

# **READ IT AND WEEP: USING FIRST-PERSON NARRATIVE VOICE TO PROMOTE EMPATHY WITH HISTORICAL VICTIMS**

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# GROUP DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTION

Many modern intergroup conflicts stem from differing perceptions of historical events and their relevance to present circumstances.



Caucasians and African Americans differ in perception of progress toward equality. (Eibach, & Ehrlinger, 2006)

# GROUP DIFFERENCES IN PERCEPTION

**Group membership influences people's subjective perceptions about the same event.**

- Jews see more anti-Semitism in the present and feel the holocaust is more recent in time than non-Jews do (Libby, Eibach & Ross, 2014).
- When Brown v. Board of Education is seen as near in time, non-Blacks perceived more discrimination against Blacks in America and thought that affirmative action is more necessary (Libby, Eibach & Ross, 2014).

# MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

**One barrier for arriving at a common understanding may be the perpetrator group's failure to understand and empathize with past victims' experiences.**



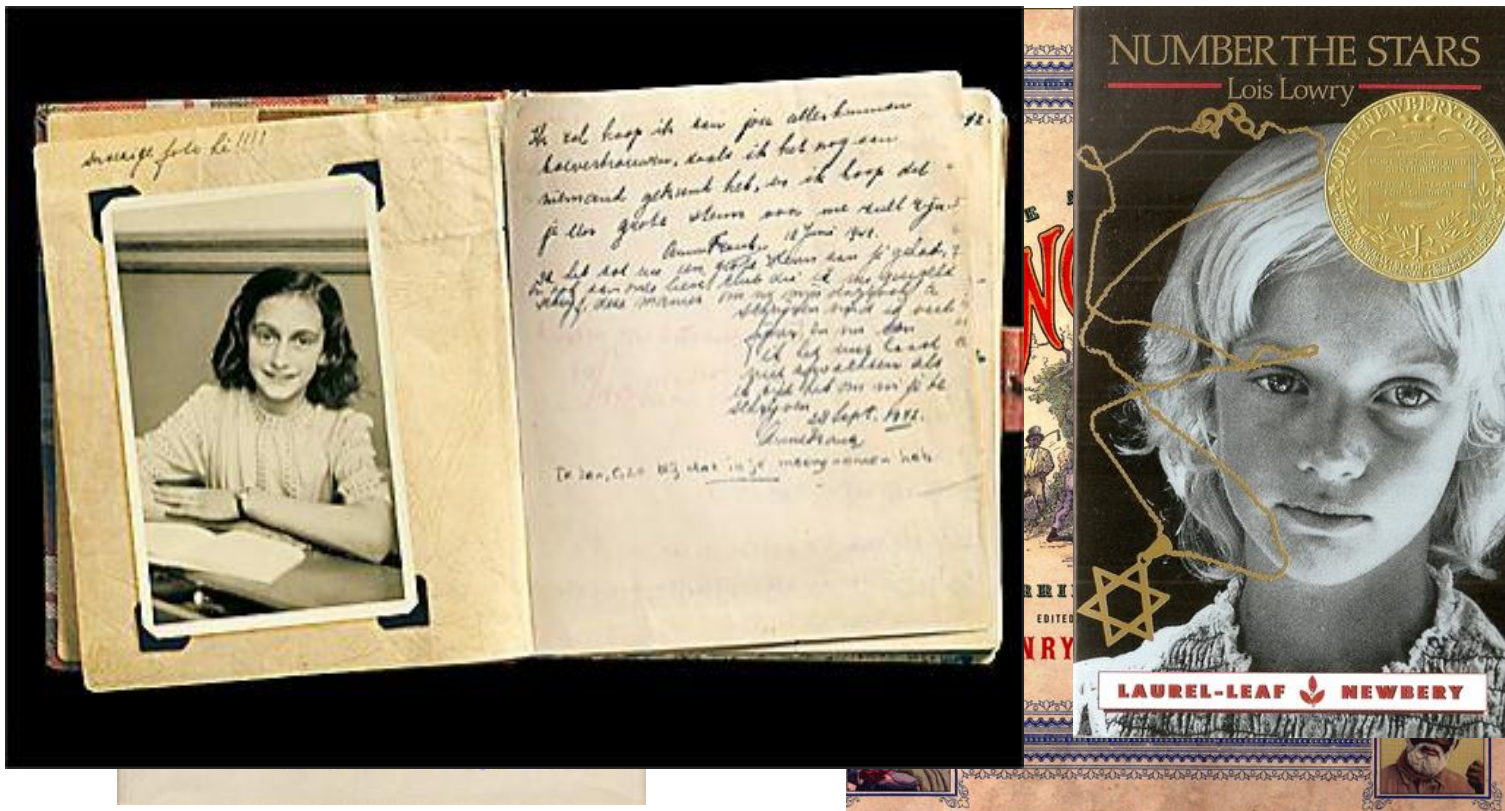
# **MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING**

**So how can we enhance historical perpetrator group members' understanding of victims' experiences?**



# NARRATIVES

We often encounter historical injustices in narrative forms.

