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Social category diversity promotes pre-meeting elaboration:

The role of relationship focus

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Abstract

A purported downside of social category diversity is decreased relationship focus (i.e., one's focus on establishing a positive social bond with a coworker). However, we argue that this lack of relationship focus serves as a central mechanism that improves information processing even prior to interaction and ultimately decision-making performance in diverse settings. We introduce the construct of *pre-meeting elaboration* (i.e., the extent to which individuals consider their own and others' perspectives in the anticipation of an interaction), and explore its link with social category diversity, and relationship focus. Experiments 1 and 2 demonstrate that when disagreement occurs, social category diversity increases pre-meeting elaboration, with relationship focus as a central causal mechanism. Experiment 3 shows that pre-meeting elaboration has important implications for performance: disagreeing dyads with social category diversity elaborate more prior to meeting, and as a result, perform better on a decision-making task than those with social category homogeneity. We discuss the value of studying early stage interaction and propose a re-consideration of the "downside" of social category diversity.

Social category diversity promotes pre-meeting elaboration:

The role of relationship focus

Bringing together individuals with different perspectives and varying opinions to make important decisions is one method organizations employ to enhance knowledge availability and solve complex problems (Gibson 2001; Kane 2010). Disagreement, resulting from differences in opinion, is a naturally important part of this process. Research has shown that disagreement can encourage individuals to actively consider key information relevant to the task (Brodbeck et al. 2002; Crott et al. 1998), which may ultimately lead to better organizational decisions (Sniezek and Henry 1989; Williams and Taormina 1993). Unfortunately, people often want to avoid conflict, fail to capitalize on differing perspectives of others, and make sub-optimal decisions (Kerr and Tindale 2004). Thus, understanding the conditions under which differing perspectives can benefit decision-making is an area of interest for scholars and practitioners alike.

Social category diversity (i.e., salient differences that individuals use to categorize themselves and others into 'in-groups' and 'out-groups') has been shown to improve the consideration of information when disagreement is present (e.g., Antonio et al. 2004; Phillips and Loyd 2006; Phillips et al. 2006; Sommers 2006). Compared to homogeneous groups, those with social category diversity are more likely to capitalize on their disagreement by demonstrating increased information processing during interaction. In some cases, this processing has led to positive consequences for group performance (Homan et al. 2007; Phillips et al. 2009; Sommers 2006).

Although most research has focused on this process *during* group interaction, in the current paper we examine the *pre-interaction* phase of the joint decision making process, which remains relatively underexplored. We suggest that information processing begins prior to a discussion, during the time when individuals *anticipate* interacting with others. Thus, we focus on the impact of social category diversity on pre-meeting elaboration. We define pre-meeting elaboration as the individual level processing of task-related information and perspectives in anticipation of interacting with another individual or other

individuals. We study pre-meeting elaboration because it has the potential to impact the quality of information that is brought to the discussion and thus decision-making performance. Further, we assert that reduced relationship focus (i.e., one's focus on establishing a positive social bond with a coworker), which is often considered a "downside" of social category diversity (e.g., Milliken and Martins 1996; Williams and O'Reilly 1998), serves as an underlying mechanism promoting pre-meeting elaboration.

Given the growing cultural, ethnic, and gender diversity in the workplace, understanding how social category diversity affects processes and outcomes in organizations has become increasingly relevant. In this paper we explore the relationships between social category diversity, relationship focus, pre-meeting elaboration, and decision-making performance in three experiments (see Figure 1). Experiments 1 and 2 illustrate that social category diversity increases pre-meeting elaboration, with relationship focus as a causal mechanism. Experiment 3 shows that pre-meeting elaboration improves performance; dyads with social category diversity elaborate more prior to meeting, and as a result, perform better on a decision-making task than dyads with social category homogeneity. Before describing the experiments, we discuss the construct of pre-meeting elaboration and provide the theoretical rationale underlying our hypothesized relationships.

## **Theoretical Development**

### **Defining Pre-meeting Elaboration**

Pre-meeting elaboration is related to the construct of group information elaboration. Homan et al. (2007, p. 1189) have defined group information elaboration as "the exchange of information and perspectives, individual-level processing of the information and perspectives, feeding back the results of this individual-level processing into the group, and discussion and integration of their implications." Group information elaboration is a process that occurs during interaction. However, in contrast to group information elaboration, pre-meeting elaboration occurs prior to interaction at an individual level. Pre-meeting elaboration can occur in any situation where an individual anticipates meeting with others to make a decision; for example, in an admissions committee where individuals review a pool of candidates

before meeting to discuss and select one, in a task force convened to determine the best compensation system for the organization, or on a board charged with deciding the right time for a company's initial public offering. In these cases, prior to actually meeting, an individual may reflect on his or her own perspective and the perspectives (known or expected) of those with whom they will make a decision.

Given that pre-meeting elaboration happens prior to an interaction, it can be viewed as part of the preparation process. The current research differs from much of the existing research on group decision-making which traditionally examines how factors present *during* interaction influence whether group members capitalize on disagreement (c.f., Kerr and Tindale 2004). Although the past work provides useful insight into how factors present during interactions can improve decision-making, it does not examine: 1) whether the information brought to the discussion by individual group members differs in the extent to which it has been processed and, 2) what might systematically influence the degree of processing. That is, prior work examining the factors responsible for optimal group decision-making has largely ignored the catalysts to the information gathering phase of group cognition (i.e., accumulation phase, Gibson 2001; acquisition phase, Saunders and Jones 1990). We believe that pre-meeting elaboration, an individual-level cognition, may help us understand why some groups outperform others, especially since it represents an important input into the group decision-making process. If individuals do not engage in much pre-meeting elaboration, they may not notice, consider, or seek additional information that may be critical for the group-level accumulation of information. Thus, pre-meeting elaboration also has the potential to offer new insight into the antecedents of successful group decision-making as the information that is brought to the table and the cognitive orientation of the individuals involved is likely to impact subsequent performance.

Finally, to effectively study pre-meeting elaboration we limit our theorizing to the domain of disagreement: where at least two individuals hold different opinions about the problem they face.. When individuals disagree they should be more likely to question their own or other's accuracy, and think further about available information as compared to when they agree. Agreement from another individual

confirms one's belief in one's own opinion, leading to a low likelihood that the joint decision will differ from the individual decisions (e.g., Brodbeck et al. 2002; Matz and Wood 2005; Stasser and Stewart 1992). Furthermore, individuals find agreement more pleasing than disagreement, even when this agreement comes from an unexpected source (e.g., Phillips 2003; Taylor 1968). Thus, the context of disagreement creates conflict and holds the potential to threaten the building or maintenance of a positive relationship which is a central part of our model.

