Perspective Taking and Self-Persuasion: Why “Putting Yourself in Their Shoes” Reduces Openness to Attitude Change

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Abstract
Counterattitudinal-argument generation is a powerful tool for opening people up to alternative views. On the basis of decades of research, it should be especially effective when people adopt the perspective of individuals who hold alternative views. In the current research, however, we found the opposite: In three preregistered experiments (total N = 2,734), we found that taking the perspective of someone who endorses a counterattitudinal view lowers receptiveness to that view and reduces attitude change following a counterattitudinal-argument-generation task. This ironic effect can be understood through value congruence: Individuals who take the opposition’s perspective generate arguments that are incongruent with their own values, which diminishes receptiveness and attitude change. Thus, trying to “put yourself in their shoes” can ultimately undermine self-persuasion. Consistent with a value-congruence account, this backfire effect is attenuated when people take the perspective of someone who holds the counterattitudinal view yet has similar overall values.

Keywords
attitude change, persuasion, perspective taking, receptiveness, resistance, open data, open materials, preregistered

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People are more divided, and less open to opposing views, than they have been in years. For example, Democrats and Republicans are further apart ideologically than at any point in the past two decades (Pew Research Center, 2017). This problem is exacerbated by selective exposure—individuals predominantly attend to information that supports their existing attitudes, beliefs, and values (Eagly, Kulesa, Chen, & Chaiken, 2001; Hart et al., 2009; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Smith, Fabrigar, & Norris, 2008)—and by ideological silos, in which individuals gravitate toward friends with attitudes that match their own (Pew Research Center, 2017). People increasingly live in echo chambers that reinforce, rather than question, their views (Quattrociocchi, Scala, & Sunstein, 2016).

How can we change attitudes on controversial issues or open people up to alternative viewpoints? One approach is to leverage insights from research on self-persuasion. Broadly speaking, self-persuasion occurs when people reflect on a topic and change their attitudes without outside input (Petty, Wheeler, & Tormala, 2003). Perhaps the most studied self-persuasion method involves asking people to consider or generate arguments that contradict their own attitudes and beliefs. An extensive literature suggests that generating counterattitudinal arguments can shift people’s attitudes in the counterattitudinal direction (e.g., Briñol, McCaslin, & Petty, 2012; Carlsmit, Collins, & Helmreich, 1966; Cialdini, 1971; Greenwald & Albert, 1968). For example, role-playing the opposition—even merely brainstorming arguments in anticipation of role playing—can cause attitude change in the direction of the opposing view (Cialdini & Petty, 1981; Janis & King, 1954). Likewise,
encouraging people to “consider the opposite” or “consider alternatives” can reduce bias in social and cognitive judgments (e.g., Adame, 2016; Hirt & Markman, 1995; Lord, Lepper, & Preston, 1984; Mussweiler, Strack, & Pfeiffer, 2000). Thus, inducing people to generate arguments against their views can soften those views and trigger shifts toward more moderate positions.

**Perspective Taking as a Catalyst for Self-Persuasion**

Given extant research, it is reasonable to expect the effect of generating counterattitudinal arguments to be even greater when accompanied by perspective taking—that is, when people are instructed to imagine the thoughts and feelings of individuals who would make those arguments. After all, if people put themselves in others’ shoes, they might generate more persuasive arguments, or relate more to opposing positions, or both. Consistent with this proposition, previous studies have shown perspective taking to have positive consequences for interpersonal outcomes. For instance, perspective taking promotes self-other merging and closeness with others (Davis, Conklin, Smith, & Luce, 1996), generous attributions for others’ negative outcomes (Gould & Sigall, 1977), and helpful behavior toward individuals in distress (Toi & Batson, 1982). Perspective taking can also decrease stereotypic biases and enhance out-group evaluations (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000). If perspective taking enhances perceptions of others—including those with divergent views—it could open people up to opposing opinions and strengthen the effect of counterattitudinal-argument generation on attitude change.