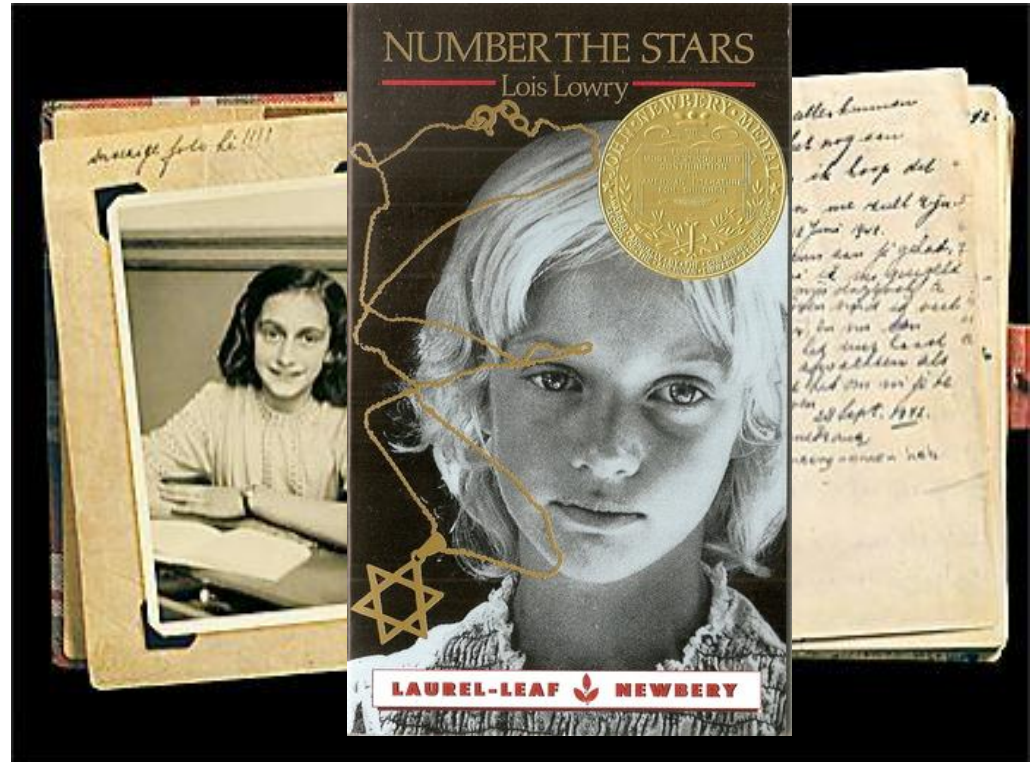
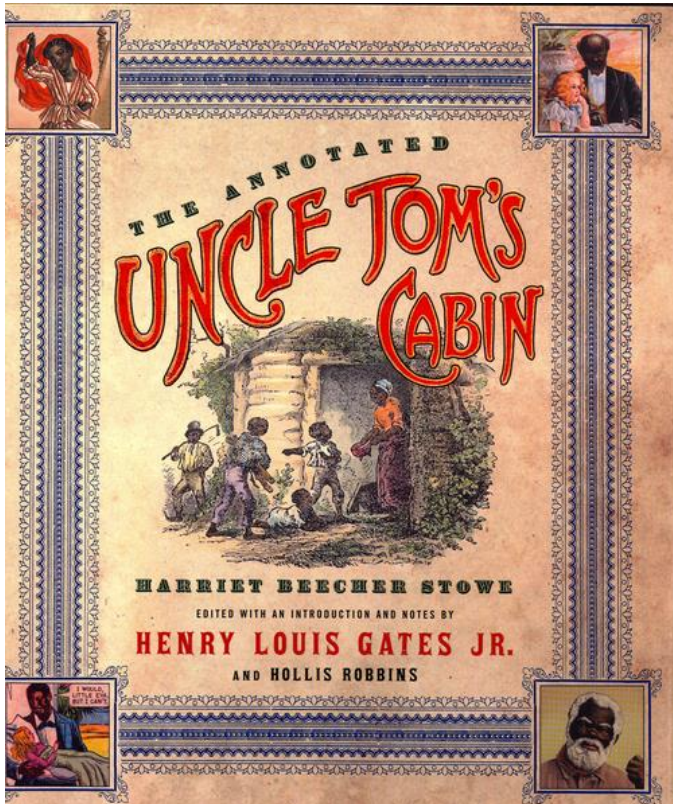


# NARRATIVE VOICE

Victims' experiences can be told through two types of narratives.