### **The Relationship between Social Category Diversity, Relationship Focus, and Pre-meeting Elaboration**

Various forms of social category diversity have been explored by researchers including race, gender, and political party affiliation (e.g., Chen and Kenrick 2002; Jehn et al. 1999; Pelled et al. 1999; Sommers 2006; Thomas-Hunt and Phillips 2004). Social category diversity in small groups has also been created via the minimal group paradigm, where categorical distinctions (e.g., red group vs. blue group) are created by the experimenter (e.g., Kane 2010; Kane et al. 2005; Lount and Phillips 2007). Irrespective of how the social category diversity is created, social identity theory highlights that the awareness of salient differences between individuals can affect how people perceive and behave toward one another (Brewer 1979; Tajfel and Turner 1986).

With respect to interactions between individuals, social category diversity has been seen as something of a double-edged sword with the reviews of the group diversity literature highlighting both 'upsides' and 'downsides' of social category diversity (see Jackson et al. 2003; Mannix and Neale 2005; Milliken and Martins 1996; van Knippenberg and Schippers 2007; Williams and O'Reilly 1998, for reviews). On the 'upside,' the potential cognitive benefits of having a group with socially diverse members are well-documented. Heterogeneous groups, compared to homogeneous groups, share more information (Janis 1982), exhibit increased creativity (Amabile 1994), and may ultimately demonstrate increased group performance (Homan et al. 2007; Sommers 2006). However, reviews of the social category diversity literature also suggest a 'downside' to diversity in the form of relationship costs.

Heterogeneous groups, compared to homogeneous groups, exhibit less cohesiveness (O'Reilly et al. 1989), less communication (Zenger and Lawrence 1989), and more conflict between members (Jehn et al. 1999; Pelled et al. 1999). Thus a dilemma exists: members of heterogeneous groups tend to cognitively engage more deeply in tasks but are less likely to get along.

Relationship costs, the purported 'downside' of social category diversity, may in fact be an underlying mechanism driving the positive effects of social category diversity on pre-meeting elaboration during disagreement. We suggest that the extent to which one desires and expects to create a positive social bond with a coworker, a concept we describe as *relationship focus*, determines the extent to which people will be willing to engage in pre-meeting elaboration. Anticipating entering a setting with social category diversity should lead individuals to be relatively less focused on building a positive relationship and relatively more focused on the task, resulting in greater pre-meeting elaboration during disagreement. Although the idea that increased focus on interpersonal relationships will lead to less pre-meeting elaboration stands somewhat in contrast to work showing that more cohesive groups can be more cooperative (Tyler and Blader 2001), we believe that whereas cohesiveness may enable group performance outcomes for certain tasks (e.g., production tasks), it can hinder group performance on complex decision-making tasks, which are the focus of our paper.

**Social category diversity and relationship focus.** Within a workgroup, social identity theory helps explain why individuals may be more focused on social goals in interactions with in-group (i.e., categorically similar) than with out-group (i.e., categorically dissimilar) members. Individuals derive part of their self-esteem through their identification with social groups (Luhtanen and Crocker 1992; Rubin and Hewstone 1998). Not only do individuals desire to see themselves as members of valued groups, they desire for others to view them as being a group member (Hogg and Terry 2000; Turner et al. 1987). Thus, because of this need for belonging, it has been argued that individuals care more about an in-group member's evaluation as compared to an out-group member's evaluation (Turner et al. 1987). This greater focus on being accepted and getting along (i.e., having social goals) with in-group members manifests



itself in a number of ways. For instance, individuals prefer to work with (Jackson 1992), are more committed to (Doosje et al. 2002), are more socially integrated with (O'Reilly et al. 1989), want friendlier interactions with (Hornsey et al. 2002; Moscovici 1980, 1985), and expect more agreement from (Phillips 2003; Phillips and Loyd 2006) in-group than out-group members. Taken together, this suggests that individuals will be more relationship focused with in-group versus out-group members.

**Relationship focus and pre-meeting elaboration.** Research on motivated information processing provides insight into why decreased relationship focus stemming from the presence of social category diversity may influence pre-meeting elaboration. The presence or absence of social category diversity affects whether individuals are primarily motivated to pursue a social goal (i.e., getting along, impression management) or a task accuracy goal (i.e., performing well) (Chen et al. 1996). Research suggests that individuals in settings with social category homogeneity versus social category diversity may be relatively more motivated by, and concerned about, social rather than task goals (e.g., Brewer and Miller 1996; Tajfel and Turner 1986).

This relationship between social and task accuracy goals has been framed as a trade-off (Chen et al. 1996; Sanchez-Burks 2002, 2005). This is not to say that individuals are only concerned with one goal at a time. Rather, relatively more focus on one goal is associated with less focus on the other. For example, Sanchez-Burks (2002, 2005) provided evidence that in North American cultures, individuals exhibited reduced relational concerns in order to direct attention to the task at hand. He argued that a cultural ideology exists (particularly in North American cultures) that espouses that one's attention to relational concerns can distract one from a focus on work. Research in the area of groupthink also supports the concept of a relationship-task tradeoff, with findings that too much cohesiveness within a group can lead to suppression of dissenting viewpoints on complex tasks, as group members feel hesitant to engage in task conflict with close others (Janis 1982; Turner and Pratkanis 1998).

There are a number of reasons why a tradeoff may exist between relational and task concerns particularly during disagreement. At a basic level, individuals are constrained as to the types of cognitions

and behaviors they can experience at any one point in time. Resources focused on the successful completion of a task inherently reduce one's ability to simultaneously allocate resources toward the relationship. Moreover, the goals and motives associated with relational vs. task concerns are often directly at odds with one another. When individuals focus on forming or maintaining positive relationships, actions which involve the potential for conflict (i.e., disagreeing on a task) create a risk that the relationship will be damaged. As such, scholars have argued that when individuals have concerns about forming positive relationships, they tend to avoid actions which could harm these goals (e.g., Baumeister and Leary 1995; Smart, Richman and Leary 2009). Moreover, researchers have documented that when people have relational concerns, they are less likely to disagree or appear at odds with others (e.g., Fry et al. 1983; O'Conner and Arnold 2011).

Thus, we propose that in the face of disagreement, a reduction in relationship focus may increase focus on the task and thus improve pre-meeting elaboration. Even prior to any actual interaction, relationship-focused individuals' attention may be directed away from the task (Sanchez-Burks 2002, 2005). Moreover, because relationship-focused individuals are anticipating an upcoming interaction, they may be more hesitant to engage in pre-meeting elaboration because promoting alternative viewpoints may jeopardize the possibility for smooth interaction (Janis 1982).

This leads us to the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:* Relative to social category homogeneity, social category diversity leads to greater pre-meeting elaboration.

*Hypothesis 2:* Relative to social category homogeneity, social category diversity leads to less relationship focus.

*Hypothesis 3:* Less relationship focus is associated with more pre-meeting elaboration.

*Hypothesis 4:* The influence of social category diversity on pre-meeting elaboration is mediated by relationship focus.

