaction partners' outcomes is not at all straightforward: The literature contains numerous examples of ironic effects whereby members of marginalized racial groups have less positive experiences with lower- as compared to higher-prejudice White individuals (e.g., Shelton, Richeson, Salvatore, & Trawalter, 2005; Vorauer & Turpie, 2004). These findings point to the value of examining concrete behaviors exhibited by others, such as the focus they impose on intergroup discussions, as determinants of the power implications of these discussions for members of marginalized groups. In this light the present research is well-positioned to identify a dimension of intergroup dialogues that helps distinguish those that are more versus less empowering for members of marginalized groups.

A further potential theoretical contribution is to illuminate specific behaviors exhibited by members of dominant groups that can support versus undermine the competence-focused social identity concerns that members of marginalized groups often have in intergroup exchanges. Research has repeatedly found that whereas members of marginalized racial groups are focused on empowerment, being respected, and being seen as competent during intergroup interaction, members of dominant racial groups are primarily concerned with being liked and with being seen as moral, warm, and unprejudiced (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010; Dupree & Fiske, 2019; Hässler et al., 2022; Lacosse & Plant, 2020; Vorauer, 2006). It stands to

reason that this broad goal divergence might have problematic consequences if it reduces the extent to which individuals' needs are addressed by their interaction partner during intergroup exchanges. And indeed, these divergent goals have been empirically linked to negative-other directed affect during intergroup interaction (Bergsieker et al., 2010). Further, perceived thwarting of such goals (as happens when members of disadvantaged groups feel that they are seen as incompetent) has been shown to hinder the positive effects of intergroup contact (Hässler et al., 2022). Yet currently the specific behaviors that are involved in satisfying versus thwarting the concerns with respect, competence, and power that members of marginalized groups have in intergroup exchanges remain unclear.

The present research examining how racialized individuals' power-relevant outcomes are affected by the kind of focus that their White interaction partner might advance for intergroup dialogues will start filling in gaps in our knowledge in this area.<sup>1</sup> Determining the impact of asking about personal experiences is of particular interest given that a focus on personal experiences seems likely to flow from White individuals' affiliative goals revolving around appearing warm and caring, and given that affiliative goals could even prompt efforts to give racialized interaction partners a competence boost (see Dupree & Fiske, 2019) by focusing on topics on which they are perceived to have expertise (Crosby, Monin, & Richardson, 2008). However, drawing on moral typecasting theory we make the opposite prediction that because it carries the implication that they are viewed as the target of others' actions, experience focusing is disempowering relative to alternatives such as asking about thoughts and reasoning.

### *Experience Focusing and Empathy in Intergroup Interaction*

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<sup>1</sup> Despite its inherent inaccuracy, for ease of exposition the term "racialized individuals" is sometimes used in place of "members of marginalized racial groups."



The present analysis of the power implications of experience focusing for members of marginalized groups intersects in a number of ways with research and theory regarding the effects of being the target of empathy, and as such has the potential to contribute to that literature as well. Being empathic toward others involves trying to understand and be sensitive to their feelings about the experiences they are having and focuses on trying to sympathize with their reactions to (typically negative) events that happen to them (Davis, 1980). In short, focusing on others' experiences – misfortunes in particular – is a key component of empathy. Research further suggests that the act of empathizing can activate a script in which the empathizer is a powerful agent in a position to provide emotional or material resources to the target if they so choose, and the target is in the complementary role of needing others' support and assistance (Vorauer et al., 2016). This dynamic, which echoes the one suggested by our application of moral typecasting theory to experience focusing, is characteristic in particular of White individuals empathizing with interaction partners who belong to marginalized racial groups and has been shown to be disempowering for those partners (Vorauer & Quesnel, 2016, 2018). Thus, the literature on empathy provides initial, indirect support for our prediction that experience focusing constitutes a behavioral dimension of intergroup dialogues that can detract from the feelings of power enjoyed by members of marginalized groups.

Notably, if the implications of being on the receiving end of experience focusing do indeed echo those of being the target of another's efforts to be empathic, this would suggest potential behavioral pathways – worthy of exploration in future research – through which empathic mindsets might exert their disempowering effects in intergroup interaction. That is, perhaps one reason that being the target of another's efforts to empathize can be disempowering is that those efforts tend to involve a focus on experience. A distinct but related possibility

centers not on experience focus per se but on *how* the focus on personal experience is advanced. For example, queries about experiences accompanied by empathy might emphasize the potential for misfortune or for needing support, akin to our prediction for disempowering effects specific to discussions of intergroup topics, where the possibility of discrimination looms large.

It is further relevant here that being the target of perspective taking has been found to be more empowering than being the target of empathy (Vorauer & Quesnel, 2016). Perspective taking is often directed toward higher power others whose behavior individuals seek to predict, and involves trying to understand another person's thoughts and cognitions (Vorauer & Quesnel, 2016). If perspective taking leads people to ask more about reasons, this behavior might help to explain its relatively empowering effects. In sum, an additional potential theoretical contribution of the present research is to shed light on why the conceptually related mindsets of empathy and perspective taking might have distinct implications for targets, thereby providing grounds for future research into behavioral pathways that currently are not well understood.

Before proceeding, we wish to emphasize that our analysis does not apply to cases where individuals choose to tell their stories at a time and place of their choosing and in service of their own goals, but rather addresses the specific situation where an emphasis on experience is imposed from the outside on discussions of intergroup issues and policies. It is when the experience focus is advanced by someone else that it has the potential to take on a constraining meaning and put self in the position of target. Relatedly, although conscious metaperceptions about how the self is regarded by others may not always be involved, we consider individuals' fundamental sensitivity and attunement to how they are construed by others to underlie the effects of experience focusing on how competent and powerful they feel in the moment.

Further, an emphasis on outcomes relevant to power, voice, and respect is congruent with the kinds of outcomes that have previously been identified as important to members of marginalized groups (see, e.g., Bergsieker et al., 2010; Dixon, Levine, Reicher, & Durrheim, 2012; Saguy et al., 2008). At the same time diverse potential meanings can be accorded to outcomes supposedly indicative of, or arising from, intergroup disadvantage (Leach & Livingstone, 2015). Accordingly, we begin our analysis, which examines racialized individuals' momentary reactions to others' apparent construals of them and not any form of internalization, with a study that assesses their reactions in an open-ended manner.

### *Overview*

We conducted seven studies to test the hypothesized disempowering implications of experience focusing for members of marginalized groups in exchanges with members of dominant groups about issues relevant to intergroup relations and to thereby document an *imposed experience focus effect*. In Study 1 Black individuals responded to open-ended questions about their reactions and metaperceptions in a situation in which a White interaction partner asked them about their personal experiences versus reasoning during a discussion of intergroup issues. Study 2 examined how experience versus reasoning focus affected racialized and White individuals' feelings of power in a hypothetical discussion of general or intergroup-relevant social issues in an academic context.

Study 3, which included a no-focus control condition, was designed to replicate the imposed experience focus effect obtained in Study 2 and to probe potential contributing psychological processes. Specifically, racialized individuals' current confidence in their abilities was assessed in terms of their performance state self-esteem. The key goals of Study 4 were to probe the generalizability of the effects to a non-academic context, and to examine whether

focusing an intergroup exchange on personal firsthand knowledge acquired rather than personal experience might constitute a means of acknowledging racialized individuals' unique perspective and understanding of the issues in a more empowering way.

Studies 5 to 7 moved beyond a scenario approach and examined behavioral outcomes. Study 5 was designed to replicate the results of Studies 2 to 4 in a context in which Black individuals believed that they were actually engaged in an online exchange with a White individual. This study further probed the implications of experience versus reasoning focus for the communications that Black individuals directed toward their ostensible White interaction partner, examining whether their word choices reflected higher or lower levels of "clout," that is, relative social status, confidence, or leadership (Pennebaker Conglomerates, n.d.).

In Study 6 members of marginalized racial groups interacted over Zoom with a White interaction partner who had been instructed to ask either about personal experiences or reasoning during a discussion of intergroup issues. Beyond feelings of power, performance state self-esteem, and metaperceptions, this study considered power manifest as persuasion and thus assessed social influence. This study also afforded an opportunity to consider, in a preliminary way, how the effects of experience focusing might depend on qualities of the person enacting it. Finally, Study 7 examined the effects of dyadic-level experience versus reasoning focus on social influence in in-person discussions of general- versus intergroup-relevant social issues.

Feelings of power were assessed in Studies 2 to 7; performance state self-esteem, used to index individuals' momentary sense of their own competence, was assessed in Studies 3 to 6; metaperceptions were assessed in Studies 1 and 6; and power-relevant behaviors were assessed in Studies 5, 6, and 7. Notwithstanding the interconnections and reciprocal relations between these constructs, our theoretical analysis emphasizes how reductions in individuals' meta- and

self-perceived competence can detract from their psychological sense of power, as manifest in their self-reported power and power-relevant behaviors. Accordingly, with experience focusing as the starting point, we consistently treat meta- and self-perceived competence as mediators, and self-reported power and power-relevant behaviors as outcomes. At the same time, the possibility exists that in some cases experience focusing may impose linguistic constraints that have direct and immediate implications for power-relevant behavior, an issue we consider in more depth when presenting the results for clout in Study 5.

Because shifts in self-construal triggered by experience focusing are most proximal to feelings of power, our studies focus on self-perceived competence as key to the path from experience focusing to reduced feelings of power. As stated previously, however, we consider sensitivity to others' apparent construals of the self to be at the heart of the imposed experience focus effect. Although this sensitivity may often be preconscious, explicit metaperceptions that another person lacks respect or sees one as less competent may sometimes arise and be particularly important to interpersonal outcomes such as social influence by virtue of their interpersonal nature. We examine explicit metaperceptions in two studies, including Study 1.

### Study 1

Study 1 adopted an open-ended approach and a within-subjects design, presenting Black individuals with two scenarios involving having a conversation with a White interaction partner about issues relevant to intergroup relations. In one scenario participants were asked to imagine that their partner's comments, questions, and attention focused on their relevant past experiences, whereas in the other they were asked to imagine that their partner instead asked about their thoughts and reasoning. Participants were first asked about their general reactions and then specifically about their metaperceptions. Their answers were coded into categories designed to

capture as many dimensions of their responses as possible. Analyses examined whether there were any systematic differences in their reactions and metaperceptions according to focusing condition. Although our approach was somewhat exploratory, we did anticipate a general theme of participants reporting more elevating metaperceptions (e.g., feeling more respected and seen as more competent) when they were asked about reasons as compared to personal experiences.

### *Method*

#### *Transparency and Openness*

For each study in this paper we report how we determined our sample size, all data exclusions, and all manipulations in the main text. Any additional measures not reported in the main text are described in the supplemental document. The data, analysis code, and research materials are available at [https://osf.io/nm46d/?view\\_only=0e63e9a32b0a4403bf5e2e4138ced5ff](https://osf.io/nm46d/?view_only=0e63e9a32b0a4403bf5e2e4138ced5ff).

Unless otherwise specified data were analyzed using SPSS 27. Studies 5 and 6 were pre-registered and the others were not.

#### *Participants*

The final sample comprised 99 U.S.-born individuals with a Black racial background currently residing in the U.S. who were recruited through Prolific and paid \$2.50 USD. Our target sample size was selected using G\*Power (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) to provide at least .80 power for detecting within-subjects effects of scenario type of  $d_z = .215$  (equivalent to the typical effect size in social psychology,  $r = .21$ ; Richard, Bond, & Stokes-Zoota, 2003), assuming no correlation between responses to the two scenarios. In all studies, we over-recruited as we estimated would be necessary to account for exclusions. Participants were randomly assigned to the Experience ( $N = 47$ ) or Reasoning First ( $N = 52$ ) condition.

Table 1 presents, for Studies 1 to 7, the breakdown of marginalized racial backgrounds in the participant sample (those representing 5% or more), the gender breakdown of the sample, the exclusion criteria, and the exclusion rate for eligible participants. Criteria (4) and (5), which involved excluding participants who took more than 60 minutes to complete the study or reported taking a break longer than 10 minutes, were implemented across all studies that did not involve real interaction (Studies 1 through 5): Because the central task involved vividly imagining a hypothetical scenario and immediately responding to questions about it, multi-tasking or taking long breaks would be problematic by virtue of reducing the availability of participants' imaginings as they answered the questions. The results of sensitivity power analyses conducted after the studies were complete are also reported in Table 1. The [masked] Research Ethics Board at [masked] approved all studies reported in this paper.

### *Procedure*

This online study was described to participants as centering on social perception in different kinds of interaction contexts. After they had answered basic demographic questions participants were asked to imagine, as vividly as possible, a situation in which they were having a conversation with another person in which issues relevant to intergroup relations came up (e.g., what kinds of diversity and inclusion initiatives are more versus less effective). They were further asked to imagine that other person had a White racial background and was an acquaintance – someone that they knew, but not extremely well.<sup>2</sup>

Those in the experience focus first condition were then instructed to imagine that the other person's comments, questions, and attention focused on their relevant past experiences.

