“I Need to Believe That Something Extraordinary Is Possible”: Effects of Transcendent Media Experiences on the Destigmatization of Mental Illness

Stephanie Whitenack

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_dissertations

Part of the Mass Communication Commons

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Mass Communication

by
Stephanie Lynn Whitenack
B.A., The Ohio State University, 2012
M.A., University of Cincinnati, 2015
August 2019
To my mom and dad, you have served as my inspiration since I was little and have provided in me the strength to follow my dreams even in times of self-doubt. I emulate your work ethic and will continue to embody your unfaltering spirits. As the greats say, “It's a long way to the top if you wanna rock 'n' roll.”
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the incredible group of individuals who have supported and encouraged me through this inconceivable journey. First, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Meghan Sanders, Dr. Chun Yang, Dr. Hyojung Park, Dr. Martin Johnson, and Dr. Boryung Ju. Your encouragement, guidance, and support have been invaluable throughout this journey.

Dr. Sanders, you have not only become a great mentor but also a friend. My successes, not only as a student but as a scholar, are due in large part because of your guidance and expertise in an area I have become very passionate about. You have been a constant light in my times of doubt and have carried me through. Your tenacity as a scholar and your kindness as a person is something I hope to emulate as an academic.

Dr. Yang, although you entered Manship mid-way through my time here, it has been wonderful to get to know you and your work. Your inquisitiveness is something I admire, and your kindness cannot be matched. I look forward to your work as an academic and I thank you for your encouragement and faith in my work.

Dr. Park, thank you for your invaluable feedback and support during this process. You have been a friendly face in times of stress and were always willing to help. Thank you for taking the time to assist me in making my work stronger and for making me a better scholar.

Dr. Johnson and Dr. Ju, thank you for taking the time out of your incredibly busy schedules to support my dissertation process. You both have been wonderful additions to my committee, and I look forward to watching you progress through your careers.
For my family and friends, I cannot express the appreciation I have for your love and support throughout this roller-coaster ride. To my twin sister Allison and my older sister Sarah, you both inspire me every day to be better in all aspects of my life. Your support, encouragement, and smiles from afar have been a driving force within me during my time in graduate school.

To all of my grandparents, thank you for your persistent belief in my journey as a person but also as a graduate student. At times it felt like you had more faith in me than I had in myself. The distance kept us apart, but you all were always with me.

Nia, Brian, and Martina thank you for your friendship at my time here at Manship. Being hundreds of miles away from home has its disadvantages when trying to make friends. All of you have helped me through this journey and I cannot thank you enough for your care and support.

Finally, to my husband Kevin, no one has ever believed in me the way you do. I met you when I first entered graduate school and I don’t know if I could have finished this journey without you. You have loved and encouraged me unconditionally through the good and bad times. I hope I’ve made you proud. This dissertation wouldn’t have been possible without the love and support of you, Simba, Nola, and Zeus, the best pets an owner could ever ask for. Thank you!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................ iii

LIST OF TABLES .................................................................................................................... vii

LIST OF FIGURES .................................................................................................................. ix

ABSTRACT .............................................................................................................................. x

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................... 1
   Brief Overview of the Problem .......................................................................................... 2
   Significance of the Study ................................................................................................. 5
   Purpose of the Study ....................................................................................................... 8

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW ................................................................................... 9
   Stereotypes and Cognition .............................................................................................. 9
   Entertainment and Intergroup Social Change ................................................................ 14
   Transcendent Media Experiences .................................................................................. 23
   Transcendent Media Experiences and the Destigmatization of Mental Illness ............ 27
   The Role of Connectedness and Compassionate Love for Others ............................... 28
   The Role of Self-Transcendent Emotions, Connectedness, and Compassion Love for Others .................................................................................................................. 32
   Elicitors of Self-Transcendent Media .......................................................................... 33

CHAPTER 3. METHODS .................................................................................................... 40
   Sampling and Recruitment ............................................................................................ 40
   Experimental Stimuli ..................................................................................................... 40
   Pilot Study One .............................................................................................................. 43
   Pilot Study Two ............................................................................................................ 46
   Main Study .................................................................................................................... 49
   Descriptive Results ....................................................................................................... 51

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS .................................................................................................... 58
   Hypothesis Testing ........................................................................................................ 58
   Within- and Between-Group Analyses .......................................................................... 62
   Predictors of Destigmatization of Mental Illness .......................................................... 68

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION ............................................................................................... 70
   The Role of Transcendent Emotions on the Destigmatization of Mental Illness .......... 70
   Relationship Between Transcendent Elicitors Within Transcendent Portrayals of Mental Illness .................................................................................................................. 73
   The Role of Transcendent Elicitors on Predicting Destigmatization of Mental illness ......................................................................................................................... 78
   Implications .................................................................................................................... 81
   Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research ......................................................... 84
Summary and Conclusion.................................................................................................86
REFERENCES .....................................................................................................................88
APPENDIX A. PILOT STUDY FILM SYNOPSIS ..............................................................95
APPENDIX B. MAIN STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE .............................................................97
APPENDIX C. CORRELATION MATRIX ........................................................................101
APPENDIX D. CONSENT FORM .....................................................................................102
APPENDIX E. IRB APPROVAL ......................................................................................104
VITA ................................................................................................................................105
# LIST OF TABLES

1. Pilot Study 1: Descriptives of Attention Check for Stimulus Videos ........................................43

2. Pilot Study 1: Descriptives of Paired-Sample t-test for Direct and Modeled Elicitors for Stimulus Videos. ..............................................................................................................45

3. Pilot Study 1: Within-Subjects Differences for Manipulation Check (Overall Transcendence) .....................................................................................................................................46

4. Main Study: Within-Subjects Differences for Self-Transcendent Emotions, Connectedness, and Compassion ..................................................52

5. Main study: Within-Subjects Differences for Manipulation Check (Overall Transcendence) ..................................................................................................................53

6. Familiarity with Someone with a Mental Illness Differences for Self-Transcendent Emotions, Connectedness, Compassion, and Destigmatization ........................................55

7. Familiarity with Having a Mental Illness: Differences for Self-Transcendent Emotions, Connectedness, Compassion, and Destigmatization ................................................................55

8. Differences for Having Seen *The Soloist* and *A Beautiful Mind* for Self-Transcendent Emotions, Connectedness, Compassion, and Destigmatization ................................56

9. Gender Differences for Self-Transcendent Emotions, Connectedness, Compassion, and Destigmatization ........................................................................................................57

10. Self-Transcendence as a Predictor of Destigmatization of Mental Illness ................................58

11. Self-Transcendence as a Predictor of Connectedness ................................................................59

12. Self-Transcendence as a Predictors of Compassionate Love for Others ................................60

13. Connectedness as a Predictor of Compassionate Love for Others ........................................60

14. Connectedness as a Predictor of Destigmatization of Mental Illness ....................................61

15. Compassionate Love for Others as a Predictor of Destigmatization of Mental Illness ....61

16. Self-transcendent Emotions: Video X Type of Elicitor ................................................................63

17. Connectedness: Video X Type of Elicitor ...............................................................................65

18. Compassionate Love for Others: Video X Type of Elicitor .....................................................67
19. Type of Elicitor: Means and Standard Errors of the Variable Destigmatization of Mental Illness

20. Predictors of Destigmatization of Mental Illness

21. Summary of Intercorrelations, Means, and Standard Deviation for Scores on Self-Transcendence, Connectedness, Compassionate Love for Others, and Destigmatization
LIST OF FIGURES

1. Self-Transcendent Emotions: Video X Type of Elicitor.................................63
2. Feelings of Connectedness: Video X Type of Elicitor ........................................65
3. Feelings of Compassionate Love for Others: Video X Type of Elicitor .................67
ABSTRACT

Entertainment psychology is moving toward an area of study where being entertained means experiencing pleasure and/or satisfying fundamental, meaningful needs as human beings (Vorderer, 2011). Now, scholars are examining meaningful media experiences and a recent subset known as transcendent media experiences. Transcendent media experiences are defined as experiences that elicit mixed affective states that can heighten feelings of elevation, compassion, and connectedness that lead to more prosocial motivations. These subjective experiences of meaningfulness can inspire universality by cultivating desires to overcome intergroup hostility (Oliver et al., 2018).

Much is known about the cognitive processes that contribute to lessening social distance toward outgroups and combatting stereotyped perceptions. What is less known, are the effects of emotional mechanisms involved in more positive intergroup interactions. It is possible that, through narratives designed to emphasize transcendence, self-reflectiveness, and connectedness, individuals may come to feel more strongly connected to outgroups that have historically been marginalized. The purpose of the study was to examine if transcendent media experiences have the ability to reduce stigma surrounding mental illness and engender more prosocial attitudes toward people with mental illness. This study also assessed how different elicitors of transcendent media representations may promote social inclusion toward people with mental illness.

A 2 (Type of Elicitor) X 2 (Message Repetition) mixed experimental design was used (N=147). Results indicate that self-transcendent emotions elicited by transcendent media experiences do not act alone. Feelings of connectedness and compassionate love for others, that are predicted by transcendent emotions, play a substantial role the destigmatization of mental
illness. Self-transcendent experiences may be heightened depending on type of transcendent elicitor present, but also the characteristics within the entertainment narrative. Witnessing characters’ reactions of self-transcendence may cause a shift in perspective that encourages reflection of one’s own behaviors and beliefs about their connectedness with humanity. Nonetheless, self-transcendent media experiences engender motivations to initiate compassion and companionship toward others that are a part of a traditionally stigmatized group, thus initiating the destigmatization process.

This is the first study to examine attitudinal outcomes associated with self-transcendent media experiences and the destigmatization process specific to mental illness. These findings might stimulate future investigation within the specific elicitors of transcendent media and the momentary affective mechanisms that lead to more positive attitudes toward stigmatized groups.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Historically, scholars have examined portrayals of mental illness in entertainment media that contribute to the stigmatization of the group (Angermeyer & Matschinger, 2003). There have been few studies that examine the potential positive effects of meaningful or inspirational portrayals of mental illness in entertainment media. Entertainment can be used as a vehicle to incorporate educational messages in popular media which discusses social, political, or health issues that positively influence awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors (i.e. Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Slater & Rouner, 2002). Intentional placements of prosocial messages within a narrative are used to disseminate ideas to engender behavioral and social change. Narrative persuasion techniques engage audiences within storylines with the intent of influencing attitudes and behaviors (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). These efforts result in audiences learning about a specific issue, health behavior, or ways to interact with groups they may not regularly encounter.

Within a social context, entertainment media has the ability to reduce stigma surrounding specific mental health issues, which have important implications for both public stigma as well as self-stigma. For example, Ritterfeld and Jin (2006) found that accurate and empathetic movie portrayals of mental illness increased knowledge and influenced stigma reduction. While the study successfully influenced knowledge acquisition, attitude change only occurred when the entertainment narrative was combined with an informative supplement at the conclusion. As more contemporary entertainment represents mental illness accurately—featuring storylines that are sympathetic to the struggles associated with a mental disorder and the social consequences involved (i.e. Silver Linings Playbook), it is important to understand the effects of positive or inspirational portrayals of mental illness (Ritterfeld & Jin, 2006). There is a need to analyze how entertainment media, exemplifying the human condition as it relates to mental illness, contributes
to reducing stigma surrounding mental disorders. The reduction of public and self-stigma is an important means to increase treatment participation for those who suffer from mental illnesses as well as creating more inclusive social environments (Rusch, Angermeyer, & Corrigan, 2005).

**Brief Overview of the Problem**

This study has practical implications within the context of mental illness representations in entertainment experiences in light of entertainment organizations “attempting” to become more inclusive. While prime-time television shows like *This Is Us* and *A Million Little Things* showcase characters with mental illness and the struggles associated with a disorder, these shows are less common in terms of representing a more diverse cast in popular media. According to Smith, Choueiti, Pieper, Case, and Choi (2018), there have been no meaningful changes in the depictions of leading characters with disabilities. In their annual report, the authors found that only 2.5% of all characters were depicted with a disability across the 100 most popular movies of 2017. Of the 2.5%, only 26.8% of all characters with disabilities were classified as having a mental disability, which included examples of characters with dissociative identity disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or amnesia.

The underrepresentation and absence of accurate portrayals in entertainment media can create potentially harmful effects on attitudes toward stigmatized groups, specifically mental illness. Media effects research has provided ample attention to negative depictions of mental illness in entertainment media. These depictions are important to discuss when considering how individuals form stereotypes and how they contribute to the subsequent consequences (i.e. increased social distance) that people with mental illness may face. In a frequently cited study of the Cultural Indicators Project, Signorelli (1989) found that over 70% of mentally ill characters in entertainment hurt or kill, as well as become victims of violence. According to Diefenbach
and West (2007) media disproportionately depict characters with mental illness as violent criminals who are multiple offenders and inherently have a negative impact on society.

Interestingly, findings also indicated that audiences who view these representations on screen do not believe that these portrayals affect the public’s perceptions of people with mental illness. However, subsequent studies on agenda-setting have shown that regardless of factual information from an expert about mental illness in regard to violence, there were less positive attitudes and a sense of dangerousness associated with mental illness (Wilson, Ballman, & Buczek, 2016). Negative images of mental illness, particularly when paired with violence, can perpetuate fear of the entire community of people with a mental disorder (Wilson, Ballman, & Buczek, 2016). Further, in a content analysis of 983 characters of prime-time crime dramas, Parrott and Parrott (2015) found that characters with mental illness in entertainment are consistently portrayed as violent criminals, however, appearance and social standing were more ambiguous.

Work in this area suggests that mental illness may be a hidden disorder because a significant portion of the population does not look ill and may “mask” psychological symptoms (Grace & Christensen, 2007). However, when mental illness as an attribute is attached to an individual who is seen as “normal” in appearance, it could potentially have implications for treatment and social connectedness with that individual. According to Corrigan and Watson (2002), people who fear being labeled as mentally ill will be less likely to seek treatment because of the stigmatizing label attached to their illness. The subsequent self-stigma and fear of rejection by others lead many to not pursue treatment for themselves (Corrigan & Watson, 2002). When representations of mental illness in the media consistently appear as negative, dangerous, violent, or unpredictable, society is more likely to perceive the entire community as such.
The way in which people conceptualize attitudes and opinions are reflected in their predispositions and biases toward an issue. While this process can operate unintentionally, they color every aspect of an individuals’ evaluation, and once an attitude is formed, a mental representation of it is stored in memory (Eagly & Chaiken, 1995). Oliver et al. (2017) state that our cognitions act as nodes in a network and as nodes are primed, they activate and spread to other nodes within our cognitive framework. As a result, people will be likely to interpret ambiguous stimuli through a lens of primed elements. For example, if an individual encounters another with a mental illness they are likely to base their evaluation of that person on what they know about mental illness, either through interpersonal or mediated contact. Shortcuts are then activated to make a quick assessment about the person with mental illness that is colored by those primed pieces of information whether they are accurate or not.

Similarly, Tversky, and Kahneman’s (1973) availability heuristic posits that individuals form judgments of frequency, likelihood, and typicality the basis with which relevant instances come to mind. When people are repetitively primed by the media that mental illness equates to danger or violence, their cognitive thought processes are more likely to associate mental illness with violence which can increase social distance and more negative feelings toward that group. For example, Sieff (2003) found that framing mental illness consisted of: 1) presenting a problem definition in which people with mental illness are violent, 2) a diagnosis of cause in that criminal behavior is due to mental illness, 3) a moral judgment implying people with mental illnesses are not capable of taking care of themselves, and 4) remedies that suggest people with mental illness should be jailed if they fail to go to treatment. All of these framing tactics, either intentional or unintentional, affect the way the public conceptualizes mental illness within the community and leads to an authoritarian ideology to “deal” with people who suffer from a
mental illness that can affect not only social interactions but also health policies (Klin & Lemish, 2008). For example, Angermeyer and Schulze (2001) found that negative public attitudes toward people with mental illness can undermine attempts of mental health advocates to deny the connection between mental illness and violence and attempts to reduce the stigma surrounding these disorders. Negative perceptions of mental illness can be detrimental as the number of people being diagnosed within the population increases each year (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2015).

Considering one in five adults in the United States experiences a mental illness every year, and one in twenty-five adults experience a severe mental illness demonstrates the underrepresentation of mental illness in entertainment media (National Alliance on Mental Illness, 2015). Klin and Lemish (2008) offer a recommendation that the best types of entertainment messages, with educational value, are those that have the ability to bring those with mental illness and the public together. While there are different depictions of mental illness within entertainment (i.e. documentaries, dramas, comedies), transcendent media experiences may have a unique ability to accurately depict mental illness on screen but do so in a way that could make audiences engage in self-reflection and extend compassion to others with mental illness. Entertainment experiences that elicit feelings of transcendence beyond the self to allow connections and compassion with others could promote more social inclusion toward people with mental illness.

**Significance of the Study**

As entertainment organizations “attempt” to move in a direction of more inclusivity within depictions of disability, studies are needed to examine how representations of mental illness promote a more prosocial world. In recent years, scholars examining how inspirational
media can create positive, meaningful experiences that translate into more prosocial attitudes has expanded exponentially (Oliver & Raney, 2011; Oliver et al. 2018). Meaningful media involves complex affective responses that represent mixed emotions “characterized by words such as touched, moved, tender, or poignant” that tend to be associated with higher levels of effortful processing (Oliver et al. 2018, p. 382). While this type of media is idiosyncratic and open to interpretation, it has common themes including portrayals of moral virtue, the human condition, and purpose in life (Oliver et al., 2018).

