



*Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 71, No. 1, 2015, pp. 106–122  
doi: 10.1111/josi.12099

## **Media-Induced Elevation as a Means of Enhancing Feelings of Intergroup Connectedness**

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*The majority of research on media counter-stereotyping of race/ethnicity has tended to employ positive portrayals or counter-stereotypical exemplars as a primary strategy in eliciting positive attitudes among White participants. In contrast, this article reports the results of an experiment on the unique role of affective responses to media messages as a mechanism in inducing greater feelings of connectedness with a diversity of racial/ethnic groups. Our focus is on the affective response of elevation specifically, which refers to feelings of being moved, touched, and inspired by images of people engaged in morally beautiful acts such as love, generosity, and kindness. Results show that the experience of elevation in*

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*response to inspiring videos was associated with heightened feelings of overlap between the self and humanity, with this overlap associated with greater feelings of connectedness with those from a diversity of racial/ethnic groups. This connection was also associated with more favorable attitudes.*

“Kid President”—the nickname for media personae Robby Novak—is an African American child comedian who has gained recent fame for his motivational and inspiring videos that have “gone viral” and have captured the hearts of millions of YouTube viewers across the world. In perhaps his most popular video, “A Pep Talk from Kid President to You” (viewed by over 33 million viewers on YouTube at the time of this writing), Kid President encourages viewers to aspire to their dreams, to care for one another, and to work together to make the world a better place (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-gQLqv9f4o>). Viewers have responded with an outpouring of enthusiasm, providing comments such as “Makes me feel good in the heart,” “This is your time to make a difference,” and “This is so inspiring! I cried while I laughed! I was so moved!” Indeed, the popularity of this video resulted in Kid President being invited by President Barak Obama to visit the White House to help launch the annual Easter Egg Roll.

User comments, such as those noted here, suggest that viewers experience feelings of tenderness, inspiration, and restored “faith in humanity.” Although only anecdotal, these responses appear to reflect feelings of connectedness with humankind per se—feelings that presumably transcend the viewer’s own ingroup to recognize the common hopes and needs that are present across demographic boundaries such as race, ethnicity, or culture. As one person commented, “I think the bottleneck in solving the world’s problems is not science or technology, but just us all getting along. I’m on your team. You’re on my team. I think that’s his core message.” But even if we are correct in inferring these viewers’ reactions, the specific characteristics of the video that engenders such responses are not readily identifiable. On the one hand, such responses may reflect that the video features a very positive and likable exemplar of an African American character. On the other hand, the responses may reflect the content of the message itself—that people need to believe in themselves and each other. Still yet, the responses may be most strongly predicted by the affective reactions that the video appears to elicit—feelings of being touched, moved, and inspired.

The purpose of this research is to examine the viability of this latter explanation—that affective responses to inspiring media messages give rise to heightened perceptions of connection with humanity that ultimately result in greater feelings of connectedness with a diversity of others that transcend racial and ethnic boundaries. Although this study appreciates the importance of specific media portrayals of race/ethnicity in reducing racial prejudice, in this article we test the unique role of elevating affect in heightening Whites’ feelings of connectedness with diverse others. We begin by examining how extant research has

frequently approached media efforts at counter-stereotyping, using this research as a basis for our interest in examining affect. We then turn to scholarship regarding elevation as a distinct and relevant emotional response. Subsequently, we apply the concept of elevation to issues regarding media and race/ethnicity, suggesting that media content that elicits elevating affect holds promise of creating feelings of closeness to humanity, which ultimately results in feelings of connectedness with a diversity of others.

### **Media and Counter-Stereotyping of Race/Ethnicity**

Media content is filled with exaggerated and destructive portrayals that provide viewers with a seemingly never-ending supply of negative examples of people of color, such as “African Americans as criminals,” “Arabs as terrorists,” and “Latinos as overly sexualized,” among others (Mastro, 2009; Tukachinsky, Mastro, & Yarchi, 2015). Because research on the harmful effects of media portrayals on racial attitudes has frequently examined these negative portrayals as catalysts for the development or priming of racial stereotypes, it stands to reason that many studies interested in counter-stereotyping have examined how positive depictions or exemplars may serve to diminish negative racial attitudes (Ramasubramanian, 2015).