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout Studies 1 to 7, our experimental materials referred to ethnic rather than racial groups and backgrounds. The descriptions in the text have been revised to use more precise and appropriate terminology.

Table 1. *Sample characteristics for Studies 1 to 7.*

Expt	Marginalized Racial Background (%)	Female (%)	Exclusion Criteria	Exclusion Rate (%) for Eligible Participants <sup>a</sup>	Sensitivity ( <i>d</i> ) with power = .80 and $\alpha = .05$ <sup>b</sup>
1	Black	49.5	(1) Duplicates (2) Did not complete or misunderstood task containing manipulation (3) Actively failed manipulation check(s) (4) Took more than 60 mins to complete study (5) Reported break longer than 10 mins	0.0	.284 (metaperceptions)
2	Black (15.9) Chinese (7.6) Filipino (40.0) Indigenous (5.5) Metis (10.3) South Asian (11.7)	65.9	(1) to (5)	26.0	.314 (R x T x F)
3	Black (12.4) Chinese (10.5) Filipino (14.4) Latin American (17.6) South Asian (22.9) South East Asian (12.4)	59.5	(1) to (5)	15.0	.512
4	Black (29.2) Chinese (14.0) South Asian (34.0) South East Asian (5.6)	51.6	(1) to (5)	18.0	.398
5	Black	52.6	(1) to (5) (6) Did not answer the demographic questions to be shared with partner (7) Expressed suspicion that their ostensible partner was not real	10.3	.333
6	Black (25.2) Filipino (23.0) Indigenous (9.6) South Asian (23.0)	58.5	(3) (8) Encountered technical difficulties or procedural problems	4.3	.489 .245 (SI: D x R x F) .488 (DE x F)
7	Black (17.4) Chinese (12.0) Filipino (27.5) Korean (5.4) South Asian (25.7)	73.1	(9) Only discussed two of the six topics <sup>c</sup>	0.6	.442 (T x F) .221 (SI: D x R x T x F)

*Note.* R = Racial Background; T = Topics; F = Focus; D = Direction; DE = Dispositional Empathy; SI = social influence.

<sup>a</sup>These numbers do not include ineligible participants (e.g., individuals who reported demographic characteristics contrary to the pre-selection/screening criteria).

<sup>b</sup>Unless otherwise specified, the sensitivity analyses were conducted for the between-subjects effect of focus on feelings of power reported by members of marginalized racial groups in discussions of intergroup topics using MorePower v.6.0.4 (Campbell & Thompson, 2012). For Study 1 and the SI analyses in Studies 6 and 7, which involve within factors,  $d_z$  is reported. For Studies 3 and 4 the values reported are for the omnibus effect of focus. The sensitivity analyses involving DE in Study 6 were calculated with the R package pwr2ppl (Aberson, 2019).

<sup>c</sup>This applied to one pair that was an outlier and unlike the rest did not discuss the issue of racial diversity on university campuses, which we expected would be particularly relevant and immediate for this sample. The remainder discussed six (152 pairs), five (13 pairs), or four (2 pairs) issues.



They were asked to describe what their reaction would be (“What would you think and how would you feel in this situation?”) and to write a least a couple of sentences about this. On the next page they were asked to describe what they would think about the person’s impression of them (“How would you think they saw you?”). Next they were asked to imagine a version of the situation in which the other person’s comments, questions, and attention instead focused on their thoughts and reasoning. Again they described their general reactions and metaperceptions in turn. Those in the reasoning focus first condition completed the reasoning version first.

Participants in all scenario studies were further asked whether they had taken any breaks from the study to do other things (e.g., to answer the phone, complete other studies), and if so to indicate the length of the break. In all studies participants were fully debriefed immediately.

### *Results*

#### *Open-Ended Reactions*

Based on a preliminary review of participants’ responses to the open question about their reactions, a set of coding dimensions was derived. Balancing the goals of precision, the desire to capture as many of the statements as possible, and coders’ likely ability to make reliable distinctions resulted in a total of fifteen categories (see Table 2). Two independent coders blind to the hypotheses and to the specific prompt that participants received classified the statements into one of the categories. Reliability was acceptable,  $K = 0.69$  (“substantial” according to Landis and Koch (1977)). The two coders resolved disagreements through discussion.

Perusal of the table reveals that although the categories captured the majority of statements (over 80%), responses were wide-ranging and many of the categories, which were quite specific, were used relatively rarely. To facilitate analysis and reduce positive skew that was evident across all categories, we summed across the general reactions, distinguishing

Table 2. *Open-Ended Reactions* (Study 1).

Frequency (%) Reas/Exper	Dimension	Example
General/Negative		
4.0/9.0	feeling nervous, awkward, uncomfortable	I would certainly feel a bit uncomfortable.
3.6/4.9	does not want to share information with the other person/too personal	I would think the person would be getting a little too personal.
3.6/7.0	negative feelings toward or impressions of the other person	I would feel threatened and annoyed.
8.5/5.3	being uncertain or wary of the other person's motives	Are they truly trying to gain more insight into different perspectives, or are they on a mission to challenge my thoughts?
1.6/2.5	how the other person could never understand	There isn't anything that I could possibly tell a white person that could make them even imagine what it feels like to be black or "african-American".
2.8/2.5	own negative behavioral reactions	to be frank, I would have ended this conversation early on
General/Positive		
10.9/11.9	positive feelings toward or impressions of the other person	I would be happy that they are willing to listen to another point of view.
4.0/2.5	curiosity about or interest in the other person's reactions and opinions	I would wonder if this person could relate and what our differences in opinions could be.
14.9/16.8	own positive behavioral reactions	I would not mind answering any questions they have, because an open dialogue is the best way for people to resolve issues.
Metaperceptual/Diminishing		
2.4/3.3	feeling that the other person does not respect them or see them as competent	I would think that the other person didn't have confidence in my abilities.
1.6/3.7	feeling that they were being used or could be used in some way by the other person	I'd feel somewhat offended that this person was asking me to share intimate things for their entertainment or to satisfy their curiosities.
2.0/0.8	concerns about reduced to a stereotype by the other person	I'd preambule anything I'd say with a "First and foremost, I am not a representative of my entire race and anything I say are my own INDIVIDUAL opinions".
Metaperceptual/Elevating		
16.9/10.2	feeling that the other person respects them or sees them as competent	I imagine that this person respects my beliefs and feelings on certain issues which would make me feel appreciated.
2.8/1.6	feeling that the other person cares about them	I would think this person cares about my life and personal opinions.
Other		
19.9/19.7	none of the above/uninterpretable	I don't have any white people that I associate with.

*Note.* Percentages were computed across all statements in the reasoning ( $N = 244$ ) and experience focus ( $N = 248$ ) conditions.

between negative and positive reactions (combining the first six and the next three categories in the upper half of Table 2 respectively). We further summed across the metaperceptual reactions, here distinguishing between the “diminishing” and “elevating” metaperceptual inferences that participants reported (combining the first three and the next two categories in the lower half of Table 2 respectively). To further reduce positive skew we submitted the resulting scores to square-root transformations; untransformed means are reported for interpretability.

We first analyzed general reactions in a 2 (Focus: Reasoning vs. Experience) x 2 (Valence: Positive vs. Negative) x 2 (Order: Experience vs. Reasoning First) repeated-measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), with focus and valence as within-subjects variables and order as a between-subjects variable. The only significant effect was a Focus x Order interaction, not moderated by valence, which reflected only that participants made more statements in whichever version of the scenario they considered first,  $F(1, 97) = 27.96, p < .001, d_z = .537 [.323, .749]$ .

Next we submitted the metaperceptual inferences to a parallel analysis. Here a Focus x Valence interaction was evident,  $F(1, 97) = 4.98, p = .028, d_z = .227 [.025, .428]$ . Table 3 presents, for Studies 1 to 7, the means, 95% confidence intervals, effect sizes, and test statistics for the analyses of simple focus effects. These analyses revealed that there were fewer elevating metaperceptions in the experience as compared to the reasoning focus condition, which was not the case for diminishing metaperceptions. Corollary analyses revealed that in the reasoning focus condition there were more elevating than diminishing metaperceptions,  $t(97) = 3.39, p = .001, d_z = .341 [.137, .542]$ , whereas this was not the case in the experience focus condition,  $t(97) = 1.36, p = .177, d_z = .137 [-.062, .334]$ . The only other effect was a main effect for valence that was qualified by the aforementioned interaction,  $F(1, 97) = 8.59, p = .004, d_z = .298 [.094, .500]$ .

Table 3. Means, Effect Sizes, 95% Confidence Intervals, and Test Statistics for Analyses of Simple Effects of Focus (Studies 1 to 7).

Study	Outcome	Participants' Racial Background	Intergroup Topics						General Topics			
			FOCUS						FOCUS			
			Reasons	Exper.	Control	Knowl.	<i>d</i> <sup>a</sup>	<i>t, p</i>	Reasons	Exper.	<i>d</i>	<i>t, p</i>
1	Elevating MPs (Open)	Black	.475 [.317, .633]	.286 [.170, .402]	--	--	-.235 [-.434, -.035]	-2.34 .021	--	--	--	--
	Diminishing MPs (Open)		.151 [.055, .248]	.183 [.091, .275]	--	--	.084 [-.113, .281]	0.84 <i>ns</i>	--	--	--	--
	Elevating MPs (Direct)		.742 [.554, .931]	.437 [.300, .575]	--	--	-.250 [-.450, -.049]	-2.49 .015	--	--	--	--
	Diminishing MPs (Direct)		.363 [.206, .520]	.653 [.437, .869]	--	--	.292 [.091, .493]	2.91 .004	--	--	--	--
2	Feelings of Power	Marginalized	4.59 [4.23, 4.94]	3.88 [3.53, 4.23]	--	--	-.630 [-1.099, -.176]	-2.79 .006	4.14 [3.78, 4.50]	4.38 [4.01, 4.76]	.222 [-.252, .695]	0.92 <i>ns</i>
		White	3.82 [3.50, 4.15]	3.80 [3.49, 4.12]	--	--	-.016 [-.427, .395]	-0.08 <i>ns</i>	4.01 [3.69, 4.32]	3.87 [3.54, 4.20]	-.126 [-.537, .286]	0.60 <i>ns</i>
3	Feelings of Power	Marginalized	4.60 [4.20, 4.99]	4.30 [3.96, 4.64]	4.14 [3.80, 4.49]	--	RE -.229 [-.630, .173]	-1.12 .263	--	--	--	--
							CE .123 [-.249, .496]	0.65 <i>ns</i>				
	State Self-Esteem		4.35 [4.04, 4.66]	3.90 [3.63, 4.16]	4.33 [4.06, 4.60]	--	RC -.353 [-.757, .053]	-1.72 .087	--	--	--	--
							RE -.449 [-.853, -.043]	-2.20 .029				
						CE -.430 [-.805, -.053]	-2.26 .025	--	--	--	--	
						RC -.019 [-.421, .382]	-0.09 <i>ns</i>					
4	Feelings of Power	Marginalized	3.94 [3.65, 4.24]	3.44 [3.16, 3.72]	--	3.87 [3.53, 4.21]	RE -.359 [-.658, -.059]	-2.37 .019	--	--	--	--
							KE -.308 [-.614, -.002]	-1.99 .048				
							RK -.051 [-.362, .261]	-0.32 <i>ns</i>				

	Perf SSE		5.23 [5.04, 5.43]	4.94 [4.71, 5.16]	--	5.32 [5.10, 5.53]	RE -.301 [-.599, -.002]	-1.98 .049				
							KE -.385 [-.692, -.079]	-2.48 .014	--	--	--	--
							RK .085 [-.227, .396]	0.53 <i>ns</i>				
5	Feelings of Power	Black	4.39 [4.15, 4.62]	3.90 [3.64, 4.16]	--	--	-.324 [-.557, -.091]	-2.74 .006	--	--	--	--
	Perf SSE		5.88 [5.73, 6.04]	5.63 [5.43, 5.82]	--	--	-.240 [-.472, -.007]	-2.03 .043	--	--	--	--
	Clout		50.11 [46.12, 54.09]	37.09 [33.29, 40.89]	--	--	-.550 [-.786, -.314]	-4.67 < .001	--	--	--	--
6	Feelings of Power	Marginalized	4.34 [4.00, 4.68]	3.91 [3.60, 4.22]	--	--	-.322 [-.661, .018]	-1.87 .064	--	--	--	--
	Perf SSE		5.05 [4.76, 5.34]	4.85 [4.54, 5.16]	--	--	-.162 [-.500, .176]	-0.94 <i>ns</i>	--	--	--	--
	Metaperceived Competence		5.01 [4.69, 5.34]	4.78 [4.40, 5.16]	--	--	-.164 [-.501, .175]	-0.95 <i>ns</i>	--	--	--	--
7	Feelings of Power	Marginalized	5.28 [4.95, 5.61]	5.03 [4.70, 5.36]	--	--	-.233 [-.664, .200]	-1.06 .290	4.86 [4.54, 5.18]	5.11 [4.78, 5.45]	.238 [-.193, .667]	1.09 .278
	Influence Over Partner (Partner Change Toward)	Marginalized	.307 [.248, .366]	.213 [.154, .272]			-.489 [-.924, -.050]	-2.23 .027	.326 [.269, .383]	.415 [.354, .475]	.459 [.024, .892]	2.10 .037
	Influence Over Partner (Partner Change Toward)	White	.244 [.185, .303]	.223 [.163, .283]			-.107 [-.538, .324]	-0.49 <i>ns</i>	.395 [.338, .453]	.361 [.301, .422]	-.176 [-.605, .253]	-0.81 <i>ns</i>
	Agreeing	Marginalized	-.079 [-.267, .110]	.231 [.042, .420]	--	--	.519 [.066, .969]	2.29 .023	-.038 [-.222, .146]	-.109 [-.303, .085]	-.119 [-.563, .327]	-0.52 <i>ns</i>

*Note.* MPs = Metaperceptions, Perf SSE = Performance State Self-Esteem. For the contrasts, RE = Reasons vs. Experience, CE = Control vs. Experience; RC = Reasons vs. Control, KE = Knowledge vs. Experience, RK = Reasons vs. Knowledge.