Autobiography (1<sup>st</sup> person)

Biography (3<sup>rd</sup> person)



# **EXPERIENCE-TAKING**

**Certain features of narratives, including first-person narrative voice and access to a protagonist's internal thoughts and feelings, can induce experience-taking** (Kaufman & Libby, 2012).



# EXPERIENCE-TAKING

**Spontaneously letting go of one's own identity and experiencing an event as another person – simulating the subjective experience of another person** (Kaufman & Libby, 2012).

## **Experience-taking scale** (Kaufman & Libby, 2012)

- I found myself feeling what the main character in the story was feeling.
- I could empathize with the situation of the main character in the story.
- I was not able to get inside the main character's head. (R)

# EXPERIENCE-TAKING

**High level of experience-taking leads the person to...**(Kaufman & Libby, 2012)

- incorporate another person's personality traits to his/her own self-concept
- have more favorable attitudes toward the person and the person's group
- change behavior in line with the other person's

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS & PREDICTIONS

## 1. Can narrative voice 'nudge' perpetrator group members to experience-take with the past victim's experiences?

- A narrative about an incident of past injustice in first-person narrative voice would lead to greater experience-taking with the past victim than in third-person.
- However, the voice effect would hold to the extent that perpetrator group members are open to taking the victim's experiences.
  - Less open historical perpetrator group members defensively distance from their own group's historical wrongdoings (Peetz et al., 2010).

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS & PREDICTIONS

## 2. Under what condition can less open perpetrator group members experience-take?

- Less open perpetrator group members would experience-take with first-person narrative voice when the narrative is less threatening to their collective identity.
  - Mitigating threat of the past wrongdoings reduced defensive distancing from the past (Peetz et al., 2010).

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS & PREDICTIONS

3. **Does experience-taking of past victim's experiences influence perpetrator group members' subjective perceptions of the past and the present?**
  - High level of experience-taking would relate to similar perceptions of the past and present as that of victims.

# **STUDY OVERVIEW**

**Study 1: Examined effect of narrative voice on perpetrator group members who varied in prejudice against the victimized group**

**Study 2: Examined effect of narrative voice on perpetrator group members who varied in collective identification while reducing the threat the narrative may pose to the collective identity**

# **STUDY 1**

**95 White undergraduate participants**

**Manipulated narrative voice (1<sup>st</sup> vs. 3<sup>rd</sup>)**

**Measured prejudice against Blacks using Modern Racism Scale (McConahay, 1986)**

# Study 1: Procedure

**Read a true story in either 1st or 3rd person voice.**

- a story of a Black student's experience on the first day of school after school desegregation in 1950's





# Excerpt from the Story

## 1<sup>ST</sup> PERSON NARRATIVE VOICE

*I sat in the back of the station wagon, the deputies in front. As **we** neared the school, the sun was crashing over the entrance of Central High School. The chilled air bit the whites of those glaring eyes surrounding the station wagon. Every face that **I** looked into, as the car crawled, glistened. The din: “Two, four, six, eight, we don’t wanna integrate,” split the morning. Arms flailed the air with homemade signs. Bodies hunched. **I** sat in the back of the station wagon, **my** back pressed against the hot leather seat. A tomato splashed against the window on **my** left. **I** didn’t flinch.*

## 3<sup>RD</sup> PERSON NARRATIVE VOICE

***He** sat in the back of the station wagon, the deputies in front. As **they** neared the school, the sun was crashing over the entrance of Central High School. The chilled air bit the whites of those glaring eyes surrounding the station wagon. Every face that **he** looked into, as the car crawled, glistened. The din: “Two, four, six, eight, we don’t wanna integrate,” split the morning. Arms flailed the air with homemade signs. Bodies hunched. **He** sat in the back of the station wagon, **his** back pressed against the hot leather seat. A tomato splashed against the window on **his** left. **He** didn’t flinch.*

# STUDY 1: MEASURES

## Subjective temporal distance

- To you, how far away in time does it feel like the event in the story occurred?
- To you, how far away in time does it feel like the desegregation of American schools occurred?