Scholars use the term meaningful media experiences to reflect the subjectivity of experiences that expand human understanding. What is meaningful or moving for one person may not be for another, and the intricacies that make up a meaningful media experience are still unclear as scholars attempt to create an exhaustive inventory of what occurs during these experiences (i.e. Oliver & Raney, 2011; Janicke, Raney, Dale, & Oliver, unpublished).

Under the umbrella term of meaningful media experiences, transcendent media experiences have become a topic of interest for scholars who study stereotypes because of its foundation in a “universalist perspective and recognition of self-in-other and other-in-self” (Oliver et al., 2018, p. 381). Self-transcendence arises when individuals recognize in themselves that they are a part of larger, shared humanity and appreciate the potential, values, and needs of others (Oliver et al., 2018). Subsequently, these findings have given impetus for further research in the area, with the inclusion of this study, to understand the relationship between transcendent media experiences and the reduction of stigma, specifically surrounding mental illness. Recent studies have shown that feelings of elevation, elicited by transcendent media, have a positive effect on the destigmatization of persons with a disability (Bartsch, Oliver, Nitsch, & Scherr, 2018).
Exposure to media that elicit elevation is associated with heightened perceptions of universal orientation, which leads to more favorable attitudes toward stereotyped groups (Kramer et al., 2017). Specifically, elevation is a “response to acts of moral beauty in which we feel as though we have become (for a moment) less selfish, and we want to act accordingly” (Algoe & Haidt, 2009, p. 2). Scholars contend that the more intensely people experience elevation, the more they perceive humans as equal and open up to others (Kramer et al., 2017; Bartsch, Oliver, Nitsch, & Scherr, 2018). As a distinct but similar affective response, self-transcendent emotions are associated with heightened levels of selflessness that extends to the furtherance of some greater cause, promoting compassion and prosocial motivations (Oliver et al. 2018). While Kramer et al. (2017) has established a link between elevation and more favorable attitudes toward stereotyped groups, studies have yet to examine the link between self-transcendent experiences and more positive attitudes toward stereotyped groups.

Not only are experiences of self-transcendence within a general sense important when considering transcendent media experiences, but so are the type of transcendent themes or elicitors that play a role in how audiences experience self-transcendence in specific ways that promote prosociality (Dale et al., 2017). According to Dale et al. (2017), transcendent elicitors are mediated representations that elicit emotions associated with self-transcendence. Both direct forms (e.g. seeing moral beauty in the environment) and modeled elicitors (e.g. witnessing others experience moral beauty in the environment) build trait transcendence that promotes appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratefulness, hopefulness, and spirituality (Dale et al., 2017).

These experiences with regard to gratification, specifically within meaningful media experiences, does not necessarily have to elicit positively valanced affect. Individuals who consume entertainment media seek pleasure and amusement (hedonic motivations) but can also
be in the pursuit of a need to search for life’s meanings, truth, and purposes that are identified as eudaimonic motivations (Oliver & Raney, 2011). Eudaimonic motivations are associated with a need for cognition, self-reflection, and a search for meaning in life surrounding the human condition that promotes well-being. According to Oliver and Raney (2011) these additional motivations for entertainment consumption, to gain a deeper understanding of a purpose in life, are important and sought-after outcomes of meaningful entertainment.

**Purpose of the Study**

While narrative persuasion techniques explain the cognitive mechanisms involved in the influence of attitudes and behaviors that bring individuals together, there is a need to examine the affective mechanisms associated with meaningful media that plays a role in the destigmatization of groups. This study will expand on meaningful media experiences concentrating on the role of self-transcendent experiences. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to examine whether transcendent media experiences have the ability to reduce stigma surrounding mental illness and engender more prosocial attitudes toward people with mental illness. This study will also assess how different elicitors of transcendent media representations may promote social inclusion toward people with mental illness. Ultimately, this study will attempt to add to the growing body of literature surrounding the role of transcendent media experiences on attitudes and behavioral intentions of intergroup interactions.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of studies have examined the effects of media that have direct, long-term implications on the public’s perceptions of social norms and realities. According to Morgan (2009), the mass media cultivate attitudes and values which are already present in a culture. Thus, the media have the ability to maintain and propagate these values amongst members of a public or culture binding it together (Morgan, 2009). The tendency to maintain cultivated attitudes through media is particularly problematic in regard to marginalized groups. Mastro (2009) states that within a shared reality framework, individuals piece together both interpersonal and mediated experiences to form a shared understanding of society through their social networks. Therefore, when individuals with mental illness are portrayed as consistently violent in crime dramas, it could affect viewers’ social reality toward people with mental illness as a whole outside of mediated experiences.

Further, Shapiro and Lang (1991) suggest that television events function as mechanisms similar to our memories, which distort people’s perceptions and judgments about reality. Vicarious experiences through television may become a part of individuals’ social experience and serve as a basis for social judgments such as attitudes toward specific groups. If individuals are likely to live in a reality that is based on their media environment, it could be particularly impactful in terms of attitudes and behaviors toward certain groups.

Stereotypes and Cognition

Humans tend to process information based on a collection of previous experiences that aid in the performance of a task without intentional and conscious awareness instead of as individual experiences (Schacter, 1987). Through the processes of implicit cognition, traces of past experiences affect subsequent evaluations even though the earlier experiences are not
remembered in the normal sense (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). As a consequence, these experiences are stored in memory and turned into cognitive shortcuts or heuristics (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). When individuals encounter others of an outgroup, they use heuristics that allow them to quickly make evaluations of that person within a spectrum of other attributes. This top-down approach to information processing constitutes multiple sources that are automatic so that it causes less cognitive stress as it reflects what we already know about the group (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). This process explains how stereotypes are formed. Stereotypes, originally conceptualized by Lippmann (1922), refer to the typical “picture” that comes to mind when we think about a certain social group.

Stereotypes occur when an individual notices some aspect of a stimulus that activates an automatic effect and mislabels it in a way that influences the evaluation of that stimulus (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). For example, when interacting with a friend, they may disclose that they have a mental illness. Automatically and subconsciously, shortcuts of what you know about mental illness will activate in a way that could mislabel who that person is. If they tell you they have schizophrenia, you may implicitly associate their illness with violence or unpredictability before receiving any more information about their condition. Stereotypes use cognitive schemas, or patterns of thought to help social perceivers to process information about individuals but they are based on fixed expectations and beliefs about outgroup members (i.e. members of a different social categorization from ourselves) (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

According to Chen and Chaiken (1999) heuristic-cue information that is available in the external environment, within subjective experiences, may serve as shortcuts during information processing. This process triggers the activation and use of stored heuristics that pertain distinctly to them. In particular, we usually use the prototype, or central tendency, of an outgroup as the
mean of a continuum we utilize when retrieving attributes during an encounter with an outgroup member. In other words, when introduced to an individual with mental illness we categorize that person along a continuum of what we believe mental illness to entail. Therefore, we anchor our perceptions toward another based on that most central belief of what we consider mental illness is. For example, if an individual watches a lot of dramas featuring characters with mental illness who are violent, we would then expect mental illness to involve acts of violence and/or criminality. So, when we encounter another character with mental illness, violence is a part of the conceptualization of the new person. This character, who has disclosed that he/she has mental illness, may meet those expectations or completely violate the expectation, but nonetheless, the activation of those heuristics has already taken place.

Some members of a category are more central, or more in line with what characteristics we believe that group to entail, than others. This process forces individuals to focus on pre-existing ideas and impede new information, which contributes to prejudices of others in different social categories. For example, Diefenbach and West (2007) found that heavy exposure to depictions of individuals with a mental illness as violent criminals, via television news, affected individuals’ willingness to live next door to a person with mental illness, spend tax dollars on mental health services, and locate mental health services in residential neighborhoods of local residents. When negative attributes are assigned to a group that individuals do not consider themselves a part of, the association creates intergroup biases.

Intergroup biases arise when individuals evaluate one’s own group membership (ingroup) more favorably than members of an outgroup. People are more likely to pay attention to and select attributes to assign outgroup members that are consistent with their preexisting attitudes and biases of the group (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). These shortcuts contribute to the persistence and
maintenance of ingroup favoritism over outgroup interaction. If the media consistently activate negative stereotypes that elicit negative evaluations of individuals with mental illness, it is likely that the viewers will encode and store those negative attributes within their own cognitive schema. While limited effects scholars would argue that this would have a very small effect on intergroup perceptions, because of motivation to process and ability to rectify inaccurate depictions of others, they do not take into consideration that mediated experiences can account for most of the interaction viewers have with an outgroup (Fiske & Taylor, 1991).

According to Fujioka (1999) individuals’ (positive or negative) evaluations of outgroup portrayals, rather than the number of television programs seen, significantly affect stereotypes of the group. Further, it was found that television messages have a significant impact on viewers’ perceptions when firsthand information is lacking. Work from this scholar suggests that negative affective evaluations of television portrayals of outgroup members are associated with stereotypes, however positive portrayals on television are effective in reducing negative associations (Fujioka, 1999). In fact, stereotype literature suggests that individuals are more likely to rely on active monitoring of the situation when stereotype-discrepant information is presented in an effort to test the discrepant information against available heuristics (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Schneider, 2005).

A study conducted by Corrigan et al. (2001) that examined the effects of three stigma-changing conditions of mental illness—education, contact, and protest—concluded that education and contact were the most effective conditions for attitude change. Moreover, the authors found that contact effects are enhanced when members of the public meet persons who disconfirm stereotypes associated with mental illness (e.g. stereotype-discrepant information). As
a result, when stereotype-discrepant information is presented, it can improve both public perceptions and recollections of persons with mental illness (Corrigan et al., 2001).

Education about mental illness can produce relatively broad effects that improve attribution about mental illness whereas contact yields more narrow and specific effects (Corrigan et al., 2001). Specifically, contact with an individual with mental illness can improve attributions about the controllability and stability of a mental disorder and the stability of psychosis. Importantly, Corrigan et al. (2001) found that contact was the only stigma-changing strategy that affected subsequent information processing of individuals with mental illness. Participants in the study who had contact with an individual with mental illness were able to recall more positive and less negative information about the life story of individuals with mental illness.

While interpersonal contact is one way to introduce stereotype-discrepant information about mental illness, media can also be successful in presenting more positive and stereotype-discrepant portrayals of mental illness that affect their subsequent perceptions of the group. As an extension of Allport’s (1954) contact hypothesis, Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes (2005) propose that individuals have the ability to process mass-mediated interactions with characters in a manner similar to interpersonal contact that is socially beneficial, especially regarding information processing and improved attributional assignment. Therefore, mediated narratives may provide vicarious contact to audiences who may have limited exposure to individuals with mental illness.

According to Fiske and Taylor (1991), encoding inconsistent information requires creating a compatible niche that demands effort. Media narratives have the capability to suppress negative stereotypes by engaging the audience in a storyline where individuals are more likely to
switch from heuristic to systematic processing and actively evaluate inaccurate depictions of outgroup members, as described in the elaboration likelihood model and heuristic-systematic model (e.g. Petty & Cacioppo 1986; Chen & Chaiken 1999). Within entertainment theory, Sanders’ (2010) character impression formation model argues that when attributes presented within a narrative do not fit a stereotype, or do not cue heuristics, viewers will attempt to resolve the inconsistencies with another stereotype, or they will attempt recategorization. One outcome to this deliberate form of processing is that viewers may opt to disregard schema-related information and rely more heavily on the “inconsistent behavioral information, representing an individuating process of impression formation” (Sanders, 2010, p. 159). Scholars suggest narratives that engage audiences in conflict activate distinct processing that requires audiences to prioritize the drive to satisfy some inner need in order to profit from the experience (Lewis, Tamorini, & Weber, 2014).

When a narrative engages the audience in cognitive conflict or encourages them to be thoughtful through emotional responses, as is the case for meaningful media experiences, it causes individuals to process information in a more deliberate manner and appreciate the experience (Lewis, Tamorini, & Weber, 2014). Therefore, narratives that feature individuals with mental illness with stereotype-discrepant representations can elicit a form of inconsistency resolution that could have the potential to make audiences process what they know about mental illness in a deliberate and effortful manner. Ultimately, the outcome for viewers could be to recategorize what they know about mental illness into less stigmatizing attributes.

**Entertainment and Intergroup Social Change**

Considering how stereotype formation, activation, and processing play a role in subsequent impression formation, it is important to discuss these processes as they apply to
entertainment media. Entertainment provides a platform where viewers are able to experience narrative forms, both novel and conventional. Audiences are drawn into the stories and lives of others who are seen as different from themselves. Entertainment narratives have the potential to generate absorption within the narrative as it relates to cognitive processes, but they also are associated with having particularly intense affective outcomes (Tan, 2008). In many cases, entertainment media represent social groups that can be inherently stigmatizing, but those that are accurate and thoughtful may promote greater social inclusion through cognitive and/or affective mechanisms.

**Cognitive processes associated with intergroup social change.** According to Moyer-Gusé (2008) entertainment experiences can influence audiences’ knowledge, beliefs systems, attitudes, and behaviors. Narrative transportation theory proposes that when individuals lose themselves in a story, their attitudes and intentions change to reflect that story (Green & Brock, 2000). Indeed, narrative persuasion techniques may provide a more effective way to influence attitudes and behaviors than traditional persuasive messages by creating an “emotional experience of being swept up into the narrative itself and becoming involved” with the characters and the storyline (Moyer-Gusé, 2008, p. 408).

Transportation into entertainment narratives reduce counterarguing and increase the likelihood that viewers will process information conveyed in a less critical manner that would normally reinforce preexisting attitudes or beliefs (Murphy et al., 2011; Green, 2006; Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Slater & Rouner, 2002). Schiappa, Gregg, and Hewes (2005) developed the parasocial contact hypothesis which posits that, when real interpersonal experiences are unattainable, sufficient quality and quantity of vicarious contact with mediated characters that interact with outgroup members may provide a window for audiences to vicariously experience
those interactions. This form of contact could produce positive evaluations that affect the way they treat similar others of outgroups in real life situations. Therefore, if an individual views a transcendent or meaningful representation of a media character showing acts of kindness toward a person with mental illness that elicits a sense of self-transcendence, he/she may be more inclined to affiliate themselves with that character and want to become more compassionate or altruistic towards people with mental illness.

Examining the cognitive processes associated with the parasocial contact hypothesis further, Klimmt, Hartmann, and Schramm (2006) posit that parasocial interactions contribute to attention allocation to the message, comprehension and reconstruction of the message, while activating prior experiences to navigate anticipatory observation, to make an evaluative judgment about the message or character. For example, a viewer who is experiencing a parasocial interaction will allocate their attention to what the character is doing, saying, and how he/she is interacting with other characters. If the viewer finds the character relevant and important to their own reality, they will invest in cognitive effort to comprehend and model the character’s action and behaviors. During this phase, the viewer will access and compare context-relevant information which they have observed in reality and then anticipate future events that would likely contain similar actions, either with that character or a person in real life. Ultimately, the viewer may experience similar emotions as the character that are “empathy-based” that could lead to behaviors that reflect the character’s morals, values, and attitudes.

Cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions are activated during a narrative to make an evaluation of a message or character. These vicarious experiences allow audience members to take a step back to experience a momentary shift in perspective that is meaningful in regard to their real lives (Slater & Rouner, 2002). If the narrative is particularly meaningful, audience
members may engage in the narrative or with characters to experience a perspective that may transcend and broaden their thoughts about a topic or issue. Much is known about the cognitive processes that contribute to lessening social distance toward outgroups and combatting stereotyped perceptions. Less is known about the emotional or affective mechanisms involved in more positive intergroup interactions. It is possible that, through narratives designed to emphasize empathy, self-reflectiveness, and connectedness, individuals may come to feel more strongly connected to outgroups that have historically been marginalized.

**Affective processes associated with intergroup social change.** It is important here to distinguish the difference between emotions and affect. According to Fredrickson (2001), emotions are a subset of the broader class of affective states. Emotional states—multicomponent response tendencies produced after an initial assessment of personal meaning—make up an appeal process that triggers subjective experiences facial expressions, cognitive processing, and physiological changes (Fredrickson, 2001). On the other hand, affect is a more general concept that incorporates emotions as well as other affective phenomena including psychological and physiological sensations, and affective traits (i.e. attitudes, moods, and physical sensations; Fredrickson, 2001). Positive affect not only facilitates internal responses but prompts individuals to engage with their environments. This study is concerned with both of these phenomena as it will attempt to examine the mechanisms of discrete emotions in relation to feelings of more transcendent affective states.

Within literature examining affective responses to media, there has been a shift in the paradigm of entertainment psychology from mood to meaning (Vorderer & Reinecke, 2015). Specifically, entertainment is being considered a new way to both satisfy and challenge human needs simultaneously (Vorderer, 2015). In the past, entertainment psychology has focused
primarily on examining hedonic, pleasurable media. More recently, entertainment psychology is moving toward an area of study where being entertained also means experiencing pleasure, appreciation, and/or satisfying fundamental, meaningful needs as human beings (Vorderer, 2011). Oliver and Bartsch (2010) define appreciation within entertainment media as “an experiential state that is characterized by the perception of deeper meaning, the feeling of being moved, and the motivation to elaborate on thoughts and feelings inspired by the experience” (p. 76). The concentration of “self-development” provides a context where meaningful media experiences encompass a reflective mode that can produce mixed affective responses, or even negatively valenced emotions, but ultimately can produce positive experiences (Bartsch & Oliver, 2016).

According to Bartsch and Oliver (2016) these meaningful experiences may cause individuals to switch from concern of their self-well-being to a concern of others’ well-being that has the potential to bridge social differences between ingroup and outgroup members. This is important when considering what types and how a narrative message may affect audiences. Engagement with the narrative is particularly influential, even when the narrative does not intend to persuade, on attitudes in-line with the narrative while affective disposition has an important impact on attitudes that represent the perspective of the characters (Das, Nobbe, & Oliver, 2017).