Indeed, initial work suggests that perspective taking might moderate people’s opinions on controversial issues. Tuller, Bryan, Heyman, and Christenfeld (2015) had participants generate proattitudinal arguments from their own perspective or counterattitudinal arguments from the perspective of someone from a disagreeing group. Participants showed more attitude change when they wrote from the perspective of the other person. However, because perspective takers were the only participants in the study to generate counterattitudinal arguments, it is unclear whether perspective taking or the counterattitudinal-argument task itself was responsible for the effect. Nevertheless, Tuller and colleagues uncovered potential support for the idea that perspective taking facilitates attitude change in a self-persuasion paradigm. This possibility also has face validity. We asked 350 people on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk which would be a more effective way to change someone’s attitude: to have them generate arguments for the opposing view or take the perspective of someone on the opposing side and generate arguments from their viewpoint. Sixty-seven percent indicated that perspective taking would be the better strategy.

**Perspective Taking as an Inhibitor of Self-Persuasion**

Diverging from the notion that perspective taking boosts openness to change in a self-persuasion paradigm, we submit that it ironically inhibits the effect of counterattitudinal-argument generation and undermines feelings of receptiveness and openness to change. Consistent with this hypothesis, an emerging literature cautions that perspective taking can backfire, causing selfishness (Epley, Caruso, & Bazerman, 2006) and negative intergroup perceptions (Galinsky, Wang, & Ku, 2008; Ku, Wang, & Galinsky, 2015; Skorinko & Sinclair, 2013; Tarrant, Calitri, & Weston, 2012; Vorauer & Sasaki, 2009). Such effects are particularly likely when groups are perceived as especially divided or in competition. For example, recent work suggests that in competitive contexts, perspective taking intensifies rather than attenuates competitive feelings and actions. Specifically, Pierce, Kilduff, Galinsky, and Sivanathan (2013) found that perspective taking fosters unethical behavior in negotiations by promoting feelings of competitive threat. Likewise, when groups are divided by seemingly unbridgeable gaps, perspective taking appears to push people apart rather than bring them together (Sassenrath, Hodges, & Pfattheicher, 2016). In short, although considerable research attests to the positive consequences of perspective taking, there is reason to suspect that it can reduce, rather than increase, openness to opposing views.

The current research examined whether perspective taking inhibits openness to attitude change in the classic self-persuasion paradigm. We hypothesized that when people take the perspective of someone who endorses a counterattitudinal view and generate arguments for that view, they become less receptive and show reduced attitude change compared with when they generate counterattitudinal arguments without perspective taking. This effect, we argue, stems from value congruence—the extent to which arguments generated reflect values that align with, versus differ from, one’s own. In essence, because perspective taking leads people to put themselves in the opposition’s shoes, it might lead them to generate arguments that are less aligned with their own values and more aligned with the values of the opposition, which undermines persuasion (e.g., Feinberg & Willer, 2015). This logic resonates with the general proposition of Pierce and colleagues (2013; see also Sassenrath et al., 2016), but in this case, perspective taking fosters value-incongruent thinking. Ironically,
then, rather than facilitating self-persuasion, perspective taking may inhibit it. We tested this hypothesis, and the value-congruence mechanism, in three preregistered experiments.

**Experiment 1**

In Experiment 1, participants generated arguments for a counterattitudinal view. Some were instructed to take the perspective of an individual who holds this view; others simply generated arguments. As noted, past research suggests that generating counterattitudinal arguments can shift attitudes in the counterattitudinal direction. Our interest was in whether perspective taking enhances or undermines this effect. Thus, we treated counterattitudinal-argument generation (without perspective taking) as a control condition. On the basis of our value-congruence hypothesis, we expected participants who generated arguments from the counterattitudinal perspective to show less receptiveness to the opposing view and less attitude change than control participants would. Moreover, we expected these effects to be mediated by value congruence: Perspective takers would generate arguments that were less congruent with their own values, thus undermining their receptiveness and rendering an attitude change less likely. Our hypotheses and analytic strategy were preregistered on the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/juah5/).

