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Comments

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Model of Inspiring Media

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Abstract: Scholars have increasingly explored the ways that media content can touch, move, and inspire audiences, leading to numerous beneficial outcomes including increased feelings of connectedness to and heightened motivations for doing good for others. Although this line of inquiry is relatively new, sufficient evidence and patterns of results have emerged such that a clearer picture of the inspiring media experience is coming into focus. This article has two primary goals. First, we seek to synthesize the existing research into a working and evolving model of inspiring media experiences reflecting five interrelated and symbiotic elements: exposure, message factors, responses, outcomes, and personal/situational factors. The model also identifies theoretical mechanisms underlying the previously observed positive effects. Secondly, the article explores situations in which, and precipitating factors present, when these hoped-for outcomes either fail to materialize or result in negative or maladaptive responses and outcomes. Ultimately, the model is proposed as a heuristic roadmap for future scholarship and as an invitation for critique and collaboration in the emerging field of positive media psychology.

Keywords: inspiring media, positive media psychology, self-transcendent emotions, prosocial behaviors, media and emotions

Over the past decade, a growing number of researchers in media psychology have turned their attention to the variety of ways that media can have positive and prosocial impacts (Raney et al., 2021). Moving dramas, inspiring narratives, and even heart-warming advertisements may all give rise to audiences feeling uplifted, inspired, or moved. Importantly, these feelings may further predict a host of prosocial effects, including greater feelings of connectedness and heightened motivations for doing good for others. Because no single genre captures this class of media content, in this paper, we use the phrase “inspiring media” to refer to the broad collection of portrayals that can pull at our heart-strings and move us toward prosocial goals.

The phrase “inspiring media” can refer to a wide variety of media content, including fare that is beyond the focus of this particular article. For example, a person may be “inspired” by a cooking show, a fitness Instagram post, or a do-it-yourself YouTube instructional video. No doubt, all of these types of content may motivate people or serve to heighten self-confidence. Although we find these types of content to be important and worthy of investigation, in this paper we are particularly interested in messages that

elicit self-transcendent experiences. In particular, our model focuses on messages that draw attention away from the self and egoistic concerns, and instead encourage a heightened awareness and concern for people or issues that are broader than the self. Examples of such awareness include feelings of universality, recognition of the unity between socially or geographically diverse people, commitment to causes or social movements that are deemed just and worthy, or deepened appreciation of our natural environment (Koltko-Rivera, 2006; Oliver et al., 2018; Yaden et al., 2017).

With this context in mind, because this line of research is still evolving, our understanding of these potentials is arguably just beginning. Yet we are also at a point where we can begin to see patterns, boundary conditions of our theorizing, and a multitude of additional variables that may play consequential roles in these processes. With the goal of synthesizing existing research to provide a roadmap for future scholarship, this paper provides a working and evolving model of inspiring media experiences that outlines current findings, suggests theoretical mechanisms, and overviews additional questions that await future research.

Existing Media Scholarship on Inspiring Media

In this section of the paper, we provide a very brief overview of the insights that existing empirical research has indicated (for a much more in-depth discussion, see Raney et al., 2021). Following this discussion, we then turn to the components and connections in our model, and finally to areas that we believe to be theoretically plausible but that await our further investigation. In so doing, we also consider when media messages designed to inspire may fail to do so or may result in unintended outcomes.

First, research strongly suggests that exposure to inspiring messages is a common occurrence for many people. A national survey in the United States found that 63% of individuals reported being inspired by media messages at least a few times a week (Janicke-Bowles et al., 2019). These messages took a variety of media formats, with the most common being music (90%) and movies (86%), but also common were online videos (63%) and even news (77%; Raney et al., 2018). Of course, the specific content that may elicit inspiration undoubtedly varies widely, but recent content analyses of social media and news content point to themes related to hope, appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, and encouragement frequently featured (Dale et al., 2017a, 2019; Ji et al., 2018; Rieger & Klimmt, 2018).