Increased affective involvement with a narrative can create intense emotional responses that could lead to more positive attitudes of outgroup members. For example, Oliver, Dillard, Bae, and Tamul (2012) found that narrative news stories (versus non-narrative), that engaged readers into a storyline, produced changes in emotions, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors that were beneficial to members of a stigmatized group. In another study employing an experimental approach, Oliver et al., (2015) compared inspirational media to humorous media to study the
differences in intergroup connectedness with different racial/ethnic groups. The authors found that experiences of elevation in response to engaging with inspiring media portrayals enhanced feelings of optimism and connectedness toward humanity. These feelings were not only general to the larger society but were also associated with more favorable attitudes toward specific individuals with diverse racial or ethnic backgrounds (Oliver et al., 2015).

**Positive emotions of meaningful media experiences.** Because meaningful media experiences encompass both positive and negative affective states, it is essential to discuss the effects of each. Positive emotions contribute to human growth and well-being. According to the broaden-and-build theory, positive emotions can engender positive, long-term effects on well-being, broaden thought-action repertoire, can undo lingering negative effects, fuel psychological resilience, and trigger an upward spiral to enhance emotional well-being (Fredrickson, 2001). Positive emotions both broaden individuals’ momentary thought-action processes and simultaneously build personal resources (Fredrickson, 1998). They also produce an environment where unrestricted reflection promotes flourishing within the human spirit as well as their connections with others.

Individuals experiencing positive affect are more likely to be flexible categorizers that lead people to see relatedness and interconnections among thoughts and ideas (Isen & Daubman, 1984). If positive emotions have the ability to promote interconnectedness with thoughts and ideas, then they could also promote interconnectedness between the self and others. Because positive emotions have an effect on both internal and external responses, positive emotions can broaden the scope of attention, rather than narrow, widening the array of the thoughts and actions that come to mind (Fredrickson, 2001). Whereas negative emotions prompt individuals to narrow their thought-action repertoire to promote quick and decisive action, similar to a flight or fight
response, positive emotions widen individuals’ thought-action repertoire that extends to their environmental surroundings to build personal resources ranging from physical and intellectual resources to social and psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2001).

The action of opening or extending a world view to allow novel thoughts and relationships to arise has important consequences in regard to the self and to others. Although our minds are programmed to rely on heuristics or shortcuts when thinking about an outgroup, broaden and build theory holds that positive emotions elicited by a stimulus can suppress the use of stereotypes. Positive emotions delay the process of relying on heuristics of an outgroup while simultaneously opening receptors to experience more relatedness to others (Isen & Daubman, 1984). Positive emotions that generate feelings of transcendence or elevation contribute to the reduction of stereotypes that is fueled by the sense of universal orientation (Kramer et al., 2017).

One of the key components of the broaden-and-build theory is that certain positive emotions prompt individuals to discard automatic, everyday behavior and to pursue novel, creative, and often unscripted paths of thought-action repertoire (Fredrickson, 1998). If this is accurate, then positive emotions have the ability to intervene in automatic responses to negative stimuli featuring an outgroup member. Specifically, positive emotions associated with contentment, love, and elevation are examples of emotions that build social resources. *Contentment*, often thought of as tranquility and serenity, arises in situations where there is a certain level of safety and certainty with a low degree of cognitive effort (Fredrickson, 1998). This emotion prompts individuals to savor their environment around them to experience a spiritual “oneness” with the world while simultaneously filling intrinsic needs to feel complete (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). The experience, known as flow, precedes a feeling of more togetherness not only internally but also with respect to others and to the world in general.
Love is an emotion that people experience in many forms that encompass a relationship with both the self and with others. Fredrickson (1998) defines love as experiences that are made up of many positive emotions that include joy, interest, and tranquility. According to Fredrickson (2001), positive emotions act as “vehicles” for individual growth and social connection by building individuals’ personal and social resources. These resources are not short-lived but enduring that fuel fundamental needs as human beings.

Haidt (2000) expands on Fredrickson’s broaden-and-build theory by including elevation as a prosocial behavior defined as a warm, uplifting feeling that people experience when they see unexpected acts of human goodness, kindness, and compassion that make individuals want to become a better version of him/herself. These prosocial goals reflect a change in the cognitive structure under the surface that alter their views about humanity and morality in a more connected, optimistic way (Haidt, 2000; Algoe & Haidt, 2009).

Just as love and contentment encompass a myriad of emotions, elevation is made up of other positive emotions such as love, admiration, and desire for affiliation with those who are morally admirable. According to Haidt (2000) elevation is an important emotion to study because of the prosocial aspect of affiliation that can potentially improve community relations. Many media psychologists contend that elevation and positive affect connect life and understanding that individuals are part of a larger whole (Janicke & Ramasubramanian, 2017; Kramer et al., 2017; Oliver et al., 2018).

Negative emotions of meaningful media experiences. Because meaningful media experiences are associated with mixed affective states that incorporate both positive and negative emotions, it is important to discuss how negative emotions in such media experiences differ from negative emotions within other contexts. Sad films or “tear jerkers” do more than elicit deep
sorrow. Films like these along with dramas and romances often focus on human values and issues of life purpose (Oliver, Hartmann, & Woolley, 2012). Negatively-valenced emotional and physical reactions within a meaningful media framework imply a sense of gratification or appreciation paired with cognitive components such as introspection.

Mixed affective states that elicit both positive and negative emotions can lead to “feelings of greater insight, awareness of core values, or the ability to cope with mortality salience” (Oliver, Hartmann, & Woolley, 2012, p. 374). Specifically, while such experience is generally characterized as positively valenced, scholars contend that words that suggest mixed affective states like touched, moved, tender, or poignant seem to more appropriately capture the experience (Oliver et al., 2018). Media that allow viewers to experience a storyline that exemplify meaning in life, the human condition surrounding the importance of a compassionate humanity, a oneness with nature, or makes salient the beauty of the human spirit and interconnectedness are all examples of media that may elicit mixed affective responses (Oliver et al., 2018). Transcendent storylines paired with depictions of mental illness could allow viewers to experience transcendence in general, but also toward those with mental illness who are at the center of exemplifying the human condition associated with the struggles related with mental illness. The outcomes associated with these experiences directed toward mental illness could create self-reflection and an understanding of what these individuals experience that may prompt compassion toward the group. Further, these scholars suggest that outcomes associated with such experiences can lead to individuals: 1) recognizing a shared humanity and the potential for moral beauty, courage, hope, and tragedy of the human condition, 2) elevating themselves from their mundane concerns, 3) increasing interconnectedness with others, and 4) increasing appreciation
for the potential, values, needs of others in relation to the natural world, powers beyond ourselves, and moral virtue.

If a media representation of an outgroup elicits emotions related to meaningful experiences within a narrative, a broadening effect could occur that has the potential promote changes in an individual’s cognitive structure (Fredrickson, 1998; Haidt, 2000). This change could improve their attitudes toward people with mental illness that could be both optimistic and enduring. For example, Oliver et al. (2015) demonstrated another way to suppress the activation of stereotypic attributes, apart from narrative engagement, by using media that elicited favorable impressions—in particular, positive affect—about all of humanity and not just one particular stigmatized group. These scholars found that media-induced feeling of elevation and shared goodness of all humanity enhanced feelings of greater connection with and favorable attitudes toward diverse others. This is one of many studies (e.g. Janicke & Oliver, 2017; Bartsch, Oliver, Nitsch, & Scherr, 2018; Kramer et al., 2017) that examine how eliciting certain emotions through narratives can promote social inclusion. Therefore, emotions may have the ability to suppress stereotypes that could discourage intergroup contact. These are just a few examples of how positive and negative emotions can influence well-being in regard to broadening and building social resources. One of the goals of this study is to examine of self-transcendence as a mechanism for the potential to engender more prosocial attitudes toward individuals with mental illness.

Transcendent Media Experiences

Scholars are now examining meaningful media experiences and a recent subset of these types of experiences known as transcendent media experiences. Broadly, meaningful media experiences are characterized in the context of mixed affect, higher levels of cognitive effort, and
fulfillment of intrinsic needs (Oliver et al., 2018). While the affective experiences tend to be ambivalent, they come together to make a meaningful, subjective experience. More specifically, transcendent media experiences encompass both positive and negative emotions and fulfill needs that are inward but also outward driven, such as a more universal orientation. According to Oliver et al. (2018) both positive and negative emotions elicited by meaningful media experiences can improve and deepen relationships, emulate excellence seen in others, and recognize human goodness. However, only those that lead us beyond self-focused concerns reflect the notion of self-transcendence (Oliver et al., 2018).

Transcendent media experiences encompass inward-oriented responses (such as elevation, mixed affect and physiological indicators, and self-enhancement) but it can also trigger more outward-oriented responses (such as conservation, self-transcendence, and moral motivations; Rieger, Frischlich, & Oliver, 2018). The literature surrounding transcendent media experiences suggest that eliciting positive and negative emotional states may increase the likelihood of engaging prosocial behaviors as a result of universal orientation (Oliver et al. 2018; Bartch et al. 2018).

**Defining transcendent media experiences.** Transcendent media messages featuring mental illness that engender heightened levels of cognitive processing cause individuals to switch from automatic processing to deliberate, effortful processing. According to Oliver et al. (2018) transcendent media experiences consists of meaning-making aroused by content that displays human virtues. Feelings of self-transcendence can broaden the focus from self to others or even a community through feelings of human connectedness.

*Self-transcendence* within the meaningful media literature is characterized as an emotion that allows individuals to experience something greater than themselves (Oliver et al., 2018). It is
outward focused in that it builds and broadens resources beyond the self that incorporate an appreciation of the interconnectedness between the self, nature, and the universe (Oliver et al., 2018). This experience promotes an individual to not only attain self-actualization, but to also transcend above the self to experience values of truth, goodness, and beauty. According to Oliver et al. (2018) self-transcendence encompasses a prosocial aspect of affiliation that can potentially improve community relations by increasing the appreciation for the potential needs of others.

Haidt (2003) proposed a preliminary definition of self-transcendent emotions as “those emotions that are linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent” (p. 853). Self-transcendent emotions encompass inward-oriented emotions that prompt elevation, like feeling moved/tender, hope, love, and interest, and are combined with outward-oriented emotions that incorporate affective dispositions toward others, such as compassion, admiration, gratitude (Janike, Raney, Dale, & Oliver, unpublished).

While both intrinsic gratifications and self-transcendent experiences are within a continuum of meaningful media experiences, for an experience to be self-transcendent it must also involve the outward-oriented emotions that promote interconnectedness, human virtue, altruistic motivation, or spirituality all of which incorporate a more universal, prosocial orientation (Oliver et al., 2018). Transcendent media experiences are emotionally complex, and individuals rarely experience positive or negative affect alone but a combination of both that results in a meaningful experience (Dale et al., 2017).

**Outcomes of transcendent media experiences.** Exploratory research within meaningful media experiences have examined the effects on engagement with the narrative and affective reactions, but they have also examined the specific prosocial outcomes from the consumption of inspiring or transcendent media content. Within the context of cognitive processes associated
with meaningful media, Das, Nobbe, & Oliver (2017) found that meaningful media entertainment that is not designed to persuade viewers can still be accidentally persuasive, especially if it triggers mixed affective responses. For example, sports movies that elicited elevation triggered reflective thoughts led to respondents’ intention to engage in physical exercise following exposure to inspirational movies. In another study, Oliver and Raney (2011) found that mixed affective responses, in relation to meaningful media, assisted in individuals’ quest for an understanding of “larger” questions surrounding the human condition. While participants reported these experiences to be contemplative or affectively mixed, generally they had a positive experience.

Recent research has concentrated more on the affective processes associated with prosocial outcomes of transcendent media experiences. In defining self-transcendent emotions, Stellar et al. (2017) state that these emotions are particularly good at building social resources. They posit that self-transcendent emotions yield direct benefits to physical health and well-being, and bind individuals together through feelings of compassion, gratitude, and awe that form commitments to kin, nonkin, and social collectives. According to Stellar et al. (2017), they do so by “fostering connection, commitment, and attachment to others, reinforcing social bonds when they can be the most easily eroded by self-interest—when others are in need of our help, when they go out of their way to benefit us, or when they display power and status superior to our own” (p. 205). Individuals not only build their personal resources within these experiences, but they also build social resources that broaden to the larger community.

In a study designed to examine the dual function of meaningful media and its role in the process of destigmatization, Bartsch, et al. (2018) found that meaningful media experiences lead to intrinsically gratifying experiences that increase audiences’ interest in learning more about a
stigmatized group (i.e. empathy, elevation, and reflective thoughts), but even more importantly, they found that those intrinsically driven gratifications also carried over into more positive attitudes and behavioral intentions toward the group in general. These outcomes explain the personal as well as social benefits of eliciting self-transcendence through media experiences.

**Transcendent Media Experiences and the Destigmatization of Mental Illness**

While extant literature on transcendent media experiences has addressed general effects of extending one’s world view, less attention has been given to understanding the distinct effects of transcendent media experiences on specific stigmatized groups. Because stereotyped groups have stigmas that affect both social (i.e. intergroup relations) and behavioral aspects of life (e.g. obtaining treatment), there is a need to understand how transcendent media experiences could affect subsequent attitudes and behaviors toward that group.

According to Bartsch and Oliver (2016) meaningful media experiences have the ability to portray life’s hardships, poignancies, and iniquities of the human condition that encourages processes of cognitive elaboration, attitude change, and information seeking about issues surrounding the storyline. There is evidence that affective and cognitive components of transcendent media experiences are linked to feelings of empathy or altruistic motivation and prosocial attitude change toward stigmatized groups (Bartsch & Oliver, 2016; Kramer et al., 2017).

Audiences who view narratives featuring mental illness that elicit feelings of transcendence and encourages greater reflection and contemplation that goes beyond the self and personal growth to include oneness with others and the broader universe may translate into less stigmatizing attitudes. Regardless of the portrayal, if viewers have a self-transcendent experience it should be enough to improve their attitudes about people with mental illnesses. Therefore,
transcendent representations of mental illness that elicit self-transcendent emotional responses have the potential to contribute to the destigmatization of people with mental illness. Hence:

H1: Transcendent emotions will be positively associated with destigmatization toward people with mental illness.

However, the likelihood of destigmatization toward people with mental illness may not increase through self-transcendent emotions alone but could also be impacted by the elements associated with their relational dispositions toward others after viewing a transcendent media representation.

**The Role of Connectedness and Compassionate Love for Others**

Janicke and Oliver (2017) found that transcendent media experiences included significantly higher levels of interconnectedness and compassion in viewers more so than purely pleasurable, or hedonic media experiences. Self-transcendence involves a loss of the egoic self and an enhanced openness to others (Oliver et al., 2018). Connectedness involves feelings of being connected to all of humanity (Janicke & Oliver), whereas compassion is defined as being moved by another’s suffering and wanting to help (Lazarus, 1991). Experiences of transcendence through viewing acts of human kindness, or positive intergroup contact with mental illness, could make people feel more connected to the outgroup and feel a greater sense of human connectedness, prosocial motivation, and more favorable attitudes toward outgroups (Kramer et al., 2017).

Scholars have argued that feelings of transcendence orient individuals outwards to serve the greater good because it activates an understanding that humans are all interconnected. If meaningful media elicit feelings of self-transcendence that motivate individuals to do better in life and orient themselves toward others, heightened feelings of love, connectedness, and
kindness toward others, including stigmatized groups, could develop (Janicke & Oliver, 2017).

According to Sprecher and Fehr (2005) compassionate love:

is an attitude toward other(s), either close others or strangers or all of humanity; containing feelings, cognitions, and behaviors that are focused on caring, concern, tenderness, and an orientation toward supporting, helping, and understanding the other(s), particularly when the other(s) is (are) perceived to be suffering or in need. (p. 630)

This type of love is thought to be encompassing and enduring compared to other constructs because it includes tenderness, caring, and other aspects of empathy that promote other-directed attitudes and behaviors (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005). According to Sprecher and Fehr (2005), the experience of compassionate love for others, including less fortunate others, may increase the well-being of others but also of themselves. Kramer et al. (2017) found further evidence that meaningful videos which show human kindness lead to an increase in universal orientation or that life and humans are all interconnected beyond that of other forms of meaningful videos. Therefore:

H2: Transcendent emotions will be positively associated with greater feelings of connectedness with others.

H3: Transcendent emotions will be positively associated with greater feelings of compassionate love for others.

Connectedness with others should be associated with greater compassion for others because when individuals feel a sense of connection, they feel as if they are similar situations as others. Through this understanding, individuals are inspired to be kind toward fellow human beings when help is needed (Janicke & Oliver, 2017). If a level of connectedness is established, individuals will be more inclined to have compassion for others if they feel as if they are traveling through life’s tumultuous journey together. Connectedness can increase our concern about the well-being of others, motivating us to help people we don’t know personally. There
becomes an impulse through connection to have a compassionate motivation to love all of humanity. Hence:

**H4:** Connectedness with others will be positively associated with compassionate love towards others.

In a similar vein, connectedness with others should lead to more positive attitudes toward persons with mental illness reflected in the destigmatization of persons with mental illness. According to Cialdini et al. (1997) feelings of connectedness or close attachments elevate benevolence because individuals feel more “at one” with the other as they perceive themselves in the other. There is a sense of shared, merged, or interconnected personal identities (Cialdini et al., 1997). If individuals feel as if they are bridging the gap and connecting with others of an outgroup, in a way the outgroup then becomes an ingroup where there is a level of understanding and acceptance.