## Perceptions of present-day discrimination

- To what extent do you think racism is a problem for Blacks in the US today?
- How serious do you think the problem of racism is for Blacks in the US today?

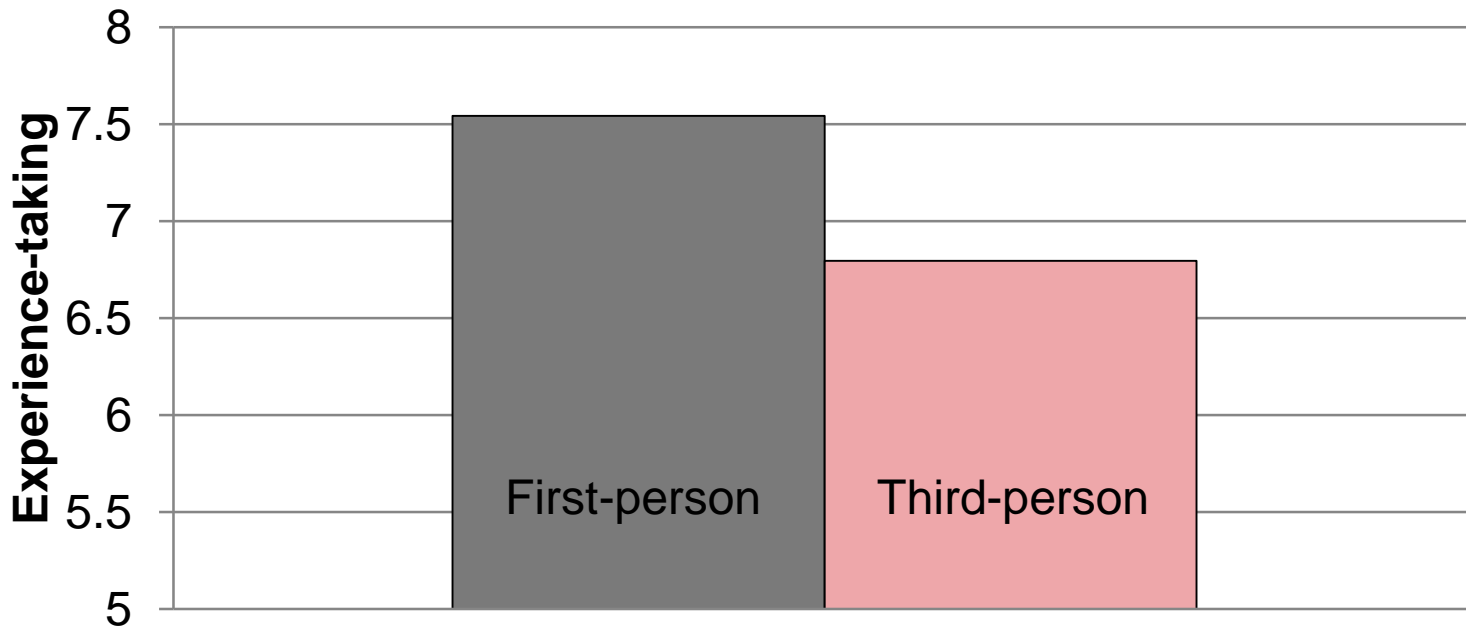
## Modern Racism Scale (McConahay, 1986)

- It is easy to understand the anger of Black people in America. (R)
- Discrimination against Blacks is no longer a problem in the United States.
- Blacks should not push themselves where they are not wanted.

# STUDY 1: RESULTS

There was no difference between first- and third-person voice when the reader was prejudiced against Blacks.