Predictors of exposure to inspiring media have also garnered a wealth of research. Although many people report encountering such fare by chance or while engaging in other activities, a sizeable proportion of individuals also report exposure via recommendations from others who suggest or send them the content (Raney et al., 2018). Nevertheless, more deliberate exposure or affinity for inspiring content also occurs, with scholars now identifying a number of important predictors including empathy, spirituality, and universality (Janicke-Bowles et al., 2019).

Audience responses to inspiring content have typically been measured immediately after viewing, with these responses usually taking the form of either self-reported affective and cognitive responses (e.g., “I was moved by this video”) or in the form of message evaluation (e.g., “This video was moving”). The self-transcendent emotion of elevation has been frequently examined and refers to moving and uplifting feelings in response to seeing extraordinary acts of moral beauty such as deep compassion or generosity. These feelings may also be accompanied by mixed affect and by physiological responses such as crying or a lump in the throat. However, related responses have also been observed, such as “kama muta,” a Sanskrit term for “being moved by love,” characterized as being a decidedly positive emotion and one that is elicited specifically

from witnessing sudden displays of communal sharing (Janicke-Bowles et al., 2021; Steines et al., 2019). Research suggests that the extent to which inspiring messages elicit these and similar emotions may be moderated by audience traits such as higher levels of moral identity (Aquino et al., 2011) and tendencies to engage with moral beauty (Diessner et al., 2013).

Numerous strands of research on self-transcendent emotions have examined not only the emotions themselves, but the outcomes that follow from them. Many of these outcomes are cognitive and affective in nature, such as heightened levels of universal orientation (Krämer et al., 2017) and reductions in stereotyping or prejudice (Oliver et al., 2015). Numerous scholars have also turned their attention to the behavioral outcomes of consuming inspiring media, finding evidence that audiences often report being motivated to be more compassionate and altruistic (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). Importantly, research examining actual behaviors has shown evidence that, generally, people demonstrate greater helping behaviors (Schnall et al., 2010), charitability (Freeman et al., 2009), and information seeking about issues depicted in the media stimuli subsequent to viewing inspiring media (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014). Additionally, some media-related outcomes – such as social sharing of the media message – have also been reported and discussed (Jang et al., 2019; Ji et al., 2018).

Model of Inspiring Media

Based on an extensive review of the extant literature from both media and positive psychology, we offer the model of inspiring media (see Figure 1). This model is not to be understood as definitive. Rather, we invite scholars to add to the model, and extend, modify, and critique it so that we may more deeply understand how to fully realize the role of media in inspiring users/viewers to their higher and better selves.

Components of the Model

There are five primary components of the model: Exposure, Media Messages, Responses, Outcomes, and Person/Situation variables. Exposure simply refers to exposure to (or selective exposure to) inspiring media messages. The Message component refers not only to the types of portrayals that often give rise to meaningful, inspiring, or self-transcendent responses, but also to additional types of message characteristics including the media channel itself (e.g., YouTube, films, games), as well as aspects related to the source (e.g., advertiser, political speech, news). The