## **Overview of Experiments 1 and 2**

In our first two studies, we test the relationship between social category diversity and pre-meeting elaboration with relationship focus as a mediator (see Figure 1). In Experiment 1, we manipulate the similarity of the participants' coworker and show that participants' exhibit more pre-meeting elaboration in settings with social category diversity versus homogeneity. Furthermore, we measure the degree of relationship focus to provide evidence that it acts as a mediator between social category diversity and pre-meeting elaboration. As a compliment to Experiment 1, in Experiment 2, we manipulate the mediator from Experiment 1 (i.e., relationship focus). Our rationale for doing this draws from Spencer et al. (2005), who argue that in experimental work, statistical mediation alone is insufficient to demonstrate that the mediator *causes* the change in the dependent variable. In other words, a correlation between Variable A and Variable B does not mean that Variable A causes Variable B. It may also be the case that Variable B causes Variable A. As formally shown by many statisticians (see e.g., Pearl 2001; Petersen et al. 2006; VanderWeele 2009; Imai et al. 2012), it is hard to establish the causal effect of the mediator using a single experimental design with a manipulated independent variable and a measured mediator because the statistical assumptions made (e.g., the mediator is randomized) are often violated.

Instead, more recently, researchers have proposed using multiple experiments to increase the validity of mediated findings. One alternative design calls for running two experiments: one in which only the independent variable is randomized and the mediator and outcome are measured, and another in which the independent variable and the mediator are simultaneously randomized followed by the measurement of the outcome variable (Imai et al. 2012). This provides more confidence than a single experimental design that the mediator (e.g., relationship focus) is a causal mechanism driving the outcome effects (e.g., pre-meeting elaboration). Thus, in Experiment 1 we randomize the independent variable (social category diversity) and measure both the mediator (relationship focus) and the dependent variable (pre-meeting elaboration), and in Experiment 2 we randomize both the independent variable (social category diversity) and mediator (relationship focus) and measure the dependent variable (pre-meeting elaboration).

To test our hypotheses, we used controlled experiments and gathered measures of pre-meeting elaboration from written statements made by participants in anticipation of a meeting with a socially similar (i.e., social category homogeneity) or dissimilar other (i.e., social category diversity). This methodology provides us with the opportunity to gain insight into cognitive processes that might otherwise be difficult to ascertain. We studied dyadic communication to remove any confounds with minority or majority influence that may occur in larger groups. Moreover, the controlled experimental setting allows for a relatively conservative test of our phenomenon. If we are able to detect significant differences in pre-meeting elaboration with a relatively short-lived situation with minimal categorical distinctions between group members, then we suspect that these effects will be even stronger in workgroups, where both the strength of the categorical distinctions and concerns about relationships are larger.

### **Experiment 1**

#### **Method**

**Participants and design.** Twenty-six female undergraduate students from a Midwestern university were paid \$10 for approximately forty-five minutes of their time. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions: Social Category Diversity or Social Category Homogeneity.

**Procedure.** Upon arriving at the laboratory, participants were seated by themselves in a private room, where they completed a consent form and a single question asking their political affiliation (either Democrat or Republican). The experimenter told participants that the study would examine how political affiliation and communication media affect group processes. All participants were told that they would communicate both in writing and face-to-face with a Democrat or a Republican.

**Stage 1: Social category identification.** Participants completed an attitude survey measuring how much their views fell in line with their political party and measuring their views on ten political issues such as handgun control and affirmative action (Chen and Kenrick 2002). Finally, participants wrote a short “political identification” paragraph asking why they identified with their political party.

**Stage 2: Decision-making task.** The experimenter then presented participants with the decision-making task: reading information about a murder which included testimony from several sources, and attempting to correctly identify the suspect who committed the murder (modified from Phillips 2003; Phillips et al. 2009; Stasser and Stewart 1992). The murder mystery was modified to include testimony about three primary suspects, none of which exonerated any of the suspects. Thus, there was no correct answer, and pretests further revealed that each suspect was equally likely to be chosen. This modification provided a better opportunity to test how deeply participants would consider all of the information provided; with one correct answer, participants could more easily discount the opinion (and supporting information) of their coworker. After reading the murder mystery case, participants recorded on a decision form who they believed committed the murder and how confident they were in that choice on a 7-point scale (1 = not at all to 7 = extremely).

**Stage 3: Coworker's social category manipulation.** The experimenter then took the decision form and presented participants with an attitude survey that was described as coming from their coworker. The attitude survey was manipulated by the experimenter so we could influence the perceived social category (i.e., Democrat or Republican) of the participant's ostensible coworker. This attitude survey was the same as the one participants answered in Stage 1, but portrayed the political identification and attitudes of either a typical Democrat or Republican (developed in a pre-test), depending upon the participants' own political affiliation and experimental condition (a setting with social category diversity or social category homogeneity). To further highlight the social category of the coworker, the experimenter placed a table tent noting the participants' political affiliation on one side of the table and another table tent with their coworker's political affiliation on the opposite side. The table tents and attitude surveys were colored according to political affiliation: red for Republicans and blue for Democrats (similar to the manipulation used by Kane 2010). The experimenter informed participants that the face-to-face discussion would take place in their room and then left to allow participants to review the attitude survey of their coworker.

**Stage 4: Disagreement feedback.** After a few minutes elapsed, the experimenter returned and gave participants the murder mystery decision form from Stage 2, which ostensibly contained their coworker's suspect choice and confidence rating. The experimenter then told participants that their coworker was concurrently reviewing their response sheet. We controlled the information about their coworker's murder suspect choice such that it was always different from the participant's choice and counterbalanced between the two other suspects. The confidence rating was held constant at 6 (out of 7).

**Stage 5: Pre-meeting elaboration essay.** The participants then wrote an essay based on the following instructions: "You will meet your partner shortly to discuss the case and decide on who committed the murder. First, we would like you to communicate your perspective in written format. Please write a statement supporting your opinion about who committed the murder of Robert Guion. This statement will be read by your partner before you meet to discuss the case." After writing their essay for their partner to read, participants answered manipulation check and demographic questions. The experimenter then debriefed participants, informing them that they would not meet their coworker.

#### **Dependent variables.**

**Relationship Focus.** Using two items, adapted from Hornsey et al.'s Friendly Intention Measure (2002), we assessed the relative value placed on maintaining the relationship with the coworker versus performing well on the task (e.g., "I feel that it is more important for us to get along than for us to get the right answer to the Murder Mystery," and "I feel that it is more important for us to get the right answer to the Murder Mystery than for us to get along"; 1 = "not at all important" to 7 = "extremely important"). We averaged the two items (with the second item reverse coded) into a composite measure with scores ranging from 1 to 7, with higher numbers reflecting higher relationship focus ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

**Pre-meeting elaboration.** The essays participants wrote provided the measure of pre-meeting elaboration. Although pre-meeting elaboration may take place completely in the individual's mind, we captured it by having individuals write down their thoughts prior to the discussion. Using criteria developed by Petty et al. (1980), two coders, blind to the hypotheses and conditions, rated each

participant's essay to measure the level of pre-meeting elaboration. Coders were told to rate the level of pre-meeting elaboration based on how well participants discussed their suspect choice using the evidence within the case and how much participants considered and wrote about all the suspects' actions and testimonials. First, each coder was asked to read through the murder mystery case thoroughly. Second, each coder was asked to read all of the essays before beginning the task. Finally, each coder was asked to provide a rating between 1 (very low pre-meeting elaboration) and 7 (very high pre-meeting elaboration) for each essay.