Oliver et al. (2015) demonstrated that feelings of connectedness, feelings of shared goodness of all of humanity, enhanced feelings of greater connection with and favorable attitudes toward diverse others. While the study employed stimuli that elicited favorable impressions about all of humanity, they found that transcendent media exposure discourages stereotyping and enhances intergroup harmony. It is understandable then that employing stimuli that features inspirational portrayals mental illness should produce similar effects toward that group. Feeling connected with or being a part of a superordinate group that involves the connection of life should create a relationship where mental illness is no longer seen as separate but interconnected providing more favorable attitudes toward people with mental illness. Therefore:

**H5:** Connectedness will be positively associated with the destigmatization of persons with mental illness.
Further, because representations of mental illness in entertainment media tend to depict some aspect of suffering, via symptoms or social hardships, within the narrative (Owen, 2012), it is important to examine how feelings of compassionate love towards others lead to more prosocial motivations associated with humanity in general, but also toward people with mental illness. Kramer et al. (2017) found that transcendent media that elicited elevation, was associated with heightened perceptions universal orientation—connectedness, compassion, and prosociality—which was then associated with more favorable attitudes toward stereotyped groups. Because self-transcendent emotions encompass aspects of elevation, and a sense of universal orientation and motivation, compassionate love toward others should lead to more positive attitudes toward people with mental illness.

Through the feeling of connection to other human beings and possible higher transcendent reality, we realize that strangers are not any different from us. The experience of compassionate love for others, including less fortunate others, may ultimately increase individuals’ well-being (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005). Higher levels of compassionate love toward others should be associated with more prosocial motivations to help not only our loved ones but should also extend toward strangers and all of humanity (Janicke & Oliver, 2017). Compassionate love for all others that activate an impulse to be a better person or help others in need should contribute to the destigmatization of persons with mental illness. Therefore:

H6: Feelings of compassionate love toward others will be positively associated with the destigmatization of persons with mental illness.

While self-transcendent emotions encompass an affective component that demonstrates how an individual may transcend the self to become more “others-focused,” connectedness and compassion add a relational component that directly addresses how individuals situate
themselves within the context others after experiencing self-transcendent emotions.

Connectedness and compassionate love toward others lead to an increased focus on the well-being of others, as it provides a dispositional perspective toward not only others in general, but specifically toward those with a mental illness. In essence, self-transcendent emotions may go through connectedness and compassionate love before individuals hold more positive attitudes toward mental illness because the destigmatization process encompasses not only an affective component (i.e. positive attitudes toward the group), but also a relational component to assess how close they feel toward that person with mental illness and/or how much they are inclined to help/love those individuals (i.e. feeling connected to those who are suffering from a mental illness).

**The Role of Self-Transcendent Emotions, Connectedness, and Compassion Love for Others**

Considering the existing literature on transcendent media experiences, elevation, and the destigmatization of social groups, this study tests the idea that several variables serve as mechanisms to predict the degree to which transcendent media experiences have the ability to contribute to feelings of connectedness, compassion, and the destigmatization of mental illness. Self-transcendent emotions prompted by elicitors of transcendent media representation of mental illness should be associated with more less stigmatizing attitudes toward people with mental illness (H1) a greater sense of connectedness (H2) and more compassionate lover for others (H3). A greater sense of connectedness is expected to lead to more compassion for others (H4) and more positive attitudes toward people with mental illness (H5). Lastly, more compassionate love for others should predict more positive attitudes toward individuals with mental illness (H6).
**Elicitors of Self-Transcendent Media**

Elicitation of self-transcendent emotions assists in the development of trait transcendence (Dale et al. 2017). Trait transcendence is a dispositional trait associated with striving for and connecting with purpose and meaning greater than ourselves (Dale et al., 2017). Dale et al. (2017) posit that humans can exhibit transcendence, but they can also develop the behaviors through media that elicits “appreciating beauty and excellence, being grateful, being hopeful, and practicing religion or spirituality” (p. 898). As described previously, emotions such as compassion, admiration, gratitude, and love share a common elicitor that exemplifies goodness or virtue found outside of ourselves, often in other people that promotes trait transcendence.

It is important to examine media that elicits self-transcendent emotions that not only benefit the individual but those they interact with because of the “others orientation” of the experience (Dale et al., 2017). Dale et al. (2017) note that there are two types of media representations that elicit self-transcendent emotions that can promote trait transcendence:

(i) **Direct elicitors**: themes or elicitors that are part of the environment where the viewer is a direct witness to something inspiring such as a beautiful sunset, seeing someone directly express gratitude, or defeat a challenge. Within the context of mental illness, a direct elicitor of self-transcendence might be a character carrying out an inspiring task such as exceptionally playing an instrument or overcoming adversity associated with their illness.

(ii) **Modeled elicitors**: those in which we witness others benefitting from or engaging in inspirational acts or being inspired themselves. Thus, witnessing others performing good deeds, demonstrating hope, or appreciating beauty. A modeled elicitor of self-transcendence might be witnessing a character with a mental
illness showing gratitude toward another character that demonstrated an act of kindness that is inspiring enough for a viewer to experience self-transcendent emotions as well as intentions to model the behavior.

With regard to this study, elicitors are important to examine because the development of trait transcendence can be beneficial to not only those who experience a greater sense of self, but it also can be beneficial to those around them (Dale et al., 2017). Mediated representations of transcendence that arise from the environment (direct elicitors) and out of witnessing others experience transcendence (modeled elicitors) have important implications for how audiences experience and build their own trait transcendence. The examination of these two types of elicitors will assist in the understanding of discrete emotional experiences as well as behavioral models within the narratives that that may serve as a socioemotional model for viewers to experience, build, and model transcendent behavior (Dale et al., 2017). Further, this study chose these elicitors to understand how witnessing transcendence first-hand (direct elicitor) may be different compared to experiencing transcendence second-hand (modeled elicitor) and how they influence relational differences toward mental illness. For example, are viewers more likely to experience transcendence and show compassion toward those with mental illness after experiencing transcendence first hand through direct elicitors or would these emotional responses be stronger after witnessing a character express transcendence and experiencing those same emotional responses second-hand?

While media psychology literature suggests that characters representing social groups with whom we have minimal "real world" contact could influence attitudes and behaviors with the group in real interpersonal settings (see Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005), it also suggests that media can act as a model for self-regulation, self-reflectiveness, and the meaning and
purpose of one’s life pursuits (see Bandura, 2001). This study attempts to fill this gap on how the emotional in addition to the relational responses differ between direct and modeled elicitors, and how attitude change may occur through viewers experiencing transcendence first-hand or through witnessing others experience it.

These experiences can arise out of four types of direct or modeled elicitors that are likely to be present in transcendent media: appreciation of beauty and excellence elicitors, gratitude elicitors, hope elicitors, and religiousness/spirituality elicitors (Dale et al., 2017). Appreciation of beauty and excellence is defined by noticing and appreciating beauty, excellence, or a skill performance in all areas of life (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). We often see elicitors of appreciation and beauty within media that intends to exemplify beauty or demonstrate excellence either elicited by characters or landscapes within a narrative. Within appreciation and beauty, Dale et al. (2017) provide appraisal dimensions of direct elicitors that include:

(i) *Another’s accomplishment*: the recognition that an individual has accomplished a goal

(ii) *Architecture*: grand or moving architectural space or designs

(iii) *Art*: includes paintings, drawings, sculptures, etc. that draws attention from the viewer

(iv) *Nature*: outdoor nature including mountains, landscapes, oceans, etc.

(v) *Performances*: includes live performances by musicians

(vi) *Skill*: displays of superior ability that requires practice or training

(vii) *Vastness*: which includes stimuli that are too large, complex, or difficult to comprehend.
A modeled elicitor of appreciation of beauty and excellence is a depiction of a character showing an appreciation of beauty or excellence including portrayals of awe, wonder, elevation or admiration (Dale et al., 2017). For example, a character appreciating the journey he/she went through while looking over a beautiful landscape.

Elicitors of gratitude are defined as being aware and thankful for the good things that happen (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Gratitude elicitors often occur within the context of characters interacting with an element of goodness or virtue. Direct elicitors of gratitude include (Dale et al., 2017):

(i) *Birth/new life:* includes depictions of new life that may elicit hope including instances where an individual has a second chance at life.

(ii) *Cheating death:* experiences where a character has survived a near-death experience or discusses the experience with another.

(iii) *Gifts:* includes physical gifts that show an act of kindness toward another

(iv) *Kindness/moral virtue:* which include displays of kindness, compassion, helpfulness, or the perception that someone had done something good for another person.

(v) *Positive end of life/death:* includes depictions of reminiscing about the life an individual has had and the experiences that create a sense of gratitude for what he/she has been able to experience.

A modeled elicitor of gratitude is the depiction of a character showing thankfulness recognizing they benefitted from another’s action (Dale et al., 2017). An example of a modeled elicitor of gratitude would be a character showing thankfulness or appreciation toward another character that demonstrated an act of kindness.
Elicitors of hope are those that elicit belief that a good future is something that can come to fruition (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Hope elicitors often occur when a character has gone through some sort of adversity and/or with the support of another. According to Dale et al. (2017) direct elicitors of hope include:

(i) *Encouragement*: displays of positive encouragement between characters.

(ii) *Overcoming obstacles/perseverance*: depictions of persistence or triumphing over setbacks.

A *modeled elicitor of hope* would include depictions of a character that was optimistic about the future (Dale et al., 2017). These types of elicitors show hope reflected by a character responding emotionally to specific elicitors of encouragement and/or perseverance. An example of this type of elicitor would be a quote about being hopeful after overcoming some sort of adversity.

For the final category of elicitors, religiousness, and spirituality elicitors, Dale et al. (2017) include *religious symbols* (i.e. symbols recognized by organized religion) and *religious traditions* (i.e. prayer) as direct elicitors. A modeled elicitor of this appraisal dimension occurs when a character discusses their spirituality or purpose in life with another.

The elicitors of self-transcendence described above have been examined within the context of overall prosociality toward others (Kramer et al., 2017; Oliver et. al, 2015; Janicke & Oliver, 2017; Dale et al., 2017). This study will focus on prosocial orientation towards groups who tend to be more ostracized than others because of the nature of stereotypes (dangerous, violent, and unpredictable) individuals have placed on them, specifically people with mental illness. The intent is to examine if these self-transcendent elicitors are present within narratives featuring mental illness and if they facilitate a more universal orientation and prosociality toward the group.
While direct and modeled elicitors are broad categories, it would be understandable to see differences in self-transcendent emotional responses because of the conceptualizations of the elicitors. Direct elicitors stem from the environment and are directly experienced first-hand by the viewer. In relation to narrative engagement, individuals have the ability to process mediated interactions with characters in a manner similar to interpersonal contact that is socially beneficial (Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005). Direct elicitors may provide an engaging experience where self-transcendence is felt first-hand that provides a closer connection with the outgroup character displaying a direct elicitor.

On the other hand, modeled elicitors arise out of other characters performing or experiencing self-transcendence. Because modeled elicitors depict others’ interactions with individuals with mental illnesses, it could serve as encouragement to reflect on one’s own behaviors and beliefs about their connectedness with humanity. According to Slater and Rouner (2002) engagement with the narrative allows audience members to take a step back to experience a momentary shift in perspective that are meaningful in regard to their real lives. Therefore, we would expect there to be differences in the way individuals experience self-transcendent emotions, connectedness, compassion, and prosociality based on whether they experience self-transcendence directly or through others (i.e. direct or modeled).

The research questions are as follows:

RQ1: How will (a) self-transcendent emotions, (b) connectedness, and (c) compassionate love for others vary as a function the type of elicitor participants view (Direct or Modeled)?

RQ2: How will the destigmatization of mental illness vary as a function of the type of transcendent elicitor (direct vs. modeled)?
RQ3: How will self-transcendent emotions, connectedness, and compassionate love for others, predict the destigmatization of persons with mental illness?

The evidence presented above provides an optimistic groundwork that transcendent media experiences may suppress stereotypical heuristics from previous encounters with mental illness in the media. One of the goals of this study is to examine how transcendent media experiences may promote positive attitudes toward people with mental illness. It will also attempt to advance the understanding of the role transcendent media elicitors have on attitudes and behavioral intentions of intergroup interaction.
CHAPTER 3
METHODS

In this study, a 2 (Type of Elicitor) X 2 (Message Repetition) mixed experimental design was used. The variables of importance within the experiment were the types of elicitors represented as modeled and direct elicitors of transcendence, self-transcendent emotional responses, connectedness, compassionate love for others, destigmatization toward people with mental illness and familiarity with mental illness.

Sampling and Recruitment

Participants were recruited from the Manship research participation pool. Students were randomly assigned to one of each of the conditions (direct, modeled). A power analysis using the Gpower computer program (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) indicated that a total sample of 210 participants was needed in the main study to detect medium effects \( (d=.25) \) with 95% power using an analysis of variance (ANOVA) that examines main effects with an alpha level at .05.

Experimental Stimuli

Reeves, Yeykelis, and Cummings (2016) suggests there should be more balance in message variance to represent the different ways individuals experience media. Therefore, this study implemented three variations of self-transcendence content for each condition. The study included movies that feature an inspirational, representation of mental illness that displays human virtues together within emotional contexts, human connection, and contemplative scenarios (Appel, Slater, & Oliver, in press). Video titles for the study were collected from imdb.com, an internet movie database, using the search term “inspirational movies about mental illness.” Movies that had scenes depicting both direct and modeled elicitors of transcendence were selected for the study. For example, a direct elicitor consisted of a person with mental
illness carrying out an inspiring task or overcoming adversity associated with their illness. A modeled elicitor consisted of a character with mental illness showing gratitude, hope, or appreciation of beauty toward the action of another character. The movies that best fit the requirements, as deemed by the researcher, were *The Soloist*, *A Beautiful Mind*, and *Wild*. Each movie was then edited to fit each of the two conditions: direct and modeled.

**Description of videos.** All of the videos contained elicitors of appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, and hope, while elicitors of spirituality or religiousness were not present in any of the videos.

*The Soloist* featured Jamie Fox playing the role of Nathaniel Ayers, a homeless street musician with schizophrenia, who possesses an extraordinary talent, even though he only plays on half-broken instruments. Steve Lopez (Robert Downey Jr.) a local reporter befriends Ayers and wants to write a story about him. Although Nathaniel has psychotic episodes that can lead to violent outbursts, his skill as a cellist surpasses faults related with his mental illness. The video in both the direct and modeled condition were edited to show the presence of each respective elicitor. The direct version included depictions of Nathaniel playing the cello with instances of performance, skill, vastness, nature, and architecture while the modeled version showed the reaction of the secondary character (Robert Downey Jr.) experiencing appreciation of beauty and excellence with facial expressions that displayed awe, wonder, and admiration. The video for both conditions was 4:22 minutes in length.

*A Beautiful Mind* portrays John Nash, played by Russell Crowe, who is a new graduate student at Princeton University seeking an original idea for his thesis paper and is afflicted with paranoid hallucinations associated with advanced schizophrenia. After the conclusion of Nash's studies, he goes on to become a successful academic in his field while continuing to manage his
mental illness. The direct elicitor version portrayed John Nash’s life while in graduate school and his job directly after obtaining his degree working for the department of defense with depictions of skill, kindness, and encouragement. The modeled elicitor version portrayed John Nash’s life early in his graduate school career then elapses the time span of 47 years where he is a professor. This version showed depictions of gratitude and thankfulness when Nash’s colleagues awarded him during the prestigious pen ceremony, depictions of hope as Nash reflects on his struggles with mental illness during his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, and depictions of appreciation beauty and excellence when Nash’s wife shows elevation, awe, and wonder during the award ceremony. The direct elicitor version was 5:15 minutes in length, while the modeled elicitor version was 6:12 in length.

*Wild*, features Reese Witherspoon as Cheryl Strayed, who after years of reckless, destructive behavior, severe depression, and drug abuse, makes a rash decision to hike the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) with no experience. Driven by determination, Cheryl hikes more than a thousand miles of the Pacific Crest Trail, alone. Similar to *A Beautiful Mind*, each condition contained a different setting within each storyline. The direct elicitor video portrayed Cheryl starting her journey on the PCT and overcoming adversity associated with life on the trial that showed depictions of nature, birth of a new life, and overcoming obstacles. The modeled elicitor version showed viewers the end of her quest on the trail while reflecting on all that she had accomplished along the way. This video included depictions of hope as she is optimistic about the future through a monologue, and depictions of appreciation of beauty and excellence as she reflects on her life while looking over a beautiful mountainscape. The video length for the direct condition was 6:15 minutes while the modeled condition video was 7:23 minutes in length (for full descriptions see Appendix A).
Pilot Study One

Prior to the main experiment, a pilot study was conducted to establish the successful creation of direct and modeled elicitors to form two conditions for the main study. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two conditions on an online Qualtrics questionnaire (see Appendix B). Participants were asked demographic questions and then were instructed to watch three videos. After each video ended an attention check question was asked, followed by a scale that identified the presence of the different elicitors. Finally, participants were asked one item about how intensely they remembered feeling inspired, moved, or hopeful while watching the video. All variables are described below.