<sup>a</sup>For Study 1 and the SI analyses in Studies 6 and 7, which involve within factors,  $d_z$  is reported.

*Reactions to Question about Metaperceptions*

For responses to the direct metaperception prompt, the coders counted the total number of comments participants made that corresponded to each of six theoretically central dimensions: Metaperceived respect (e.g., “They respected me enough to ask”;  $\alpha = .84$ ), competence (e.g., “possibly that they view me as someone who is knowledgeable and articulate”;  $\alpha = .91$ ), and strength/assertiveness (e.g., “they may think I’m a strong individual”;  $\alpha = .96$ ), as well as their opposites – metaperceived disrespect (e.g., “I’d feel that they don’t take me seriously”;  $\alpha = .82$ ), incompetence (e.g., “they may see me as irrational, or overly emotional”;  $\alpha = .87$ ), and weakness/unassertiveness (e.g., “I think they see me as a pitiful minority person”;  $\alpha = .88$ ). For completeness metaperceived warmth (e.g., “I think they would find me to be a good person”;  $\alpha = .76$ ) (versus coldness,  $\alpha = -.01$ ) were also coded. Very few instances of metaperceived coldness were detected and thus this dimension was not considered further. As preliminary review of responses revealed that some participants expressed specific concerns about being viewed through the lens of group membership (e.g., “They would not be seeing me as a fully three-dimensional person”;  $\alpha = .87$ ) or being used in some way by the other person (e.g., “I’d be apprehensive that they want me to say something to assuage any guilt they may feel for being born into a position of greater privilege”;  $\alpha = .95$ ), these were initially assessed separately despite being broadly related to disrespect. Two additional dimensions, other positive ( $\alpha = .57$ ) and other negative ( $\alpha = .79$ ), designed to include any comments not captured by the aforementioned categories, were also coded (codes of individual statements were again mutually exclusive).

As it was necessary to reduce positive skew in the data and also to streamline the analyses, we computed two overarching categories, one that involved summing over all elevating metaperceptions, namely respect, competence, and strength, and one that involved summing over

all diminishing metaperceptions, namely disrespect, incompetence, weakness, being seen through the lens of group membership, and being used. Across all of the 198 responses (i.e., collapsing over the experience versus reasoning versions of the scenario), there were 49.5% non-zero scores on the elevating index and 34.8% non-zero scores on the diminishing index. To further reduce positive skew we applied a square-root transformation (also for the remaining categories); untransformed means are reported for interpretability.

Participants' elevating and diminishing metaperceptions were analyzed in a 2 (Focus: Reasoning vs. Experience) x 2 (Valence: Elevating vs. Diminishing) x 2 (Order: Experience vs. Reasoning First) repeated-measures ANOVA, with focus and type of metaperception as within-subjects variables and order as a between-subjects variable. The only significant effect yielded by the analysis was a Focus x Valence interaction,  $F(1, 97) = 11.02, p = .001, d_z = .337$  [.132, .541]. Participants reported fewer elevating metaperceptions when imagining being asked about their experiences as compared to their reasoning, and more diminishing metaperceptions when imagining being asked about their experiences as compared to their reasoning. Further, corollary analyses revealed that although participants reported more elevating than diminishing metaperceptions when imagining being asked about their reasoning,  $t(97) = 3.19, p = .002, d_z = .320$  [.118, .522], when they imagined being asked about their experiences they reported just as many diminishing as elevating metaperceptions,  $t(97) = -0.98, ns, d_z = -.099$  [-.296, .099], with the means descriptively in the opposite direction. There were no significant effects on metaperceived warmth, other positive, or other negative, all  $ps > .15$ .

### *Discussion*

The results of this study revealed that participants had a diverse range of reactions to being asked about personal experiences and reasoning when discussing intergroup issues with a

White interaction partner, some involving quite positive feelings and perceptions and others involving quite negative feelings and perceptions. Some of individuals' most common responses involved favorable reactions such as noting their own positive behavioral inclinations. Further, it was not unusual to see positive reactions to the experience focus version or negative reactions to the reasoning focus version. Overall we noted, with this within-subjects design, that there was substantial within-person consistency in responses to the scenarios. For example, reporting more negative reactions in one scenario was correlated with reporting more negative reactions in the other ( $r = .26$ ). Undoubtedly there are important individual differences to consider that may guide reactions in situations such as the one we asked participants to imagine.

Nonetheless, against this backdrop of diverse responses, overlapping distributions, and within-person consistency, some notable patterns emerged. In terms of general reactions, as assessed by the initial very broad and open question, just under a quarter of participants' responses were metaperceptual in nature, centering on what they would think about how their interaction partner viewed them. Across both these metaperceptual responses to the general first question and responses to the direct question about metaperceptions, participants reported fewer elevating metaperceptual inferences, such as feeling respected or seen as competent by their White interaction partner, when imagining being asked about their experiences as compared to their reasoning. Responses to the specific question about metaperceptions also indicated an effect on diminishing metaperceptual inferences, whereby participants were more likely to report reactions such as feeling disrespected, or seen as incompetent or weak, when imagining being asked about their experiences as compared to their reasoning. These results suggesting that an externally imposed focus on experience leads individuals to feel less respected and seen as less competent are broadly consistent with our theorizing that such a focus can have disempowering



implications. In our next study we directly probe the implications of experience focusing for individuals' feelings of power, the outcome of central interest to our analysis.

### Study 2

In Study 2, students with a White or marginalized racial background imagined having a discussion with a classmate about social issues. White participants imagined that the other student belonged to a marginalized racial group and vice versa. Participants in the reasoning focus condition imagined being asked to explain the reasoning behind their opinions, whereas those in the experience focus condition imagined being asked about their relevant past experiences; whether participants imagined discussing topics directly relevant to intergroup relations was also manipulated.

The situation that participants considered was one in which the focus was imposed by the academic context on all individuals present. As such, it provides an opportunity to examine the implications of less individually-targeted experience focusing imposed by the broader social environment, and whether these implications are different for those with a marginalized as opposed to White racial background. We hypothesized that participants belonging to a marginalized racial group would report lower feelings of power when they imagined being asked to focus on personal experiences rather than reasoning, and that this effect would be specific to discussions of intergroup issues; no such effects were anticipated for White participants. Although experience focusing could conceivably be threatening to White individuals, perhaps by activating concerns about being seen as prejudiced, such concerns put these individuals squarely in the role of perpetrator and bad moral actor/agent, such that reduced feelings of competence and power would not be expected – if anything the effects should run in the opposite direction.

### *Method*

*Participants*

The final sample comprised 328 Canadian introductory psychology students who received partial course credit for their participation; 183 reported having a White racial background and the remaining 145 reported having any of a variety of marginalized racial backgrounds. The most well-represented were Filipino (40.0%) and Black (15.9%). Our target sample size was selected to provide at least .95 power to detect an interaction effect size of  $d = .430$  (equivalent to  $r = .21$ , see Study 1). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight cells created by the 2 (Racial Background: White vs. Marginalized) x 2 (Topics: General vs. Intergroup) x 2 (Focus: Reasoning vs. Experience) design; cell  $N$ s ranged from 33 to 48.

*Procedure*

The procedure was similar to Study 1 except that the (one) situation participants were asked to imagine involved having a face-to-face discussion with another student as part of an in-class assignment for a course. Those in the reasoning focus condition were instructed: “The discussion involves expressing your opinions on a series of controversial social issues and explaining the reasoning behind your opinions. The task for each of you is to come up with good arguments to make your case.” Those in the experience focus condition were instead instructed: “The discussion involves expressing your opinions on a series of controversial social issues and explaining how your opinions are informed by your personal experiences. The task for each of you is to draw upon your past experiences to make your case.”

Those with a marginalized racial background were told to imagine that the other student had a White/European racial background and vice versa. Participants were given three examples of the issues they would be discussing consistent with whether they were in the general (e.g., whether the voting age in Canada should be lowered) or intergroup topics condition (e.g.,

whether universities in Canada should do more to increase racial diversity on campus). They were instructed to take a minute to visualize the situation; to encourage this they were asked to briefly describe what they would be thinking and feeling if they were in that situation right now.

Participants completed the key dependent measure of feelings of power immediately afterward. They indicated how *powerful*, *in charge*, and *in control* they would feel in the situation they imagined ( $\alpha = .88$ ); the items were drawn from Chou (2018). Unless otherwise indicated, participants responded to all items on 7-point scales on which higher numbers indicated stronger endorsement.

Participants also completed three manipulation checks, one regarding the racial background of the other student in the scenario, one regarding the topics to be discussed, and one regarding the reasoning or experience focus of the exchange. Those who selected the inaccurate response for their condition were considered to have failed the manipulation check.<sup>3</sup>

### *Results*

Participants' feelings of power were analyzed in a 2 (Racial Background: White vs. Marginalized) x 2 (Topics: General vs. Intergroup) x 2 (Focus: Reasoning vs. Experience) ANOVA. This analysis yielded a Racial Background x Topics x Focus interaction,  $F(1, 319) = 4.75, p = .030, d = .244 [.024, .464]$ . In line with predictions, participants with a marginalized racial background contemplating an exchange with a White student centering on intergroup issues felt less powerful when the exchange focused on personal experiences than when it focused on reasoning; the focusing manipulation did not have a significant effect anywhere else

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<sup>3</sup> Some studies included “neither” (Study 3) or “neither” and “I don’t remember” (Study 7) response options. To minimize exclusions and maximize consistency across studies we only excluded those who selected an answer that was directly contrary to the information they received (e.g., those who indicated that the other participant was White after being told the other participant belonged to a marginalized racial group).

(see Table 3 for details regarding the simple effects of focus). Corollary analyses revealed that although when intergroup topics were being discussed within a reasoning focus those with a marginalized racial background reported feeling more powerful than those with a White background,  $t(319) = 3.12, p = .002, d = .693 [.243, 1.138]$ , this effect evaporated when an experience focus was instead instantiated,  $t(319) = 0.32, ns, d = .069 [-.356, .495]$ . When general topics were being discussed experience focus instantiated a power advantage for those with a marginalized racial background,  $t(319) = 2.02, p = .044, d = .47 [.01, .93]$ , that was not evident in the reasoning focus condition,  $t(319) = 0.54, ns, d = .12 [-.31, .55]$ .

### *Discussion*

Consistent with predictions, the results of Study 2 indicated that members of marginalized racial groups thought that they would feel less powerful in an intergroup exchange about social issues if the exchange involved explaining the personal experiences rather than the reasoning behind their opinions. This effect did not arise for White participants and was specific to discussions of intergroup issues. Indeed, there was some indication that in discussions of general issues experience focusing instead conferred a power advantage to members of marginalized racial groups relative to White individuals. We return to this issue when discussing the results of Study 7, which also considered exchanges about general topics.

### *Study 3*

Study 3 was designed to build on Study 2 in two key ways. First, Study 2 leaves open the question of how much the disempowering effect of experience relative to reasons focus is due to the negative effect of focusing on experience versus the positive effect of focusing on reasoning. Our theorizing centers on how the processes set in motion by experience focusing could be disempowering for members of marginalized groups. However, it is possible that abstract

thought invoked by an emphasis on reasoning could be empowering by virtue of the connection between abstract thought and power (Smith, Wigboldus, & Dijksterhuis, 2008). Although it was not immediately clear why such a mechanism would be contingent on racial background or the specific discussion topics – which would be required to account for the results of Study 2 – to address this question Study 3 included a no-focus control condition.

Second, to clarify the psychological processes accompanying the effects of experience focusing we assessed individuals' current feelings about their own competence and capabilities as well as their feelings of power. Specifically, to probe potential feelings of reduced competence and agency in the wake of experience focusing we assessed participants' performance state self-esteem, which centers on confidence in one's abilities (Heatherton & Polivy, 1991). To the extent that experience focusing undermines racialized individuals' feelings of competence and agency we would expect to see effects on performance state self-esteem. Further, if reduced feelings of competence constitute a path to lower feelings of power, an indirect negative effect of experience focusing on power via performance state self-esteem should be evident. So as to probe the specificity of any effects to performance state self-esteem in particular, social and appearance state self-esteem were also assessed.