Coders were given general guidelines such that essays exhibiting more pre-meeting elaboration included more support for their chosen suspect, considered the implicating and exonerating information for multiple suspects, and considered the fact that multiple suspects could reasonably be chosen as the murderer. Moreover, coders were given specific guidelines for each rating: for example, essays receiving a 1-rating would have included only one reason and no explanation surrounding the reason, whereas essays receiving a 7-rating would have included multiple reasons, provided in-depth descriptions of their reasoning, and considered the various motives and actions of all three suspects. Thus, coders rated how thoroughly and accurately participants wrote about the evidence within the case, with higher scores signifying that participants evaluated and considered the case information more thoroughly. The following are descriptions of scores and examples from actual essays from the experiments to illustrate the different levels of pre-meeting elaboration. Scores of 2, 4, and 6 reflect levels of quality that fall between the subsequent examples. No participants wrote a level 7 essay; therefore, we do not show an example below.

*Score 1 (very low pre-meeting elaboration):* I feel [Suspect 2] committed the crime; he seems like the most likely suspect. *Score 3 (moderately low pre-meeting elaboration):* I think it was [Suspect 2] because he avoided the questions about his whereabouts until the police officer confronted him. Also, his need for gambling is a motive for why he would steal the money. *Score 5 (moderately high pre-meeting elaboration):* I think that [Suspect 2] is more likely to be the murderer than [Suspect 1] for a few reasons.

First, [Suspect 2] changed his story multiple times while [Suspect 1] did not waver. Second, the weapon used belonged to [Suspect 1]... wouldn't he use something else? Third, [Suspect 2's] fingerprints were found on the weapon. Fourth, no evidence of contempt of [Suspect 1] toward Robert was shown. Sixth, [Suspect 2] had a gambling problem, and money was taken from the wallet, and if it were [Suspect 1], he would have to drive away, then drive back because he was at the scene of the crime, whereas [Suspect 2] did drive away once and [Suspect 3] heard him. [Suspect 2] found the body but didn't call police... strange? Right?

Each essay was rated by two of three coders; one coder rated all of the essays and the other two coders each rated a subset of the essays. The ratings of the coders reached an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability (average intraclass correlation = .97). For each essay, the ratings of the coders were averaged.

## Results & Discussion

**Preliminary analyses.** All participants accurately recalled their coworker's political affiliation and suspect choice. Further, we confirmed that essay length did not differ by condition,  $F(1, 24) = 1.20, p = .28$ .

**Hypothesis tests.** Consistent with Hypothesis 1, participants exhibited more pre-meeting elaboration in settings with social category diversity ( $M = 5.13, SD = 1.37$ ) than in settings with social category homogeneity ( $M = 3.32, SD = 1.59$ ),  $t(24) = 3.07, p = .005, d = 1.22$ . We expected that individuals would exhibit less relationship focus towards out-group coworkers than towards in-group coworkers (Hypothesis 2). To test this, we submitted the relationship focus ratings to an independent-samples t-test (Social Category: Diversity vs. Homogeneity). In support of Hypothesis 2, a significant effect for coworker's social category emerged, with participants reporting less relationship focus towards coworkers in settings with social category diversity ( $M = 2.71, SD = 1.18$ ) than in settings with social category homogeneity ( $M = 4.07, SD = 1.65$ ),  $t(24) = 2.39, p = .03, d = .95$ . Hypothesis 3 predicted that less relationship focus would be associated with more pre-meeting elaboration. A linear regression was



conducted, with relationship focus as the independent variable and pre-meeting elaboration as the dependent variable. A significant negative relationship emerged ( $B = -.60$ ,  $SE = .29$ ,  $p = .004$ ), supporting Hypothesis 3. We next turned our attention to testing the mediation hypothesis (Hypothesis 4).

**Mediation analysis.** To test that relationship focus mediates the link between social category diversity and pre-meeting elaboration, we estimated the coefficients of our predicted mediation using the criteria established by Baron and Kenny (1986). We further assessed model significance by determining the indirect effect using a constrained nonlinear regression (CNLR), which estimates coefficients from a series of bootstrap samples (Preacher and Hayes 2008). Bootstrapping tests the significance of mediation given that it accounts for the possibility of a skewed shape of the sampling distribution of effects and helps capitalize on power, needed in the smaller sample sizes typically seen in experiments (Shrout and Bolger 2002). We regressed (1) social category diversity on pre-meeting elaboration, (2) social category diversity on relationship focus, (3) relationship focus on pre-meeting elaboration, and (4) both social category diversity and relationship focus on pre-meeting elaboration. Steps 1 (Hypothesis 1), 2 (Hypothesis 2), and 3 (Hypothesis 3) were significant as reported above. The fourth regression (Step 4) tested for mediation. When controlling for relationship focus,  $B = -.43$ ,  $SE = .20$ ,  $p = .04$ , the relationship between social category diversity and pre-meeting elaboration became marginally significant,  $B = 1.22$ ,  $SE = .61$ ,  $p = .06$ .

To confirm that relationship focus mediates the effect of social category diversity on pre-meeting elaboration, bootstrap confidence intervals for this conditional indirect effect were obtained. A confidence interval (CI) is an estimate of a population parameter and indicates the reliability of an estimate. A procedure with 1,000 bootstrap samples yielded a 95% confidence interval of  $\{.01, 1.26\}$ , which does not include 0, suggesting that relationship focus mediates the link between social category diversity and pre-meeting elaboration, supporting Hypothesis 4.

## Experiment 2

In Experiment 1, when disagreement was present, participants in settings with social category diversity exhibited more pre-meeting elaboration than did those in settings with social category homogeneity. Moreover, relationship focus was found to mediate the relationship between social category diversity and pre-meeting elaboration. Consistent with Experiment 1, in Experiment 2 we manipulate the independent variable, social category diversity or homogeneity. However, in Experiment 2 we now manipulate our proposed mediator (i.e., relationship focus) to be either high or low. Because of the theorized tradeoff between relationship and task focus, high relationship focus corresponds with low task focus and low relationship focus corresponds with high task focus (Chen et al. 1996; Sanchez-Burks 2002, 2005). While it is often the case that the examination of an interaction effect is intended to establish moderation, our purpose here, as noted earlier, is instead to more robustly demonstrate the mediating role of relationship focus. (Imai et al. 2012; Spencer et al. 2005).