Experiment 1 tested these hypotheses using an issue that people cared about and a context in which people took the perspective of an ostensibly real individual whose attitude differed from their own. Specifically, participants read about a current political issue—universal health care—and were led to believe they would discuss this issue with another individual. To ensure that our sample would be interested in universal health care, we focused recruitment on politically oriented individuals from the website reddit.com. Reddit is an online discussion forum where users interact with specific communities around particular topics, including politics, specific political issues, and politicians. Consequently, Reddit enabled us to recruit people who cared about politics and were already active in discussing politics online.

Participants were informed that they would discuss universal health care with another Reddit user, and they then received background information about this user. The goal was to give participants the impression of a real, multidimensional target person by presenting the person’s political ideology and attitude toward universal health care in the context of other personal information. To increase the psychological realism of the experiment, we wanted participants to believe they would actually interact with the target person. In reality, all participants received the same information about the target (except for political ideology and attitude, which were always opposite to participants’), and the interaction never occurred.

**Method**

On the basis of a pilot test indicating a Cohen’s $d$ of 0.175, we set a target sample size of 1,000 participants, yielding 75% power to detect a small effect size after allowing for 100 exclusions (10%). However, because of the unpredictable nature of recruitment on Reddit, we also preregistered an end date at which data collection would be stopped even if the target were not met. On the end date, 568 Reddit users had completed the survey. Following our preregistration plan, we excluded 84 participants (14.8%) who failed the attention check or did not follow instructions (final $N = 484$; 44.4% female; mean age = 30.57).

At the outset, participants were told that we were conducting a preliminary survey for an event during which they would interact with another Reddit user on a political topic. After providing demographic information, including age, gender, ethnicity, home state, and political ideology, participants received a description of the target issue (universal health care) and reported their attitude toward it on a scale from 0 (strongly against) to 100 (strongly support).1 Participants then received information about their interaction partner. Participants were given their partner’s Reddit user name, age (22), gender (male), ethnicity (White), home state (Ohio), political ideology (liberal or conservative), and attitude toward universal health care. All participants were told that the target was of the opposite political ideology and held the opposite opinion of universal health care from theirs. For instance, if a participant were liberal and in favor of universal health care, he or she was informed that the interaction partner was conservative and against universal health care. As an attention check, participants were asked questions about their partner’s demographics.

Next, participants were told they would complete a short task to prepare for the event. Here, each participant was assigned to one of two conditions. In the **perspective-taking condition**, participants were instructed to take the perspective of their interaction partner:

> Before you write an argument, please take a moment to consider the perspective of this individual, reflecting on their intentions and interests. Try to visualize clearly and vividly what this individual’s life and experiences may be like, and how they may feel.

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These instructions were adapted from past research (Clore & Jeffery, 1972; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000). Participants then generated an argument that the interaction partner might give for his position. In the control condition, participants generated an argument for the counterattitudinal position, without perspective-taking instructions. To reduce self-presentation concerns, we told participants in both conditions that the activity was for their own preparation and would not be shown to the other participant. After generating the argument, all participants indicated their attitude using the same scale as before.

Finally, we measured receptiveness toward the counterattitudinal position and value congruence. Receptiveness was measured using four items assessing participants’ receptiveness and openness toward the specific argument they wrote down and the counterattitudinal position in general. Responses, provided on scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely), were averaged ($\alpha = .88$). Value congruence was measured with three items assessing participants’ perceptions that the argument they wrote down was congruent with their own values, fit their worldview, and reflected their personal morals ($\alpha = .92$). Responses were provided on scales ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely). Finally, to gauge whether we had selected an issue that Reddit users cared about, we asked participants to indicate the importance of universal health care ($1 = extremely unimportant$, $7 = extremely important$). See the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/heun6/) for complete stimuli.

**Results**

First, participants indicated that universal health care was an important issue ($M = 6.00$, 95% confidence interval, or CI = [5.90, 6.11]). Moreover, initial attitudes did not significantly differ between the control ($M = 81.48$, 95% CI = [77.93, 85.03]) and perspective-taking ($M = 81.61$, 95% CI = [77.82, 85.38]) conditions, $t(482) = 0.05$, $p = .96$. Attitude change was computed as the difference between Time 1 (preargument) and Time 2 (postargument) attitudes. Change was coded in the direction of the generated argument; positive numbers indicated movement toward the counterattitudinal position, and negative numbers indicated movement away from the counterattitudinal position.