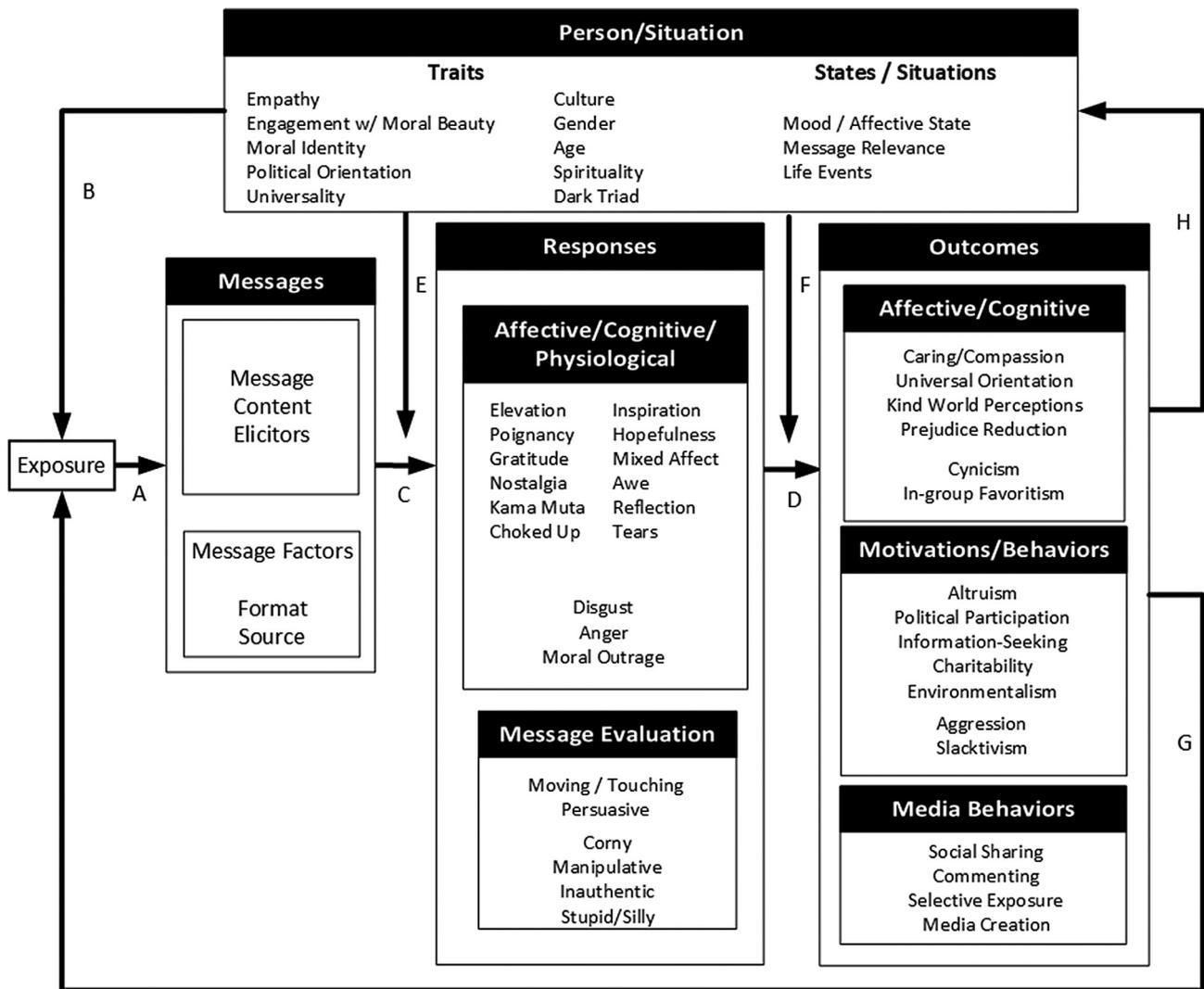


Figure 1. Components and connections in the model of inspiring media.

Response component refers to affective, physiological, and cognitive reactions of users, as well as their evaluations of the message. Some of these responses, such as physiological responses, are in the beginning stages of systematic examination (Clayton et al., 2021). The Outcomes component refers to the effects that occur subsequent to exposure and initial response. These outcomes may include behaviors and perceptions that reflect greater meaning and self-transcendence (e.g., greater compassion for others, heightened feelings of universal connectedness), but also reflect unexpected or inconsistent responses such as heightened cynicism that have yet to be studied empirically. This component also includes media-related behaviors, including selective exposure to similar content, and media-interaction variables such as social sharing or commenting. The final component refers to Person/Situation variables. Here, we include more stable traits including demographic characteristics such as gender identity and age, and also

individual-difference variables such as empathy, engagement with beauty, moral identity, political ideology, and culture, among many others that have yet to receive our adequate attention. In addition, this component includes state-related variables such as mood or message relevance.