### **Hypothesis Development**

Consistent with Experiment 1, we expect that individuals will naturally exhibit more pre-meeting elaboration in settings with social category diversity than in settings with social category homogeneity. We expect this to occur because individuals are inclined to have relatively higher relationship-focus (and lower task-focus) in settings with social category homogeneity and lower relationship-focus (and higher task-focus) in settings with social category diversity. However, by instructing individuals to place more relative focus on the relationship or task, one may be able to change the natural levels of pre-meeting elaboration that occur in settings with social category diversity or homogeneity.

*In contexts with social category diversity*, we make two predictions. First, compared to when participants have been given no instructions about relationship focus (i.e., the control condition) we expect that instructing individuals to focus on the relationship with their coworker (i.e., high relationship focus condition) should decrease pre-meeting elaboration. Second, we expect that no difference in pre-meeting elaboration will emerge between individuals that have been given no instructions about relationship focus (i.e., control condition) and those instructed to focus on the task instead of the

relationship (i.e., low relationship focus condition). We expect no difference because individuals working in contexts with social category diversity are naturally low in their relationship focus.

*In contexts with social category homogeneity*, we make two additional predictions. First, compared to the control condition, instructing individuals to have low relationship focus should increase pre-meeting elaboration. Second, we expect that no difference in pre-meeting elaboration will emerge between the control condition and individuals instructed to have high relationship focus because individuals working in contexts with social category homogeneity should be naturally high in their relationship focus. Thus, we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 5: Social category diversity and relationship focus will interact such that:*

*5a) In contexts with social category diversity, pre-meeting elaboration will be lower for individuals with high relationship focus as compared to individuals in the control condition; and,*

*5b) In contexts with social category homogeneity, pre-meeting elaboration will be higher for individuals with low relationship focus as compared to individuals in the control condition.*

## **Method**

**Participants and design.** One hundred sixty-three undergraduate students from a Midwestern university were paid \$10 for approximately forty-five minutes of their time. Participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions in a 2 (Social Category: Homogeneity vs. Diversity) x 3 (Relationship Focus: High vs. Low vs. Control) between-subjects factorial design. Similar to Experiment 1, we used political affiliation as the social category distinction. We removed three participants from the analyses because they did not identify with either party, leaving one-hundred sixty participants (112 female, 44 male, 4 unreported; 123 Democrats, 37 Republicans).

**Procedure.** Experiment 2 had a similar procedure as Experiment 1. Participants believed they would be completing a task with a coworker from the same social category (i.e., same political affiliation)

or from a different social category (i.e., different political affiliation). In Stage 1 (*Social category identification*), participants indicated their political affiliation. In Stage 2 (*Decision-making task*), they read the murder mystery task and chose a murder suspect. After making their decision, in Stage 3 (*Social category manipulation*), participants learned the political affiliation of their coworker who, depending on condition, was an in-group or out-group member. In Stage 4 (*Disagreement feedback*), participants learned their coworker disagreed with their suspect choice.

In Stage 5 (*Pre-meeting elaboration essay and relationship focus manipulation*) participants in the control conditions received the instructions on how to write the pre-meeting elaboration essay from Experiment 1. In the *high relationship focus conditions*, participants received the following additional instructions: “As you are working on this task, it is extremely important for you to focus on trying to get along with your decision-making partner. Because research shows that concentrating more on interpersonal relationships than on the task is often a prerequisite to being productive on tasks like this, we want you and your decision-making partner to focus on having smooth interactions in order to make the best decision possible about who committed the murder of Robert Guion.” In the *low relationship focus conditions*, participants read, “As you are working on this task, it is extremely important for you to focus on the task. Because research shows that concentrating more on the task than on interpersonal relationships is often a prerequisite to being productive on tasks like this, we want you and your decision-making partner to focus on using the task information in order to make the best decision possible about who committed the murder of Robert Guion.” After writing their essay for their partner to read, participants answered manipulation check and demographic questions. The experimenter then debriefed participants, informing them that they would not meet their coworker.

**Dependent variable.**

*Pre-meeting elaboration.* Two coders blind to the hypotheses and conditions rated each participant’s essay to measure the level of pre-meeting elaboration using the same criteria as Experiment

1. Both coders rated all 160 participants' arguments, and inter-rater reliability was deemed acceptable (average intraclass correlation = .87). We averaged the coders' ratings.

## Results and Discussion

**Preliminary analyses.** After completing the essay, participants were asked to recall the coworker's political affiliation and suspect choice. All but two individuals responded accurately, and all participants were kept in the analysis as the results did not differ when we excluded these two individuals. Consistent with Experiment 1, essay length did not differ by condition,  $F(2, 154) = .50, p = .61$ .

**Hypothesis tests.** To examine our hypotheses, results were analyzed using a 2 (Social Category: Diversity vs. Homogeneity) x 3 (Relationship Focus: High vs. Low vs. Control) ANOVA. A main effect emerged for social category: participants working in a context with social category diversity ( $M = 4.57; SD = 1.10$ ) elaborated more in their written essay than those working in a context with social category homogeneity ( $M = 4.10; SD = 1.30$ ),  $F(1, 154) = 4.37, p < .05, d = .39$ .

As anticipated, we found that this main effect was qualified by a significant interaction between social category diversity and relationship focus,  $F(2, 154) = 3.12, p < .05$  (see Figure 2). In the control condition, participants working in a context with social category diversity ( $M = 4.76, SD = 1.04$ ) exhibited more pre-meeting elaboration than those working in a context with social category homogeneity ( $M = 3.80, SD = 1.27$ ),  $t(154) = 3.29, p < .001, d = .83$ . This replicates the result for Hypothesis 1 from Experiment 1.

The relationship focus manipulation had differential effects depending on the social category context. Supporting Hypothesis 5a, in the context of social category diversity, high relationship-focused participants ( $M = 4.09, SD = 1.06$ ) exhibited less pre-meeting elaboration than control participants ( $M = 4.76, SD = 1.04$ ),  $t(154) = 2.09, p < .05, d = .64$ . In the context of social category diversity the level of pre-meeting elaboration by low relationship-focused participants ( $M = 4.78, SD = 1.14$ ) did not differ from the level of pre-meeting elaboration by control participants ( $M = 4.76, SD = 1.04$ ),  $t(154) < 1$ .

In contrast, partially supporting Hypothesis 5b, in the context of social category homogeneity, low relationship-focused participants exhibited marginally higher levels of pre-meeting elaboration ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ) than control participants ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ),  $t(154) = 1.78$ ,  $p = .08$ ,  $d = .45$  whereas, high relationship-focused participants did not differ in their levels of pre-meeting elaboration ( $M = 4.24$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ) as compared to control participants ( $M = 3.80$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ),  $t(154) = 1.42$ ,  $p = .16$ ,  $d = .34$ .

Experiment 2 shows empirically that relationship focus plays an important role in the level of pre-meeting elaboration exhibited when disagreement is present. In Experiments 1 and 2 when they received no explicit instructions to focus on the relationship, participants working in a setting with social category diversity elaborated more than did those working in a setting with social category homogeneity. However, in Experiment 2, by manipulating relationship focus, we demonstrated that high relationship focus decreased pre-meeting elaboration in settings with social category diversity and low relationship focus marginally increased pre-meeting elaboration in settings with social category homogeneity. These findings provide additional evidence for our expectation that relationship focus is an underlying causal mechanism driving pre-meeting elaboration in settings with social category diversity.