### *Method*

#### *Participants*

The final sample comprised 153 university students with a marginalized racial background living in Canada or the U.S. The Canadian sample ( $N = 62$ ) received partial course credit in introductory psychology for their participation; the U.S. sample ( $N = 91$ ) participated through Prolific and were paid \$2.60 USD. The most well-represented groups were South Asian (22.9%) and Latin American (17.8%). Our target sample size was based on the size of the focus

effect from Study 2 for members of marginalized racial groups considering a discussion about intergroup topics and was selected to provide at least .80 power to detect the difference between experience versus reasoning or no focus. We originally planned on the Canadian sample only but due to unanticipated limits on participant availability during the summer when this study was conducted we sought additional participants through Prolific. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three cells created by the one-way three-level (Focus: Reasoning vs. Control vs. Experience) design; cell *Ns* ranged from 42 to 56.

### *Procedure*

The procedure was the same as in Study 2, except for the additional no-focus control condition in which participants were told only that “the discussion involves expressing your opinions on a series of controversial social issues.” All participants were asked to imagine intergroup topics and that the other student had a White/European racial background. In addition to completing the same measure of feelings of power as in Study 2 ( $\alpha = .92$ ), later in the survey participants also completed the performance state self-esteem scale ( $\alpha = .84$ ), which examines confidence in one’s abilities (e.g., “I feel confident in my abilities,” “I feel as smart as others”). Social state self-esteem was also assessed (e.g., “I feel self-conscious”;  $\alpha = .82$ ), as was appearance state self-esteem (e.g., “I feel unattractive”;  $\alpha = .86$ ).

### *Results*

Participants’ state self-esteem was analyzed in a 3 (Focus: Reasoning vs. Control vs. Experience) x 3 (Domain: Performance vs. Social vs. Appearance) repeated-measures ANCOVA, with focus as a between-subjects variable and domain as a within-subjects variable; sample was included as a covariate to take into account potential differences across the two samples. Results revealed an effect for focus,  $F(2, 149) = 3.41, p = .036$ , that was not moderated

by domain,  $F(4, 298) = 0.84$ , *ns*. Contrast analyses revealed that state self-esteem (collapsed across domain) was lower in the experience focus as compared to both the reasoning focus and control conditions, with the two latter conditions not differing from one another (see Table 3). There were no other effects aside from a main effect of domain that was not qualified by focus.

For participants' feelings of power the focus effect was not significant,  $F(2, 149) = 1.50$ ,  $p = .227$ , nor were any of the specific contrasts. However, in view of the significant correlation between performance state self-esteem and feelings of power,  $r(151) = 0.20$ ,  $p = .012$ , we tested the indirect effect of focus on feelings of power via performance state self-esteem using PROCESS v.3.4 Model 4, with focus as the predictor (X), feelings of power as the outcome (Y), and performance state self-esteem as the mediator (M). In all of our PROCESS analyses we used 10,000 bootstrap samples. For the multicategorical focus predictor we specified two orthogonal contrasts (i.e., Helmert coding, see Hayes, 2018), with one "experience" contrast comparing the experience focus condition with the other two (coded -.667, .333, .333) and another "corollary" contrast comparing the reasoning and control conditions with each other (coded .000, -.500, .500). Results indicated a significant indirect path from the experience contrast to reduced feelings of power via reduced performance state self-esteem,  $b = 0.10$  [95% CI .0033, .2526]; for the corollary contrast  $b = -0.01$  [95% CI -.1380, .1187]. Although a test of reverse mediation did not yield significant effects, this was not the case in subsequent studies (these analyses are all described in the supplemental document), a point to which we return in the General Discussion.

Neither social or appearance state self-esteem were significantly correlated with feelings of power,  $r_s = .02$  ( $p = .845$ ) and  $.15$  ( $p = .101$ ) respectively. When they were included as parallel mediators along with performance state self-esteem in the PROCESS analysis the results

for performance state self-esteem were similar,  $b = 0.17$  [95% CI .0129, .3725], and there were no indirect effects involving the other state self-esteem domains for either contrast.

### *Discussion*

The results of Study 3 revealed a clear negative effect of experience focus – as compared to either reasoning focus or no specific focus at all – on participants' current self-evaluations. These findings suggest that the locus of the imposed experience focus effect does indeed lie with pitfalls of focusing on personal experience, as opposed to positive implications of focusing on reasoning and argumentation. Further, participants' confidence in their own capability was intertwined with their feelings of power: Although experience focusing did not have a direct effect on feelings of power, it had an indirect effect via reduced performance state self-esteem. No such effect was evident for any other domain of state self-esteem. In view of these results, together with the particular relevance of performance state self-esteem to our theorizing, we narrow our focus to performance state self-esteem in our subsequent studies.

### *Study 4*

In Study 4 we sought to generalize the results of Studies 2 and 3 to a non-academic context. Accordingly, participants were members of marginalized racial groups working full-time who considered having a discussion about diversity initiatives with White co-workers. To further probe the generalizability of the imposed experience focus effect, the focusing manipulation in this study involved requests made by the White co-workers that were more personally directed toward participants. The same measures of feelings of power and performance state self-esteem were administered as in Study 3.

There are many considerations beyond power that may be relevant to the desirable focus to advance for intergroup exchanges. Not the least of these may be a motivation to acknowledge



in some way the personal stake that members of marginalized groups have in the matters at hand and their special standing to speak to the issues. Accordingly, we sought to probe alternatives that might constitute a step in this direction without the negative power implications of focusing explicitly on personal experience.

The specific possibility we examined was whether advancing a focus on personal firsthand knowledge acquired rather than personal experience might constitute a means of acknowledging racialized individuals' unique perspective and understanding of the issues in a more empowering way: Whereas experiences happen *to* a person, knowledge is something that they *acquire*. This distinction is captured in the German language by two different words for experience, namely *erfahrung*, which implies the active gaining of knowledge and expertise, and *erlebnis*, which implies passively living through something. We thus anticipated that reference to knowledge, which also has a semantic association with elevating constructs such as status, expertise, and intellect, would have more salutary implications for individuals' sense of their own capabilities and feelings of power than would reference to experience, which in this context would be associated with thoughts about being the target of others' actions.

### *Method*

#### *Participants*

The final sample comprised 250 non-student adults with a marginalized racial background residing in Canada or the United Kingdom and working full-time who participated through Prolific and were paid \$1.47 CAD. The most well-represented groups were South Asian (34.0%) and Black (29.2%). Our target sample size was based on the average size of the experience versus reasoning focus effect for members of marginalized racial groups across

Studies 2 and 3 and selected to provide at least .80 power to detect an omnibus effect of focus.<sup>4</sup>

Participants were randomly assigned to one of the cells created by the one-way 3-level (Focus: Reasoning vs. Knowledge vs. Experience) design; cell *N*s ranged from 76 to 91.

### *Procedure*

The procedure was very similar to the Studies 2 and 3, except that the scenario centered on a work situation. Participants were asked to imagine that they were having a discussion with some colleagues at work, both of whom were White, and that the topic of diversity training and bias in the workplace came up. Those in the experience focus condition were further instructed to imagine that they were asked for their opinion and specifically about the past personal experiences that informed their opinion. Those in the reasoning focus condition were instead asked to imagine that they were asked specifically about the reasoning and arguments that informed their opinion. Those in the personal firsthand knowledge focus condition were instead asked to imagine that they were asked specifically about the personal firsthand knowledge they had acquired that informed their opinion. Participants completed the same measures of feelings of power ( $\alpha = .92$ ) and performance state self-esteem ( $\alpha = .83$ ) as in Study 3.<sup>5</sup>

### *Results*

Participants' performance state self-esteem was analyzed in a one-way 3-level (Focus: Reasoning vs. Knowledge vs. Experience) ANOVA. Results indicated a main effect for focus,  $F(2, 247) = 3.51, p = .031$ . Contrast analyses revealed that performance state self-esteem was

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<sup>4</sup> Although we assumed that pre-screening for participants to be working full-time would result in a non-student population, we discovered that this was not the case (13.4% of the full sample were students). The exclusion rate reported in Table 1 is after students were excluded.

<sup>5</sup> Details regarding results for social and appearance state self-esteem, which were also assessed in Study 4, are presented in the supplemental document.

lower in the experience focus as compared to both the reasoning and personal firsthand knowledge focus conditions, with the two latter conditions not differing from one another (see Table 3 for details on all contrasts).

A parallel analysis of participants' feelings of power yielded a main effect of focus,  $F(2, 247) = 3.30, p = .039$ . Echoing the effects for state self-esteem, contrast analyses revealed that feelings of power were lower in the experience as compared to both the reasoning and personal firsthand knowledge conditions, with the two latter conditions not differing from one another.

As feelings of power were once again significantly related to performance state self-esteem,  $r = .33, p < .001$ , we tested the indirect effect of focus on feelings of power via performance state self-esteem using PROCESS v.3.4 Model 4, with focus as the predictor (X), feelings of power as the outcome (Y), and performance state self-esteem as the mediator (M). For the multicategorical focus predictor we again specified two orthogonal contrasts, with one "experience" contrast comparing the experience focus condition with the other two (coded -.667, .333, .333) and another "corollary" contrast comparing the reasoning and knowledge conditions with each other (coded .000, -.500, .500). Results indicated a significant indirect path from the experience contrast to reduced feelings of power via reduced performance state self-esteem,  $b = 0.15$  [95% CI .0288, .2954]; for the corollary contrast,  $b = 0.04$  [95% CI -.0935, .1744].

### *Discussion*

The results of Study 4 again indicated an imposed experience focus effect, this time a direct effect obtained with non-student members of marginalized racial groups considering a discussion about diversity initiatives with White co-workers who advanced the focus for the exchange. Critically, focusing on personal firsthand knowledge did not have the same disempowering effect as focusing on experience: The simple wording change made a big

difference. The same pattern was evident in participants' current self-evaluations and, as in Study 3, there was an indirect negative effect of experience focus on feelings of power through reduced performance state self-esteem.

### Study 5

The main goal of Study 5 was to replicate the results of Studies 2 to 4 in a context in which members of a marginalized racial group believed that they were actually engaged in an online exchange with a White person. The pre-registration for this experiment is available at [https://aspredicted.org/ZJC\\_RBK](https://aspredicted.org/ZJC_RBK). Participants with a Black racial background had a computer-mediated exchange with an ostensible White partner about a series of intergroup issues. They were advised that their partner had been randomly assigned to choose the kind of information they would provide in the first step of their exchange about the issues, and that the partner had either chosen for them to describe their relevant personal experiences or their reasoning and arguments. Participants then proceeded to indicate their opinions and provide the requested information about experiences or reasoning to their partner. Subsequent to this their performance state self-esteem and feelings of power were assessed.

We expected that those whose partner had asked about experiences would report lower feelings of power than those whose partner had asked about reasoning, and that experience focusing would reduce feelings of competence as assessed by the performance state self-esteem scale. As in Studies 3 and 4, we planned to conduct analyses that would test the indirect path from experience focusing to reduced feelings of power via lower feelings of competence.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> As detailed in our pre-registration and summarized in the Method section we included additional items to test some more complex potential mediational pathways. These failed to yield any significant or clarifying findings.

Further, we used the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count system (LIWC; Pennebaker, Boyd, Jordan, & Blackburn, 2015) to analyze the content of participants' responses to the social issues questions. Specifically, we assessed whether the focus that was imposed on their answers had implications for the "clout" participants evidenced in their communication about the issues to their ostensible partner. Clout refers to "the relative social status, confidence, or leadership that people display through their writing" (Pennebaker Conglomerates, n.d.), and according to the LIWC manual "a high number suggests that the author is speaking from the perspective of high expertise and is confident; low Clout numbers suggest a more tentative, humble, even anxious style." As further noted by Jordan, Sterling, Pennebaker, and Boyd (2019), "people high in clout speak with a sense of certainty and authority" (p. 3477). Of particular interest with this linguistic behavioral variable was whether being prompted to focus on personal experience rather than reasoning and argumentation would lead participants to display less confidence and status when expressing themselves to their White partner.

### *Method*

#### *Participants*

The final sample comprised 287 adults with a Black racial background currently living in the United States who participated through Prolific and were paid the equivalent of \$2.00 USD. Our target sample size was based on the average size of the experience versus reasoning focus effect for members of marginalized racial groups across the previous experiments for which we had results in hand when beginning this study ( $d = .351$ ) and was selected to provide at least .80 power to detect a difference across experience and reasoning focus. Participants were randomly assigned to the Reasoning ( $N = 148$ ) or Experience ( $N = 139$ ) Focus condition.

#### *Procedure*

This online study was described to participants as focusing on social perception in computer-mediated exchanges. Participants were led to believe that they would be exchanging responses with another participant. We took several steps to enhance the plausibility of this information, such as telling them to expect delays and explaining the procedures to be followed if for any reason another participant was not available.

Participants first completed demographic questions (e.g., gender, racial background, country of birth, first language) and answered a couple of “ice-breaker” questions (about their siblings and pets), with the understanding that their answers would be provided to the other participant in their session. While they were waiting for the other participant’s response, the social issues that would be the focus of the rest of the exchange (e.g., whether diversity and anti-bias training should be mandatory in all workplaces) were presented for their consideration.