Relationships Between Components

The model of inspiring media conceptualizes all of the five components as interrelated, with some components serving as moderators, mediators, or independent/dependent variables. Further, the model includes feedback loops, meaning that a given component (e.g., media exposure) may serve as an independent variable in some circumstances, but as a dependent variable in others (as in the case of selective exposure). For ease of presentation, we have labeled the paths in Figure 1 to illustrate their function.

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Path A simply refers to exposure to some meaningful message. Although this path, at first glance, may seem straight forward, some recent research has begun to explore how repeated viewing may function in the process (Neubaum et al., 2020). Path B reflects that, in the case of selective exposure, individual traits and states play a consequential role in predicting preference for (and hence exposure to) meaningful media. Path C refers to the affective, cognitive, and evaluative responses that occur, undoubtedly a function of the elicitors present in the media content as well as additional message-related factors (e.g., source). Path D refers to the outcomes associated with the responses. Generally, these series of paths suggest that outcomes that occur in response to exposure to meaningful media are mediated via the immediate affective, cognitive, and evaluative responses, although we believe that research on cumulative exposure and long-term outcomes is theoretically and practically needed and important.

Paths E and F represent how person/situation variables moderate both the responses following exposure (E) and the relationship between responses and outcomes (F). Some of the possible moderating effects have already been observed in the literature. For example, in terms of the E path, studies have shown that feelings of elevation resulting from exposure to meaningful media are heightened among those who score higher on moral identity (Aquino et al., 2011), whereas perceptions of the message as corny are higher among those scoring high on elements of the dark triad (Appel et al., 2018). Similar findings of the importance of person/situation have been obtained in terms of culture (Kim, 2017; Kim & Eom, 2020).

We believe that Paths D and F hold promise for encouraging additional scholarship exploring the boundary conditions of the effects of meaningful media on audience response, and further predict that, at times, responses that are at odds with self-transcendent responses may be observed. For example, images of Colin Kaepernick kneeling at a US football game in protest of police brutality may inspire audience members on the left of the political spectrum but arouse feelings of disgust or moral outrage among those on the right. Further, images of patriotism (e.g., flag waving) may arouse inspiration among those on the right, ultimately leading to higher levels of in-group favoritism.

Paths G and H provide feedback loops in the model. Path G suggests that resultant outcomes likely influence future exposure. This exposure may occur because of selective exposure or interest, but may also take the form of sharing or posting meaningful media, thereby spreading exposure to others. Path H reflects how the outcomes may affect the person/situation. The most obvious way that this might happen is in terms of states, with exposure to meaningful media potentially affecting one's mood, for example. However, we also believe that some outcomes (e.g., universal

orientations) may, over time, serve to shape the values and hence character traits of the audience (see Erickson et al., 2018).

Opportunities for Revision, Expansion, and Critique

Thus far our overview of inspiring media highlights the optimistic outcomes that many of us hoped for when we began studying this phenomenon – that media messages can elicit self-transcendent responses that lead to a host of prosocial outcomes. Yet as we continue this line of research, we find ourselves becoming increasingly aware of the need to expand the model by introducing and researching additional variables that may be consequential, and to take stock of when these hoped-for outcomes may either fail to materialize or may result in responses and/or outcomes that are antithetical to prosociality.