## Readers with low prejudice against Blacks



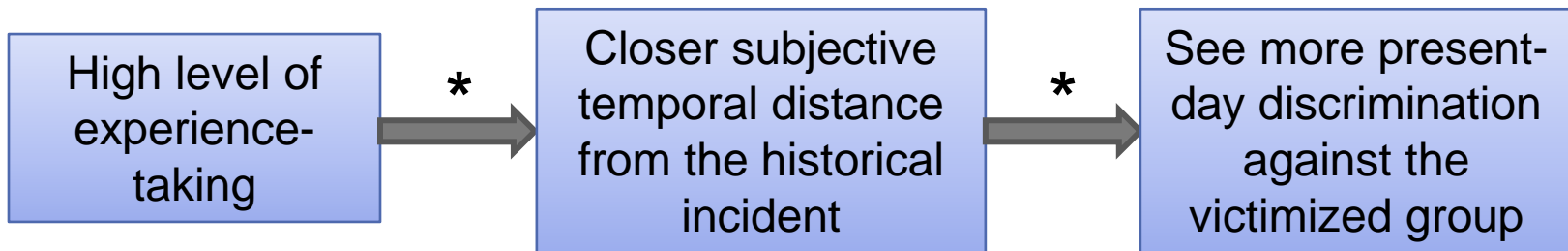
# RESEARCH QUESTIONS & PREDICTIONS

## 1. Can narrative voice 'nudge' perpetrator group members to experience-take with the past victim's experiences?

✓ A narrative about an incident of past injustice in first-person narrative voice would lead to greater experience-taking with the past victim than in third-person.

✓ However, the voice effect would hold to the extent that perpetrator group members are open to taking the victim's experiences.

# STUDY 1: RESULTS



\*  $p < 0.05$

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS & PREDICTIONS

3. Does experience-taking of past victim's experiences influence perpetrator group members' subjective perceptions of the past and the present?

✓ High level of experience-taking would relate to similar perceptions of the past and present as that of victims.

# STUDY 2

**But can we make those who are ‘unwilling’ open up more?**

- Less open perpetrator group members would experience-take with first-person narrative voice when the narrative is less threatening to their collective identity.

# **STUDY 2**

**140 White online participants**

**Manipulated threat to group identity (mitigated threat vs. threat) and narrative voice (1<sup>st</sup> person vs. 3<sup>rd</sup> person)**

**Measured racial identification**



# **STUDY 2: PROCEDURE**

**Read either threatening or non-threatening background information about school desegregation** (modified from Peetz et al., 2010)

# THREAT

Before 1954 many American schools were segregated: there were separate schools for Black and White students. One of the goals of the Civil Rights Movement was to integrate the schools so that Black and White students attended school together. In the 1954 US Supreme Court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Court ruled that segregation in the schools was unconstitutional. In the wake of this decision, schools around the country were forced to integrate. **In many communities White citizens protested this order, and in some cases US Army troops had to be sent in to ensure the safety of Black students as they attended previously White schools for the first time.**

# MITIGATED THREAT

**However, there were also supports for desegregation among White citizens.** Some White authority figures supported the Court rule on school desegregation and helped effectively enforce school desegregation around the country. Some White citizens helped Black students safely attend school by volunteering to guard these students on their way to school. Others tried to provide better school environment for Black students by donating school supplies. In this way, many White authority figures and citizens helped some Black students successfully integrate into previously White schools.