Participants were advised that their exchange about the social issues would be structured, with each of them having some choices about what to ask the other person at different points, and were further told that the other person had been randomly assigned to make the first choice. This choice involved indicating the kind of information they wanted to receive from the participant, chosen from the two options of “the personal experiences that have affected how you feel about the issues, that is, your relevant past experiences” or “the reasoning and arguments behind your opinions, that is, your thoughts on the issues.”

After a short delay, participants received the other person’s ostensible answers to the demographic and ice-breaker questions, which indicated that the other person had a White racial background, was the same sex as the participant, had been born in the United States, and had English as a first language. The answers to the siblings and pets questions indicated that the person had one younger sister and no pets at the moment. The other person’s selection regarding

the information they wanted to receive from the participant was also provided at this time, thereby instantiating the experience or reasoning focus.

The next step was for participants to indicate their opinions on each of the three issues, using a 10-point scale on which 1 = *strongly disagree* and 10 = *strongly agree*. For each issue, after indicating their opinion they either described the reasoning and arguments behind their opinion or the personal experiences affecting their opinion.

Next, participants completed a range of items designed to map directly onto Gray and Wegner's (2009) analysis of moral patiency versus agency. Although the items were based on Gray and Wegner (2009) they needed to be substantially modified to make them applicable to an online exchange with a stranger (instead of, for example, perceptions of Mother Theresa or of someone who commits murder, or in the context of events involving physical pain from being cut with glass). These measures, which did not yield any significant results, are described in the pre-registration and supplemental document.

Participants then proceeded to complete the performance state self-esteem scale ( $\alpha = .86$ ) followed by three items assessing their feelings of power (*powerful, in control, dominant*,  $\alpha = .87$ ). Toward the end of the survey an exploratory item asked participants whether, if they had had the choice to describe their personal experiences or their reasoning and arguments on the issues, which they would have chosen.

### *Results*

As per our pre-registration, participants' performance state self-esteem and feelings of power were each analyzed in a one-way 2-level (Focus: Reasoning vs. Experience) ANOVA. Results revealed that participants in the experience focus condition had lower performance state self-esteem and felt less powerful than did participants in the reasoning condition (see Table 3).

We used the LIWC to identify the level of clout evident in participants' responses to the social issues questions, which they believed they were directing toward their partner in the study. Although the precise algorithm is proprietary, clout includes second person pronouns (e.g., "you," "your"), first person plural pronouns (e.g., "we," "us," "ours"), and social words, all scored positively, and first person singular pronouns (e.g., "I," "me," "myself") and negations, scored negatively (see Jordan et al., 2019), and the final value is a percentile based on standardized scores from large comparison samples (Pennebaker et al., 2015). The analysis of these scores revealed that participants who explained the personal experiences that informed their opinions displayed lower clout than did those who explained their reasoning.

Because there were no effects on the items designed to assess moral agency and patency, we departed from our pre-registration and excluded these measures from our analyses of underlying process, testing the indirect effect of focus on feelings of power via lower performance of state self-esteem as in the previous studies. Results indicated a significant indirect effect,  $b = -0.2018$  [95% CI  $-.4123, -.0082$ ]. Although clout and performance state self-esteem were correlated,  $r(285) = 0.13$ ,  $p = .028$ , the indirect effect of experience focusing on clout via performance state self-esteem was not significant,  $b = -0.5793$  [95% CI  $-1.6775, 0.1200$ ]. Thus, only a direct effect of focusing was evident for the clout outcome.

As to participants' responses to the exploratory item asking whether they would have chosen to describe their personal experiences or their reasoning on the issues if they had had the choice, the majority (63.8%) indicated that they would have chosen to describe their reasoning and arguments rather than their experiences,  $\chi^2 = 21.75$ ,  $p < .001$ , a preference that was not moderated by focusing condition,  $B = -.280$  ( $SE = 0.246$ ), Wald = 1.292,  $p = .256$ .

#### *Corollary Analyses of Clout*



The effect of experience focusing on clout may seem quite unsurprising given the linguistic constraints imposed by the call to focus on personal experiences: In directing individuals to think and talk about their personal experiences this focus essentially requires self-referential thought and behavior (e.g., thinking in terms of, or using, the word “me”) and focusing on the self, which is scored negatively in the clout index. However, in our view this requirement is theoretically meaningful and in some ways its obviousness is exactly the point. That is, low levels of clout in thought or expression may be a direct outcome of experience focusing at the same time as constituting a linguistic channel through which this focus can increase the extent to which individuals feel like a target and detract from their feelings of power. After all, for example, self-focused attention is linked to perceiving the self as a target of others’ actions (e.g., Fenigstein, 1979, 1984) and in light of the reliable link between self-reference and occupying a lower power position (e.g., Kacewicz, Pennebaker, Davis, Jeon, & Graesser, 2014; Liu, 2022) self-reference would seem to have clear potential to serve as a signal of low power to both self and other.

To probe this issue we examined the extent to which the effects of experience focusing were specific to the component of the clout index most directly dictated by a focus on personal experience, namely first person singular pronouns. These analyses revealed that experience focusing did indeed have a substantial positive effect on the number of first person singular pronouns in participants’ responses,  $t(285) = 8.06, p < .001, d = .955 [.707, 1.196]$ . It also reduced the number of first person plural pronouns (e.g., we, us, ours), which typically characterize the speech of high status individuals (Jordan et al., 2019),  $t(285) = -2.32, p = .021, d = -.275 [-.506, -.041]$ . There were no effects on word count ( $t < 1$ ) nor were there any significant effects across other components of the clout index.

We proceeded to conduct analyses treating the linguistic variables as mechanisms rather than as outcomes, to test the idea of linguistic channels through which experience focusing might exert some of its effects. The indirect effect of experience focusing on feelings of power via more first person singular pronouns was significant,  $b = -0.1587$  [95% CI  $-.3453, -.0019$ ]; for first person plural pronouns it was not,  $b = -0.0255$  [95% CI  $-.0744, .0085$ ]. Reverse mediation (i.e., the path from feelings of power to pronoun use) was not significant in either case.

### *Discussion*

The findings from this study document negative implications of experience focusing for Black individuals in the context of an ostensibly real exchange about intergroup issues with a White interaction partner. In line with predictions, participants whose partner asked about their personal experiences perceived themselves as less competent, felt less powerful, and exhibited lower levels of clout in their communications to their White partner than did those who had instead been asked about their reasoning. Further, an indirect path from experience focusing to reduced feelings of power via lower self-perceived competence was once again evident.

No such indirect path was evident for the linguistic clout outcome. Although such an interpretation is speculative, it may be that experience focusing directly imposes constraints on thoughts and behavior that funnel individuals toward word choices and styles of expression – namely frequent self-reference – that connote low power. Further, the corollary analyses suggesting that increased self-reference prompted by experience focus was in turn associated with reduced feelings of power were consistent with the possibility that experience focusing may sometimes exert some of its disempowering effects via linguistic channels.

Finally, the exploratory item probing participants' preferences revealed that the majority would rather be asked about their reasoning than their experiences.

### Study 6

Studies 6 and 7 were designed to test the imposed experience focus effect in real back-and-forth intergroup exchanges. We arranged for pairs including one individual with a White racial background and one individual with a marginalized racial background to have a face-to-face discussion over Zoom about controversial social issues. The White dyad member received instructions either to ask their partner about their relevant past personal experiences or to ask their partner about their thoughts and reasoning. As in the previous studies, we expected that experience focusing would reduce racialized individuals' feelings of power.

Further, in Studies 6 and 7 we broaden our analysis to consider the implications of experience focusing for power manifest externally as the ability to exert social influence over others (French & Raven, 1959). In line with our theorizing and results to this point, we expected that members of marginalized racial groups would exert less social influence over their White partner when asked to focus on their experiences than when asked about their reasoning. Given that power tends to be complementary, with one person's greater power being linked to an interaction partner's lesser power (see, e.g., Tiedens & Fragale, 2003), another possible way that disempowering implications of experience focusing might be manifest for members of marginalized racial groups is through being more influenced by their White partner's opinions. Accordingly, so as to achieve the most comprehensive analysis we planned to examine the influence exerted by individuals belonging to a marginalized racial group relative to the influence exerted by their White partner (i.e., whose opinion moved more?). The pre-registration for this experiment is available at [https://aspredicted.org/JHF\\_ZWN](https://aspredicted.org/JHF_ZWN).

A corollary goal of Study 6 was to probe the role of conscious metaperceptual inferences in contributing to the imposed experience focus effect. Of particular interest was whether

experience focusing would lead members of marginalized racial groups to sense that they were viewed as less competent and/or more warm and whether such metaperceptions would help account for any effects of experience focusing on their power outcomes.

Finally, on an exploratory basis (not part of the pre-registration) we assessed White individuals' level of dispositional empathy at the start of the experimental session. The procedures for Study 6 were unique in placing the implementation of the focusing manipulation in the hands of racialized individuals' White interaction partner. Thus, we were interested in exploring whether the effects of experience focusing might be moderated in some way by personal qualities of the White participants that seemed likely to shape how they enacted the focusing. In light of the intersection between the present analysis of experience focusing and research and theory on empathy, these individuals' chronic orientation toward empathizing with others stood out as an especially interesting and relevant potential moderator.

Specifically, although we did not have clear a priori predictions about what the pattern might look like, a key possibility was that experience focusing might have more potent effects on racialized individuals' sense of agency, capability, and power when enacted by higher-empathy White individuals, by virtue of these individuals' chronic attunement to the hardships and obstacles encountered by others and orientation toward being helpful and protective. That is, because individuals higher in empathy are sensitive to others' possible misfortunes and are ready to perceive others as in need of support, they might be more likely than those lower in empathy to ask about experiences in a manner that suggests, in line with our theorizing about moral typecasting, that they see their partner as a potential target of harmful or beneficial actions of others.

### *Method*

### *Participants*

The final sample comprised 135 pairs of previously unacquainted same-sex introductory psychology students who received partial course credit for their participation. Each pair included one individual with a White/European background and one individual with a marginalized racial background. The most well-represented groups were Black (25.2%) and Filipino (23.0%). Our goal was to run as many dyads as possible by the end of the academic term in which we started the study to a maximum of 220 dyads, which we identified as the biggest sample size worth collecting given the labor-intensive nature of the procedures (da Silva Frost & Ledgerwood, 2020) and which we anticipated would yield at least 180 dyads after exclusions. Fewer participants were available than we had hoped although at the same time there were fewer exclusions than we anticipated.<sup>7</sup>

### *Procedure*

This online study was described to participants as centering on social perception in first meeting situations. Each pair member began by accessing a Qualtrics link that took them through informed consent and then some preliminary exploratory individual difference measures. These included the empathic concern subscale of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (IRI; Davis, 1980).

*Focusing Manipulation.* White participants subsequently received the focusing manipulation. They were advised that after their discussion with the other participant they would

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<sup>7</sup> Because we realized that recording of the Zoom sessions allowed us to check the integrity of participants' responses to the checks, we deviated from our pre-registration to minimize unnecessary exclusions and maximize statistical power. For example, if a participant in the experience focusing condition indicated on the check that they were told to ask about reasoning but review of their recording showed that they asked about experiences and not reasons, the pair was retained. To further minimize exclusions, we departed from our pre-registration and retained four pairs who discussed only two of the topics. These pairs were more common than expected and not outliers (seven pairs discussed only three topics). Further, the issue of diversity on university campuses, which we expected would be particularly relevant and immediate to this sample, came first and was discussed by all. The results are extremely similar if these pairs are excluded.

be asked to answer a number of questions about it. Depending on whether they were in the reasoning or experience condition they were further told that “we have found that people are better able to answer these questions if they seek an understanding of *the reasons and arguments behind the other person’s opinions/how the other person’s past personal experiences have affected their opinion*. So, during the discussion, please ask the other person about *their reasons, thinking, and arguments on the issues/their past experiences relevant to the issues* and focus on this as much as possible.” They were further provided examples of what they might say (e.g., “Can you tell me about your reasons and thinking on this issue?”; “Can you tell me about your past personal experiences relevant to this issue?”), advised that they were the only one getting these instructions because they were specific to the questions they would be asked later, and asked to do everything they could to follow the instructions.

*Pre-Discussion Opinions.* The next step was for both participants to indicate their current opinion regarding five social issues relevant to intergroup relations (e.g., the need for universities to do more to promote Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) practices on their campuses, best practices for Christmas tree displays). In each case a statement was presented (e.g., “Because Christmas is not celebrated by everyone, Christmas tree displays should only be allowed in Canadian public schools if symbols of other seasonal holidays (e.g., Hanukkah, Kwanzaa) are equally represented”) and participants indicated their agreement on a 10-point scale where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 10 = *strongly agree*.