Exposure

Although a number of different traits predictive of exposure have been identified, we believe that there are additional predictors that deserve our attention. In particular, the bulk of research thus far has tended to examine traits or more enduring dispositions as predictors (e.g., need for affect, empathy), whereas states or more short-lived situations have yet to be systematically studied. Yet it seems clear that inspiring media may be more appealing (or even needed) under some circumstances than others. For example, given that the depiction of hope is characteristic of many examples of inspiring media (Dale et al., 2017b), it seems plausible to suggest that people may be particularly drawn to inspirational messages when they face some adversity or challenge. Although this specific hypothesis awaits further testing, existing media research in such domains as health appeals (Nabi & Myrick, 2019), restorative narratives (Paravati et al., 2020), terror management (Rieger et al., 2015), and stress reduction (Janicke et al., 2017; Nabi & Prestin, 2020) shows that media messages have the power to inspire hope, reduce anxiety, and increase efficacy. Consequently, we encourage further research to examine the states and circumstances that may reflect users' needs that would be particularly predictive of inspiring media that heightens the ability to cope and to have hope in stressful or frightening circumstances.

Message Factors

We previously noted that people report encountering inspiring media in a variety of formats and that a variety of elicitors (e.g., hope, gratitude) play consequential roles in

inspiring audiences. However, this snapshot of the inspiring-media landscape is in need of further elaboration. For example, in addition to the narrative presented in these messages, additional factors such as music, pacing, and aesthetic qualities also undoubtedly play important roles (e.g., Bartsch et al., 2014; Ji et al., 2019). Likewise, in social-media contexts, user comments and “likes” play a role in users’ responses to inspiring messages (Krämer et al., 2019; Waddell & Bailey, 2017).

The list of additional non-narrative aspects of media messages that may be relevant is seemingly endless. However, we encourage scholars to consider additional message-based variables that may be particularly relevant. For instance, to what extent do the themes in the narrative resonate with the viewer’s fundamental values? As an example, depictions of soldiers and US patriotism appear to be common in stories featured on Fox News’ “good news section,” and messages about social justice are common on Upworthy.com. Although all of these stories may be equally inspiring to partisan audiences, it is likely that some story themes may be particularly appealing to liberal versus conservative viewers/readers. Indeed, recent research found that participants who favored Hillary Clinton in the 2016 US election were more moved by an inspiring political ad for Clinton than for Donald Trump, whereas the opposite was true for Trump supporters (Seibt et al., 2018).

An additional message-related factor that we believe deserves greater attention regards the source of the message. First, recent scholarship has found that individuals are more likely to agree with non-divisive statements when the statements are attributed to in-group versus out-group sources (Hanel et al., 2018). These findings suggest that when viewers perceive the source of the inspiring message to be aligned with their salient in-group identity (e.g., political party, faith tradition), then they may be more likely to accept or trust the message and thus experience inspiration. Likewise, when the source is a liked friend or family member (such as is often the case when messages are shared), then the message may be received more favorably.

A second source attribute concerns the perceived motivation for the creation and dissemination of the inspiring message. Undoubtedly, many such messages are created with an authentic desire to inspire audiences or to provide support or helpful information. Public service announcements such as those developed by the Ad Council on topics of diversity and inclusion, Meals on Wheels, and fatherhood involvement may be such examples (see <https://www.youtube.com/c/adccouncil/playlists>). By contrast, many media messages are driven by goals of profit-making. On the one hand, such messages (predominantly advertising) may succeed in inspiring audiences despite their intention to sell products, such as Budweiser’s famous Super Bowl commercials featuring Clydesdales and puppies (e.g., see

www.youtube.com/watch?v=tTbLBL2P6YA). Indeed, the effectiveness of “warmth” appeals in advertising speaks to the idea that they not only often succeed in “inspiring,” but also in creating heightened liking of the brand and purchase intentions (Aaker et al., 1986). On the other hand, several notable exceptions deserve our attention. For example, viewers reacted so critically to a Pepsi advertisement using portrayals of social justice and alluding to a Black Lives Matter march that the company pulled the ad after only 1 day (Victor, 2017; see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9x15lR9VIg>). Likewise, a Super Bowl commercial using a voice over of Dr. Martin Luther King was greeted by a wave of backlash on social media platforms (Maheshwari, 2018; see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVz1xa7S4Q4>). Perhaps these examples illustrate that when advertisers attempt to employ images and issues that are deeply held and often sacred and cherished, people deem the messages as manipulative, inauthentic, or crass rather than as inspirational. This response of “outrage” is something we address again in the next section on responses.