Bodenhausen, Schwarz, Bless, and Wanke (1995) were among the earliest to examine the effects of counter-stereotypical exemplars. On the basis of three studies, these authors concluded that exposure to well-known exemplars of successful African Americans (e.g., Oprah Winfrey) results in a greater awareness of racial discrimination in society, but only if the exemplar is liked and the atypicality of the exemplar is not salient. Building on these results, more recent experimental research indicates that positive and archetypal media characterizations (over merely sympathetic or counter-stereotypical portrayals) are critical to reducing stereotypes and promoting more favorable intergroup outcomes (Mastro & Tukachinsky, 2011). More generally, Dasgupta and Greenwald (2001) reported that exposure to favorable depictions of African Americans (and negative depictions of Whites) not only diminished self-reported racial prejudice among White participants, but also reduced negative implicit (or automatic) attitudes as assessed via the Implicit Association Test (IAT).

With these notable studies in mind, we also recognize other studies suggesting that efforts at counter-stereotyping may face several challenges. For example, Holt’s (2013) research on crime-related counter-stereotyping implies that content characteristics in media messages other than race (e.g., a focus on crime) may overwhelm the effects of any counter-stereotypes that are also included. Further, Ramasubramanian and Oliver’s (2007) research suggests that media depictions of one racial group may result in “comparative stereotyping” of members of other groups. Specifically, these authors reported that exposure to news stories

about Asian Americans led to more hostile perceptions of African Americans. Finally, some earlier research shows that even when counter-stereotypes are salient, viewers may have a tendency to interpret the content in ways that sustain their existing racial attitudes nevertheless. In a now-classic study, Vidmar and Rokeach (1974) reported that viewers scoring high on a measure of racial prejudice interpreted the television program *All in the Family* as depicting the bigoted main character (Archie Bunker) as heroic, despite the show's intention of mocking the absurdity of racial prejudice.

Together, research using positive media exemplars of race and ethnicity to combat stereotyping shows both promise and challenges. Though some studies have been effective at reducing negative attitudes via favorable depictions, other studies have been less successful; in some cases failing to produce prosocial outcomes, and in others, even perpetuating and heightening negative attitudes about racial/ethnic groups. Further, even under conditions where counter-stereotypes are effective, the specific attributes of the messages that best predict positive outcomes are somewhat difficult to isolate. For example, the importance of viewers' liking of exemplars (Bodenhausen et al., 1995) suggests that media messages may be effective at increasing positive attitudes when they illustrate counter-stereotypes and/or elicit favorable affective responses. As a result of these issues, additional scholarship is clearly needed to identify media characteristics and audience responses that may optimize the likelihood of increasing positive attitudes toward a multitude of diverse groups—not just the one portrayed, and not at the expense of those not being featured. We approach this challenge by considering viewers' affective responses to entertainment specifically, and their experience of elevation in particular.

## Elevation

Jonathan Haidt first identified elevation as an other-praising moral emotion that is elicited when witnessing others engage in virtuous acts such as generosity, kindness, love, or selflessness (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Haidt, 2003). Haidt and his colleagues' research has shown that elevation is not only associated with unique mixed-affective states and physiological responses (e.g., tears, lump in the throat), but that it is also linked with heightened motivations to emulate virtuous acts by doing good for others or by being a better person (Schnall, Roper, & Fessler, 2010). In several studies, Haidt and other scholars have demonstrated that numerous types of media content are effective at eliciting elevation, including inspiring clips from television shows such as *Oprah Winfrey* (Schnall et al., 2010; Silvers & Haidt, 2008), news stories highlighting selflessness in the face of community tragedy (Aquino, McFerran, & Laven, 2011), and a variety of film depictions (Oliver, Hartmann, & Woolley, 2012b). Consequently, the appropriateness of

testing elevation in the context of media scholarship is well established (Oliver, Ash, & Woolley, 2012a).