*Zoom Interaction.* Following this, they each landed on a page that provided the link for the Zoom interaction, which was moderated by a White female experimenter. She admitted the racialized participant first, checked that their technology was working and asked for permission to record the discussion, and then put them in the waiting room. Next she did the same with the

White participant but also reinforced the focusing manipulation by repeating the instructions that had appeared in Qualtrics and reminded them to try to ask focus-consistent questions for every issue. She further advised them that she would be sending a reminder of their instructions part-way through the discussion using the private chat function.

The experimenter then re-admitted the racialized participant and gave them both instructions for the 10-minute discussion of the same five issues on which they had previously provided their opinions. She explained that she would send a copy of the issues to the White participant (who was referred to by name, not racial background), who would start by reading the issue out loud and asking for the other participant's opinion. They were then to take turns asking each other questions about their opinions and could spend as much or as little time on each topic as they liked. She informed them that she would turn off her video and audio and also her own sound so that she could not hear them, and that she would not watch the discussion but would monitor the chat in case they had any questions. After the 10 minutes were up the experimenter re-joined and gave participants the passcode for completing the rest of the Qualtrics survey.

*Dependent Measures.* The first set of questions asked participants to answer the social issues questions again. The instructions emphasized that they should indicate their current opinions. As per our pre-registration we computed the number of issues on which each participant's opinion moved toward versus away from their partner's ingoing opinions. For each issue we determined whether participants were closer to the opinion their partner brought to the discussion after the discussion than they were before. The total number of "toward" issues, on which they got closer and the total number of "away" issues, on which they got further, were computed. To take into account that not everyone discussed all five issues, these calculations were made across the issues actually discussed and were divided by the number of issues discussed.

Overall there was substantial consistency across participants' pre- and post-discussion opinions: Their opinion stayed the same 40.7% of the time. Participants then proceeded to complete the performance state self-esteem scale ( $\alpha_R = .86$ ) followed by three items assessing their feelings of power (*powerful, in control, dominant*,  $\alpha_R = .83$ ).

Next, racialized participants completed a set of items designed to assess different facets of their metaperceptions regarding their partner's impression of them. The items were designed to include dimensions relevant to competence and warmth (*competent, intelligent, independent, capable, warm, sensitive, trustworthy, and sincere*). However, a factor analysis indicated that some items loaded on both factors or not on the theoretically intended factor. In our analyses we consider each item separately on an exploratory basis.

### *Results*

#### *Planned Analyses*

We began by conducting our planned analyses of how the experience focusing manipulation affected racialized individuals' feelings of power. Results of a one-way 2-level (Focus: Reasoning vs. Experience) ANOVA indicated that those whose partner had been instructed to ask about their experiences descriptively felt less powerful than did those whose partner had been instructed to ask about their reasoning, although the effect was not statistically significant (see Table 3 for details). Turning to the process variables, parallel analyses of performance state self-esteem and metaperceptions did not yield significant effects.

The extent to which participants changed toward versus away from their partner's ingoing opinion was analyzed in a 2 (Racial Background: White vs. Marginalized) x 2 (Direction: Toward vs. Away) x 2 (Focus: Reasoning vs. Experience) repeated-measures ANOVA, with



pairs as the unit of analysis; racial background and direction were within-pairs variables and focus was a between-pairs variable. There were no significant effects involving focus condition.

*Exploratory Analyses: Role of Individual Differences in Empathy*

*Direct Effects.* With the caveat that these results must be interpreted with caution given the post hoc nature of the analyses and also because our sample size was modest for testing the interaction, to probe the potential moderating role of White participants' level of dispositional empathy we conducted additional analyses using PROCESS v.3.4 Model 1 in which White individuals' level of dispositional empathy ( $\alpha = .77$  with items standardized) was entered as a moderating variable. For racialized individuals' feelings of power results indicated a significant Empathy x Focus interaction,  $b = -0.81 [-1.51, -0.10]$ ,  $t(131) = -2.27$ ,  $p = .025$ ,  $d = -.397 [-.742, -.050]$ , whereby experience focusing had a negative effect when enacted by White individuals higher in empathy,  $b = -0.90 [-1.53, -0.27]$ ,  $t(131) = -2.83$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $d = -.495 [-.841, -.146]$ , reasoning and experience  $\hat{Y}$ s = 4.42 and 3.51, but not lower in empathy,  $b = 0.06 [-0.54, 0.66]$ ,  $t(131) = 0.20$ ,  $ns$ ,  $d = .035 [-.308, .377]$ , respective  $\hat{Y}$ s = 4.29 and 4.35.

A parallel analysis of performance state self-esteem also yielded an Empathy x Focus interaction,  $b = -1.13 [-1.76, -0.51]$ ,  $t(131) = -3.58$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -.626 [-.925, -.274]$ , whereby experience focusing had a negative effect on racialized individuals' sense of their own competence when enacted by White individuals higher in empathy,  $b = -0.88 [-1.45, -0.32]$ ,  $t(131) = -3.11$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $d = -.543 [-.891, -.194]$ , reasoning and experience  $\hat{Y}$ s = 5.27 and 4.29, but not lower in empathy,  $b = 0.47 [-0.07, 1.00]$ ,  $t(131) = 1.73$ ,  $p = .085$ ,  $d = .302 [-.043, .646]$ , respective  $\hat{Y}$ s = 4.90 and 5.37. Analyses of whether White individuals' level of empathy moderated the effects of experience focusing on racialized individuals' metaperceptions yielded no significant effects apart from an Empathy x Focus interaction on metaperceived competence,

$b = -0.83 [-1.60, -0.06]$ ,  $t(131) = 2.13$ ,  $p = .036$ ,  $d = -.372 [-.026, -.717]$ , whereby experience focusing had a negative effect when enacted by White individuals higher in empathy,  $b = -0.76 [-1.45, -0.07]$ ,  $t(131) = 2.18$ ,  $p = .031$ ,  $d = -.318 [-.035, -.726]$ , reasoning and experience  $\hat{Y}$ s = 5.29 and 4.53, but not lower in empathy,  $b = 0.23 [-0.43, 0.89]$ ,  $t(131) = 0.68$ ,  $ns$ ,  $d = .119 [-.224, .461]$ , respective  $\hat{Y}$ s = 4.83 and 5.05.

There were no direct effects on an overall social influence index computed to reflect the extent to which White individuals' opinions moved toward (vs. away from) their racialized partner's opinions more than racialized individuals' opinions moved toward (vs. away from) their White partner's opinions, and on which higher scores thus represented relatively greater social influence exerted by members of marginalized racial groups (overall  $M = 0.01$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ).

*Indirect Effects.* We proceeded to test the indirect paths from experience focusing to racialized individuals' power outcomes via reduced feelings of competence as in our previous studies, but here moderated by their White partner's level of empathy. First we used PROCESS v.3.4 Model 8, with focus as the predictor (X), White individuals' empathy as the moderator (W), feelings of power as the outcome (Y), and performance state self-esteem as the mediator (M). Results indicated a significant indirect path from experience focusing to reduced feelings of power via reduced performance state self-esteem, but only when the White individual was higher in empathy,  $b = -0.4743$  [95% CI -0.8262, -0.1632]; for the index of moderated mediation [95% CI -1.0284; -0.2592]. A parallel analysis with the social influence index as the outcome did not yield a significant indirect effect.

Interestingly, when we conducted the same analysis with metaperceived competence as the mediator, indirect effects were evident both for feelings of power and the social influence

index. Specifically, results indicated a significant indirect path from experience focusing to reduced feelings of power via reduced metaperceived competence, but only when the White individual was higher in empathy,  $b = -0.2390$  [95% CI -0.5464, -0.0204]; for the index of moderated mediation [95% CI -0.6342; -0.0105]. As well, there was a significant indirect path from experience focusing to reduced social influence via reduced metaperceived competence, but only when the White individual was higher in empathy,  $b = -0.0529$  [95% CI -0.1205, -0.0026]; for the index of moderated mediation [95% CI -0.1385; -0.0004]. Overall the pattern here for social influence indicates that experience focusing reduced racialized individuals' sense of how competent their White partner considered them to be, which in turn predicted them exerting less influence relative to their White partner during the discussion – but only when their partner was high in dispositional empathy.

### *Discussion*

Study 6 provides an important complement to our other studies by testing the effects of experience focusing advanced by a real White interaction partner in a real intergroup exchange. None of the predicted effects were evident, however, unless individual differences in White individuals' level of dispositional empathy were taken into account.

Specifically, exploratory analyses revealed that being asked by a White interaction partner about their personal experiences rather than reasoning reduced racialized individuals' performance state self-esteem as well as their feelings of power, but only when their White partner was higher in dispositional empathy. Likewise, an indirect path from experience focusing to reduced feelings of power via reduced performance state self-esteem was evident, but only for racialized individuals whose White partner was higher in dispositional empathy. Results further indicated that experience focusing led racialized individuals to sense that their White interaction

partner saw them as less competent, but only when their partner was higher in dispositional empathy. This reduction in racialized individuals' metaperceived competence was linked downstream to lower feelings of power and also to reduced relative social influence.

Although in hindsight it makes sense that the effects of focusing enacted by real, naïve, individuals would depend on their personal qualities, and the role played by dispositional empathy coincides well with previous research and theory regarding its implications for targets' power outcomes, these results must be interpreted with caution given the post hoc nature of the analyses and also because our sample size was modest for testing the interaction. The results for metaperceived competence are particularly tentative given that they involved only a single item. It is unclear why the effects were specific to this one item, although methodological factors such as the placement of the metaperception questions late in the survey might have played a role. It is also possible that our measurement missed an important dynamic by not including more explicitly relational questions on this front, namely, questions about how much participants felt respected (or not) by their partner. The absence of any effects on warmth perceptions, which was unexpected, may reflect that there is relatively less malleability in self-judgments in this domain.

With respect to the social influence outcomes, the only effect of experience focusing that was evident was indirect, through reduced metaperceived competence. Conceivably the design of Study 6 provided a conservative test of the implications of experience focusing for social influence given that the manipulation was directly delivered only to the White dyad member.

### Study 7

Study 7 probed social influence dynamics using a face-to-face in-person interaction paradigm in which the focusing manipulation was directly delivered to both members of the dyad. This ensured that experience focusing was instantiated with maximum clarity for members

of marginalized racial groups and avoided forcing an imbalance in each person's role in the discussion, such that the flow of information between members of the interacting dyad was less constrained and more symmetrical. Our overarching hypothesis was that under these conditions experience focusing would reduce the social influence that members of marginalized racial groups exerted over their White partner's opinions relative to the influence that their partner exerted over them. We further included a condition in which general rather than intergroup topics were discussed, so as to provide an additional test (beyond Study 2) of the specificity of the effects to discussions of intergroup issues.

On a more corollary basis we also arranged for coding of participants' behavior during the exchange, focusing on specific nonverbal behaviors that have previously been found to be associated with power such as interrupting another person and speaking with a loud voice (Smith & Galinsky, 2010). Further, given that the exchanges centered on discussing controversial topics we were interested in how an experience versus reasoning focus would affect racialized individuals' readiness to express agreement with their White interaction partner's statements: If they were feeling viewed as less capable and on less solid ground as a function of the experience focusing they might be more inclined to outwardly go along with or conform to the things their partner was saying.

Finally, although our focus in this study was on social influence and behavior, we did also assess racialized individuals' self-reported feelings of power, albeit some time later in the session, after the main opinion change measures were collected.

### *Method*

#### *Participants*

The final sample after exclusions comprised 167 pairs of Canadian introductory psychology students who received partial course credit for their participation. Each pair included one student who reported having a White racial background and one student who reported having any of a variety of different marginalized racial backgrounds. The most well-represented were Filipino (27.5%) and South Asian (25.7%). Our target sample size was selected to provide .80 power to detect a two-way between-subjects interaction effect size of  $d = .430$  (see Study 1). Pairs were randomly assigned to one of the four cells created by the 2 (Topics: General vs. Intergroup) x 2 (Focus: Reasoning vs. Experience) design; cell  $N$ s ranged from 40 to 44.

### *Procedure*

Each pair member arrived at a different location for a study of "social perception in first meeting situations" and pair members were kept separate at all times except for the discussion and debriefing. As a cover story, the White female experimenter told participants that the researchers were interested in how perceptions are affected by the kind of information that is exchanged between two people and by how that information is exchanged. She further informed them that some pairs talk together face-to-face whereas others exchange written information, and that their communication would be face-to-face. Participants were also advised that the researchers were particularly interested in interactions between people with different racial backgrounds and that their partner had a different racial background than they did. Prior to signing the consent form participants were given an overview of the procedures, including that they would be having a discussion about their opinions regarding a variety of different social issues and the reasons behind their opinions (reasoning condition) or how their personal experiences have affected their feelings about the issues (experience condition).

*Pre-Discussion Opinions.* Participants first completed a preliminary questionnaire in which they indicated their current opinion regarding six social issues. The issues in the general topics condition included, for example, reducing the voting age and making it illegal to keep animals in zoos. The issues in the intergroup topics condition included, for example, opening the doors to increased immigration and increasing racial diversity on university campuses. In each case a statement was presented (e.g., "Keeping animals in zoos should be illegal") and participants indicated their agreement on a 10-point scale where 1 = *strongly disagree* and 10 = *strongly agree*.