We found a significant effect of the manipulation on receptiveness and attitude change. Participants reported less receptiveness to the counterattitudinal view in the perspective-taking ($M = 3.27$, 95% CI = [3.11, 3.43]) relative to the control ($M = 3.53$, 95% CI = [3.56, 3.69]) condition, $t(482) = -2.15$, $p = .032$, $d = 0.20$. Participants also showed less attitude change in the perspective-taking ($M = 0.39$, 95% CI = [−0.17, 0.94]) relative to the control ($M = 1.52$, 95% CI = [0.55, 2.50]) condition, $t(482) = -1.98$, $p = .048$, $d = 0.18$. Moreover, as indicated by the 95% CIs, attitude change was greater than zero in the control but not the perspective-taking condition.

To determine whether these effects were driven by value congruence, we conducted mediation analyses using bootstrapping (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). These analyses indicated that condition affected value congruence, $\beta = -0.21$, $t(482) = -2.30$, $p = .02$, and value congruence predicted both receptiveness, $\beta = 0.49$, $t(482) = 12.06$, $p < .001$, and attitude change, $\beta = 0.18$, $t(482) = 4.09$, $p < .001$. As hypothesized, the indirect effects (the $ab$ paths) of condition on receptiveness and attitude change were mediated by value congruence—receptiveness: indirect effect = −0.10, 95% CI = [−0.19, −0.02], $p = .02$; attitude change: indirect effect = −0.04, 95% CI = [−0.09, 0.00], $p = .02$. See the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/heun6/) for discussion of alternative mediation models.

**Discussion**

Experiment 1 revealed that perspective taking reduced openness to opposing views in a self-persuasion paradigm and provided initial support for a value-congruence account. That we observed this effect in a sample of politically oriented Reddit users, who generated arguments on a personally important topic and believed that they would interact with the person whose perspective they took, suggests that this finding has ecological validity. However, conducting an experiment with Reddit users also had a downside: We were unable to recruit the target number of participants ($N = 1,000$) within the prespecified time frame. Thus, we present a conceptual replication of Experiment 1 ($N = 998$ after exclusions) using participants from a Qualtrics panel. This experiment, detailed in the Supplemental Material available online, fully replicated the results of Experiment 1.

**Experiment 2**

In Experiment 2, we sought to replicate the findings of Experiment 1 and provide further evidence for the value-congruence account with a moderation approach. Specifically, if the backfire effect of perspective taking is driven by the perception that the arguments generated are incongruent with one’s personal values, this effect should be attenuated when people take the perspective of someone who disagrees on the target issue yet has similar values. To investigate this possibility, we included two perspective-taking conditions in
Experiment 2, varying whether participants took the perspective of someone with a similar or different political ideology. Unlike in Experiment 1, participants in these conditions received no information about the perspective-taking target beyond his or her attitude and political ideology. Our hypotheses and analytic strategy were preregistered on the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/p5fta).

Method

All participants began by completing a demographic questionnaire that included a political-ideology measure (1 = extremely liberal, 7 = extremely conservative). Because our manipulation required that participants self-identified as either liberal or conservative, participants who responded using the midpoint of the scale (neither) were disqualified. Sample size was determined on the basis of the same Cohen’s $d$ as in Experiment 1 (0.175), suggesting approximately 1,350 participants across three conditions for 75% power. To allow for exclusions, we collected data from 1,411 participants on Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. Following our preregistration plan, we excluded 159 participants (11.3%) who failed the attention check, completed the survey multiple times, or did not follow instructions (final $N = 1,252$; 58.1% female; mean age = 35.3).