A final source attribute that we believe may be promising to explore is user-generated content. In this context, users themselves become the source as they create and distribute their materials on a host of existing and emerging platforms such as TikTok and Instagram. A uses and gratifications study of user-generated content argued that media creation serves as means of fulfilling the needs of self-expression and self-actualization (Shao, 2009). As such, traits such as self-transcendence may increase the likelihood of one creating their own inspiring media messages. At the same time, we note that the act of media creation itself likely feeds back into users’ emotions and cognitions. Oliver et al. (2016) utilized cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) and the self-effects media model (Valkenburg, 2017) to argue that the process of *creating* inspiring media may elicit higher levels of elevation than viewing the content alone, an argument that was supported in their research. Of course, these results beg the question of how to encourage inspiring-media creation outside of the laboratory: However, we can also envision how they may contribute to media-literacy curricula, lesson plans, or even contests that may seek to achieve prosocial outcomes.

Responses

By far, the most common immediate responses to inspiring media have focused on self-transcendent emotions and cognitions such as elevation, inspiration, empathy, and gratitude (Oliver, Ash, et al., 2012; Oliver et al., 2018; Stellar et al., 2017). Self-transcendent emotions share a common conceptual core defined by “their capacity to encourage individuals to transcend their own momentary needs and desires and focus on those of another” (Stellar et al., 2017,

p. 201). This other-focused quality of responses to inspiring media is also reflected in Oliver and colleagues' (2018) description of self-transcendent media experiences as "a unique form of media experience that causes us to look beyond our own concerns, to recognize moral beauty, and to feel unity with humanity and nature" (p. 380). Such self-transcendent emotions and experiences constitute an important prerequisite for altruistic and prosocial outcomes associated with inspiring media experiences.

Conversely, however, responses not heightening prosocial outcomes may also occur at times. For example, Bartsch et al. (2018) found that an inspiring message about the Paralympic Games elicited elevation, compassion, and pity. However, whereas both elevation and compassion were associated with greater destigmatization, pity was a negative predictor. Consequently, efforts to employ inspiring messages for purposes of stereotype reduction or destigmatization should exercise caution in eliciting affective responses such as pity that may ultimately be counterproductive.

Research also has begun to explore how inspiring messages may "fall flat" for some viewers. For example, just as researchers have examined a variety of traits that appear to moderate and enhance the relationship between media exposure and feelings of inspiration (Path E), it is only recently that scholars have begun to explore traits that appear to dampen self-transcendent affect. Appel et al. (2018) found that scores on aspects of the Dark Triad (Machiavellianism, psychopathy, narcissism; Jonason & Webster, 2010) were associated with rating touching and moving short videos as corny, overly sentimental, and manipulative rather than inspiring.

Although a lack of self-transcendent affect is one way that inspiring messages may fail, we also believe that some inspiring messages may not only fail, but rather produce responses that are antithetical. For example, we note that in Haidt's conceptualization of elevation, disgust was argued to be at the opposite end of the continuum from elevation (Haidt, 2003). In this regard, we can imagine that responses to a given message may elicit inspiration among some individuals, but disgust or contempt among others. For example, videos of then-President Donald Trump's 2017 speech at the National Boy Scout Jamboree were met with approval among many people who left comments such as, "When did Obama ever touch the hearts of the people like this man?!" or "I love this story. It is truly inspiring." By contrast, additional comments reflected strong disapproval among others, such as "Revolting," "Such a sad pathetic individual. Can't even call (it) a man," or "I want to vomit now. I wish I would have never clicked" (NBC News offers the full video of the speech here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QwoTegi72WI>). Undoubtedly, additional evidence of divergent responses can be found

for a host of messages that hold appeal for fragmented audiences, including religious messages, messages about climate change, or messages regarding social justice. Consequently, our model suggests that for people who find a message to be contrived, inauthentic, or at odds with their prevailing beliefs, their response may reflect disgust, anger, or even moral outrage.