### Experiment 3

In Experiment 3 we examine the influence of pre-meeting elaboration on decision-making performance and propose that pre-meeting elaboration mediates the relationship between social category diversity and dyadic performance. Pre-meeting elaboration has the potential to positively impact decision-making performance as increased pre-meeting elaboration means that individuals will arrive to the table having *more deeply* considered the task-relevant information. In other words, individuals with higher pre-meeting elaboration will come to the interaction having thought about the information in a more complex way and made more useful connections between various pieces of information. Thus, pre-meeting elaboration may improve the quality of task-relevant information available during the discussion, which has been shown to increase the likelihood of better decisions (Tasa and Whyte 2005). We argue that pre-meeting elaboration will improve dyadic performance in a decision-making task.

*Hypothesis 6:* More pre-meeting elaboration leads to better dyadic performance in a decision-making task.

Our findings from Experiments 1 and 2 show that social category diversity can increase pre-meeting elaboration. Prior studies have shown that social category diversity can also have a positive impact on decision-making performance (Homan et al. 2007; Phillips et al. 2009; Phillips et al. 2006; Sommers 2006). Taken together, our arguments suggest a model where pre-meeting elaboration mediates the relationship between social category diversity and decision-making performance. Thus we hypothesize that:

*Hypothesis 7:* Dyads will perform better on a decision-making task in settings with social category diversity versus settings with social category homogeneity.

*Hypothesis 8:* The impact of social category diversity on dyadic performance in a decision-making task is mediated by increased pre-meeting elaboration.

## **Method**

**Participants and design.** Seventy undergraduate female students from a Midwestern university were paid \$15 for approximately sixty minutes of their time. Participants were randomly assigned either to the *social category diversity* or the *social category homogeneity* condition. These participants were assigned to thirty-five dyads, of which three dyads were removed either because the coworkers were familiar with one another or they failed to follow the experimenter's instructions, leaving thirty-two dyads.

### **Procedure.**

**Stage 1: Social category identification.** To show the robustness of our effects by using a category other than political affiliation, we used a minimal group distinction (i.e., red group or blue group) as the indicator of the social category difference for this third experiment (Kane 2010; Lount and Phillips 2007). Participants were told that they would be involved in a decision-making task with someone from their own group or another group. To determine their social category membership, participants pulled a red or

blue strip of paper out of a container. We highlighted the differences in social category membership in two ways. First, all participants (approximately twelve at a time) were in the same room but we visually divided the lab into “red” and “blue” sections by having one side of the room represent the red section and one side represent the blue section and by placing a red or blue shirt over the back of each chair in the appropriate section. Second, we instructed the participants to sit on the side of the room based on their social category and to put on a colored t-shirt that they would wear for the remainder of the experiment.

**Stage 2: Decision-making task.** The experimenter then presented participants with the decision-making task: reading information about four suspects, which included testimony from several sources, and attempting to correctly identify the suspect who committed a murder (modified from Phillips 2003; Phillips et al. 2009; Stasser and Stewart 1992). In Experiments 1 and 2, the murder mystery was modified so that there was no correct answer. In contrast, the murder mystery task in this experiment had a correct answer: based on the information in the case, participants could deduce which one of the four suspects was the correct choice. We used this version of the murder mystery task because we sought to measure decision-making performance in Experiment 3. Participants all received the same exact case information. After reading the case for 20 minutes, participants recorded, on a decision form, who they believed committed the murder and how confident they were in that choice (1 = not at all to 7 = extremely).

**Stage 3: Social category diversity manipulation and disagreement feedback.** While participants completed a short filler task, the experimenter created dyads that either exhibited social category diversity or social category homogeneity. Dyads with social category diversity included one participant from each group (i.e., one blue group member, one red group member). Dyads with social category homogeneity included two participants from the same group (i.e., two red or two blue). Dyads were paired together such that participants chose different suspects (i.e., the two participants in each dyad disagreed). Participants were then given their coworker’s decision sheet, revealing their coworker’s group and that the coworker disagreed with their suspect choice.



**Stage 4: Pre-meeting elaboration essay.** Participants wrote an essay with the following instructions, “You will meet the other person shortly to discuss the case and decide on who committed the murder. Before the meeting, we would like for you to prepare for your meeting with the other person. To help you prepare for this discussion, we would like you to take a few minutes to write a statement about your suspect choice. Please write this essay as if the other person will be reading it.”

**Stage 5: Dyad discussion and decision.** After completing the pre-meeting elaboration essay individually, dyads were taken to breakout rooms and given fifteen minutes to discuss the case and reach a joint decision. Dyads wrote their final decision and their confidence in this choice (1 = not at all to 7 = extremely) on a joint-decision making form. Then, participants individually completed a set of demographic questions and were debriefed about the purpose of the study.

#### **Dependent variables.**

**Pre-meeting elaboration.** The essays participants wrote prior to meeting their coworkers provided the measure of pre-meeting elaboration. Two coders rated each essay, reaching an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability (average intraclass correlation = .86). The ratings of the two coders were averaged, providing a final individual-level pre-meeting elaboration score for each participant. Next, we aggregated the individual-level pre-meeting elaboration score to the dyad-level by taking the averages of the individual pre-meeting elaboration scores within each dyad.

**Dyad decision-making performance.** Dyad performance was based on whether or not the dyad chose the correct suspect (0 = incorrect choice, 1 = correct choice).

### **Results and Discussion**

**Preliminary analyses.** Consistent with Experiments 1 and 2, essay length (averaged by dyad) did not differ by condition,  $F(1, 30) = 1.55, p = .22$ . Moreover, there was no difference between conditions in the number of dyads where at least one member chose the correct suspect prior to the group discussion,  $F(1, 30) = .51, p = .48$ .

**Hypotheses tests.** Consistent with Experiments 1 and 2, we found that dyads with social category diversity ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = .99$ ) exhibited more pre-meeting elaboration than dyads with social category homogeneity ( $M = 3.45$ ,  $SD = .91$ ),  $F(1, 30) = 5.03$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = .80$ . A binary logistic regression analysis tested the effect of pre-meeting elaboration on joint decision-making performance (0 = incorrect choice, 1 = correct choice). The more dyads exhibited pre-meeting elaboration, the better they performed ( $B = 1.44$ ,  $SE = .62$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 4.23$ ,  $p < .05$ ), providing support for Hypothesis 6. A binary logistic regression analysis also found that dyads with social category diversity performed better on the decision-making task than dyads with social category homogeneity (77% vs. 40% correct),  $Wald = 4.15$ ,  $B = 1.58$ ,  $SE = .78$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 4.88$ ,  $p < .05$ , providing support for Hypothesis 7.