The attention check question was asked directly after viewing the video in order to assess if the participants were engaged and attentive during the video. Participants were asked a specific multiple-choice question that could be answered if they were paying close attention to the video (i.e. What was John Nash trying to decode during his time at the Pentagon?). Table 1 refers to the percentages of answers participants answered correctly and incorrectly after each video.

| Table 1. Pilot Study 1: Descriptives of attention check for stimulus videos |
|-----------------|-----|-----|------|
| N               | Correct | Incorrect |
| Direct #1 - *The Soloist* | 42 | 95.2% | 4.8% |
| Direct #2 - *Beautiful Mind* | 42 | 78.6% | 21.4% |
| Direct #3 - *Wild* | 42 | 90.5% | 4.8% |
| Modeled #1 - *The Soloist* | 30 | 90% | 10% |
| Modeled #2 - *Beautiful Mind* | 30 | 86.7% | 13.3% |
| Modeled #3 - *Wild* | 30 | 100% | 0% |
In order to assess presence of direct and modeled elicitors, a scale was developed using language from Dale et al. (2017) study. Direct elicitors of self-transcendent emotions are prompted by the environment or surroundings within a narrative. For the purposes of this study, a direct elicitor could arise from a person with mental illness carrying out an inspiring task like overcoming an obstacle themselves without the help of another character. Modeled elicitors, on the other hand, arose out of witnessing others performing good deeds (Dale et al., 2017). Witnessing a character displaying gratitude toward another character that showed an act of kindness was used as an example of a modeled elicitor for this study.

The scale was implemented after each video. Items like “I experienced beauty” and “I experienced a skill that left me in awe” were used to assess direct elicitors during the video on a seven-point scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree; \( \alpha = .63-.85 \)). Items including “I witnessed a character experience awe from another character” and “I witnessed a character experience gratitude or thankfulness from another character” were used to assess the modeled elicitors (\( \alpha = .65-.85 \)). The goal of the scale was to assess if the participants could differentiate the presence of direct and modeled elicitors.

Transcendence was measured by asking participants how intensely they remembered feeling inspired, moved, or hopeful while watching the video on a scale from 1 (not intensely) to 7 (very intensely). This measure was implemented to gauge whether participants viewed the video as transcendent regardless of the type of elicitors they viewed.

A total of 73 participants were recruited through the Manship research participation pool and completed the online experiment. After checking the attention check question, eighteen participants were excluded from the analysis (N=55). Paired sample t-tests were used to analyze the presence of direct or modeled elicitors within each video. For each direct video we would
expect the mean of the “direct” measures to be higher than the mean for the “modeled” measures indicating that the participants thought that video consisted of more direct elicitors than modeled elicitors. For the modeled condition, we would expect the mean of the “modeled” measures to be higher than the mean for the “direct” measures indicating the video consisted of more modeled elicitors.

After analyzing the results, this was not the case. Results revealed that only one of the modeled videos (A Beautiful Mind) was significant in the right direction $t(23)=-2.16, p<.05$, indicating the participants reported the video to show more modeled elicitors ($M=5.80, SD=1.06$) than direct elicitors of transcendence ($M=5.46, SD=1.09$) (see Table 2). Results show that the rest of the modeled videos did not contain a greater number of modeled elicitors than the direct elicitors. Further, the video Wild in the direct condition had a significant test statistic, but in the wrong direction indicating that participants viewed the video more as examples of modeled elicitors than direct elicitors.

Table 2.
Pilot Study 1: Descriptives of paired-sample t-test for direct and modeled elicitors for stimulus videos.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Direct</th>
<th>Modeled</th>
<th>$t(32)$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct #1 - The Soloist</td>
<td>5.66, 1.09</td>
<td>5.72, 1.23</td>
<td>-.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct #2 – A Beautiful Mind</td>
<td>5.11, .86</td>
<td>5.40, 1.10</td>
<td>-1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct #3 - Wild</td>
<td>5.34, .94</td>
<td>5.90, 1.02</td>
<td>-4.12***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Modeled</th>
<th>$t(23)$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modeled #1 - The Soloist</td>
<td>5.70, 1.02</td>
<td>-.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeled #2 - Beautiful Mind</td>
<td>5.46, 1.09</td>
<td>-2.32*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeled #3 - Wild</td>
<td>5.83, .79</td>
<td>6.01, .87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$Note$: * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$
A series of one-sample t-tests using the middle of the scale (n=3.5) was conducted to assess how transcendent participants thought the videos were overall (see Table 3). Results indicated that the participants found all of the videos to be transcendent significantly above the midpoint of the scale at the p<.001 level. The results showed that participants reported the videos to be transcendent but were not able to differentiate the effects of the different types of elicitors. The differences between direct and modeled may be too subtle for individuals to detect, so the next step was to use a content analysis for the second pilot study, based on previous research, to determine the presence of direct and modeled elicitors (i.e. Dale et al. 2017).

Table 3.
Pilot Study 1: Within-Subjects Differences for Manipulation Check (Overall Transcendence)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t(32)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct #1: The Soloist</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>5.75***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct #2: A Beautiful Mind</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>4.90***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct #3: Wild</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>6.68***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t(23)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modeled #1: The Soloist</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>5.09***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeled #2: A Beautiful Mind</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>9.67***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeled #3: Wild</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>8.83***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: *p < .05  **p < .01  ***p < .001

Pilot Study Two

Because participants were not able to differentiate the films based on the conceptualization and operationalization of elicitor type, the second pilot study included a content analysis of the stimuli in order to assess the different transcendent elicitors. Two coders assessed all of the videos (n=6) used in pilot study one. Using Dale et al. (2017) codebook, each scene served as the unit of analysis for coding. A scene change was indicated by a change in place or time. The final sample contained a total of 66 units or scenes. The goal was to identify if
the direct videos contained more direct elicitors of transcendence and the modeled videos more modeled elicitors. Adhering to Dale et al. (2017) study, this study used Peterson and Seligman’s (2004) classification of transcendence-related characteristics and the conceptual link of self-transcendent emotional elicitors as well as specific aspects of trait transcendence.

The analysis excluded the religiousness variables because the primary researcher determined that the videos did not contain any instances of religiosity. The coders coded the presence (1) or absence (0) of the following eleven direct elicitors: nature, skill and talent, accomplishment, art, music, architecture, vastness, gifts, kindness, overcoming obstacles, and encouragement. They also coded three modeled elicitors of appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, and hope within each scene. Each elicitor represents a distinct coding category. However, it is possible for scenes to include multiple categories and both modeled and direct elicitors (Dale et al., 2017).

**Direct condition results.** Results of pilot study two indicated that the films *The Soloist* and *Beautiful Mind* in fact contained more direct elicitors in the direct condition. *The Soloist*, in the direct condition contained a total of 20 direct elicitors and four modeled elicitors. *Beautiful Mind*, in the direct condition contained a total of 27 direct elicitors and 13 modeled elicitors. After the initial coding, there was an issue with the third video, *Wild*. The direct condition did not have both coders reporting more direct elicitors.

**Modeled condition results.** The results demonstrated that the manipulation in the videos were not successful. In the modeled condition for *The Soloist*, the coders reported a total of 17 direct elicitors and nine modeled elicitors. Similarly, for *Beautiful Mind*, the coders reported 12 direct elicitors and six modeled elicitors. Finally, for the film *Wild*, the coders reported 16 direct
elicitor and 13 modeled elicitors. Because neither of the manipulations were successful for the film *Wild*, the film was excluded from the study.

To further strengthen the distinction between modeled and direct elicitors in the stimuli, *The Soloist* and *Beautiful Mind*, the modeled videos were edited again to include more modeled elicitors of transcendence. Once the videos were edited, one of the coders used in pilot study two re-coded the new videos. The coder reported 10 direct elicitors and 5 modeled elicitors for *The Soloist*, and 11 direct elicitors and 7 modeled elicitors for *Beautiful Mind*. While these numbers were closer in modeled versus direct elicitors, the coder still reported that there were more direct elicitors present.

After analyzing the results, it was concluded that there was a limitation in the codebook that was used in the Dale et al. (2017) study\(^1\). Because of the operationalization of what constituted a unit, the scene of a time or place change, each scene was only coded for the modeled elicitor once even though there were a number of times a modeled elicitor could have been present within each scene. The time frame of these scenes, as determined by the codebook established by Dale et al. (2017), was longer in length than a cut frame, defined as a continuation of two different shots within the same time and space. While this is a very simple construction of a film, the subject matter on each side of the cut can have prominent implications in a film (Dick, 2010).

Using a cut-frame method of analysis would better suit the reactional aspects of modeled elicitors when a direct elicitor takes place. For example, when a character gives another character a heart-warming gift a cut frame would suit the analysis better to show the reaction of the

\(^1\) Please contact Katherine R. Dale; e-mail: krdale@fsu.edu; School of Communication, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-2664, USA for the codebook and code sheet.
character (modeled) and the reaction of others who find the gesture moving (modeled). So instead of only coding modeled once because there was no change in place or time, the variable would be coded twice. This would occur because the “cut” to the face of the character receiving the gift would be one case/data point and then the “cut” to the reaction of other characters would be another data point even though they occur in the same time and place, or scene.

The primary researcher analyzed the videos again using the cut-frame as the unit of analysis. The modeled version of *The Soloist* contained 15 direct elicitors, and 22 modeled elicitors. The modeled version of *A Beautiful Mind* contained 11 direct elicitors and 21 modeled elicitors indicating that there were in fact more instances of modeled elicitors in both videos. Therefore, the two original direct videos of the films *The Soloist* and *A Beautiful Mind* and the re-edited versions of modeled videos of *The Soloist* and *A Beautiful Mind* were used in the main study data collection.

**Main Study**

**Participants.** A total of 147 students at a large southern university participated in the experiment. Respondents were recruited from various mass communication and political science courses to participate in the study in exchange for course credit. The majority of respondents (74%) were female, with an average age of 20.58 (*SD*=2.18; range=18-30). Most of the participants were White (76%), while 12% were African American, 5% were Hispanic, 3% were Asian, and 4% were biracial/multiracial. 82.3% of respondents knew someone who has been diagnosed with a mental illness, and 30.6% of participants reported being diagnosed with a mental illness. Of the two movies shown during the experiment, *The Soloist* and *A Beautiful Mind*, only 10.9% and 21.8% of the sample had seen the movies respectively.
**Procedures.** During the laboratory portion of the study, participants were randomly assigned to one of the following two conditions: direct or modeled. For message variance purposes, participants viewed a total of two videos. Participants read a description of movie prior to viewing the clip to provide context for the video they were about to view. After viewing each video, participants were asked an attention check question and how inspirational they thought the video was as a manipulation check. After, they answered questions addressing transcendent emotional reactions, connectedness, and compassion (see Appendix C for correlation matrix). Then, after completing these items, participants viewed the second video, completed the same items and then moved to the post-test questionnaire that addressed mental illness stigma, familiarity with mental illness, and familiarity with the movies they viewed.

**Measures**

**Self-transcendent emotions.** Transcendent emotions experienced during the videos were analyzed using a self-report measure of emotion utilized by Janicke and colleagues (2017). Participants were asked how intensely they felt each of seven emotional items including love, interest, compassion, moved/tender, gratitude, hope, and admiration while watching the videos from 1 (not intensely) to 7 (very intensely) \( (M=4.82, \ SD=1.12; \ \alpha=.82-.93) \).

**Connectedness.** Connectedness was assessed using Janicke and Oliver (2015) connectedness subscale; connectedness toward close others. Participants were asked 11 items using a scale from 1 (not intensely) to 7 (very intensely) (i.e. this movie made me realize the importance of relationships) \( (M=4.67, \ SD=1.11; \ \alpha=.91-.92) \).

**Compassionate love for others.** Compassion was measured using a seven-item scale Janicke and Oliver (2015) adapted from Sprecher and Fehr’s (2005) that addressed compassionate love toward humanity and strangers on a scale from 1 (not intensely) to 7 (very
intensely) (i.e. The movie...made me want to help others that I don’t even know) ($M=5.18$, $SD=1.05$; $\alpha=86-.93$).

**Mental illness stigma.** For the post-test questionnaire, destigmatization of mental illness was assessed using an attitude scale. Stigma toward mental illness was measured using 23 items developed by Wahl, Susin, Kaplan, Lax, Zatina (2011) that measured attitudes toward others with mental illness on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) that addressed stigma (i.e. If I had a mental illness, I would not tell any of my friends) ($M=6.15$, $SD=.56$; $\alpha=.77$). Higher scores on this scale indicated less stigmatizing and more positive attitudes toward mental illness.

**Descriptive Results**

A series of paired-sample $t$-tests were conducted to examine the within-subject differences on all of the dependent variables including self-transcendent emotions, connectedness, and compassion for each condition (see Table 4). Within the direct elicitor condition, participants who viewed *The Soloist* reported significantly more self-transcendent emotions ($M=5.03$, $SD=1.20$), connectedness ($M=4.90$, $SD=1.28$), and compassion ($M=5.74$, $SD=0.90$) than after they watched *A Beautiful Mind* (self-transcendent emotions, $M=4.18$, $SD=1.09$; connectedness, $M=3.70$, $SD=1.20$; compassion, $M=4.31$, $SD=1.31$), (self-transcendent emotions).

Within the modeled elicitor condition, participants reported higher levels of self-transcendent emotions ($M=5.30$, $SD=1.21$) and connectedness ($M=5.29$, $SD=1.10$) after viewing *A Beautiful Mind* than after viewing *The Soloist* (self-transcendent emotions, $M=4.91$, $SD=1.35$; connectedness, $M=4.87$, $SD=1.11$), (self-transcendent emotions), $t(71)=-3.09$, $p<.01$; (connectedness), $t(71)=-3.47$, $p<.01$. However, participants reported more compassion after

Table 4.
Main Study: Within-Subjects Differences for Self-Transcendent Emotions, Connectedness, and Compassion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>The Soloist</th>
<th>Beautiful Mind</th>
<th>t (71)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct Condition</td>
<td>Self-Transcendent Emotions</td>
<td>5.03 1.20</td>
<td>4.18 1.09</td>
<td>6.28***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>4.90 1.28</td>
<td>3.70 1.19</td>
<td>9.48***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>5.74 .90</td>
<td>4.31 1.31</td>
<td>10.60***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeled Condition</td>
<td>Self-Transcendent Emotions</td>
<td>4.91 1.35</td>
<td>5.30 1.21</td>
<td>-3.09**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>4.87 1.11</td>
<td>5.29 1.03</td>
<td>-3.47**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>5.69 1.03</td>
<td>5.09 1.24</td>
<td>5.66***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* *p* < .05  **p* < .01  ***p* < .001

A one-sample t-test, using the midpoint of the scale (3.5), was conducted to examine how inspirational the participants believed the videos were (see Table 5). After testing for univariate outliers two participants were excluded from the analysis. Results indicated while all of the videos were significantly different within each group, all videos were significantly more inspirational above the midpoint of the scale for both videos (*The Soloist*), *t*(72)=11.95, *p*<.001, (*A Beautiful Mind*), *t*(72)=9.44, *p*<.001. The same was found for both modeled videos (*The Soloist*), *t*(71)=6.25, *p*<.001, (*A Beautiful Mind*), *t*(71)=16.53, *p*<.001.
Control variables. Variables that were identified as potentially confounding were familiarity with mental illness (both addressing knowing someone with a mental illness and the participant having a mental illness) and familiarity with the movies (i.e. Do you know someone who has been diagnosed with a mental illness?; Have you seen the Soloist before?). The variable addressing if the participant knew someone with a mental illness (1=Yes, 2=No, 3=I don’t know) was collapsed to create a dichotomous variable. Answers “No” and “I don’t know” were combined to indicate that the participant did not know someone with a mental illness. The decision was made that if the participants responded that they “didn’t know if they knew someone with a mental illness” they could have made the assumption based upon the prevalence of mental illness (such as depression and anxiety) in the United States. Therefore, participants who didn’t know if they knew someone with a mental illness would likely also not have a strong opinion toward mental illness. As a result, the dichotomous variable was created as follows: 0=No/I don’t know and 1= Yes. 82.3% of participants reported that they knew someone with a mental illness while 17.7% reported that they did not know someone with a mental illness or was unsure.

Table 5.
Main Study: Within-Subjects Differences for Manipulation Check (Overall Transcendence)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t(72)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct #1: The Soloist</td>
<td>5.30</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>11.85***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct #2: A Beautiful Mind</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>9.44***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modeled #1: The Soloist</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t(71)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modeled #2: A Beautiful Mind</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>6.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>16.53***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *p < .05  **p < .01  ***p < .001
The familiarity with mental illness variable with regard to having a mental illness was also made into a dichotomous variable. This variable initially assessed if the participant had a mental illness (1=Yes, 2=No, 3=I prefer not to answer). For this variable, “Yes” and “I prefer not to answer” were collapsed into one item that identified if the participant had a mental illness (0=No, Yes=1). This decision was based upon the sample in the experiment. Being that all of the participants were college students and the high prevalence of mental health issue among college students, it was determined that the “I prefer not to answer” item was selected due to avoiding disclosure of the mental illness and the stigma associated with identifying as having a mental illness. The sample consisted of 69.4% of participants reporting they did not have a mental illness while 30.6% reported that they did have a mental illness or preferred not to answer.

Finally, the seen variable for each movie was collapsed into a dichotomous variable respective of the video. The answer choices 1= “Yes” and 3= “I’m not sure” were combined to create an item that identified that participants had seen or thought they had seen the movie. The dichotomous variable for each movie is as follows 0= “No”; 1= “Yes, I’m not sure.” For the new variables, 10.9% of participants reported they had seen or were unsure if they had seen The Soloist while 21.8% of participants reported they had seen A Beautiful Mind.

A series of independent-sample $t$-tests were run to examine the differences in the control variables on the key dependent variables including self-transcendent emotions, connectedness, compassion, and destigmatization for each condition. Results indicated that the only variable with a significant difference was the destigmatization variable (see Table 6). Participants who indicated that they knew someone with a mental illness reported significantly less stigmatizing attitudes toward mental illness ($M=6.22$, $SD=5.30$) than those who reported not knowing someone with a mental illness ($M=5.82$, $SD=.56$) $t(145)=-3.38$, $p<.01$.  