*Discussion.* Pair members were then introduced and left alone for a 10-minute discussion of the same six issues on which they had provided their opinions. They were instructed that for each topic they should discuss whether they disagreed or agreed with the statement and explain the reasons behind their opinion (reasoning condition) or how their personal experiences have affected their feelings about it (experience condition). They were asked to begin with initial introductions and then go through the topics in order. The discussion was videotaped with participants' knowledge and permission (11 pairs declined and had the discussion without being recorded).

*Post-Discussion Opinions.* Immediately after the discussion pair members were separated into different rooms and answered the social issues questions again. The instructions emphasized that they should indicate their current opinions. The key dependent measure was the number of issues on which White individuals' opinions moved toward versus away from their racialized partner's ingoing opinions, as compared to the number of issues on which racialized individuals' opinions moved toward versus away from their White partner's ingoing opinions. These computations were done the same way as in Study 6. Once again overall there was substantial consistency across participants' pre- and post-discussion opinions: Their opinion stayed the same 47.3% of the time.

At the end of the study participants completed a final questionnaire that for marginalized racial group members (only) included a measure of how *active* (vs. passive), *capable* (vs. incapable), *powerful* (vs. weak) and *dominant* (vs. submissive) they perceived themselves to be during the discussion; these ratings were combined to index of feelings of power ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

*Behavior Coding.* To assess expressions of agreement and power behaviors we had four independent coders (three female, one male) review the first and last 2.5 minutes of the video recordings of the discussions and rate participants' behavior. They went through the recordings twice, once rating the racialized participant's behavior and once rating the White participant's behavior (with order varied across coders). The power behaviors were drawn from research on the nonverbal behaviors associated with power (Smith & Galinsky, 2010). There were two specific nonverbal power behaviors that could be assessed with sufficient reliability (with coders' ratings standardized) for both groups of participants ( $\alpha_s \geq .60$ ): Interrupting the other person ( $\alpha_R = .70$ ;  $\alpha_W = .62$ ) and speaking with a loud voice ( $\alpha_R = .86$ ;  $\alpha_W = .86$ ). For expressions of agreement we assessed verbal expressions of agreement ( $\alpha_R = .60$ ;  $\alpha_W = .67$ ) and nonverbal expressions in the form of nodding ( $\alpha_R = .65$ ;  $\alpha_W = .70$ ). As these ratings were significantly correlated ( $r_s = .53$  for both groups of participants) we combined them together.

## *Results*

### *Social Influence*

The proportion of issues discussed on which participants changed their opinion toward versus away from their partner's ingoing opinion was analyzed in a 2 (Racial Background: White vs. Racialized Dyad Member) x 2 (Direction: Toward vs. Away) x 2 (Topics: General vs. Intergroup) x 2 (Focus: Reasoning vs. Experience) repeated-measures ANOVA, with pairs as the unit of analysis; racial background and direction were within-pairs variables and focus and topics



were between-pairs variables. Results revealed a significant four-way interaction,  $F(1, 163) = 4.13, p = .044, d_z = .159 [.004, .313]$ . Simple interaction analyses revealed a three-way Racial Background x Topics x Focus interaction on participants' change toward their partner's opinions,  $F(1, 293.74) = 5.88, p = .016, d_z = .141 [.026, .256]$ . Considering White participants' change toward their racialized partner's opinions, a Topics x Focus interaction was evident,  $F(1, 303.01) = 9.80, p = .002, d = .360 [.132, .586]$ , whereby they changed their opinions toward their partner's opinions on a lower proportion of intergroup issues under an experience as compared to reasoning focus; the opposite was true for general issues (see Table 3 for details regarding the simple effects of focus and the supplemental document for results of additional contrasts). For racialized participants' change toward their White partner's opinions, no Topics x Focus interaction was evident,  $F(1, 303.01) = 0.06, ns, d = .028 [-.197, .253]$ . No three-way interaction was evident on participants' change away from their partner's opinions,  $F(1, 293.74) = 0.76, ns, d_z = .051 [-.064, .165]$ , nor were there any other effects involving focus.<sup>8</sup> The other effects yielded by the overall analysis were a main effect for direction,  $F(1, 163) = 32.68, p < .001, d_z = .448 [.286, .608]$ , a Direction x Topic interaction,  $F(1, 163) = 4.81, p = .030, d_z = .160 [.005, .314]$ , and a Topics x Focus interaction,  $F(1, 163) = 4.14, p = .044, d = .319 [.009, .627]$ , all of which were qualified by the four-way interaction.

### *Interaction Behavior*

The extent to which members of marginalized racial groups expressed agreement during the discussion was analyzed in a 2 (Topics: General vs. Intergroup) x 2 (Focus: Reasoning vs.

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<sup>8</sup> The error terms used to test simple interaction effects were computed according to the formula provided by Howell (1987).

Experience) ANOVA. Results revealed that that these participants expressed more agreement with their White partner during discussions of intergroup issues under an experience focus as compared to a reasoning focus, whereas no such effect was evident in discussions of general topics,  $F(1, 152) = 3.96, p = .048, d = .320 [.002, .642]$ , for the two-way interaction. There were no significant effects on their interruptions or speaking with a loud voice. Analyses of White participants' expressions of agreement, interruptions, and speaking with a loud voice yielded no significant effects.

### *Power Perceptions*

Racialized individuals' perceptions of their power during the discussion, as assessed toward the end of their experimental session, were analyzed in a 2 (Topics: General vs. Intergroup) x 2 (Focus: Reasoning vs. Experience) ANOVA. The Topics x Focus interaction was not significant,  $F(1, 163) = 2.31, p = .130, d = .238 [-.070, .546]$ .

### *Discussion*

Broadly consistent with our theorizing and the findings from Studies 1 to 6, the results of Study 7 revealed that members of marginalized racial groups exerted less social influence over their White interaction partner in discussions of intergroup issues when they were prompted to focus on their personal experiences than when they were instead prompted to focus on reasoning and argumentation. There were no other focus effects on the persuasion outcomes apart from an effect in the opposite direction when general topics were discussed. The source of this reversal is unclear, although notably it dovetails with the corollary findings from Study 2 that in discussions of general issues experience focusing conferred a power advantage to members of marginalized racial groups. Although speculative, one possibility is that the effect reflects the influence of negative competence stereotypes about marginalized racial groups activated by the emphasis on

intellect in the reasoning condition. Regardless, the overall pattern of results is consistent with our theorizing that experience focusing has the most problematic implications for members of marginalized groups in contexts where intergroup issues are discussed and construing the self as a potential target of prejudice and discrimination is thus most likely.

The findings for social influence were complemented by those indicating that racialized individuals outwardly expressed more agreement with their White partner during discussions of intergroup issues in the experience as compared to the reasoning focus condition. Altogether this constellation of outcomes is suggestive of reduced power. However, there were no significant effects on racialized individuals' self-reported feelings of power, possibly because these feelings were assessed quite late in the experimental session, or on the power-relevant nonverbal behaviors that were coded from the discussions, possibly reflecting that the implications of experience focusing were manifest primarily in individuals' word choices and the content of what they said.

In view of the dynamic nature of the interaction situation it must be acknowledged that it is possible that the effects we have attributed to social influence by members of marginalized racial groups instead or in addition reflect White individuals' openness to influence. Specifically, it could have been that White individuals became more resistant to influence when they were exposed to an experience rather than a reasoning focus in discussions of intergroup issues. Regardless, inasmuch as resistance to social influence is a hallmark of occupying a high power position (Galinsky, Rucker, & Magee, 2015), an account in terms of White individuals' resistance to social influence is still consistent with the idea that a focus on personal experience imposed by the broader social context puts members of marginalized racial groups at a power disadvantage relative to White interaction partners in discussions of intergroup issues.

*Integrative Data Analysis*

Finally, to obtain an estimate of the overall effect size of experience versus reasons focusing on feelings of power we conducted a “mega-analysis” across Studies 2 to 7 (Boedhoe et al., 2019; Curran & Hussong, 2009; Hussong, Curran, & Bauer, 2013): We combined the raw data from these studies together and analyzed them using a linear mixed-effects model that included a fixed-effect for focus condition (dummy coded) at Level 1 and a random-intercept for study at Level 2 to account for the clustering of the data.<sup>9</sup> Following the recommendations of Yaremych et al. (2021), focus condition was centered at the mean of each study and we included the study means as a predictor. We considered only the responses of participants who belonged to marginalized racial groups, the case of topics relevant to intergroup relations, and the experience and reasons focus conditions. This analysis yielded a significant overall effect of focus,  $b = -0.45 [-0.64, -0.27]$ ,  $SE = .09$ ,  $t(845.95) = -4.89$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -.336 [-.472, -.200]$ .

To probe whether the experience focus effect was moderated by whether the study involved a scenario approach (Studies 2 to 4) or ostensible or real interaction (Studies 5 to 7) we created a dummy coded variable representing this factor. We then conducted another linear mixed-effect model in which we entered this variable, grand mean centered at Level 2, as well as its interaction with focus condition as fixed-effects. The interaction between focus and study method was not significant,  $p > .70$ . We further considered moderation by sample type

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<sup>9</sup> We also estimated models that included a random slope for focus. However, these models failed to converge for both feelings of power and performance state self-esteem and consequently coefficients, test statistics, and effect sizes could not be computed accurately. Computational difficulties of this sort have been reported elsewhere (e.g., Boedhoe et al., 2019) and in line with recommendations (e.g., Bates et al., 2018) for when convergence problems arise we simplified our model by trimming these parameters.

(introductory psychology students versus crowdsourced) in the same manner and found no evidence of moderation,  $p > .60$ .

Parallel analyses of performance state self-esteem across Studies 3 to 6 revealed a significant overall effect of focus,  $b = -0.28 [-0.44, -0.12]$ ,  $SE = .08$ ,  $t(689.004) = -3.34$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = -.254 [-.405, -.105]$ . There was no evidence of moderation by study method,  $p > .50$ , or sample type,  $p > .90$ . See Figure 1 for forest plots of the effect of experience versus reasons focus on feelings of power (A) and performance state self-esteem (B).

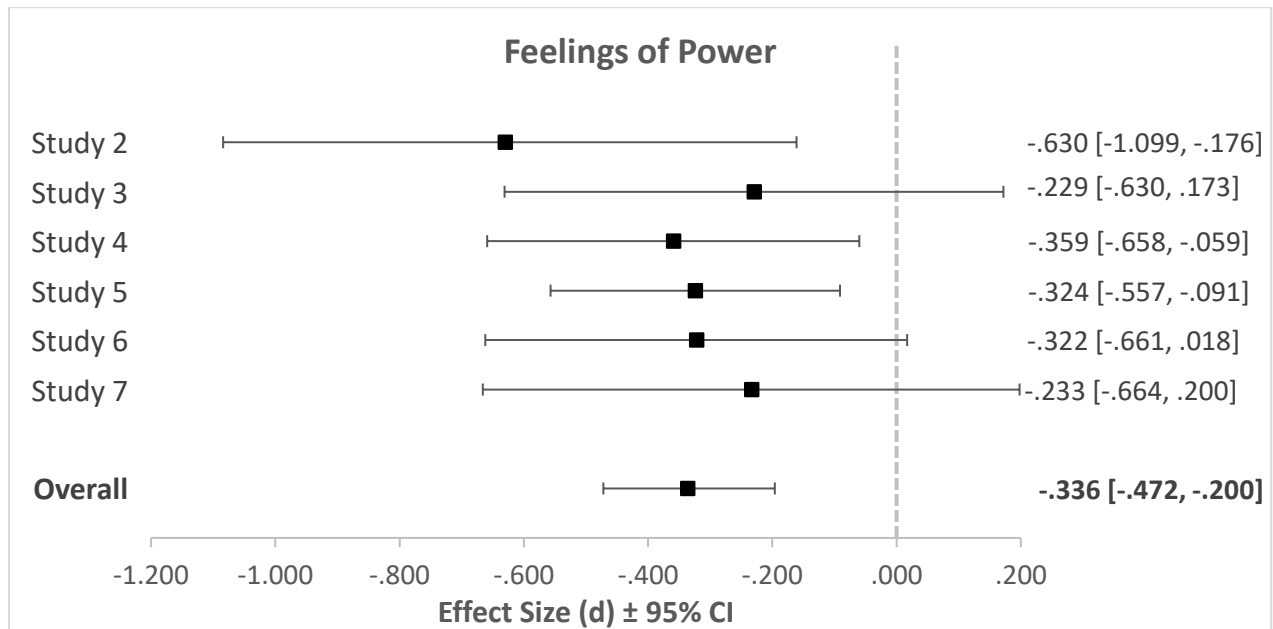
### *General Discussion*

Taken together, the results of Studies 1 to 7 suggest that, well-intentioned or not, asking members of marginalized groups to approach discussions of intergroup issues and policies through the specific lens of their personal experiences may be subtly undermining. Our findings indicate that when an experience focus is imposed from the outside by someone else on members of marginalized racial groups during exchanges about intergroup policies – which is fundamentally different from when these individuals choose to share their personal experiences on their own initiative and on their own terms – it has a disempowering effect in the moment.

