“Mind the gap”? Exploring the role of beliefs of similar experiences to the outgroup during perspective taking

Steven Sherrin
Which groups deserve empathy?
Hurricane Katrina Led to Largest Ever Red Cross Relief Response

A large crowd of people quickly filled the Astrodome when the Katrina evacuees arrived. Red Cross photo by Daniel Cima.
Opposing outgroup perspectives
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-Barack Obama

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Imagine-self perspective taking

Batson et al., 1997; Todd & Galinksy, 2014
What would I be thinking and feeling, if I were in Orange’s situation?
Self-Outgroup experience gap

The gap’s not that big…
Fig. 1. White and Black respondents’ perceptions of anti-White and anti-Black bias in each decade.
Research Questions

Do the effects of perspective taking depend on the perceived size of the gap between self and outgroup?

Does it alter…

…self-related beliefs: predictions of how the self would act, in the outgroup’s place?

…outgroup-related beliefs: judgments of the outgroup’s behavior?
Study 1 (n = 99 White participants)

- Imagine-self or “remain objective” manipulation (between-subjects).

Measures:
- Self-predictions (“I would have acted/felt more positively than [outgroup target]”; two items; α = .71)
- Negative beliefs about targets (targets are overreacting, exaggerating, and/or lying; α = .88)
- Perceived experiences in similar situations as outgroup target

“Imagine how you would feel if you were in [person]’s situation. Imagine everything you would be thinking or feeling, if this situation were happening to you.”

“Try to remain objective and detached while reading the story. Do not get caught up in the feelings of the people in the story, or your own.”
Study 1

Descriptive statistics
(1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived similar experiences</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive self-predictions</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative evaluations</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.24</td>
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Study 1

Main effect, PT condition

Imagine-Self | Objective
---|---

**PT Condition**

$b = -0.31, \ p = 0.23, \ 95\% \ CI \ [-0.82, 0.20]$
Study 1

PT condition x Size of Gap

\[ b = 0.59, p = 0.02, 95\% \text{ CI } [0.09, 1.01] \]

Above line = self would act more positively than target
From self to other

“There’s no way I’d act like that!”

“I think she’s exaggerating…”

“I’m not sure I believe him.”
Study 1
From self-predictions to evaluations of outgroup

Perceived gap size

Perspective Taking (0.5 = imagine-self; -0.5 = objective)

Positive self-predictions

Negative beliefs about outgroup targets

95% CI [.06, .63]

Correlations:
- .54* from Perceived gap size to Positive self-predictions
- .75*** from Positive self-predictions to Negative beliefs about outgroup targets
- -.53* (-.36*) from Perspective Taking to Negative beliefs about outgroup targets

* p < .05
** p < .01
*** p < .001
Study 1 Recap

• The “small gaps” PT effect: Perspective takers who feel they’ve been in similar situations to the outgroup target are more likely to think they’d act less negatively, in the outgroup target’s situation.

• Self-predictions predict beliefs that the target(s) are exaggerating, overreacting, or lying.

New Directions:
• More controversial intergroup situation (Study 1 was not so controversial, it seems…).
• Understand mechanisms underlying effects.
Study 2

N = 80 White participants
Story: Black Lives Matter protestor responds in a physical manner to verbal abuse.
Manipulation: Imagine-self vs. “imagine-other” condition

“Imagine how you would feel if you were in [person]’s situation. Imagine everything you would be thinking or feeling, if this situation were happening to you.”

“Imagine how [person] is feeling…imagine everything this person is thinking and feeling, in this moment.”
Study 2

PT condition x Size of Gap

\[ b = 0.58, \, p = 0.06, \, 95\% \, CI \, [-0.04, \, 1.20] \]

Above line = self would act more positively than target

Imagine Self | Imagine-Other
---|---
PT Condition

Big Gap  |  Small Gap

b = .58, \( p = .06 \), 95% CI [-.04, 1.20]
What information are people using when imagining themselves in the outgroup’s situation?

Does imagining the self in the outgroup’s situation encourage “small gap” participants to rely more on aspects of the self, when making self-predictions? Examples below:

- Previous experiences
- Other self-related features, such as traits and moral values
  - People are often overly optimistic self-predictors (Epley & Dunning, 2000; Epley & Dunning, 2006).
  - Bias appears to be partially due to increased focus on individual features (e.g., traits).
  - Perhaps this only occurs when people feel they’ve been in the outgroup’s situation before, and thus have relevant information about the self.
Study 2

Self-related information used

“When predicting how you would act in Rashard’s situation, to what extent did you…”

…rely on your own previous experiences?
…rely on your personality (who you are, as a person)?
…rely on your moral values?”
Imagine-self perspective takers who feel the experience gap between themselves and the outgroup target is small rely more on their “moral values”.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Self-related information used</th>
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<tr>
<td>Use their personality</td>
<td>.09</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use their previous experiences</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use their moral values</td>
<td>.01</td>
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Imagine-self perspective takers who feel the experience gap between themselves and the outgroup target is small rely more on their “moral values”.
Study 2
From using moral values to self-predictions

- Perceived gap size
  - Perspective Taking (0.5 = imagine-self; -0.5 = imagine-other)
  - Use moral values
  - Positive self-predictions

95% CI [-.01, .28]

- .46* from Perceived gap size to Perspective Taking
- .21+ from Use moral values to Positive self-predictions
- -.18 (-.13) from Perspective Taking to Positive self-predictions

Statistical significance:
+ p < .10
* p < .05
** p < .01
*** p < .001
Study 2 Recap

- Replicated “small gap” PT effect.

- Imagine-self perspective takers who believe the self-outgroup gap is small rely more on their moral values when predicting self in outgroup’s situation.
Study 3 + 4

• Study 3
  • 2 x 2 (self vs. objective; ingroup vs. outgroup target)
  • “Small gap” PT effect occurs for outgroups ($p = .001$) but not ingroups ($p = .97$)

• Study 4
  • Direct replication, 3 conditions (self, other, objective), outgroup only
  • “Small gap” PT effect occurs, when comparing self vs. other ($p = .01$), and self vs. objective ($p = .01$).
Summary

Should we “step in the shoes” of groups we disagree with?
Can we make outgroup experiences feel more dissimilar to one’s own?

Can people learn to tolerate others who act in ways different than how the self would act?
Thanks!

Eliot Smith

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References