54
Table 6.
Familiarity with Someone with a Mental Illness Differences for Self-Transcendent Emotions, Connectedness, Compassion, and Destigmatization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>No or I Don’t Know</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Cohen’s d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Transcendent Emotions</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>4.87</td>
<td>-1.09</td>
<td>-.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>4.74</td>
<td>-1.78</td>
<td>-.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>-1.51</td>
<td>-.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destigmatization</td>
<td>5.82</td>
<td>6.22</td>
<td>-3.38</td>
<td>-.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001

Another t-test determined that familiarity in terms of the participant having a mental illness was similar for those participants who reported knowing someone with a mental illness (see Table 7). Those who self-reported having a mental illness reported significantly more positive attitudes toward mental illness ($M=6.35, SD=.47$) than those who did not report to have a mental illness ($M=6.06, SD=.57$), $t(145)=-2.99$, $p<.01$.

Table 7.
Familiarity with Having a Mental Illness: Differences for Self-Transcendent Emotions, Connectedness, Compassion, and Destigmatization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes/I Prefer Not to Answer</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Cohen’s d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Transcendent Emotions</td>
<td>4.90</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>5.20</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destigmatization</td>
<td>6.06</td>
<td>6.35</td>
<td>-2.99**</td>
<td>-.52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001
The control variables addressing whether participants had seen each video was examined. Results indicated that there were no group differences between seeing *The Soloist* and *A Beautiful Mind* with regard to the key dependent variables (see Table 8).

Table 8.
Differences for Having Seen TheSoloist and A Beautiful Mind for Self-Transcendent Emotions, Connectedness, Compassion, and Destigmatization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Yes/I’m Not Sure</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Cohen’s d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The Soloist</em></td>
<td>Self-Transcendent Emotions</td>
<td>4.85</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>4.66</td>
<td>1.24</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>-.45</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compass</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Destigmatization</td>
<td>6.16</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>6.11</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>A Beautiful Mind</em></td>
<td>Self-Transcendent Emotions</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>1.23</td>
<td>1.84</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Compass</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>4.97</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Destigmatization</td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>-.62</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* p < .05  **p < .01  ***p < .001

Gender differences were present on all of the variables (see Table 9), with females reporting higher levels of self-transcendence, connectedness, compassion, and destigmatization. The results of all the analyses indicated that gender is an important covariate to include in all of the analyses. Also, knowing someone with a mental illness and having a mental illness was a covariate in all the analyses that included the destigmatization variable.
Table 9.
Gender Differences for Self-Transcendent Emotions, Connectedness, Compassion, and Destigmatization

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Cohen’s d</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Transcendent Emotions</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>5.02</td>
<td>-3.62</td>
<td>-.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>4.34</td>
<td>4.79</td>
<td>-2.21</td>
<td>-.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>-3.09</td>
<td>-.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destigmatization</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>6.23</td>
<td>-2.91</td>
<td>-.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: p < .05 ** p < .01 *** p < .001*
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Hypothesis Testing

A series of multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to examine H1 through H6. All analyses included gender as a control variable. H1, H5, and H6 included the destigmatization variable and was also controlled for knowing someone with a mental illness and the participant having a mental illness.

Hypothesis 1, which stated that transcendent emotions will be positively associated with destigmatization toward individuals with mental illness, controlling for the effects of gender, knowing someone with a mental illness, and the participant having a mental illness, was not supported\(^2\). Together, the variables in the model accounted for a significant portion of the variance in destigmatization of mental illness, Adjusted \(R^2 = .16\), \(F(1,141)=8.01, p<.001\) (see Table 10). However, self-transcendent emotions were not a significant predictor of less stigmatizing attitudes toward mental illness (\(\beta=.10, p>.05\)).

Table 10.
Self-Transcendence as a Predictor of Destigmatization of Mental Illness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Destigmatization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1 (Control Variables)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Female =1)</td>
<td>.25**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing someone with a mental illness (Yes=1)</td>
<td>.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a mental illness (Yes=1)</td>
<td>.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R^2)</td>
<td>.16***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2 (Independent Variable)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Transcendent Emotions</td>
<td>.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(\Delta R^2)</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \(p < .05\), \(p < .01\), \(p < .001\). Entries are standardized \(\beta\).

\(^2\) One case with an extremely low z-score on the destigmatization of mental illness was found to be a univariate outlier. The outlier was deleted, leaving 146 respondents for the analysis. There were no violations of multicollinearity and there were no multivariate outliers.
Hypothesis 2 proposed that self-transcendent emotions would positively predict feelings of connectedness. The results support this hypothesis, \( \beta=.68 \ p<.001 \), Adjusted \( R^2=.45 \), \( F(1,144)=59.99, \ p<.001 \) (see Table 11). Participants who reported higher levels of self-transcendent emotions were more likely to experience greater feelings of connectedness.

Table 11.
Self-Transcendence as a Predictor of Connectedness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1 (Control Variables)</th>
<th>Connectedness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Female =1)</td>
<td>.18**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( R^2 )</td>
<td>.03**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 2 (Independent Variable)</th>
<th>Connectedness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Transcendent Emotions</td>
<td>.68***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \Delta R^2 )</td>
<td>.42***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * \( p < .05 \), ** \( p < .01 \), *** \( p < .001 \). Entries are standardized \( \beta \).

Hypothesis 3 examined if self-transcendent emotions were a significant predictor of compassionate love for others. The analysis revealed support for H3, (Adjusted \( R^2=.44 \), \( F(1,144)=57.70, \ p<.001 \) (see Table 12). Those who experienced higher levels of self-transcendent emotions were more likely to experience greater feelings of compassionate love for others \( \beta=.65 \).
Table 12.
Self-Transcendence as a Predictors of Compassionate Love for Others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1 (Control Variables)</th>
<th>Compassionate Love for Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Female =1)</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.06*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 2 (Independent Variable)</th>
<th>Compassionate Love for Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Transcendent Emotions</td>
<td>0.65***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>0.38***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.  * $p < .05$,  ** $p < .01$,  *** $p < .001$. Entries are standardized $\beta$.

H4 was supported as connectedness with others was a positive predictor of compassionate love for others, Adjusted $R^2=0.59$, $F(1,144)=106.06$, $p<.001$ (see Table 13). Greater feelings of connectedness lead to greater feelings of compassionate love for others ($\beta=0.74$, $p<.001$).

Table 13.
Connectedness as a Predictor of Compassionate Love for Others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1 (Control Variables)</th>
<th>Compassionate Love for Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Female =1)</td>
<td>0.25**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.06**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 2 (Independent Variable)</th>
<th>Compassionate Love for Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>0.74***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>0.53***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note.  * $p < .05$,  ** $p < .01$,  *** $p < .001$. Entries are standardized $\beta$.

H5 proposed that feelings of connectedness would be positively associated with feelings of the destigmatization of mental illness. The results supported this hypothesis, Adjusted $R^2=0.19$, $F(1,141)=9.26$, $p<.001$ (see Table 14). Greater feelings of connectedness significantly predicted less stigmatizing attitudes toward mental illness ($\beta=0.18$, $p<.05$).
Finally, a multiple linear regression revealed support for H6; compassionate love for others positively predicted less stigmatizing attitudes toward mental illness ($\beta=.22, p<.01$; Adjusted $R^2=.20$), $F(1,141)=9.93, p<.001$ (see Table 15). The more compassionate love participants felt the more they were likely to endorse positive attitudes toward mental illness.

### Table 14. 
Connectedness as a Predictor of Destigmatization of Mental Illness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Destigmatization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1 (Control Variables)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Female =1)</td>
<td>.25**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing someone with a mental illness (Yes=1)</td>
<td>.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a mental illness (Yes=1)</td>
<td>.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.16***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2 (Independent Variable)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>.18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>.03*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Entries are standardized $\beta$.*

### Table 15. 
Compassionate Love for Others as a Predictor of Destigmatization of Mental Illness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Destigmatization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1 (Control Variables)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Female =1)</td>
<td>.25**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing someone with a mental illness (Yes=1)</td>
<td>.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a mental illness (Yes=1)</td>
<td>.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.16***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2 (Independent Variable)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>.22**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>.04**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Entries are standardized $\beta$.*
Within- and Between-Group Analyses

Research question one examined how types of transcendent elicitors and transcendent videos differed in the influence on a) self-transcendence, b) feelings of connectedness, c) compassionate love for others, controlling for the effects of gender. A series of 2 (Video) X 2 (Type of Elicitor) mixed repeated measure analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) were conducted to examine self-transcendental emotions, connectedness, and compassion, controlling for the effects of gender.

For RQ1a, the analysis revealed no significant main effect for the video (i.e. *The Soloist* and *A Beautiful Mind*), with participants experiencing similar levels of transcendence in *The Soloist* video (*M*=4.95, *SE*=.10) and *A Beautiful Mind* video (*M*=4.70, *SE*=.09), Wilk’s $\lambda$=.99, $F(1, 144)$=1.99, $p$>.05, partial $\eta^2$=.01. However, there was a significant main effect for the type of elicitor. Participants who viewed modeled elicitors (*M*=5.02, *SE*=.12) reported significantly higher levels of self-transcendent emotions than participants who viewed direct elicitors (*M*=4.62, *SE*=.13), $F(1, 144)$=5.25, $p$<.05, partial $\eta^2$=.04.

A Video X Condition interaction was obtained, Wilk’s $\lambda$=.77, $F(1, 144)$=43.32, $p$<.001, partial $\eta^2$=.23. A Bonferroni post hoc test was used to examine the interaction (see Figure 1). As Table 16 shows, self-transcendent emotions were felt more strongly after viewing direct elicitors compared to the modeled elicitors in *The Soloist* video, but the difference was not significant. However, there were significantly stronger feelings of self-transcendence after viewing the modeled elicitors in *A Beautiful Mind* (*M*=5.21, *SE*=.13) compared to the direct elicitors (*M*=4.20, *SE*=.14, $p$<.001).

---

3 Each analysis was examined for assumption checks including multivariate normality, homogeneity, univariate outliers, and multivariate outliers. Results indicated there was no violation of the assumptions before conducting each test.
Figure 1.
Self-Transcendent Emotions: Video X Type of Elicitor

Table 16.
Self-transcendent Emotions: Video X Type of Elicitor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Direct Elicitors</th>
<th>Modeled Elicitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Soloist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>5.05ₐA</td>
<td>4.84ₐA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Beautiful Mind</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>4.20ₐB</td>
<td>5.21ₐB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Using Holm’s sequential Bonferroni post hoc comparisons within rows, means with no subscript in common differ at $p<.05$; within columns, means with no uppercase subscript in common differ at $p<.05$. 
For RQ1b, the analysis revealed no significant main effect for the video (The Soloist and A Beautiful Mind), with participants experiencing similar levels of connectedness after viewing The Soloist ($M=4.86, SE=.10$) and A Beautiful Mind ($M=4.46, SE=.10$), Wilk’s $\lambda=.99, F(1, 144)=.93, p>.05$, partial $\eta^2=.01$. However, there was a significant main effect for the type of transcendent elicitor, $F(1, 144)=15.91, p<.001$, partial $\eta^2=.10$. Participants who viewed the modeled elicitors reported significantly higher levels of connectedness ($M=5.00, SE=.12$) than those participants who viewed the direct elicitors ($M=4.32, SE=.12$).

These results should be considered in light of the significant Video X Type of Elicitor interaction, Wilk’s $\lambda=.66, F(1, 144)=75.92, p<.001$, partial $\eta^2=.35$ (see Figure 2). After running a Bonferroni post hoc test, results indicated that similar to self-transcendent emotions, participants experienced higher levels of connectedness after viewing the direct elicitors in The Soloist ($M=4.92, SE=.14$) than after viewing the modeled elicitors, but the difference was not significant (see Table 17). However, there were stronger feelings of connectedness after viewing the modeled elicitors in A Beautiful Mind ($M=5.20, SE=.14,$) than after viewing the direct elicitors ($M=3.73, SE=1.4, p<.001$).
Figure 2.
Feelings of Connectedness: Video X Type of Elicitor

Table 17.
Connectedness: Video X Type of Elicitor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Type of Elicitor</th>
<th>Direct Elicitors</th>
<th>Modeled Elicitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Soloist</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>4.92_{aA}</td>
<td>4.80_{aA}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A Beautiful Mind</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>3.72_{aB}</td>
<td>5.20_{bB}</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Using Holm’s sequential Bonferroni post hoc comparisons within rows, means with no subscript in common differ at $p<.05$; within columns, means with no uppercase subscript in common differ at $p<.05$. 

Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: 
Gender = .73, Knowing Someone with a Mental Illness = .62, Has a Mental Illness = .30
The analysis of RQ1c, which examined feelings of compassionate love, resulted in a significant main effect for video, Wilk’s $\lambda=.83$, $F(1, 144)=28.89$, $p<.001$, partial $\eta^2=.17$. Participants reported higher levels of compassionate love for others after viewing *The Soloist* ($M=5.67$, $SE=.08$) in both elicitor conditions than after viewing *A Beautiful Mind* ($M=4.68$, $SE=.10$). However, there was no significant main effect for type of elicitor, $F(1, 144)=2.47$, $p>.05$, partial $\eta^2=.02$.

A Video X Type of Elicitor interaction was obtained, Wilk’s $\lambda=.85$, $F(1, 144)=24.90$, $p<.001$, partial $\eta^2=.15$ (see Figure 3). After running a Bonferroni post hoc test, results indicated that participants who viewed *The Soloist* in both the direct ($M=5.76$, $SE=.12$) and modeled elicitor conditions ($M=5.58$, $SE=.12$) had much higher but similar levels of compassion (see Table 18). However, there were higher levels of compassion for *A Beautiful Mind* reported by participants in the modeled condition ($M=5.03$, $SE=.15$) than those who viewed *A Beautiful Mind* in the direct condition ($M=4.34$, $SE=.15$). Feelings of compassionate love were much higher than after viewing *The Soloist* compared to *A Beautiful Mind*, however the feelings were not that different between the direct and modeled condition.
Figure 3.
Feelings of Compassionate Love for Others: Video X Type of Elicitor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Type of Elicitor</th>
<th>Direct Elicitors</th>
<th>Modeled Elicitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Soloist</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>5.76_aA</td>
<td>5.58_aA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Beautiful Mind</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>4.34_aB</td>
<td>5.03_bB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Using Holm’s sequential Bonferroni post hoc comparisons within rows, means with no subscript in common differ at p<.05; within columns, means with no uppercase subscript in common differ at p<.05.*
Because attitudes toward destigmatization was only measured once in the post-questionnaire, one-way between-subjects ANCOVA was conducted to examine RQ2 that explored the effects of the type of elicitor on destigmatization of mental illness, controlling for the effects of gender, knowing someone with a mental illness, and the participant having a mental illness.4 The analysis revealed that participants who viewed direct elicitors ($M=6.17$, $SE=.06$) held similar, positive attitudes toward mental illness to those participants who viewed modeled elicitors ($M=6.16$, $SD=.06$), $F(1, 141) = .03$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .00$ (see Table 19).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Direct Elicitors</th>
<th>Modeled Elicitors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>6.17$_a$</td>
<td>6.16$_a$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Means with no subscript in common differ at $p < .05$ using Holm’s sequential Bonferroni post hoc comparisons

**Predictors of Destigmatization of Mental Illness**

Research question three explored if self-transcendent emotions, connectedness, and compassionate love for others, will predict the destigmatization if persons with mental illness, controlling for the effects of gender, knowing someone with a mental illness, and the participant having a mental illness. A multiple linear regression was used to examine if these variables

---

4 One case with an extremely low z-score on the destigmatization of mental illness was found to be a univariate outlier. The outlier was deleted, leaving 146 respondents for the analysis. There were no violations of multicollinearity and there were no multivariate outliers.
predicted the destigmatization of mental illness. The analysis indicated that the variables did not predict the destigmatization of mental illness. Together, self-transcendent emotions, connectedness, compassionate love for others accounted for a significant portion of the variance in destigmatization of mental illness, Adjusted $R^2 = .19$, $F(6,139)=6.75$, $p<.001$. However, none of the predictor variables were significant at the $p<.05$ level (see Table 20).

Table 20.
Predictors of Destigmatization of Mental Illness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1 (Control Variables)</th>
<th>Destigmatization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender (Female =1)</td>
<td>.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing someone with a mental illness (Yes=1)</td>
<td>.24**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a mental illness (Yes=1)</td>
<td>.17*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>.16***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 2 (Independent Variable)</th>
<th>Destigmatization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Transcendent Emotions</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>.05*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Entries are standardized $\beta$.

---

5 One case with an extremely low z-score on the destigmatization of mental illness was found to be a univariate outlier. The outlier was deleted, leaving 146 respondents for the analysis. There were no violations of multicollinearity and there were no multivariate outliers.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The central focus of this study was to examine whether transcendent media experiences have the ability to reduce stigma and engender more prosocial attitudes toward people with mental illness. It also sought to assess how different elicitors of transcendent media representations influence affective responses associated with transcendent media experiences and subsequent attitudes toward people with mental illness. Whereas previous literature has examined meaningful media and specific emotions like elevation, this study adds to the growing body of literature providing evidence that the similar, yet distinct emotion of self-transcendence plays a role in the destigmatization of a particular social group. Results indicate that, while self-transcendent emotions elicited by transcendent media experiences do not act alone in the destigmatization process, feelings of connectedness and compassionate love for others, that are predicted by transcendent emotions, play a substantial role the destigmatization of mental illness.