# STUDY 2: MEASURES

**Experience-taking scale** (Kaufman & Libby, 2012)

**Subjective temporal distance**

**Perceptions of present-day discrimination**

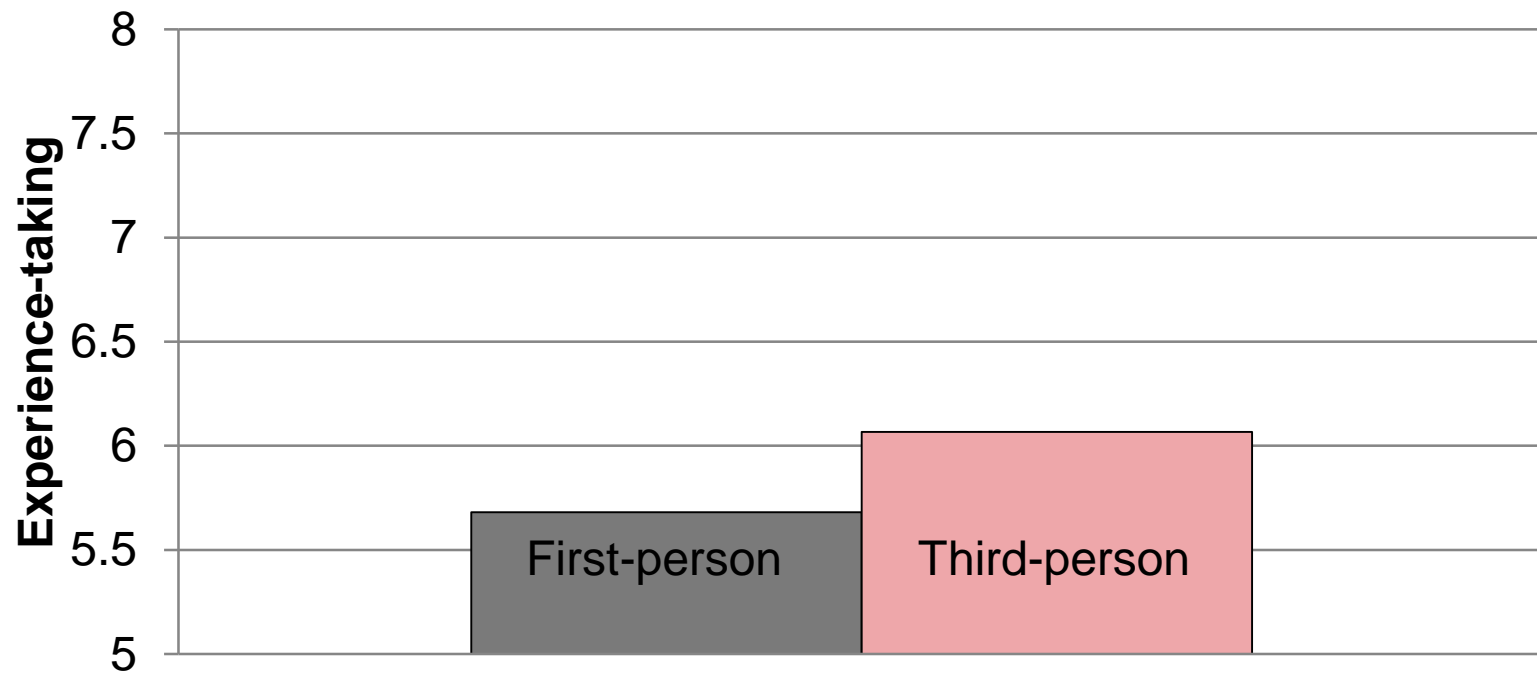
**Racial identification measure**

- My race is an important component of who I am.
  - Overall, my race has very little to do with how I feel about myself.
- (R)

# STUDY 2: RESULTS

## Threat condition

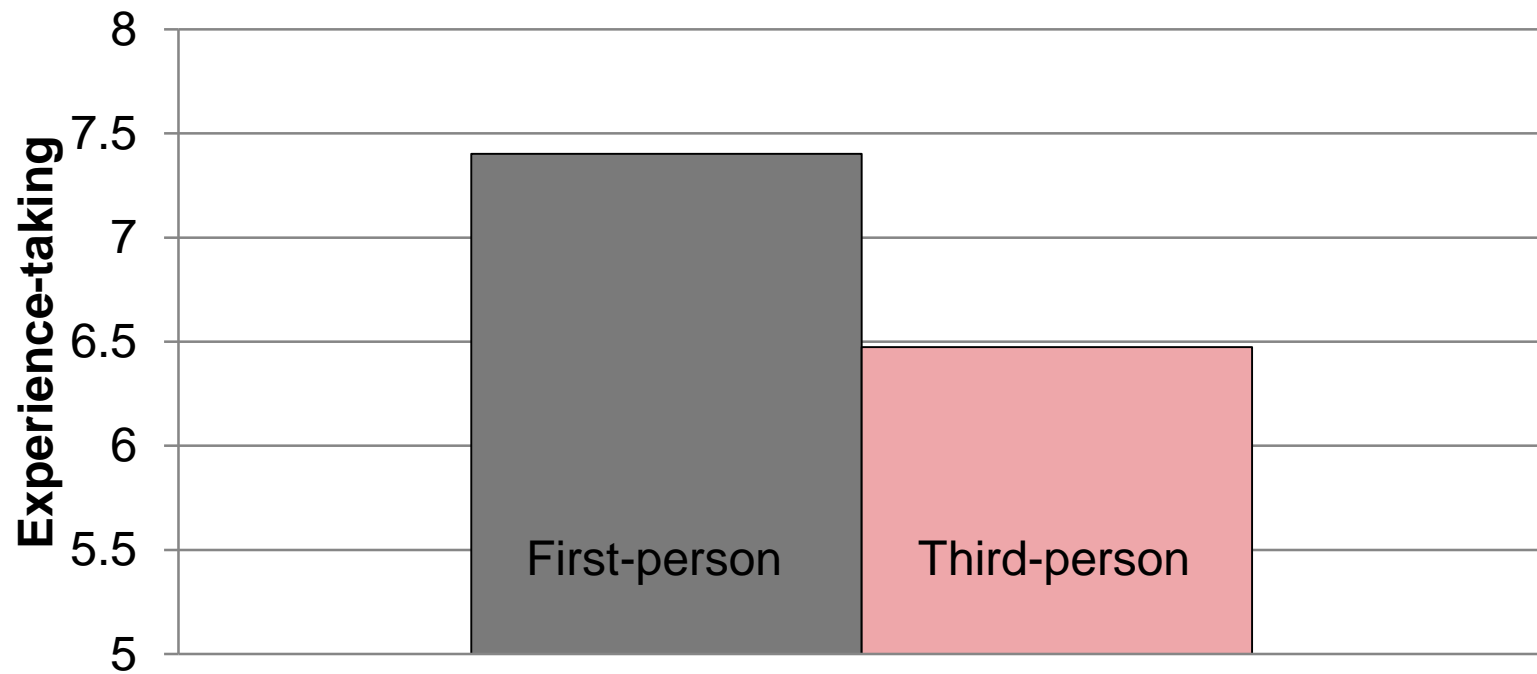
Readers with higher racial identification