Of particular importance to this study is that prior research has also shown that the experience of elevation is characterized by a feeling of closeness and perceived goodness of all of human kind (Haidt, 2003) and an openness to other people in general (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). For example, Schnall et al. (2010) reported that heightened elevation was associated with greater feelings of optimism about humanity. Likewise, Aquino et al. (2011) found that elevation was positively associated with more positive views of humanity in general, indicated by agreement with statements such as “The world is full of kindness and generosity,” and “People are really good” (p. 706). The notion that elevation can create greater feelings of optimism about and closeness with others is similar to Fredrickson’s (2001) broaden-and-build theory arguing that the experience of positive emotions results in more “inclusive social categorization and subsequently produces feelings of oneness” (Waugh & Fredrickson, 2006, p. 95).

### **Elevation and Racial Attitudes**

Research on elevation (and its resultant altruistic motivations and cognitions reflecting closeness with humanity) points to its applicability as a potentially effective means of eliciting positive attitudes toward people from a diversity of racial/ethnic backgrounds. Further, unlike extant scholarship on counter-stereotyping, research on elevation would imply that the trigger of elevating responses (e.g., an inspiring media clip) need not feature a specific racial or ethnic depiction, as the resultant feelings of elevation should elicit perceptions of closeness with humanity in general.

To date, only a handful of studies have examined the role of elevation (or related emotions) in enhancing positive attitudes toward outgroup members. Notable among these, Freeman, Aquino, and McFerran (2009) reported that elevation was successful in diminishing the negative impact of social dominance on Whites’ altruistic behaviors toward African American charities. Importantly, these findings were obtained despite the fact that the stimulus materials contained no African American characters.

Freeman et al. (2009) did not test for any mediating variables that might provide greater insights into the mechanisms at work, although related research suggests that self–other overlap and common group membership may be one potentially important variable to consider. For example, research on the common-group identity model (Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993) generally suggests that perceptions of outgroup members as similar to the self or as belonging to a same superordinate group are associated with more favorable attitudes and feelings of closeness (Craemer, 2008) and with lower feelings of threat (Riek, Mania, Gaertner, McDonald, & Lamoreaux, 2010). Additional scholarship

also implies that positive affect may heighten feelings of connection with outgroup members by broadening social categories, expanding self–other overlap, and enhancing feelings of shared group membership (Dovidio, Gaertner, Isen, & Lowrance, 1995; Fredrickson, 2013). Although research in this area has typically focused on emotions such as joy or happiness, this work points to the importance of affect (including elevation) as a potentially important means of enhancing feelings of connectedness. Further, whereas prior research has typically examined the role of affect in changing perceptions toward specific groups, races, or ethnicities (e.g., African Americans), we believe that elevation may result in enhanced feelings of connection with numerous diverse others given its relationship with perceptions of humanity in general.

### Summary and Hypotheses

Altogether, extant research on affective states, self–other overlap, and perceptions of outgroup members suggests that feelings of elevation may have important benefits in enhancing Whites' favorable feelings toward other racial/ethnic groups. By eliciting perceptions of self–other overlap via feelings of elevation, White participants should perceive a greater connection between themselves and a variety of outgroup members, thereby resulting in more favorable attitudes to a diversity of others.

To test this assertion, an experiment was conducted to examine the role of media-induced elevation on feelings of closeness with humanity and, thereby, closeness with a diversity of other races/ethnicities. Inspiring clips (designed to induce elevation), humorous clips (designed to induce positive affect), and a control condition, were employed to differentiate the role of elevation from positive affect. Figure 1 illustrates the model and paths examined. The first part of the model pertains to the effects of media exposure on feelings of elevation and accompanying perceptions regarding optimism in humanity (what we label as “shared human goodness”). The second part of the model pertains to the downstream effects of responses to media messages related to more global perceptions regarding self–other overlap and feelings toward diverse others.