The Role of Transcendent Emotions on the Destigmatization of Mental Illness

The series of hypotheses sought to examine predicting variables of destigmatization elicited by transcendent media experiences. As hypothesized, transcendent media experiences have a distinct effect in that they lead to more pronounced affective reactions that are prosocial in nature, specifically toward mental illness. The results of this study suggest support for the affective mechanisms described by Oliver et al. (2018). Although self-transcendent emotions are not a direct predictor of destigmatization, it seems to activate a sense of resonance in a universal sense that inspires appreciation for and motivation to cultivate interconnectedness, human virtue, and altruism toward others (Oliver et al., 2018). While past studies have demonstrated how emotions associated with transcendent media activate a myriad of mixed-affective responses
(Kramer et al. 2017; Janicke & Oliver, 2017), results of this study indicate that feelings of connectedness and compassionate love for others act as profound explanatory mechanisms in the destigmatization process.

Results also show that a greater sense of connectedness leads to more compassion for others. Similar to findings from Janicke and Oliver’s (2017) study, feelings of connectedness with a shared humanity activate feelings of compassionate love for others, especially those in need because they recognize the “importance of human bonds and love in life” (p. 18). Most importantly, the results demonstrate that elevated feelings of connectedness and compassion both act as predictors in the destigmatization of mental illness.

Transcendent media that elicits feelings of an interconnectedness as well as feelings of compassion toward strangers is a potential mechanism for the destigmatization of stereotyped groups. These findings are consistent with Kramer et al. (2017) that show elevation elicited by human kindness heightens perception of universal orientation which was associated with more favorable attitudes toward stereotyped groups. While elevation elicits universal orientation (Kramer et al., 2017), connectedness, and compassionate love with close others (Janicke & Oliver, 2017), this study demonstrated that self-transcendence also predicts profound affective responses that have implications for prosocial dispositions toward humanity and strangers with a specific stigmatization.

This means that individuals recognize that others go through hardships in life that may look different from their own. But, regardless of the hardship, all humans are interconnected and deserve compassion just as they would. Within intergroup relations literature, interconnectedness encompasses a cognitive process regarding the extent to which groups are seen as connected to or included in the self-concept (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992). These mechanisms may
engender a relational connection that could produce more positive attitudes about mental illness in general (outgroup). It could also make people realize that individuals with mental illness are not defined by their illness but by similar characteristics they possess as interconnected human beings (ingroup). Self-transcendent experiences may activate a recategorization process that allows individuals to focus on broader levels of inclusiveness, such as the “human category” (Sparkman, Eidelman, & Till, in press).

Interestingly, there was no direct link found between self-transcendent emotions and the destigmatization of mental illness. The results suggest that self-transcendent emotional responses alone are not enough to precipitate the destigmatization process. Stigma is understood as a relational process that includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral components as it relates to a social process of labeling, loss of status, and discrimination toward a person who has an attribute that is considered negative by their community (Link & Phelan, 2001). The destigmatization process is complex and difficult to achieve. The results of this study seem to show that a one-shot attempt at inducing attitude change associated with mental illness is not enough to make an actual change. However, attitude change within the context of transcendent media experiences may rely on the frequency and breadth of these experiences. Consequently, these experiences need to encompass an affective component (i.e. a transcendent experience) as well as a relational component (i.e. positive feelings toward the group) in order to engender destigmatization (i.e. behavioral component). While self-transcendent emotions fulfill the affective components of prosociality (i.e. self-transcendence), the relational components of connectedness and compassionate love (i.e. situating themselves in the context of others), which are activated by self-transcendence, serve as vehicles through which attitude change can occur. Future research
will examine the mediating relationship between these variables and their influence on destigmatization.

According to Mestdagh and Hansen (2014) the relational aspect of interpersonal encounters is important in reducing stigma surrounding mental illness. Those who feel connected with individuals with mental illness and/or feel inclined to show compassion not only incorporate affective dimensions of stigma reduction (i.e. positive attitudes) but also the relation dimension through prosocial actions or motivations (i.e. a motivation to show compassion) toward people with mental illness. In essence, results suggest that self-transcendent emotions act as a catalyst that promotes the motivational aspects of the destigmatization process.

**Relationship Between Transcendent Elicitors Within Transcendent Portrayals of Mental Illness**

With regard to the first research question that examined variables in association with videos featuring transcendent portrayals of mental illness and the type of elicitors shown, the results yielded some interesting patterns within the data. While different entertainment narratives include different elicitors, the study was able to represent a range of elicitors previously conceptualized and observed by Dale et al. (2017). Whereas previous attempts to examine transcendent elicitors occurred in observational studies, this is the first study to use an experimental approach to reveal underlying causal mechanisms of different transcendent elicitors, particularly the differences between modeled and direct elicitors. The manipulation and operationalization of direct and modeled elicitors in this study revealed interesting findings between conditions, but also within each condition.

**Self-transcendent emotions and connectedness.** In terms of direct and modeled elicitor effects, self-transcendent emotions and feelings of connectedness occurred at higher levels in the modeled elicitor condition than the direct elicitor condition. With what we know about modeled
elicitors, those that arise out of witnessing others perform good deeds (see Dale et al. 2017 for review), self-transcendent emotions and feelings of connectedness may occur at higher rates because viewers are getting a “double dose” of transcendent elicitors. Viewers are not only witnessing someone else experience self-transcendence (i.e. a character tearing up with gratitude), but they are also experiencing that transcendent action prompted by the environment (i.e. the act of showing kindness or connectedness). This interpretation can be traced back into the operationalization of the direct versus modeled elicitors within entertainment narratives, and the fact that modeled elicitors often (but not always) can occur concurrently with direct elicitors in order to show perspective and strengthen narrative engagement.

Therefore, the combination of the direct action combined with the aftermath of transcendence may act as a reinforcing agent that heightens self-transcendent emotions and feelings of connectedness with others. This finding is important within expanding self-transcendent media experiences literature in that the type of elicitors matter for self-transcendent emotions and feelings of connectedness. However, taking these findings into consideration, there were no differences for compassionate love for others and destigmatization of mental illness between the direct condition and modeled elicitor conditions. Compassion seems to be more of a dispositional response that is activated by the narrative representation of the characters, which may override the type of elicitors. Therefore, the context in which the transcendent elicitors occur (i.e. character traits and/or situations) may say more about how individuals feel compassionate love toward others. Destigmatization was also not shown to be higher in the modeled condition. This may have occurred because the transcendent representations of more accurate, inspiring portrayals of mental illness might be enough to also mask the differences
between the two types of elicitors, reflected in both the direct and modeled conditions scoring higher on the destigmatization scale.

**Compassionate love for others.** As the central focus of the study, the treatments were intended to do the same thing (elicit transcendence), but the study anticipated that the two types of elicitors would operate differently. Results indicate that not only did the elicitors operate differently but the films also operated differently as an unexpected outcome. The results show that the narrative context can conceal elicitors within transcendent media in terms of feelings of compassionate love. Results indicate that the type of video (*The Soloist* and *A Beautiful Mind*) affected feelings of compassionate love toward others. Individuals reported higher levels of compassionate love after viewing the video clip from *The Soloist* than *A Beautiful Mind*.

It is important to note here that *The Soloist* featured a talented cello player who is African American, homeless, and lost his music scholarship to Julliard due to complications with his schizophrenia. *A Beautiful Mind*, on the other hand, features a White man in academia that struggles with schizophrenia, but is not in the same monetary and environmental situation as the character in *The Soloist*. Because the video from *The Soloist* depicted homelessness, it could have elicited more compassion than *A Beautiful Mind* because viewers witnessed Nash go on to live a relatively successful life of achievement. The success and brilliance depicted in *A Beautiful Mind* might have overshadowed the struggles with mental illness Nash experienced and viewers may have given less weight to the references of mental illness such as when Nash stated within the video that “he sees people who aren’t there.” These differences in the situations could prompt differences in feelings of compassionate love for others. As defined by Lazarus (1991) compassion involves being moved by another’s suffering so much so that they want to help. Because viewers were given a scenario where the person with mental illness was suffering
considerably more in terms of living conditions and basic necessities, it could produce heightened levels of compassionate love toward that individual suffering due to the nature of that suffering, therefore concealing the elicitors within the narrative. Researchers need to further examine compassionate love for others as a dimension within self-transcendent media experiences as it relates to differences in the effects of certain groups having different characteristics or in terms of being more stigmatized than others. Therefore, there is a need for research to measure affective responses of the entire experience but also the responses specific to portrayals of the characters within the narrative.

**Destigmatization.** While there was no difference between the effects of direct and modeled elicitors on less stigmatizing attitudes toward mental illness, results indicate that the attitudes toward mental illness across both groups were overall more positive. These findings indicate that transcendent media experiences featuring mental illness may have overall positive effects on attitudes toward mental illness regardless of the type of elicitor individuals may view. However, this claim should be evaluated with caution as this study did not examine the effects destigmatization between transcendent and non-transcendent media experiences. Nonetheless, these findings are in line with previous research conducted by Kramer et al. (2017), which found that merely observing media that triggers self-transcendence can produce more positive perceptions of all humans, including those with mental illness. The mechanism of self-transcendence may act as a catalyst for more positive perceptions of stereotyped groups, specifically ones that may suffer from more stigmatizing stereotypes, as this study found.

**Effects of transcendent video and transcendent elicitor interaction.** The results indicate a pattern between the relationship of transcendent media representations and type of elicitors present. Narratives featuring modeled elicitors generally elicited greater affective
responses than direct elicitors, with the exception of compassionate love. In the video featuring a character with a mental illness who is also homeless (*The Soloist*), we see elevated feelings of compassion that were generally higher than the video featuring a character who was in academia, but within that video we see compassion increase exponentially from the direct to the modeled elicitor condition.

With regard to literature surrounding different representations of elicitors, it seems that viewers who witness someone else experience self-transcendence is more powerful in eliciting self-transcendence and other prosocial responses than witnessing the stimulus on our own (Dale et al., 2017). This could be due in part because viewers are able to experience a momentary shift in perspective that are meaningful in regard to their real lives. Viewers may not have felt the urgency as they did with the other character portrayal and could examine the interaction from outside looking in being particularly engaged with witnessing others experience self-transcendence. This could have prompted encouragement to reflect on one’s own behaviors and beliefs about their connectedness with humanity, which could heighten their own feelings of self-transcendence, connectedness, and compassion for others.

A similar pattern occurs for compassionate love for others, however there were overall higher levels of compassion reported by viewers in the video featuring the homeless man with mental illness. It is understandable that compassionate love is higher in transcendent videos featuring an individual that is suffering considerably more than others because the results demonstrate that as self-transcendence increases, and individuals become “others-oriented,” they will have higher feelings of compassionate love for those who they perceive to be suffering or in need (Sprecher & Fehr, 2005). Direct elicitors that engage viewers directly with the narrative might experience higher feelings of self-transcendence, connectedness, and compassionate love.
for outgroup members who are suffering more because they are experiencing the interaction in a manner similar to first-hand, interpersonal contact and feel they need to extend themselves toward the outgroup (i.e. Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005). Therefore, the results indicate that the narrative context within the transcendent videos may have concealed the elicitors.

These findings show that portrayals featuring characters in different circumstances regarding mental illness elicit different levels of self-transcendent emotions when direct or modeled elicitors are present within the narrative. While this study included a range of elicitors within each narrative, it focused less attention to the characteristics of the characters of mental illness. Future research should investigate further how specific portrayals of mental illness elicit different levels of self-transcendence and subsequent feelings of connectedness, compassion, and ultimately the destigmatization of persons with mental illness.

**The Role of Transcendent Elicitors on Predicting Destigmatization of Mental illness**

In contradiction of expectations, there were no differences in the direct and modeled elicitors within examining emotions elicited by transcendent media that lead to the destigmatization of mental illness. While the type of transcendent elicitors was invariant across conditions, the direct paths from connectedness and compassion elicited by self-transcendence were nonetheless significant in the destigmatization process.

Adding to Dale et al. (2017) study, this approach provided another lens through which scholars can explore affective and relational responses to particular transcendent media representations that are theoretically tied to prosocial attitudes and behaviors. Dale et al. (2017) stated that research was needed to better understand the relationships between witnessing someone else experience self-transcendence, witnessing the stimulus triggering that reaction in someone else, and witnessing the stimulus on our own the might lead to self-transcendent
emotion. The results of the study seem to elucidate that as social beings, we are more likely to respond to another’s emotions alone or in combination with witnessing the stimulus triggering the reaction in someone else as they are effective in eliciting self-transcendence.

This type of response is consistent with parasocial contact literature regarding a subset of affective processes associated with mood contagion, the automatic and unintended transfer of mood from one person to another (Neumann & Strack, 2000). Mood contagion occurs between characters who are expressing a certain emotion and a viewer who “catches” the emotion the character is displaying. An example of mood contagion within self-transcendent experiences would be watching a character in a narrative tear up with emotion after someone showed an act of kindness and the viewer spontaneously tears up as well.

Because viewers respond to media characters similarly as they would real people, this line of research should explore self-transcendence within the cognitive and affective processes associated with parasocial contact and the subsequent effects on attitudes and behavioral intentions toward individuals with mental illness (Klimmt, Hartmann, & Schramm, 2006). This research would have important implications for how viewers interact with characters on screen and also how they interact with those in real life, as previous research has shown that parasocial contact can provide an experience that has the capabilities to reduce prejudice, particularly if an audience member has limited interpersonal contact with a minority group member (Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005).

Dale et al. (2017) also called for research to explore whether certain subcategories of elicitors (i.e. hope, gratitude, etc.) alone or in combination may be more emotionally impactful than others that may influence self-transcendence. These scholars reported that elicitors of hope were predominantly seen in self-transcendent media within the context of viral videos on
YouTube. While this study examined differences in direct versus modeled elicitors, there is a need for further research to explore the intricacies of the subcategories of transcendent elicitors, such as hope and gratitude, within narratives that could have implications for the destigmatization of social groups.

Specifically, it is important to examine elicitors of hope in media featuring mental illness not only with regard to society’s perspective of mental illness but for those who experience self-stigma. The emotional reaction of hope, which encompasses encouragement and overcoming obstacles/perseverance, may serve as a mechanism that promotes optimism about the future. This is important to consider as Or et al. (2013) found negative influences of self-stigma on functioning and quality of life, including lower self-esteem, less self-efficacy, less empowerment, less social support, less hope, lower compliance to treatment, and lower quality of life within individuals who suffer from a mental illness. Further research should examine self-transcendence within media as an intervention tool that promotes hope, appreciation of one’s life, as well as behavioral outcomes associated with obtaining treatment and life’s ambitions. For example, Dale et al. (2017) reference the underdog narrative that likely contains elicitors of hope that increases motivation to pursue personal goals.

A note of caution within the context of self-transcendent media experiences and stigmatized groups is the potential for a savior effect to occur. Because compassionate love involves wanting to help from another’s suffering, more research is needed to examine if this outcome is inherently altruistic or if this outcome is a result of a savior effect. The savior effect involves providing aid while simultaneously reinforcing stereotypes that individuals who are “mentally ill” are incapable of making their own decisions, promoting an authoritarian
perspective of the disorder (Klin & Lemish, 2008). While self-transcendent experiences are fundamentally good for the greater society, research should address these possible outcomes.

**Implications**

**The role of transcendent emotions in meaningful media experiences.** Self-transcendence appears to be a distinct facet of meaningful media experiences. Meaningful media often encompasses content that elicits human virtues, values, and loving relationships that make individuals feel inspired to situate “their own well-being within the broader context of others around them,” (Bartsch & Oliver, 2016, p.87). Findings of this study point to specific effects within transcendent media experiences that have implications for a more universal orientation. Affective responses, specifically compassion and connectedness, were found to play an important role between initially mixed-affective responses of self-transcendent emotions and more positive attitudes toward individuals with mental illness. Elicitation of these emotions make a difference in terms of ingroup/outgroup relationships as positive mediated experiences can alter one’s behavior in a way that they will seek out additional contact rather than avoid it (Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005). Further, these scholars suggest that if individuals develop affective ties with outgroups seen on screen it could encourage a change in prejudicial attitudes about the out-groups of which minority characters belong.

A unique contribution of the study was the examination of self-transcendent emotions in order to study the mechanisms involved in self-transcendent media experiences. Findings of this study reinforce the idea that self-transcendent emotions involve elements of interconnectedness as it relates to a shared humanity (Oliver et al., 2018). Further, it also provides evidence that connectedness directly predicts feelings of compassion for strangers that exemplifies the human virtue element and altruistic motivations of wanting to help those in need. Therefore, eliciting
emotions associated with connectedness and compassion on screen should translate into interpersonal contact with those with a mental illness in real life situations.

Results of this study also suggest that modeled elicitors seem to be more powerful in terms of eliciting self-transcendence. With reference to parasocial contact literature, self-transcendence seems to be heightened by witnessing others experience self-transcendence as they may “catch” those affective states and engage in reflection of their own lives with regard to what they see on screen (Klimmt, Hartmann, & Schramm, 2006; Neumann & Strack, 2000). Viewing others interacting and experiencing self-transcendence could incentivize altruistic affective and dispositional motivations.

Whereas eudaimonic media experiences build the self, self-transcendent experiences seem to build the community. Past research has applied self-transcendence within a broader context of a shared humanity (Oliver et al. 2018; Dale et al. 2017; Janicke & Ramasubramanian, 2017) whereas this study demonstrated the specific effects of self-transcendent emotions. Future studies are needed to examine these outcomes within the context of different stereotyped groups. Findings suggest that self-transcendent experiences do not act alone in the destigmatization process. Notwithstanding, the study demonstrated that self-transcendent or inspiring portrayals of a stigmatized group have important implications for the destigmatization of stereotyped groups. More theoretical research is needed to examine what other momentary affective experiences, apart from connectedness and compassion, may lead to more positive attitudes toward stigmatized groups within transcendent media experiences.