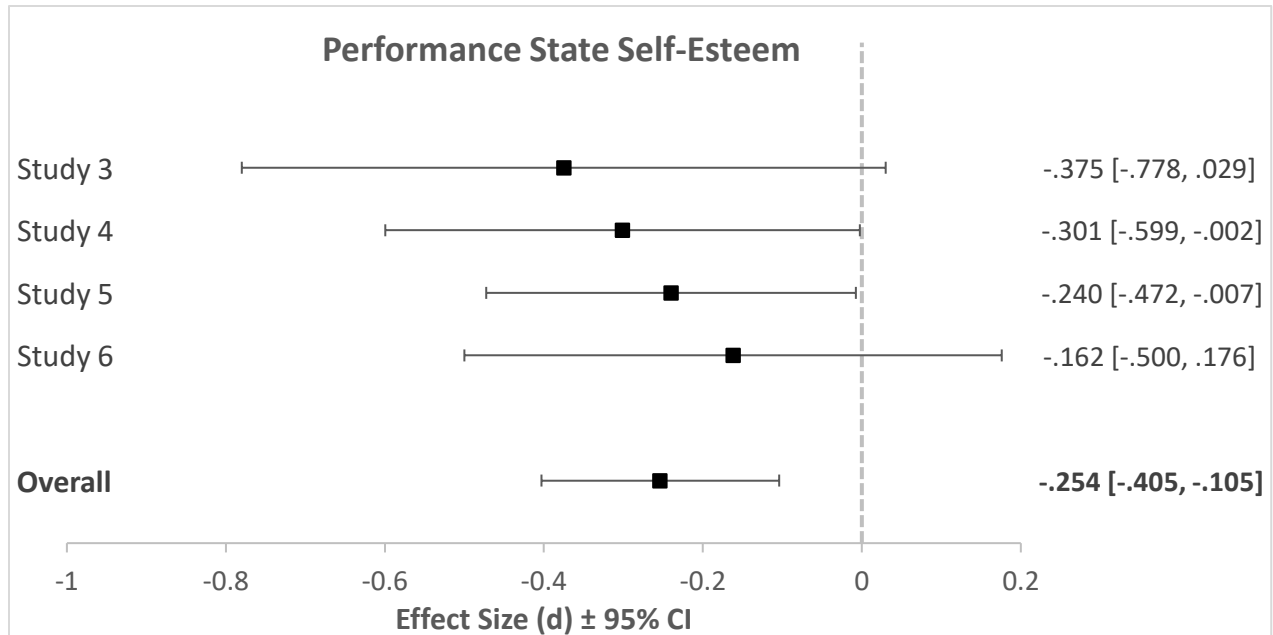
Across the present studies, disempowering effects of experience focusing were evident with respect to racialized individuals' subjective feelings of power (Studies 2 to 6) and two different power-relevant behaviors: During real or ostensible exchanges with White individuals about intergroup issues, members of marginalized racial groups used fewer words that conveyed “clout” in their communications (Study 5) and exerted less social influence relative to their interaction partner when prompted to approach the issues through the lens of their personal experiences rather than their reasoning (Study 7; indirect effect in Study 6). These findings were obtained across studies using diverse methodologies including hypothetical scenario (Studies 2

Figure 1. *Forest plots for all studies testing the effect of experience versus reasons focus on feelings of power (A) and performance state self-esteem (B).*

A



B



to 4), ostensible interaction (Study 5), real online interaction (Study 6), and real in-person interaction (Study 7) paradigms, in academic (Studies 2 and 3) and work (Study 5) contexts as well as more general social ones, and when the focus was imposed by the broader context (Studies 2, 3, and 7) as well as by their interaction partner(s) (Studies 4 to 6).

Results from the process measures were consistent with the idea, based on moral typecasting theory and related research, that imposing an experience focus on members of marginalized racial groups during discussions of intergroup issues leads them to sense that they are viewed – and to construe themselves in the moment – as targets rather than agents and thus as less competent. Indeed, every study that assessed racialized individuals' current confidence in their own competence and capabilities suggested an important role for these perceptions in accounting for the disempowering implications that experience focusing had for them: In each of Studies 3 through 6, an indirect path from having an experience focus imposed on them to reductions in their feelings of power via decreased performance state self-esteem was evident.

Other aspects of our results are also consistent with this interpretation of the imposed experience focus effect. First, it is for members of marginalized groups and in discussions of intergroup issues in particular – where the spectre of prejudice is raised – that the call to focus on experience should be most likely to cue construals of the self as the target of others' morally-relevant actions and thus as less competent. We did indeed find that the disempowering effects of experience focusing were specific to members of marginalized racial groups in exchanges about intergroup issues (see in particular Studies 2 and 7).

Second, Study 1, which used an open-ended methodology, revealed that Black individuals thought that they would feel less respected and viewed as less competent by a White interaction partner who asked them about their personal experiences as opposed to their reasoning in a

discussion of intergroup issues. Further, in Study 6 there was an indirect effect of experience focusing on the social influence that members of marginalized racial groups exerted over their White partner, relative to the influence their partner exerted over them, through their metaperceptions of being viewed as less competent by their partner.

Finally, although the analyses were post hoc, the results of Study 6 revealing that disempowering implications of experience focusing for members of marginalized racial groups were most evident when the focus was imposed by White individuals higher in dispositional empathy are also consistent with the idea that feeling viewed as a target – whether of hardship or benevolence – is important to the effect, and thereby also speak to underlying process. Individuals higher in empathy are chronically attuned to the difficulties and obstacles encountered by others and are oriented toward being helpful and protective. For example, an item from the IRI reads: “When I see someone being taken advantage of, I feel kind of protective towards them.” Thus the finding that experience focusing enacted by higher-empathy individuals had particularly potent implications for targets’ sense of agency and competence fits well with our theorizing based on the moral typecasting framework.

#### *Externally Imposed versus Self-Initiated Focus*

It is critically important to note that the present analysis and findings apply only to externally imposed experience focusing, that is, situations in which members of marginalized groups are directly asked by others to approach intergroup issues by drawing on their personal experiences. In our view having the focus be imposed from the outside by someone else fundamentally transforms its meaning. The impact of talking about personal experiences on one’s own initiative and one’s own terms is almost certainly quite different by virtue of the choice and agency involved in doing so. Indeed, deciding to share experiences – especially when



coupled with the feeling of being heard – is instead likely empowering. Possibly this is true of any focus that is self-initiated and asserts one's own goals and preferences for how to approach the exchange in question. Likewise, cases in which the focus is advanced by a fellow ingroup member may also fundamentally be different. Conceivably, for example, when the salient audience is perceived to be in a similar position to self, the complementary roles of moral agent and patient are not implied within the immediate interaction context. The implications for individuals' metaperceptions, momentary self-evaluations, and feelings of power might then diverge considerably from those documented here.

A further consideration here is that the present analysis has centered on situations in which members of marginalized groups are directed to focus on personal experience in discussion of social issues relevant to intergroup relations such as diversity initiatives, immigration and language rights. The question arises as to the extent to which our findings might be relevant across the broader range of situations in which members of marginalized groups are sometimes asked about their discrimination experiences. In our view the critical problem in the situations we have examined is that experience focusing imposes a constraint on members of marginalized groups to adopt the specific approach of an "experiencer" when discussing social policy, to the exclusion of other dimensions of their individual personhood such as their thoughts and reasoning about the issues. Accordingly, in other contexts where the sharing of experiences is itself the key objective, perhaps in service of goals such as helping others or increasing awareness and acknowledgement of the reality of racism and the harm it causes, we expect that the effects of being asked about experiences might sometimes be quite different and are apt to depend on details of the situation such as the audience's behavior and also the specific outcome

under consideration. Nonetheless, the present findings highlight that these are empirical questions and that positive effects should not be assumed.

### *Alternatives*

Experience focusing was compared against several alternatives in the present research. In all studies we contrasted it with a call to use reasoning and argumentation. In addition, Study 3 included a no-focus control condition and Study 4 included a condition in which participants were asked about the personal firsthand knowledge they had acquired that informed their opinion. Experience focusing had negative effects compared to all of these alternatives, which – although we did not have a study that directly compared the personal firsthand knowledge and no focus conditions – did not appear to differ markedly from one another in terms of the outcomes we assessed. Nonetheless, these alternatives do vary in ways that may be important to their appeal and the specific psychological reactions they engender. Perhaps most notably, prompting a focus on reasoning and argumentation or personal firsthand knowledge still involves advancing a particular focus for the exchange. Yet our results suggest that any general negative effects of imposing a focus per se, if they exist, are countered in these cases by the more uplifting implications of their emphasis on abstract reasoning and expertise, which have positive relations to power. In contrast, just leaving things open and not suggesting any particular focus may provide valuable freedom and choice to members of marginalized groups, although this could conceivably be undermined in some circumstances by their sense that others nonetheless expect them to focus on personal experience. Possibly dynamics such as this account for why we did not see more benefits attached to having no focus at all in Study 3.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

The present research has a number of strengths, such as using a variety of methods, examining outcomes of real interaction between pairs of naïve participants, collecting closed- and open-ended data to probe racialized individuals' experiences, and assessing behavior. Further, it makes theoretical contributions on numerous fronts, including by extending the moral typecasting framework to meta- and self-perception, illuminating a dimension of intergroup dialogues that influences whether they are more versus less empowering for members of marginalized racial groups, identifying specific concrete behaviors that White individuals might exhibit that are likely to support versus undermine racialized individuals' competence and respect goals, and suggesting behavioral pathways that might help account for the distinct effects of being the target of empathy versus perspective taking for power-relevant outcomes.

At the same time, there are important limitations to acknowledge. First, the results from the process measures, as well as the pattern of findings across studies and conditions, were generally consistent with the idea that the disempowering effect of an externally imposed focus on experience arises because it leads members of marginalized groups to sense that they are viewed – and to construe themselves in the moment – as targets rather than agents and thus as less competent. However, we do not have direct evidence for all aspects of this theorized set of reactions, which was based on ideas advanced in the literature on moral typecasting and extended here to relations involving the self. In particular, whereas the results for self- and metaperceived competence were in line with our reasoning, we encountered measurement difficulties in our efforts to directly assess perceptions of the self as a target and in adapting measures from the moral typecasting literature for the present context. We suspect that this aspect of the mechanism is not fully conscious and thus is difficult to capture with explicit self-report measures, but it is also possible that different or complementary mechanisms are at play.

Regardless, we are not able to identify an alternative account that points to a mundane interpretation or that undercuts the implications of the findings for our understanding of how the particular focus that is advanced for discussions of intergroup issues affects the power outcomes of members of marginalized groups.

In addition, although our analyses emphasized the pathway from experience focusing to power outcomes via self- and metaperceived competence, and these were the paths that were most consistently evident, tests of reverse mediation (presented in the supplemental document) generally yielded significant effects. As noted at the outset, these various constructs are clearly intertwined and we consider them to be reciprocally related and mutually reinforcing. Our emphasis on the path through competence perceptions to power outcomes was guided by the moral typecasting theoretical framework. Relatedly, although self-perceptions can guide metaperceptions as well as vice versa (e.g., Kenny & DePaulo, 1993), in line with theorizing regarding the fundamentally social nature of the self-concept (e.g., Leary & Downs, 1995) we conceptualize the imposed experience focus effect as reflective of how others' apparent construals of them shape how individuals think about themselves in the moment. A detailed empirical parsing of these various different potential causal pathways awaits further research.

Other issues for further research include probing individual differences in reactions to experience focusing, as well as the extent to which the effects documented in the present studies generalize to different marginalized groups such as those based on gender or sexual orientation. Based on our theorizing, we would expect the effects to generalize so long as the group in question is perceived to be the target of discrimination, but this is an empirical question. It will also be important to consider how the dynamics probed in the present studies might differ across cultural contexts and populations. It is a limitation of the present work that, notwithstanding the

diverse racial backgrounds that were represented, it was all conducted with university student or crowdsourced samples from educated, industrialized, rich, democratic nations.

Additionally, more systematically and directly probing individuals' preferences, and expectations regarding others' preferences, for the focus of discussions of intergroup issues would be worthwhile. For example, members of dominant groups might sometimes assume that an experience focus would be preferred by an interaction partner belonging to a marginalized group when this is not the case. Alternately, despite the documented implications of experience focusing for power and self-evaluation – and the corollary results of Study 5 suggesting an overall (but by no means unanimous) preference for alternatives – for reasons beyond those considered here members of marginalized groups might sometimes prefer to be asked about personal experiences during discussions of intergroup topics. A fuller understanding of these preferences and expectations is essential to a fuller understanding of how to best facilitate positive and productive intergroup exchanges about pressing social issues.

### *Conclusion*

The present results documenting the imposed experience focus effect suggest that efforts to empower members of marginalized groups and enhance their voice in exchanges about intergroup issues are apt to be more effective if they avoid prompting a focus on personal experience. Asking members of marginalized groups for their opinion or point of view in a more open manner, or asking about their reasoning or personal firsthand knowledge, all appear to have more salutary implications for their power-relevant outcomes in the moment and to constitute a means of learning about their perspective and understanding of the issues in a more empowering way.

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