Participants in Experiment 2 were introduced to the issue of universal basic income and reported their attitudes toward it on a scale from 0 (strongly disagree/against universal basic income) to 100 (strongly agree/in favor of universal basic income). Each participant was then randomly assigned to one of three conditions. In the perspective-taking/different-ideology condition, participants generated an argument that a person with the opposite political ideology would give for the counterattitudinal viewpoint. For example, liberals with favorable attitudes were instructed as follows: “Many conservatives in America are against a universal basic income. What is one argument that a conservative who supports universal basic income would give? (i.e., against universal basic income)” Participants in this condition also received the perspective-taking instructions. Participants in the control condition generated a counterattitudinal argument without perspective taking.

Finally, participants reported attitudes on the same scale as before and answered the receptiveness ($\alpha = .86$) and value-congruence ($\alpha = .93$) questions from Experiment 1. For exploratory analysis, we also asked participants to complete two items assessing the extent to which they believed liberals and conservatives have similar values to theirs (1 = not at all, 7 = very much).

Primary results

There were no differences in initial attitudes, $F(2, 1249) = 1.05, p = .35, d = 0.08$ (see Table 1). We submitted receptiveness, attitude change, and value congruence to one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) with the three-level manipulation as a between-participants factor, and we observed significant effects on each (see Table 1). First, the manipulation affected receptiveness, $F(2, 1249) = 18.36, p < .001, d = 0.35$. Participants in the control and perspective-taking/same-ideology condition were more receptive than participants in the perspective-taking/different-ideology condition, $F(1, 1249) = 33.78, p < .001, d = 0.35$. Participants were marginally more receptive in the perspective-taking/same-ideology condition than in the control condition, $F(1, 1249) = 3.27, p = .07, d = 0.13$. Likewise, we found a significant effect on attitude change, $F(2, 1249) = 27.47, p < .001, d = 0.42$. Participants in the control and perspective-taking/same-ideology conditions changed more than participants in the perspective-taking/different-ideology condition, $F(1, 1249) = 41.47, p < .001, d = 0.38$. In addition, change was greater in the perspective-taking/same-ideology condition than in the control condition, $F(1, 1249) = 14.21, p < .001, d = 0.24$. Viewed differently, relative to the control condition, generating counterattitudinal arguments from the perspective of someone with different values undermined receptiveness, $t(1249) = -4.17, p < .001, d = 0.28$, and attitude change, $t(1249) = -3.73, p < .001, d = 0.28$, whereas generating counterattitudinal arguments from the perspective of someone with similar values increased receptiveness, $t(1249) = 1.81, p = .07, d = 0.13$, and attitude change, $t(1249) = 3.78, p < .001, d = 0.24$.

These results suggest that value congruence drives the inhibitory effect of perspective taking on receptiveness and attitude change in the self-persuasion paradigm. Providing additional evidence, results showed that the manipulation affected the value-congruence index, $R^2(2, 1249) = 34.78, p < .001, d = 0.47$. Participants in the control and perspective-taking/same-ideology conditions perceived their arguments as more value
congruent than did participants in the perspective-taking/different-ideology condition, F(1, 1249) = 69.56, p < .001, d = 0.50. In this case, the control and perspective-taking/same-ideology conditions did not differ from each other, F(1, 1249) = 0.10, p = .75, d = 0.02, suggesting that other factors might account for the unexpected boost in receptiveness and attitude change in the perspective-taking/same-ideology condition.

Mediation analysis followed recommendations for testing process with multicategorical variables (Hayes & Preacher, 2014). Value congruence mediated decreased receptiveness in the perspective-taking/different-ideology condition relative to the other conditions (indirect effect = 0.06, 95% CI = [0.04, 0.08], p < .001), but not increased receptiveness in the perspective-taking/same-ideology condition relative to the control condition (indirect effect = 0.004, 95% CI = [−0.02, 0.03], p = .73). Similarly, value congruence mediated decreased attitude change in the perspective-taking/different-ideology condition relative to the other conditions (indirect effect = 0.03, 95% CI = [0.01, 0.04], p < .001), but not increased attitude change in the perspective-taking/same-ideology condition relative to the control condition (indirect effect = 0.002, 95% CI = [−0.009, 0.01], p = .74).

