

Researchers find inspirational online videos could lessen prejudices

March 30 2015, by Katie Jacobs



People participating in the Free Hugs campaign. Oliver and her team used videos of the campaign in their study. Credit: FreeHugsCampaign.org

Scroll through your social media feeds or browse the Web and you're bound to see links to videos and images on sites like BuzzFeed or Mashable, many of them featuring cute animals or inspirational messages.

It can be easy to dismiss them as silly spam designed to attract clicks—and to be honest, many of them might be. But some of these videos and images can have a surprising benefit, according to research by Mary Beth Oliver, distinguished professor of communications and co-director of the Media Effects Research Laboratory at Penn State.

A recent study led by Oliver and published in the *Journal of Social Issues* found that watching inspiring online videos creates [feelings](#) of "elevation"—defined by New York University professor Jonathan Haidt as "a warm, uplifting feeling that people experience when they see unexpected acts of human goodness..."

In turn, elevation can create feelings of greater kinship with and less prejudice toward diverse racial and ethnic groups.

"Essentially, what we found is media images that create these feelings of elevation hold great promise as a way to reduce prejudicial feelings, at least in the short term," said Oliver. "One of the ways they do this is by making us feel closer to all of humanity, across different races and ethnicities."

An example of these videos are those of Kid President—the online alter ego of Robby Novak, an 11-year-old African-American with a brittle bone condition who creates and posts inspiring clips on YouTube. His most popular [video](#), "A Pep Talk from Kid President to You," has been viewed more than 35 million times.

Online viewers commented that the video made them feel inspired and restored their faith in humanity, precisely the feeling of "we're in this together" that Oliver hypothesized would create a sense of connection and would lower prejudice toward those in other racial or ethnic groups.

To test her hypothesis, Oliver and her team of researchers split 258

white undergraduate students into three groups. One watched an inspiring video, the second watched a funny video and the third watched a neutral video. Afterward, the participants were rated on their reported feelings of elevation.

Oliver found that those who watched the inspiring videos felt more elevation, and therefore felt a greater connection to humanity overall. These feelings of connection also led to greater feelings of closeness to others from different racial and [ethnic groups](#).

While the effects of the videos were clear, future work is needed to see how long-lasting the effects could be.

"Right now we're not sure if the effect is short or long term," said Oliver. "There are a lot of factors that could affect the length of the effect. For example, how often we see these images or if we see them go viral. Or, what if we're the ones to create these videos?"

Oliver said she hopes the results and the questions raised by the study will inspire further research in the field, both with improving attitudes toward other races and ethnicities and with additional issues such as bullying or stigmatization related to mental and physical health.

"Oppression and inequality are pressing social concerns. It's important to note that people may not be aware of their prejudicial actions toward others, making it difficult for them to acknowledge their own role in perpetuating prejudice," said Oliver. "It's important that we're committed to using the media in ways that can combat this."

Creating greater feelings of connectedness across racial and ethnic lines is one way [social media](#) may combat racism, Oliver said, adding that at the same time, diversity is something we all must protect.

"Diversity is essential," she said. "We have to remember that we're all part of the same big game, and that our diversity in that game is beautiful."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

Citation: Researchers find inspirational online videos could lessen prejudices (2015, March 30) retrieved 15 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-03-online-videos-lessen-prejudices.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.