We also pause to reflect on the "fuzzy" boundaries surrounding the experience of emotions/cognitions themselves. For example, a number of scholars have reflected on the nature of "mixed affect" in describing uplifting and meaningful moments, including media moments that may be described as "bittersweet" or consisting of happiness and sadness simultaneously (Ersner-Hershfield et al., 2008; Larsen & McGraw, 2011; Larsen et al., 2001). Following from this, we are curious as to whether or not inspiration may also co-occur with other seemingly discordant affective responses. For example, Van de Vyver (2016) and Van de Vyver and Abrams (2015) note that elevation and outrage are both approach emotions and that both heighten motivations to help others, but with elevation leading to benevolent behaviors and outrage leading to justice-related behaviors. Although these authors did not discuss whether these emotions can co-occur, we find this possibility intriguing. One can imagine watching a protest for social justice that leads to feelings of inspiration from the unity of the protestors but outrage at the injustice that spurned protest in the first place. Similarly, stories of refugees may inspire us by portraying their courage and survival in an uncertain world but outrage us as reminders of the unjust circumstances that caused them to leave their homes.

Even if the co-occurrence of inspiration with emotions such as anger or outrage do not exist *within* persons, we do think their connections can be manifest in other forms. For example, user comments to an inspiring video can reflect elevation among some readers and outrage by others. As illustration, CBS evening news posted a video of police officer Eugene Goodman as he led insurrectionists who rampaged and stormed the US Capitol on January 7 2021 away from senators and house members. Comments by viewers of the video posted on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SFzx1FJia94>) appear to reflect inspiration among some users (e.g., "The story makes me shed a tear. The courage of this man is priceless," "God Bless all the Eugenes of this World") and contempt or outrage among others (e.g., "They act like they are patriots, but then they run around with confederate flags. How do so many people have an IQ below room temperature?"). We believe that this mixture of affective responses may be consequential to individuals' perceptions and emotional reactions. Given that the majority of respondents in a US survey reported reading and sometimes commenting on news stories, often to express their opinions and emotions

(Stroud et al., 2016), and given research reporting that user comments can affect users' perceptions of inspiring media (Krämer et al., 2019; Waddell & Bailey, 2017), we find this direction of research potentially fruitful.

A final way that we believe inspiration may sometimes be tied to seemingly incompatible affect is via recommendation algorithms. Just as streaming platforms such as Netflix recommend videos based on our prior viewing choices and videos that may have related content, inspiring media may be tied to recommendations that may lead to feelings of disgust or anger. Take as an example the previously mentioned Trump speech to the Boy Scouts. As of this writing, the related videos suggested by YouTube (at the link provided in the previous section) include a video of an argument between Trump and Democratic leaders Nancy Pelosi and Charles Schumer (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6wm-NtMkqz8>). From there, recommended YouTube videos include ones featuring Democrats and Republicans arguing for and against a Trump impeachment. We imagine that the same may be true for inspiring content found on other algorithmically driven platforms (e.g., Netflix, Pandora). In short, viewing an inspiring media offering can offer a host of additional media options, including those that may elicit decidedly different affective responses from those of inspiration. Thus, one's networked media consumption may ultimately lead to a viewing experience that, in total, is associated with content that inspires and content that may, at times, lead to anger or disgust.

Outcomes

As with research on audience responses, scholarship that has assessed the outcomes that follow from responses has tended to focus on virtuous feelings, beliefs, and behaviors. In line with the self-transcendent nature of typical affective responses to inspiring media, these outcomes include heightened caring and compassion, perceptions of humanity as generally "good," altruism, and an enhanced and broader sense of connectedness with others (Oliver et al., 2015). Moreover, exposure to elevating media content has been shown to raise viewers' desires to be a better person and to do good things for others (e.g., Oliver, Hartmann, et al., 2012) and to increase helping intentions and actual helping behavior (Schnall et al., 2010). Generally, Raney et al. (2018) found that those who reported being inspired by more media content were the most likely to self-report prosocial and altruistic behaviors. Additional responses are now beginning to emerge such as greater motivations for political participation (Ellithorpe et al., 2019) and the adoption of environmentally friendly behaviors (Yang et al., 2018).