**Exploratory analyses**

Our value-congruence account suggests that the receptiveness and attitude-change results might be especially likely to emerge when participants view themselves as more similar to the in-group and different from the out-group. Thus, we conducted exploratory analyses using participants’ self-reported similarity to liberals and conservatives. Only participants who completed both items were included in this analysis.

Not surprisingly, liberals perceived other liberals as more similar to themselves (M = 5.30) than conservatives did (M = 2.84), t(1246) = 33.55, p < .001, d = 1.99, and conservatives perceived other conservatives as more similar to themselves (M = 5.28) than liberals did (M = 2.58), t(1246) = −36.15, p < .001, d = 2.14. We computed the distance (i.e., difference) between participants’ perceptions of similarity to liberals and conservatives and coded scores such that higher values indicated greater similarity to the in-group and greater dissimilarity to the out-group. For example, liberals who viewed themselves as highly similar to other liberals and dissimilar to conservatives would have high (positive) distance scores, whereas liberals who viewed themselves as similar to both groups (or as more similar to conservatives) would have low (or negative) distance scores.

We surmised that the effect of condition on receptiveness and attitude change would be amplified when participants had high distance scores (i.e., when they perceived themselves as more similar to their in-group and less similar to their out-group) and attenuated when they had low distance scores (i.e., when they perceived themselves as less similar to their in-group and more similar to their out-group). Indeed, we found significant interactions between condition (control and perspective-taking/same-ideology conditions versus perspective-taking/different-ideology condition) and in-group/out-group distance on both attitude change, $\beta = 0.04$, $t(1246) = 2.28$, $p = .02$, and receptiveness, $\beta = 0.10$, $t(1246) = 4.99$, $p < .001$. In each case the inhibitory effect of the perspective-taking/different-ideology condition relative to the other conditions increased as distance grew—that is, as participants saw themselves as increasingly similar to their in-group, different from their out-group, or both (see Figs. 1 and 2).

| Table 1. Mean Scores on Each of the Dependent Measures in Experiment 2 |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Variable | Control (n = 431) | Perspective-taking/same-ideology (n = 407) | Perspective-taking/different-ideology (n = 414) |
| Initial attitude (100-point scale) | 53.26a | 56.73a | 55.42a |
| Receptiveness (7-point scale) | 3.93a | 4.11a | 3.53b |
| Attitude change (100-point scale) | 5.51a | 9.37a | 1.72 |
| Value congruence (7-point scale) | 3.83a | 3.87a | 3.00a |

Note: Values in brackets are 95% confidence intervals. Within a row, means with different subscripts differ significantly (p < .05); means with the same subscript and a dagger differ marginally significantly (p < .10).
We decomposed the interactions using floodlight analysis (Spiller, Fitzsimons, Lynch, & McClelland, 2013) and conducted Johnson-Neyman tests to determine the regions of significance. First, we examined receptiveness. Interestingly, individuals with distance scores below 1.38 showed less receptiveness in the perspective-taking/different-ideology condition than in the other conditions ($p < .05$). Interestingly, individuals with distance scores below...
−1.17 showed more receptiveness in the perspective-taking/different-ideology condition than in the other conditions ($p < .05$). Next we examined attitude change. For individuals with distance scores greater than or equal to .08, the perspective-taking/different-ideology condition produced less attitude change than the perspective-taking/same-ideology condition.

Fig. 2. Attitude-change results from Experiment 2. The top panel shows attitude change as a function of in-group/out-group distance and argument-generation condition. The dotted line indicates the Johnson-Neyman number for the contrast comparing the perspective-taking/different-ideology condition with the perspective-taking/same-ideology condition and the control condition. The shaded region indicates an area of significance ($p < .05$). The bottom panel shows the magnitude of this attitude-change backfire as a function of in-group/out-group distance. Curved dashed lines indicate 95% confidence intervals, and the dotted line indicates the Johnson-Neyman number.
or control condition ($p < .05$); below .08 on the distance measure, there was no effect ($p > .05$).