The first hypothesis (H1) predicts that inspiring videos will elicit greater feelings of elevation than will the humorous and control videos (paths a and b). Because we were interested in examining the role of elevation specifically, above and beyond any positive affect that may be associated with viewing inspiring videos, we included both elevation and positive affect as predictors, with our second hypothesis (H2) stating that elevation will be associated with greater perceived human goodness (path e), and will be a stronger predictor than will positive affect (path f). Essentially, H1 and H2 provide a test of the effectiveness of the experimental manipulation.

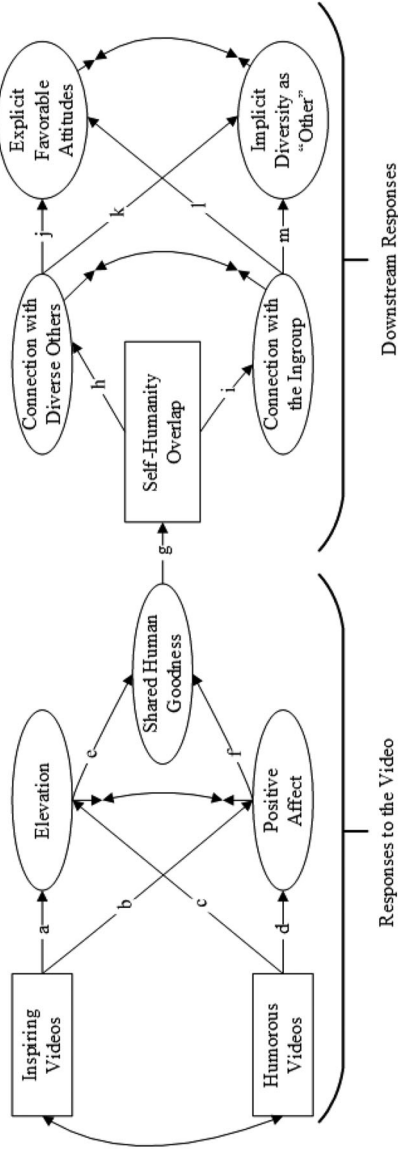


Fig. 1. Proposed model.

After providing their responses to the video, participants reported their more general feelings and attitudes about social groups. Specifically, the third hypothesis (H3) predicts that heightened feelings of shared human goodness in response to the video specifically will be positively associated with greater perceived overlap between the self and humanity (path g).

The more global self-humanity overlap was then employed as a predictor of more specific variables regarding race/ethnicity. We reasoned that self-humanity overlap reflects a greater expansion of the self and inclusiveness in social boundaries, leading us to predict our fourth hypothesis (H4) that self-humanity overlap will be positively associated with feelings of connection with diverse others (path h). To examine if self–other overlap has any unique association with connection to diverse groups (which would imply an expansion of the self), or if it is also associated with connection to the ingroup (which may be antithetical to self-expansion), we proposed a research question (RQ1) to ask if self-humanity overlap will be positively associated with feelings of connection to the ingroup (path i).

Finally, as a means of verifying that our measure of connection with diversity reflected more favorable attitudes toward diverse others specifically, our fifth and final hypothesis (H5) predicted that feelings of connection with diversity will be associated with more favorable explicit attitudes (path j) and with a decreased implicit association of “White with Self” and “Racial/Ethnic Minorities with Other” (path k). In contrast, it is unclear how ingroup connection would operate, as connection with the ingroup may simply be unrelated to feelings about diverse others, or it may signify feelings of superiority or social dominance. Consequently, our second research question (RQ2) asked how feelings of connection with the ingroup would predict explicit and implicit attitudes (paths l and m).