However, as with responses, we also believe that under some circumstances, outcomes that are not necessarily

prosocial can occur as well. Perhaps the most obvious case in which inspiring messages may lead to deleterious outcomes is when the messages elicit outrage or disgust rather than self-transcendent affect. As in the case of the aforementioned Pepsi commercial alluding to social justice protests, many viewers expressed a great deal of cynicism toward Pepsi and therefore may have been unlikely to feel motivation to purchase Pepsi products. Likewise, a seemingly "inspiring" political speech that is met with disgust may elicit cynicism toward both the politician and perhaps politics more broadly.

We also speculate about whether or not all aspects of inspiration itself necessarily lead to prosocial outcomes such as prejudice reduction or universal orientation. In exploring the physiological manifestations of the experience of elevation, Silvers and Haidt (2008) pointed to the importance of oxytocin, a nonapeptide hormone that is associated with a variety of both physiological experiences (e.g., lactation, giving birth) and social manifestations (e.g., affiliation, trust; Lee et al., 2009). However, Silvers and Haidt (2008) also noted that oxytocin is a complex hormone with a host of possible effects. As other scholars have noted, oxytocin, although generally thought of as a hormone related to compassion, can have unsavory effects on behaviors and behavioral tendencies when administered to individuals, including "gloating, envy, out-group hostility, and ethnocentrism" (Saturn, 2017, para 8; see also Carter et al., 2017). In a review of their five studies on exogenous (administered) oxytocin, Olf et al. (2013) reported that the administration of oxytocin can elicit negative outcomes when cues in the environment signal potential threats (e.g., strangers) or among individuals who chronically tend to view their environments in threatening or negative terms (e.g., clinical patients with disorders). How this literature contributes to our understanding of how media-related elevation (and perhaps hormones such as oxytocin) may predict both prosocial and potentially antisocial outcomes is unclear at this point. However, we note that some "inspirational" messages or campaigns may signal both compassion and threat simultaneously. For example, in a recent content-analytic study of Islamic extremist posts on Instagram, Frischlich (2020) found that inspiring portrayals (e.g., vastness, human connection, moral virtue) were also commonly featured. Certainly, more research on this topic is needed before reaching any definite conclusions, but we find it an intriguing direction, and particularly so in this time of increasing political fragmentation.

Feedback Loops

Whereas our discussion above outlines the numerous ways that inspiring media may elicit responses and outcomes that are typically not the ones hoped for, the final aspect of our

model may be decidedly more optimistic. Paths G and H are feedback loops leading from outcomes to both exposure (G) and to Person/Situation (H). In terms of exposure, we have discussed how some media-related outcomes (e.g., selective exposure, sharing, content creation) may lead to a heightened likelihood of exposure either for the viewers themselves or for other people, via sharing, in their social or information network (Path G). However, how these outcomes may lead to more enduring changes in terms of persons/situations regarding more stable traits or dispositions (e.g., empathy Path H) awaits our investigation (see Erickson et al., 2018).

Conclusion

The model of inspiring media is the first attempt to provide a synthesis of existing findings and predictions in the realm of positive media psychology. By examining the myriad potential outcomes, some of which that may be antithetical to goals of social good, we hope that our model will invite critique, revision, and, ultimately, a more nuanced framework by which we can understand users' responses to inspiring media. We believe that having a fuller and richer understanding of how we can use media to help us realize a more compassionate and just world is an important goal, and we look forward to learning and growing from the scholars who may be inspired to take up this calling.

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