**Understanding representations of marginalized groups.** Self-transcendent experiences may be heightened depending on type of transcendent elicitor present, but also the characteristics within the entertainment narrative. Previous research in this area has concentrated on hedonic
versus eudaimonic forms of entertainment. This is the only study that examined affective responses from inherently inspiring or transcendent media, which has implications for the types of groups represented in these types of media that contribute to more prosocial attitudes. While unexpected, there were no differences in the type of elicitor on more positive attitudes toward mental illness, but that effect may have been a secondary area of concern compared to the overall effects of transcendent media on attitudes toward stereotyped groups. For example, results show that attitudes did not differ across elicitor conditions, however, these results could be due to existing presence of positive attitudes that were experienced regardless of elicitors present. As long as individuals find media transcendent or inspiring, there are implications in a broad sense of universal orientation (i.e. connectedness and compassion), but also specific effects directed toward the group represented on screen (i.e. positive attitudes toward mental illness).

Therefore, it can be concluded that as long as individuals find the media experiences transcendent, they will hold less stigmatizing attitudes toward that group once the experience has ended. Future research should address the short-term effects as well as the long-term effects of self-transcendent media on attitudes toward marginalized groups as it relates to uses and gratifications (i.e. individuals who seek out transcendent media to fulfill a need) as well as selective exposure (i.e. those who avoid transcendent media experiences). Further, more research is needed to examine under what conditions, specifically within transcendent elicitors and the condition surrounding stigmatized characters, activate heightened levels of self-transcendence and subsequent feelings of connectedness and compassion.

**Practical implications.** The results of this study suggest that entertainment narratives that feature inspirational portrayals of stigmatized groups have the potential to activate general feelings of wanting to become better humans for egalitarian purposes. More importantly, self-
transcendent media experiences may also engender motivations to initiate compassion and companionship toward others that are a part of a traditionally stigmatized group, thus initiating the destigmatization process. Initiatives like the National Alliance on Mental Illness’ campaign “stigma free” would benefit from promoting films that achieve specific effects like those demonstrated in this study. While documentaries can be effective with regard to their educational value, entertainment narratives that engage viewers cognitively and affectively may have more profound effects in the destigmatization process.

**Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

Although this study produced important theoretical and practical implications, some limitations need to be addressed. First, the sample size produced by the Gpower analysis indicated that in order to examine medium effects, the study needed to obtain a sample of 210 total participants. Because the direct paths were significant, there is a need to study the mediating effects of these variables further to examine these relational responses within the destigmatization process. Additionally, more research is necessary to examine these variables as it relates to the type of transcendent elicitor that act as a moderating variable. While both are important analyses to consider, they went beyond the scope of this study that examine the specific effects of each path, and a future study should use a larger sample size to examine these effects in more depth.

The second limitation of the study involved the stimuli for the experiment. While direct and modeled elicitors have a distinct and clear conceptualization, when working in entertainment narratives, the operationalization is not as well-defined. Because narratives encompass a combination of a progressive storyline, dialogue, and series of actions, coding for a presence of an elicitor using a scene as the unit of measurement excludes multiple instances of elicitors that
are otherwise only coded one time. As previously stated in the method, future studies should consider using the “cut-frame” method of coding in order to identify multiple pronounced elicitors in a scene to obtain a better estimate of the presence of direct and modeled elicitors within the entire stimuli.

A third limitation of this study was that the experiment did not delve into the subcategories of elicitors. Although the study revealed specific relationships between direct and modeled elicitors and emotional responses, it did not address the specific themes of elicitors present (i.e. hope, gratitude, appreciation of beauty), in each video as there was a wide array of elicitors present. The effects of the specific types of elicitors (those related to mental illness as well as those not such as a sunset) could elicit different levels of transcendence but also destigmatization of mental illness and other outgroups. There is a need to examine what subcategories of elicitors alone or in combination impact both strength and duration of self-transcendence in viewers as well as destigmatization.

Fourth, within the narratives, the characters portraying mental illness were male, and only one form of mental illness (i.e. schizophrenia) was used in this study. While not necessarily a limitation with regard to maintaining consistency within the experiment, it may have affected individual’s perceptions of gender within the context of schizophrenia, and subsequently mental illness overall. With that being said, future studies should examine other forms of mental illness (e.g. depression, bi-polar disorder, etc.) featuring different genders, races, and socioeconomic statuses in relation to self-transcendent media experiences and those effects on prosocial attitudes and behaviors toward mental illness. While social desirability could play a role in how individuals perceive the media experience in relation to the destigmatization of mental illness, measures are limited to test this effect. Future research should implement reaction time measures
to test implicit cognitions associated with stereotyped groups and facial expression analysis as emotional indicators instead of relying on self-report measures as this study did. Further, the absence of a control condition that depicted mundane aspects of mental illness (e.g. driving to store, picking up medications) was not used in the study as a comparison group. It would useful in future research to compare documentaries that depict the everyday lives of individuals with mental illness and compare them to more transcendent portrayals of mental illness to examine not only transcendent emotional responses but also the educational/prosocial value of each type of entertainment.

Finally, the findings may be limited in generalizability in terms of attitudes toward stigmatized groups because the data for the study were collected based on a convenience sample of college students. While experimental designs have high internal validity and are useful for hypothesis testing, they have lower levels of external validity because the samples used in experiments are usually small and are not representative of the larger population. There is a need to study self-transcendent media experiences within a more representative sample to identify how different demographics—especially those who are not situated in an environment that promotes inclusivity—may differ in their interpretations of transcendent media experiences and their attitudes toward stigmatized groups.

**Summary and Conclusion**

This is the first study to examine attitudinal outcomes associated with self-transcendent media experiences and the destigmatization process specific to mental illness. By doing so, the study attempted to not only fill the research gaps regarding self-transcendent emotions on the destigmatization of stereotypes groups, but it also examined the effects of specific types of transcendent elicitors. Findings elucidate the specific dimensions of self-transcendent media
experiences in which connectedness and compassion play an important role in assessing perceptions of stereotyped groups.

While scholars have provided ample attention to transcendent media within a broad context of a universal orientation, there is a need to further examine self-transcendent media experiences as it applies to other stigmatized groups. These findings might stimulate future investigation within the specific elicitors of transcendent media (i.e. direct versus modeled; hope versus appreciation of beauty and excellence) and affective activation. This study moves media psychology in a direction that challenges researchers to not only examine media that have implications for individual users but also for society. Those who experience self-transcendence associated with inspirational portrayals of stereotyped groups may recognize in themselves that they are a part of a greater cause that inspires compassionate love toward others who suffer from ostracization.
REFERENCES


91


APPENDIX A
PILOT STUDY FILM SYNOPSES

Direct Condition

The Soloist
In 2005, the only thing hurting Los Angeles Times columnist Steve Lopez more than his face from a recent bike accident was his pressing need for story ideas. That is when he discovers Nathaniel Ayers, a homeless street musician with schizophrenia, who possesses extraordinary talent, even though he only plays on half-broken instruments. When Nathaniel plays his cello Lopez is moved to tears and realizes that Nathaniel’s extraordinary skill as a cellist surpasses any faults related with his mental illness.

A Beautiful Mind
John Nash arrives at Princeton University as a new graduate student. He is a recipient of the prestigious Carnegie Prize for mathematics. Nash meets a group of other promising math and science graduate students, Martin Hansen, Sol, Ainsley, and Bender, with whom he strikes up an awkward friendship. Nash is seeking a truly original idea for his thesis paper, and he is under increasing pressure to develop his thesis, so he can begin work. Although John is afflicted with paranoid hallucinations associated with advanced schizophrenia, he has an extraordinary skill as a mathematician. After the conclusion of Nash's studies as a student at Princeton, he accepts a prestigious appointment at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), along with his friends Sol and Bender where he can use his awe-inspiring mathematic skills to help the Department of Defense.

Wild
With the dissolution of her marriage and the death of her mother, Cheryl Strayed has lost all hope. After years of reckless, destructive behavior, severe depression, and drug abuse, she makes a rash decision to hike the Pacific Crest Trail. With absolutely no experience, driven only by sheer determination, Cheryl hikes more than a thousand miles of the Pacific Crest Trail, alone. In the beginning of her quest, Cheryl realizes she has the wrong type of fuel to prepare hot meals during her journey. In desperation she finds a farmer nearby that she hopes will show an act of kindness and take her to get a hot meal and the correct fuel.

Modeled Condition

The Soloist
In 2005, the only thing hurting Los Angeles Times columnist Steve Lopez more than his face from a recent bike accident was his pressing need for story ideas. That is when he discovers Nathaniel Ayers, a homeless street musician with schizophrenia, who possesses extraordinary talent, even though he only plays on half-broken instruments. When Nathaniel plays his cello Lopez is moved to tears and realizes that Nathaniel’s extraordinary skill as a cellist surpasses any faults related with his mental illness.

A Beautiful Mind
John Nash arrives at Princeton University as a new graduate student. As a recipient of the prestigious Carnegie Prize for he has an extraordinary skill as a mathematician. However, while Nash is seeking a truly original idea for his thesis paper, he struggles to sustain a passing grade point average with the threat of being kicked out of Princeton. His advisor expresses his concern
during a prestigious pen ceremony “reserved for the members of the department that make an achievement of a life time.” Under increasing pressure to do well in school, John is afflicted with paranoid hallucinations associated with advanced schizophrenia. After almost 47 years of struggling with mental illness but continuing his studies, Nash finds out that he is being considered for the Nobel Prize. He soon experiences overwhelming sense gratitude when he realizes that he is a recipient of the prestigious pen ceremony.

Wild
With the dissolution of her marriage and the death of her mother, Cheryl Strayed has lost all hope. After years of reckless, destructive behavior, severe depression, and drug abuse, she makes a rash decision to hike the Pacific Crest Trail. With absolutely no experience, driven only by sheer determination, Cheryl hikes more than a thousand miles of the Pacific Crest Trail, alone. After major obstacles and feats, Cheryl finally reaches the end of her journey where she takes in the beautiful landscape as she experiences an overwhelming sense of optimism and hope for her future.
APPENDIX B
MAIN STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

We care about the quality of our data. In order for us to get the most accurate measures of your opinions, it is important that you thoughtfully provide your best answers to each question in this survey.

Q1. Do you commit to thoughtfully provide your best answers to each question in this survey?
   1. I will provide my best answers
   2. I will not provide my best answers
   3. I can’t promise either way

Q2. What is your age

Q3. What is your sex
   1. Male
   2. Female
   3. Other

Q4. Are you of Hispanic, Spanish, or Latino origin?
   1. Yes
   2. No

Q5. Please specify your race
   1. White Hispanic or Latino
   2. Black or African American
   3. Native American or American Indian
   4. Asian/Pacific Islander
   5. Biracial/Multiracial
   6. Other

You are about to watch videos from the movies The Soloist and Beautiful Mind. Please watch and listen to each entire video carefully.

**INSERT VIDEO SYNOPSIS**

You are about to watch a portion of the movie. Please watch and listen to each entire video carefully. You will not be able to move on with the rest of the survey until the video is over. As you’re watching the video, please think about how inspiring you find the video. That is, to what extent is the video moving, touching, heart-warming or hopeful? How much does it make you want to be a better person?

*Please put on headphones to the right of you. The videos will show up as a pop-up window. Once the video is over you can exit out of the screen and return to the questionnaire.*
Q6. Attention check question

Q7. Manipulation check
How intensely do you remember feeling inspired, moved, or hopeful while watching the video? Please rate on a scale from 1 (Not at all intense) to 7 (Extremely intense)

Q8. Emotional responses
How intensely are you feeling each of the following emotions right now? Please rate on a scale from 1 (Not at all intense) to 7 (Extremely intense)

1. Disgust
2. Fear
3. Humility
4. Appreciative
5. Interested
6. Love
7. Introspective
8. Contemplative
9. Reverence
10. Embarrassment
11. Compassion
12. Moved/tender
13. Sadness
14. Gratitude
15. Happy
16. Anger
17. Upbeat
18. Joy
19. Hopeful
20. Guilt
21. Admiration
22. Amusement
23. Contentment
24. Inspired

Q9. Connectedness
Please select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).
The movie:

1. Made me think about the power of love
2. Made me realize that love and being loves is a great gift in life
3. Made me realize the importance of relationships made me feel how important human bonds are
4. Taught me that love and kindness to others are the key to a fulfilling life
5. Made me feel happy to have the people in my life that make me feel loved
6. Made me feel like faith and love can accomplish miracles
7. Made me cherish the people in my life
8. Showed me the value of friendship
9. Made me feel like I can merge with a power or force greater than myself
10. Revealed a transcendent aspect to reality
11. Made all things appear to be part of a larger whole

Q10. Compassion
Please select how much you agree or disagree with the following statements from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).
The movie...
1. Made me want to help others that I don’t even know
2. Made me feel compassionate love for people from everywhere
3. Made me think about the well-being of humankind
4. Made me want to understand rather than judge people who are strangers to me
5. Made me want to sacrifice in order to let people from other places who are less fortunate achieve their goals
6. Made me want to reach out to people I don’t know that are having a hard time
7. Made me want to be kind and good to fellow human beings

Q11. Attitudes towards mental illness
Please indicate how much you Agree or Disagree with the following statements from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

1. I would be comfortable meeting a person with a mental illness.
2. I would be frightened if approached by a person with a mental illness.
3. I have little in common with people who have mental illness.
4. People with mental illness are able to help others.
5. It would be embarrassing to have a mental illness.
6. Only people who are weak and overly sensitive let mental illness affect them.
7. If any friends of mine had a mental illness, I would tell them NOT to tell anyone else.
8. Keeping people with mental illness in the hospital makes the community a safer place.
9. It is important to learn about mental illness.
10. We should do more to help people with mental illness get better.
11. Jokes about mental illness are hurtful.
12. A person with a mental illness is able to be a good friend.
13. People with mental illness deserve respect.
14. It is a good idea to avoid people who have mental illness.
15. If I had a mental illness, I would not tell any of my friends.

Q12. Familiarity with mental illness
1. Do you know someone who has been diagnosed with a mental illness?
2. Have you ever been diagnosed with a mental illness?
Q13. Familiarity with the movies
   1. Have you seen *The Soloist* before?
   2. Have you seen *A Beautiful Mind* before?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Self-Transcendence</th>
<th>Connectedness</th>
<th>Compassionate Love for Others</th>
<th>Destigmatization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-Transcendence</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>.68***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassionate Love for Others</td>
<td>5.18</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>.67****</td>
<td>.76***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Destigmatization</td>
<td>6.16</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>.24**</td>
<td>.29***</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: p < .05  **p < .01  ***p < .001*
APPENDIX D
IMPLIED INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

Louisiana State University

Title of Project: Emotional Responses to Characters in Entertainment Media

Persons in Charge:

Stephanie L. Whitenack
255 Hodges Hall
Manship School of Mass Communication
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
(513)532-9382
swhi117@lsu.edu

Meghan Sanders, Ph.D.
246 Hodges
Manship School of Mass Communication
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA 70803
(225) 578-7380
msand@lsu.edu

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to examine how depictions of characters in a movie will affect viewers' emotional reactions to the videos. Further, this study will examine the attitudes viewers will hold after watching a character on screen.

Number of participants: A total of 300 participants over the age of 18 will participate in this study.

Procedures to be followed: Each participant will watch 15 minutes’ worth of video clips and complete a questionnaire asking them how they felt while viewing the videos and perceptions towards the prominent media character.

Discomforts and Risks: There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life.

Benefits:

a. You might learn more about yourself by participating in this study. You might have a better understanding of your media attitudes and perceptions.

b. You may gain insight into the ways in which characters are portrayed on-screen with mental illness.

Duration: It will take about 30 minutes to complete the study.

Statement of Privacy: No identifying information will be included on any of the answers that you provide. If this research is published, no information that would identify you will be included since your name is in no way linked to your responses. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Specifically, no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet by third parties.
Right to Ask Questions: You have the right to ask questions at any point in time about the research. The person in charge will answer your questions. Contact Stephanie Whitenack at 513-532-9382 or swhi117@lsu.edu with questions. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, contact Dennis Landin, Chairman, LSU Institutional Review Board, (225)578-8692.

Compensation: Participation is purely voluntary, and no compensation will be provided for participation.

Voluntary Participation: You do not have to participate in this research nor do you have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. You can stop your participation at any time.

You must be 18 years of age or older to consent to participate in this research study.

Completion and return of the survey implies that you are 18 years of age or older, have read the information in this form, and consent to participate in the research.

Study approved by
Louisiana State University
Institutional Review Board
203 B-1 David Boyd Hall
225-578-8692
Dennis Landin, Chair
Approval #: E11324
Approval Expires:11/28/2021
APPENDIX E
IRB APPROVAL

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Stephanie Whitenack
Mass Communication

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: April 5, 2018

RE: IRB# E11033

TITLE: Emotional Responses to Characters on Screen


Review Date: 4/5/2018
Approved_____ X _____ Disapproved__________

Approval Date: 4/5/2018 Approval Expiration Date: 4/4/2021

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 2a

Signed Consent Waived?: Yes

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable)

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING –
Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:
1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU’s Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.

* All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU’s Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb
VITA

Stephanie L. Whitenack is a native of Cincinnati, Ohio. She completed her Bachelor of Arts degree in Communication at The Ohio State University in 2012. She continued on to receive a Master of Arts degree from the University of Cincinnati in 2015, where her research focused on disability and mediated relationships. Stephanie completed her Doctor of Media and Public Affairs degree in 2019 at Louisiana State University with a focus on meaningful media experiences to examine the effects of positive affect on the destigmatization of mental illness.