# STUDY 2: RESULTS

## Threat condition

Readers with lower racial identification



# RESEARCH QUESTIONS & PREDICTIONS

## 1. Can narrative voice 'nudge' perpetrator group members to experience-take with the past victim's experiences?

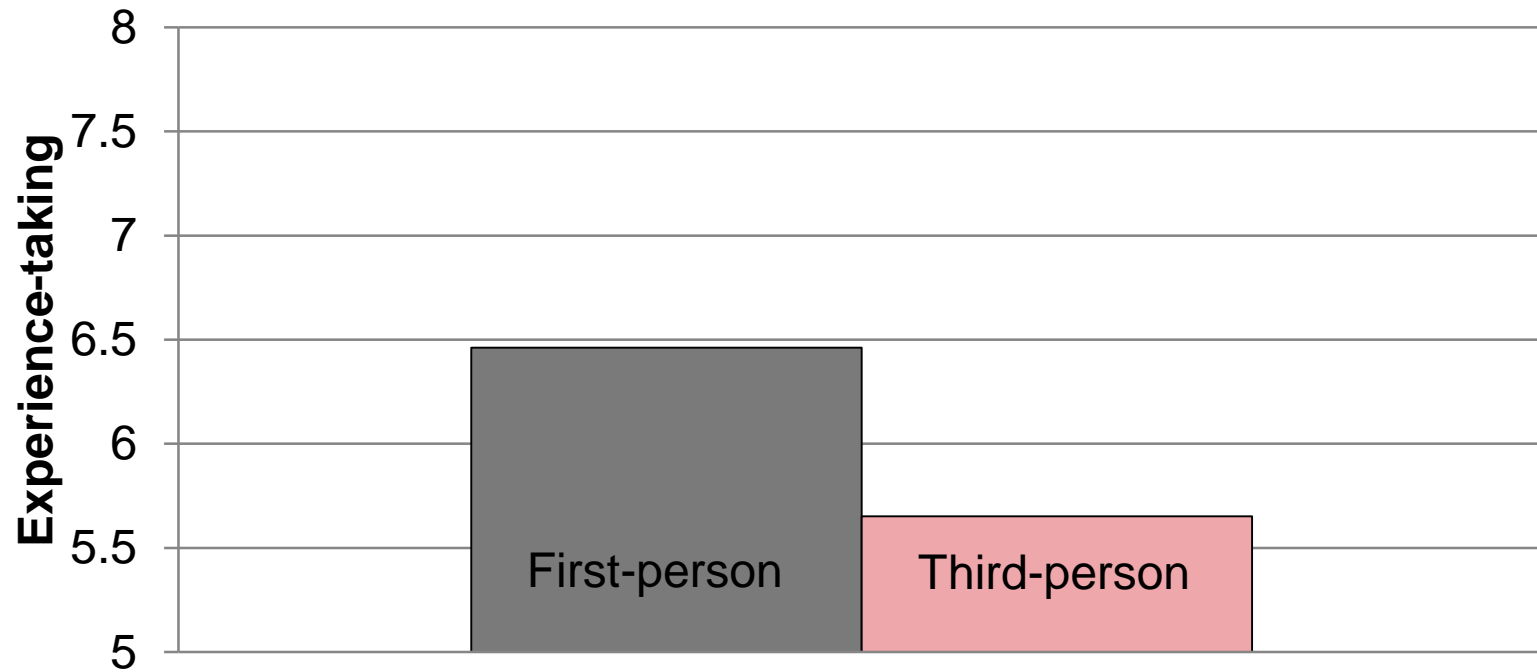
✓ A narrative about an incident of past injustice in first-person narrative voice would lead to greater experience-taking with the past victim than in third-person.