## Method

### *Participants and Procedures*

Two-hundred and fifty-eight undergraduate students completed the experiment in exchange for a nominal amount of extra credit. As this study examined the role of elevation in affecting Whites’ attitudes toward racial and ethnic outgroup members, data from participants who reported “White” as their only racial/ethnic group ( $N = 197$ ) were employed in the analyses. The final sample was 58% female and 42% male with a median age of 19.

### *Design and Materials*

This study employed a three-way between-subjects experimental design in which participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: an inspiring



condition, a humorous condition, or a control condition. The experiment was presented online using Millisecond Software (Inquisit, 2012). Participants in the inspiring condition watched one of two videos: a video about a man offering “free hugs” to passersby on a pedestrian street, or a video depicting street musicians from various locations playing the same song simultaneously. Participants in the humorous condition also watched one of two videos: an improvisational comedy troupe walking “invisible dogs” on leashes throughout a city, or an improvisational comedy troupe depicting ghosts and ghost busters in a public city library. Participants in the control condition watched a nature video about parrots. All videos were brief, lasting less than five minutes. Both inspiring and humorous videos contained a variety of characters from different races, though none focused on any particular racial or ethnic minority. Affective measures were employed as verification of the intended manipulations.

### *Measures*

Elevation in response to the video was assessed by having participants indicate how much they felt five different affective states while viewing: moved, touched, inspired, compassionate, and tender (see Oliver et al., 2012b). Responses were recorded on scales ranging from 1 (*Not at All*) to 7 (*Very Much*), ( $\alpha = .96$ ). Three additional items were employed to assess positive responses to humor specifically: humored, amused, and entertained ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

Six items taken from Piedmont’s (1999) universality scale, and Phillips and Ziller’s (1997) universal orientation scale assessed the extent to which participants agreed that the video encouraged heightened feelings of shared human goodness. Example items included [The video made me believe that . . . ] “There is a certain beauty in everyone,” and “On a higher level, all of us share a common bond.” Responses were recorded on 7-point scales ( $\alpha = .91$ ).

A modified version of Aron, Aron, and Smollan’s (1992) scale measuring the inclusion of others in the self was employed to assess feelings of connectedness with humanity. The original scale asks participants to select from a series of increasingly overlapping Venn diagrams to indicate how close they feel toward a specific individual. In the modified version, the specific “other” individual was modified such that participants indicated their feelings of closeness toward “humankind.”

To assess the primary dependent variable—feelings of connection to diverse others—participants were asked to rate their perceived similarity to a host of different groups (e.g., Americans, children, elderly people) (see Oveis, Horberg, & Keltner, 2010). Ratings were recorded on scales ranging from 1 (*Not at All Similar*) to 7 (*Very Similar*). Ratings of connection to diverse others consisted of ratings of similarity with five different groups: Asians, Latinos, African Americans,

Muslims, and Blacks ( $\alpha = .89$ ). Ratings of connection to the ingroup consisted of similarity ratings with Whites and Americans ( $r = .49$ ).

Finally, two additional measures were employed to assess explicit and implicit attitudes. Feeling thermometers were utilized to measure explicit attitudes toward diverse others, consisting of ratings of Asians, African Americans, Muslims, and immigrants on scales ranging from 0 (*Very Cold*) to 100 (*Very Warm*) ( $\alpha = .91$ ). Slight variations in the specific groups represented in this measure from the prior ratings of connection to diverse others were employed to avoid redundancy and to reduce demand effects. To assess implicit attitudes regarding connection with diverse others, a modified version of the race-specific IAT was employed (Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998). In contrast to a typical race-specific IAT that assesses automatic associations of White with “good” and African American with “bad,” the modified version in this study was designed to assess automatic associations of White with “self” and racial/ethnic outgroup members with “other.” In a typical race-specific IAT, participants categorize a series of faces in terms of a specific race (e.g., White, African American), whereas this study presented a diversity of races/ethnicities and asked participants to categorize them in terms of “White” and “Not White.” Additionally, rather than categorize words in terms of “good” and “bad,” participants rated a series of words (e.g., me, them, my, their) in terms of “self” and “other.” Higher scores on this modified IAT represent a stronger association of the self with White, and racial/ethnic diversity with “others.”