**Mediation analysis.** Following the same procedures performed in Experiment 1, to test for mediation, we regressed (1) social category diversity on decision-making performance (Hypothesis 7), (2) social category diversity on pre-meeting elaboration, (3) pre-meeting elaboration on decision-making performance (Hypothesis 6), and (4) both social category diversity and pre-meeting elaboration on decision-making performance (Hypothesis 8). Steps 1, 2, and 3 were significant as reported above. The fourth regression (Step 4) tested for mediation. When controlling for pre-meeting elaboration,  $Wald = 4.02$ ,  $B = 1.26$ ,  $SE = .63$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 3.53$ ,  $p < .05$ , the results of the binary logistic regression showed that the relationship between social category diversity and decision-making performance was no longer significant,  $Wald = 1.46$ ,  $B = 1.04$ ,  $SE = .86$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 2.83$ ,  $p = .23$ .

To confirm that pre-meeting elaboration mediates the effect of social category diversity on decision-making performance, bootstrap confidence intervals for this conditional indirect effect were obtained. A procedure with 1,000 bootstrap samples yielded a 95% confidence interval of  $\{.08, 3.80\}$ , which does not include 0, suggesting that pre-meeting elaboration mediates the link between social category diversity and decision-making performance, supporting Hypothesis 8.

Consistent with our hypotheses, Experiment 3 demonstrates that social category diversity improves both dyadic pre-meeting elaboration and performance when disagreement is present, with pre-

meeting elaboration mediating the link between social category diversity and increased decision-making performance.

### **General Discussion**

In three experiments we explored pre-meeting elaboration, a new construct that helps explain why settings with social category diversity may show better decision-making performance during disagreement than those with social category homogeneity. Pre-meeting elaboration is measured as the extent to which individuals consider their own and others' perspectives in the anticipation of an interaction. In Experiments 1 and 2, by both measuring and manipulating the central mechanism of relationship focus, we showed that when anticipating interaction in a socially diverse versus homogeneous environment people are less focused on their relationships and thus more focused on the task, leading to more pre-meeting elaboration. Furthermore, as shown in Experiment 3, this greater pre-meeting elaboration is directly linked to improved decision-making performance. We conclude here that a concern about establishing a positive relationship reduces individuals' willingness to elaborate on task-relevant information in the face of disagreement even prior to meeting; this concern undermines elaboration in socially homogeneous settings whereas a lack thereof fuels consideration of multiple perspectives in diverse environments.

These empirical findings provide two key contributions to the literature. First, in examining pre-meeting elaboration, we find that the task-related cognitions individuals enact even before actual face-to-face interaction, affect performance. This suggests that more attention should be paid to early stages of the decision-making process as doing so may enhance the acquisition of information that is to be used in the decision-making interaction (Gibson 2001) and be quite consequential for downstream performance. Second, this research highlights the important connection between relationship focus and pre-meeting elaboration in settings with social category diversity, a link that has been discussed but not empirically tested (Phillips and Loyd, 2006). Our findings show that decreased relationship focus with coworkers in settings with social category diversity is a critical underlying mechanism responsible for improving pre-

meeting elaboration. Thus, one of the purported “downsides” of social category diversity is actually an important mechanism that facilitates decision-making performance.

The current findings have potential implications for the development of organizational policies. One organizational recommendation, that has already received considerable support, is to introduce a devil’s advocate (a person selected to represent the counterpoint to the dominant view) into any group decision-making context (e.g., Cosier and Schwenk 1990; Janis 1982). When a dissenting position is known to exist prior to a meeting, our results suggest that who possesses this counterpoint may be just as important as the disagreement itself: disagreement in settings with social category homogeneity does not appear to be as productive as disagreement in settings with social category diversity. Another implication for organizations may be the potential for introducing an intervention (i.e., reducing relationship focus) to help increase performance benefits in settings with social category homogeneity. In Experiment 2, individuals in settings with social category homogeneity who were instructed to focus less on the relationship (and more on the task) showed a marginal improvement in their pre-meeting elaboration. This suggests that by implementing practices such as reminding members of a decision-making team about the importance of focusing more on the task and less on the relationship before preparing to engage in discussion, organizations may see some gains in information processing and performance.

### **Implications and Future Directions**

**Pre-meeting elaboration.** One avenue for future research is to better understand the link between pre-meeting elaboration and group information elaboration during interaction. We found that pre-meeting elaboration influenced performance. However, because pre-meeting elaboration has not been measured in previous research, it is not clear whether it fully accounts for the performance effects seen in settings with social category diversity or it has an additive effect with group information elaboration during the discussion to influence performance. Prior studies that showed increased group elaboration and performance in settings with social category diversity may have been partially capturing the effects of pre-meeting elaboration if individuals in these studies were aware of whether they would be interacting

with a socially similar or dissimilar other. Pre-meeting elaboration may increase group elaboration during an interaction because it can impact *what* information is brought into the discussion (i.e., bringing more relevant information up during the discussion) and *how* one thinks about the information that does come up in the discussion (i.e., considering task-relevant information in a more complex way). Both of these benefits may be what ultimately improve decision-making.

**Relationship focus tradeoff.** To explain our findings, we draw from work that suggests a tradeoff between task and relationship focus and show that people are less relationship focused (i.e., more task focused) in settings with social category diversity. However, it is important to highlight that some researchers posit that increased social support *increases* constructive conflict because coworkers feel more comfortable challenging one another (Gibson and Vermeulen 2003). As a result, one could argue that coworkers in homogeneous as opposed to diverse settings should be more likely to vocalize their ideas, as trust should be higher between in-group members (Simons and Peterson 2000). Although we found evidence for a trade-off in this case, future research could examine conditions under which the tradeoff is more or less likely to occur.

One such condition may be whether the individuals are familiar with one another or simply similar to one another. Many studies do not definitively separate familiarity from social category homogeneity. However, we are often more familiar with those who are socially similar to us because we interact more frequently. Individuals who frequently interact may feel comfortable challenging each other because they do not anticipate that disagreement will irreparably damage their relationship (Gruenfeld et al. 1996). For instance, research suggests that friends are better able to focus on group tasks than are strangers (Jehn and Shah 1997) and are more willing to raise disagreements about the task (Shah and Jehn 1993). In other words, friends may be willing to elaborate on the task, without worrying about how it might damage the relationship (Gruenfeld et al. 1996; Jehn 1995; Van de Vliert and De Dreu 1994). Moreover, increased task focus may not decrease relationship focus when individuals are familiar with one another, as the relationship has already been established. Future research should compare the effects

of familiarity versus social category homogeneity on levels of pre-meeting elaboration. One possibility is that a tradeoff exists for situations characterized by social category homogeneity, but is not as applicable in situations characterized by familiarity (i.e., individuals may not be focused on establishing a positive social bond because a bond already exists). Importantly, the nature of the relationship and the stability of the connection must be considered because researchers have found that people in romantic relationships may be just as or more concerned about their social relationships as the strangers in the aforementioned research (Fry et al. 1983). Combining these studies together with research on groupthink (Janis 1972, 1982; Janis and Mann 1977) suggests that a curvilinear relationship may exist between the strength of ties among group members, the concern for the relationship, and pre-meeting elaboration and performance outcomes. Future research should consider testing a full model to reconcile these different perspectives.