**Posttests**

The results from Experiment 2 suggest that perspective taking inhibits self-persuasion when it leads people to generate value-incongruent arguments. But could it be that the perceived source of the arguments (e.g., liberals or conservatives), rather than their value congruence per se, accounts for the effects? Perhaps the arguments simply seemed unappealing when they were paired with a salient disagreeable out-group. As another possibility, could it be that participants generated objectively inferior arguments in the perspective taking/different-ideology condition—for example, because of less effort? Alternatively, perhaps demand effects explain the results. Did participants intuit that we expected them to report lower value congruence in that condition and respond in kind, or were the arguments generated actually less value congruent (as hypothesized)? To investigate these issues, we conducted several posttests (see the Supplemental Material online for full details).

First, we explored whether participants viewed their arguments as differentially persuasive when their condition assignment (i.e., the liberal or conservative argument source) was no longer salient. One week after the initial session, we invited participants from Experiment 2 to complete a follow-up survey. The participants who returned ($N = 855$ after exclusions) rated their own arguments for quality (on a six-item index) and value congruence without being reminded of their original condition or argumentation instructions. Participants in the control and perspective-taking/same-ideology conditions viewed their arguments as higher quality than did participants in the perspective-taking/different-ideology condition, $F(1, 852) = 46.10, p < .001, d = 0.48$. This effect was mediated by value congruence (indirect effect = 0.09, 95% CI = [0.06, 0.12], $p < .001$). This finding helps to reduce concerns about salient condition assignments (or out-group source associations) driving the results of Experiment 2.

Second, we explored whether participants’ arguments were objectively poor in the perspective-taking/different-ideology condition by inviting a new group of participants from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk to rate the quality of the arguments generated in the main experiment. Because of randomization issues, not all of the arguments were rated, and some were rated twice. When arguments were rated twice, we used the first rating. We observed no difference in perceived argument quality across conditions, $F(2, 1205) = 0.93, p = .39, d = 0.06$. This result suggests that reduced receptiveness and attitude change in the perspective-taking/different-ideology condition was not driven by reduced effort or generation of objectively inferior arguments.

In a third posttest designed to provide evidence of actual differences in value congruence across conditions (as opposed to demand effects in self-reported value congruence), two judges blind to condition and hypothesis coded the arguments from Experiment 2 on whether they appealed to liberal (e.g., harm, fairness; $κ = .78$) or conservative (e.g., tradition, patriotism; $κ = .67$) values (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; see the Open Science Framework for full instructions) as two independent binary dimensions. Composites for liberal and conservative values were computed such that arguments that both coders agreed appealed to a particular value system were coded as 1 for that value system, arguments on which coders disagreed were coded as .5, and arguments that both coders agreed did not appeal to a value system were coded as 0.

We found that the values invoked in arguments differed according to political ideology and condition. Liberals wrote less liberal arguments, $t(550) = −6.37, p < .001, d = 0.54$, and more conservative arguments, $t(550) = 6.58, p < .001, d = 0.56$, in the perspective-taking/different-ideology condition relative to the control condition, but they wrote more liberal arguments, $t(541) = 5.62, p < .001, d = 0.48$, and less conservative arguments, $t(541) = −4.41, p < .001, d = 0.38$, in the perspective-taking/same-ideology condition relative to the control condition. Conservatives wrote directionally less conservative arguments, $t(289) = −1.43, p = .16, d = 0.17$, and more liberal arguments, $t(289) = 2.03, p = .04, d = 0.24$, in the perspective-taking/different-ideology condition relative to the control condition, but they wrote more conservative arguments, $t(291) = −2.89, p = .004, d = 0.34$, and less liberal arguments, $t(291) = −2.07, p = .04, d = 0.24$, in the perspective-taking/same-ideology condition relative to the control condition. Thus, participants generated arguments that actually varied in value congruence rather than merely labeling their arguments as more or less value congruent because of experimental demand.