## Results

All hypotheses were tested via structural equation modeling using maximum likelihood estimates. Modeling was done in two steps. The first step allowed all of the variables to covary as means of testing the measurement portion of the model. The second step then specified the predicted model to test the structural portion. The first step revealed a good fit for the measurements in our model,  $\chi^2(336) = 546.69$ ,  $p < .001$ , comparative fit index = .94, root mean square error of approximation = .06 (90% CI: .05–.07), standardized root mean square residual = .06. The second step revealed a good fit for the hypothesized model overall,  $\chi^2(364) = 569.99$ ,  $p < .001$ , comparative fit index = .94, root mean square error of approximation = .05 (90% CI: .05–.06), standardized root mean square residual = .06. A  $\chi^2$ -difference test between the two models provided further evidence for the fit of the structural portion of our hypothesized model,  $\chi^2(28) = 23.30$ ,  $p = .74$ . Figure 2 reports the structural weights for all of the paths tested in this model.

Our first hypothesis (H1) predicted that inspiring videos would elicit greater elevation than would either the humorous or control videos. Consistent with this hypothesis, our model showed that inspiring videos were associated with significantly higher levels of elevation compared to the control ( $\beta = .78$ ,  $p < .001$ ),

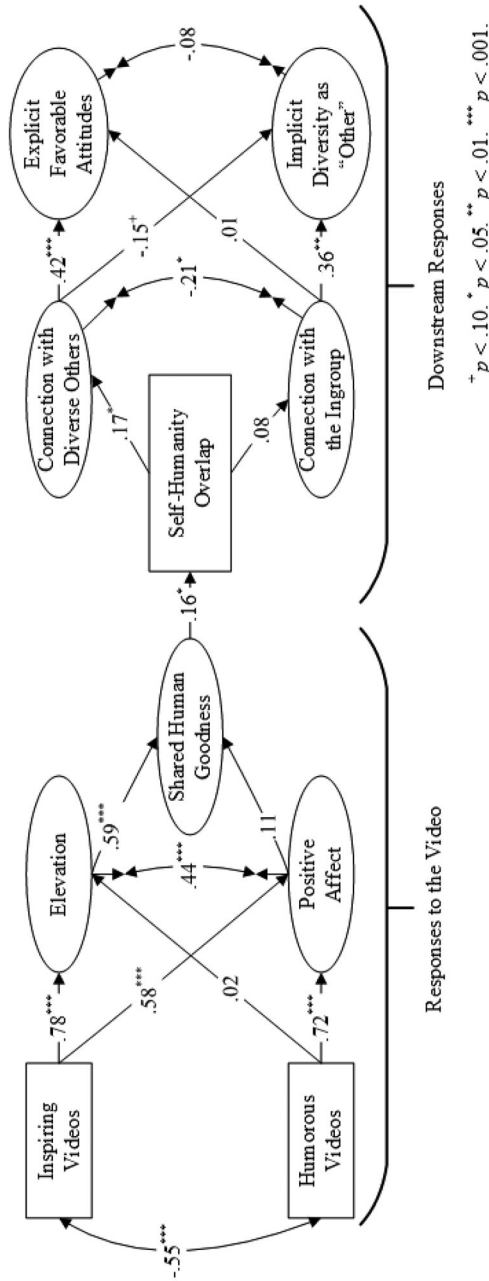


Fig. 2. Final model.

whereas humorous videos were not associated with heightened elevation ( $\beta = .02$ , ns). The analysis of affect also revealed that although humorous videos were associated with positive affect as one might expect ( $\beta = .72$ ,  $p < .001$ ), inspiring videos were also associated with positive affect ( $\beta = .58$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, as predicted by H2, heightened perceptions of shared goodness was significantly predicted by elevation ( $\beta = .59$ ,  $p < .001$ ), but not by positive affect ( $\beta = .11$ , ns).