✓ However, the voice effect would hold to the extent that perpetrator group members are open to taking the victim's experiences.

# STUDY 2: RESULTS

## Mitigated threat condition

Readers with higher racial identification





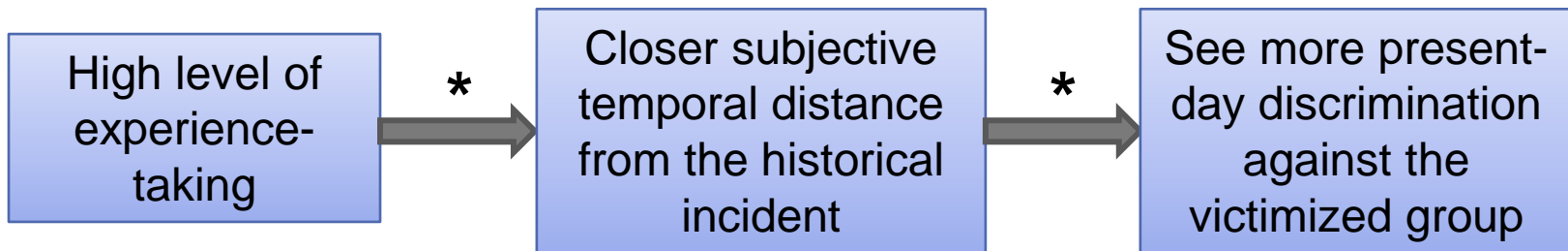
# RESEARCH QUESTIONS & PREDICTIONS

## 2. Under what condition can less open perpetrator group members experience-take?



Less open perpetrator group members would experience-take with first-person narrative voice when the narrative is less threatening to their collective identity.

# STUDY 2: RESULTS



\*  $p < 0.05$

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS & PREDICTIONS

3. Does experience-taking of past victim's experiences influence perpetrator group members' subjective perceptions of the past and the present?

✓ High level of experience-taking would relate to similar perceptions of the past and present as that of victims.

# CONCLUSION

**First-person narrative voice can increase perpetrator group members' experience-taking with past victims...**

- when the perpetrator group members are open
- when the narrative poses little threat to their collective identity

**Experience-taking with past victims can lead perpetrator group members to perceive past injustice as closer in time and present-day discrimination as more serious.**

# **IMPLICATIONS**

**Even after appropriate amends are offered, post-conflict reconciliation may take a long time for involved members to psychologically accept post-conflict apologies and forgiveness.**

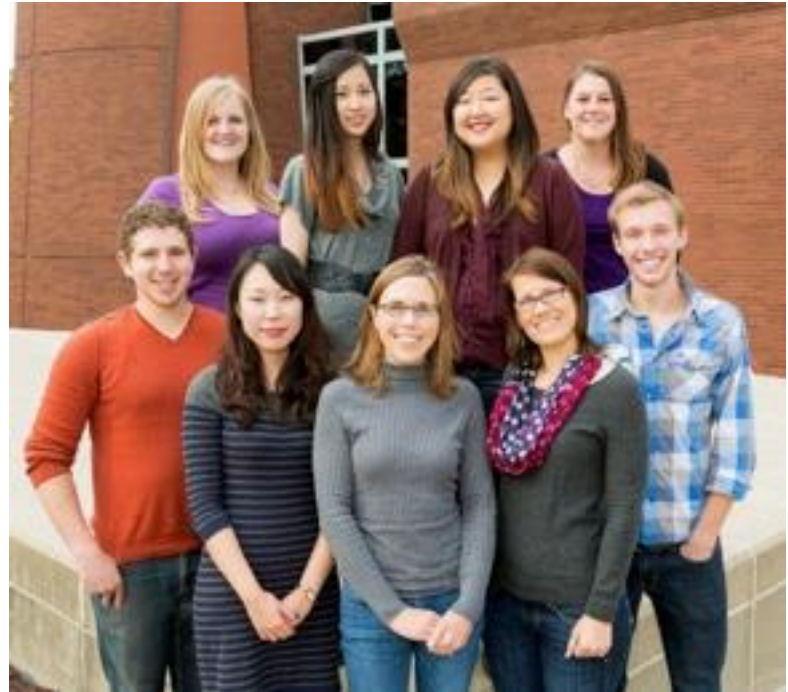
**The current research offers insight into psychological processes involved in complex post-conflict situations and provides a potential intervention to enhance intergroup understanding.**

# THANK YOU!

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