Another interesting question for future research is to understand the extent to which members of certain groups may be more concerned about establishing and maintaining the relationship than others. Presumably, a propensity toward increased relationship focus should lead individuals to be less likely to exhibit pre-meeting elaboration when facing disagreement. Research has shown that women tend to rate relational aspects of their identity as more important to them than do men (Gabriel and Gardner 1999). This suggests that women may be naturally more relationship focused and less task focused when interacting with disagreeing in-group members. Although Experiment 2 showed that men were also susceptible to the manipulation of relationship focus, future research can examine this question as well as whether other types of groups may differ in their degree of relationship focus. For example, collectivistic cultures are naturally more focused on the relationship than individualistic cultures (e.g., Gardner et al. 1999), which may influence levels of pre-meeting elaboration in a decision-making context. A related question is whether there is an optimal level of relationship focus that should be maintained at all times to maximize performance. To determine this, however, researchers will need to do a better job at measuring the levels of relationship focus present in both social category homogeneous and diverse groups.

**Demographic characteristics and status.** In three studies, we examined political affiliation and a more minimal distinction (i.e., red or blue group) as the dimensions that distinguished the in-group and out-group. In organizations, many differences may be salient such as one's departmental affiliation, race, gender, or age. These characteristics, however, also may differ in their relative status (or how much they are valued and respected in the organization; Berger and Conner 1974). Differences in status between groups have been shown to affect behavior and cognition (Pettit and Lount 2010; Sachdev and Bourhis 1987; Thomas-Hunt, Ogden and Neale 2003). When working on a task, one's status is also used as a proxy for expected competence, such that individuals with low relative status are expected to be less competent or perform worse on the task (Ridgeway and Berger 1986). Thus, future research should explore the extent to which individuals will continue to exhibit more pre-meeting elaboration when anticipating interaction with a disagreeing out-group member if that member is higher or lower in status. Disagreement coming from a low-status out-group member may have less of an influence on pre-meeting elaboration than disagreement coming from a high-status out-group member because the low status other may be seen as less competent.

**Group decision-making performance.** Although our findings demonstrate that individual level pre-meeting elaboration affects decision-making performance at the dyadic level, one area for future research is to explore how anticipating interaction with a group may influence pre-meeting elaboration differently. The dynamics of groups are often more complicated than the dynamics of dyads (Moreland 2010). Once three or more people are involved, there is an opportunity for minority opinions and coalitions. Accordingly, it is possible that pre-meeting elaboration may be affected by both 1) the relative percentage of demographically similar/dissimilar others in the group, and 2) the percentage of members who agree/disagree. For instance, in settings where one is both a categorical minority and holds an opinion different from the majority of the group, pre-meeting elaboration may be the highest because relationship concerns should be the lowest for these individuals. Another possibility is that when one is in the opinion majority (i.e., the majority of group members agree with your opinion), levels of pre-meeting

elaboration may be reduced. In a dyad, you must “speak up” if you want your perspective defended; thus, you may arm yourself by paying more attention and processing the information more in anticipation of an interaction. When you anticipate interacting with a group, if you know that even one person agrees with you, you may defer the responsibility of defending the position to the other party. Past research by Phillips and her colleagues examining the influence of congruence on group decision-making may be an appropriate framework and paradigm through which to test these ideas (e.g., Phillips 2003; Phillips et al. 2009; Phillips and Loyd 2006; Phillips et al. 2004).

### **Conclusion**

The work presented here provides insight into why environments with social category diversity are characterized by greater pre-meeting elaboration than those with social category homogeneity in the presence of disagreement. Research has praised social category diversity’s positive benefits for group performance (Antonio et al. 2004; McLeod et al. 1996; Sommers 2006; Sommers et al. 2008), while lamenting its negative impact on interpersonal relationships. Our findings suggest that in decision-making situations, rather than lamenting the relatively lower levels of interpersonal attraction in diverse groups compared to homogeneous groups, we may want to lament the higher levels of interpersonal attraction in homogeneous groups for their detrimental impact on cognition and performance (Phillips and Apfelbaum 2012). A decreased focus on establishing interpersonal relationships in diverse settings may ironically provide an advantage for the decision-making process, as it promotes pre-meeting elaboration of task-relevant information and enhances decision-making performance.



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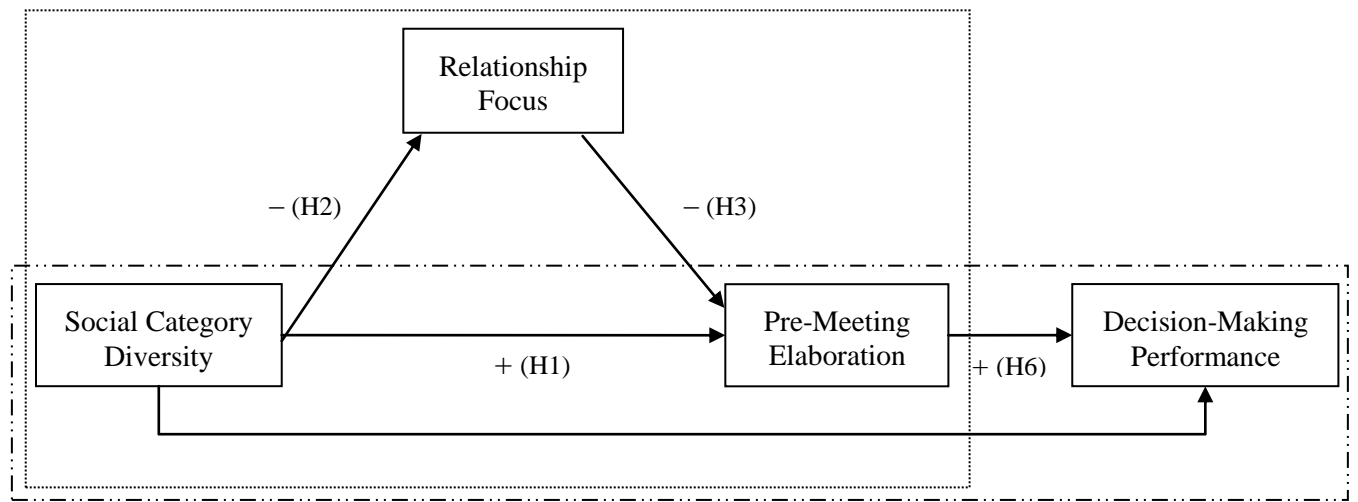
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Figure 1. Proposed and tested model



Note:

..... Experiments 1 and 2

- - - - - Experiment 3

Figure 2. The effect of social category diversity and relationship focus on pre-meeting elaboration, Experiment 2.