Consistent with H3 and H4, enhanced feelings of shared human goodness were positively associated with perceived self-humanity overlap ( $\beta = .16$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and that overlap was, in turn, associated with elevated levels of connection with diverse others ( $\beta = .17$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In answer to our first research question (RQ1), self-humanity overlap was unrelated to feelings of connection to the ingroup ( $\beta = .08$ , ns), suggesting that overlap involves an expanded sense of self that enhances connection to diverse others that might not be perceived as part of one's ingroup.

The fifth hypothesis (H5) addressed how connection with diverse others would be associated with explicit and implicit attitudes. In partial support of this hypothesis, connection with diverse others was associated with significantly more favorable explicit attitudes ( $\beta = .42$ ,  $p < .001$ ), though it only approached conventional levels of significance in predicting a decreased implicit association of the "self with White" and "others with racial/ethnic outgroup members" ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $p = .08$ ). Additionally, in answer to RQ2, the model showed that connection to the ingroup was unrelated to favorable explicit attitudes to diverse others ( $\beta = .01$ , ns), though ingroup connection was significantly associated with a greater implicit association of self-White/diversity others ( $\beta = .36$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

A final set of analyses examined the indirect effects of the videos on the intervening and dependent variables employing bootstrapping techniques with 2000 bootstrap samples (see Hayes, 2013). These analyses showed that inspiring videos, via responses of elevation, were indirectly related to heightened feelings of shared human goodness ( $B = 1.33$ , CI: 0.96–1.76,  $p < .001$ ), greater perceptions of self-humanity overlap ( $B = 0.21$ , CI: 0.03–0.43,  $p < .05$ ), enhanced feelings of connection with diverse others ( $B = 0.03$ , CI: 0.00–0.11,  $p < .05$ ), and more favorable explicit attitudes ( $B = 0.15$ , CI: 0.01–0.67,  $p < .05$ ). There were no significant indirect effects associated with feelings of ingroup connection or with implicit attitudes, nor were there any indirect effects of the humorous videos or via positive affective responses.

## Discussion

The purpose of this research was to examine the unique role of elevating affect as a means of enhancing Whites' positive attitudes toward others from different racial and ethnic groups. Our experiment largely supports the idea that

media-induced feelings of elevation and its consequent perceptions of the shared goodness of all of humanity appear to enhance feelings of greater connection with and favorable attitudes toward diverse others. Although elevation was associated with greater perceived overlap between the self and humankind overall, this self-human overlap was predictive of greater connection with diverse others (in particular) rather than to connection with ingroup members. These findings are consistent with the idea that affect can play a consequential role in expanding the sense of self to include others who may be dissimilar, thereby creating more favorable orientations.

These findings contribute notably to the growing body of literature examining the potential for media exposure to discourage stereotyping and enhance intergroup harmony. Rather than employing stimuli that feature positive portrayals of a specific race or ethnicity, this study used stimuli that elicited favorable impressions about all of humanity. Although the videos did include diverse characters, no particular group functioned as the target of favorable portrayals. Second, rather than examining participants' perceptions of a specific racial or ethnic group, this study examined Whites' perceptions of a diversity of races/ethnicities. In so doing, we were better able to capture the theorized notions of a self–other overlap (and its consequent expanded sense of self) thought to serve as key mechanisms in this process.

Of course, findings highlighting the important prosocial implications of elevating media do not undermine the importance of specific, positive media portrayals. Rather, we hope that our research can contribute to this body of literature by suggesting additional variables that may help to address some of the challenges reported in previous research on counter-stereotypes in media. Perhaps by eliciting favorable perceptions of all of humanity, scholars may help to address problems associated with comparative stereotyping. Likewise, by placing a greater emphasis on affect rather than on particular salient portrayals of race, viewers may be less likely to engage in selective perception and reinterpretation of race-related portrayals.