**General Discussion**

Despite the well-documented benefits of perspective taking for a variety of interpersonal outcomes, the current experiments reveal that perspective taking can inhibit openness to counterattitudinal positions. People were less receptive to opposing views and less inclined to change their attitudes after generating a counterattitudinal argument when they took the perspective of someone who would make that argument. Thus, encouraging people to put themselves in someone else’s shoes can backfire in the context of self-persuasion. Our evidence suggests that this effect is driven by value congruence. Because individuals generate value-incongruent
arguments when they take an opposing perspective, they are less open to those arguments. When people generate arguments for the opposing view without perspective taking, they think of more value-congruent arguments, and are more receptive to those arguments. Consistent with this account, the receptiveness and attitude-change effects were amplified when people viewed the opposition as especially different from themselves and attenuated when people took the perspective of someone with similar values. These results were observed in national participant panels and among politically oriented users of an online discussion forum.

In addition to providing a novel perspective on the relationship between perspective taking and self-persuasion, this investigation creates opportunities for future research. First, it would be useful to further explore the conditions under which perspective taking increases openness to counterattitudinal views. Experiment 2 suggests that taking the perspective of an individual with similar values is one promising direction. However, unlike the backfire effect of taking the perspective of someone with different values, this bolstering effect was not mediated by value congruence. What drives the bolstering effect? One possibility is that taking the perspective of someone with similar values (e.g., an in-group member) reduces feelings of competitive threat (see Pierce et al., 2013), which opens people up to divergent views. In addition, balance theory (Heider, 1958) offers a clue. Perhaps attitude disagreement fosters discomfort when people take the perspective of similar others, leading people to open up to restore balance. Future research investigating these possibilities could illuminate the potential value of perspective taking in self-persuasion.

Another useful direction would be to extend our analysis beyond politicized attitudes. Political groups are defined by different values (Graham et al., 2009) and could be especially vulnerable to the effects observed here. It remains to be determined whether these findings extend to groups that are not defined by different values (e.g., gender, ethnicity, age) or to attitudes that are not value laden (e.g., product preferences). Perhaps the current effects would be attenuated in contexts that are less explicitly tied to people’s core values. On the other hand, if people see others who disagree as very different from themselves, the effects could persist as a function of mere preference incongruence. Future work investigating this issue is warranted.

Conclusion

People are more divided and more hostile toward those who disagree with them than they have been in decades. Given past research, self-persuasion—specifically, having people generate counterattitudinal arguments—seems a promising means of increasing openness to opposing views. Our experiments offer some support for this idea. Importantly, though, whereas prior work suggests that perspective taking should be an ally in this endeavor, we found that it can inhibit these outcomes. Perspective taking reduces the benefit of self-persuasion in promoting openness to opposing views unless it is specifically directed toward others with similar values. Thus, our experiments suggest a more complex relationship between perspective taking and attitudinal outcomes and offer a cautionary note to influencers: Despite its well-known benefits, perspective taking can inhibit, rather than facilitate, openness to change.

Action Editor

Bill von Hippel served as action editor for this article.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed to the study concept. R. Catapano and Z. L. Tormala designed the study. R. Catapano collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data under the supervision of Z. L. Tormala. R. Catapano drafted the manuscript, and Z. L. Tormala and D. D. Rucker provided critical revisions. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript for submission.

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Open Practices

Stimuli, analysis code, and anonymized data for the experiments are available on the Open Science Framework (Experiment 1: https://osf.io/heun6; Experiment 1 replication: https://osf.io/8sxgu; Experiment 2: https://osf.io/p5fta). The experiments reported in this article were preregistered on the Open Science Framework (Experiment 1: https://osf.io/jua5f; Experiment 1 replication: https://osf.io/7rwy5; Experiment 2: https://osf.io/bkd7). The complete Open Practices Disclosure for this article can be found at http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/suppl/10.1177/0956797618822697. This article has received the badges for Open Data, Open Materials, and Preregistration. More information about the
Open Practices badges can be found at http://www.psychologicalscience.org/publications/badges.

Note
1. Across experiments, participants who reported neutral attitudes were randomly assigned to a side. All significant relationships reported remained significant when these participants were excluded.

References