We also hope that future research will expand upon this area of scholarship to provide further specificity into the processes at play in this context. For example, the videos used in this study did feature portrayals of people of color, though these portrayals were not the focus of any of the videos. As such, it may be possible that downstream effects on racial attitudes of inspiring videos and the elevation it elicits happen only when the videos feature a diversity of portrayals. That said, we believe that were these diverse portrayals solely responsible for any immediate responses to the video or any downstream effects, there would have been no differences between the inspiring and humorous videos, as both contained such portrayals. Accordingly, future scholarship would benefit from examination of the combination of racial/ethnic portrayals with elating affect to determine the unique and combined influence of these two content features.

We also encourage future research to build on our conceptualization of feelings of closeness with “diverse others.” Our efforts at assessing this notion are an initial attempt to account for perceptions about diverse others (as opposed to specific, target outgroups). Accordingly, greater development and further validation is required. It is conceivable that these measures reflect a broadened sense of self that may include increased connection to diverse others or a more diluted connection to one’s own ingroup.

We also hope that future research will examine possible moderating variables that may be consequential to the potential of media elevation to affect feelings of connection. In a recent study, Diessner, Iyer, Smith, and Haidt (2013) identified a number of personality variables that were predictive of an individuals’ likelihood of engagement with moral beauty, including a greater salience of the moral dimension of care, higher levels of agreeableness, and with a reported love of all of humanity. Likewise, Aquino et al. (2011) reported that moral identity was an important moderator of the experience of elevation. These studies point to additional variables that may help fine-tune our understanding of when, how, and under what circumstances elevating media promote positive intergroup dynamics.

Future scholarship may also benefit from further considerations of the social implications of these findings. For example, educational efforts at counter-stereotyping may fruitfully consider how inspiring people to feel connection with all of humanity may ultimately result in more favorable responses to a diversity of individuals rather than any specific ethnicity or race. In addition, given that the videos in this study were taken from a popular user-generated streaming video site, future scholars may find it useful to examine how newer media technologies may serve as effective platforms for presenting messages for social change.

Of course, this research is not without its limitations. For example, we used self-report measures, some of which had somewhat lower levels of reliability. We also employed a student sample that may be more homogeneous than a broader population. In addition, we assessed measures concurrently rather than over time. Relatedly, our research did not assess how long affective responses and associated feelings may have persisted. On the one hand, emotions are generally conceptualized as being rather short-lived, so we may expect that any influence of media exposure may be unfortunately fleeting. On the other hand, there is at least some research that points to the idea that elevation may produce longer-term outcomes (Cox, 2010).

Finally, we also believe that additional scholarship is needed to test the range of effects of exposure to elevating media including its potentially undesirable outcomes. For example, it is possible that Whites’ ratings of greater perceived similarity between themselves and a diversity of other races/ethnicities may reflect perceptions of others accommodating or conforming to White/dominant norms. If this is the case, exposure has the potential to unwittingly produce paternalistic responses akin to benevolent racism (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002). Ash

(2013) made a similar argument in her research on “White savior films” (e.g., *The Blind Side*). She argued that although many White viewers find these types of films elevating, these types of media portrayals potentially serve to increase feelings of moral superiority and mask the extent of racism as a continued problem in today’s society. Similarly, these films may run the risk of contributing to colorblindness, denial of discrimination, and reduced support for activism and social change (e.g., see Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2009).

Despite limitations, the current approach to using media as a means of increasing favorable connection to a diversity of others takes a unique tack that provides new avenues by which scholars and media producers may attempt to use media for purposes of social good. By elevating us to see the moral beauty in everyone, perhaps inspiring media messages hold the promise of encouraging us to celebrate our diversity while at the same time recognizing our shared humanity.

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