

Meaningful media may push altruism across bounds of race and age

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People who watch meaningful entertainment may be more willing to lend a hand to people they consider different, according to researchers.

After watching a meaningful clip from a television show, participants in a study were more likely to help someone from a different age and race than they were people in their own age and racial groups, according to Erica Bailey, doctoral student in [mass communication](#), Penn State.

"Previous research has shown that people tend to be more altruistic after they watch a movie or television program that they consider more meaningful, but this study suggests that not only are they more altruistic, but they are more willing to offer help to people from different groups outside of their own," Bailey said.

Participants in the study were asked to watch a video clip from the television show "Rescue Me" and fill out questionnaires. They were also asked to take part in an optional task to help either a researcher from their university who was closer to them in age and race, or a researcher from another university, who was of a different race and age. One group saw a light-hearted, less meaningful clip and another group saw a more emotional, more meaningful clip.

People who watched the more meaningful clip were more likely to help the different researcher than they were to assist the similar researcher, according to Bailey, who worked with Bartosz W. Wojdyski, assistant professor of journalism and mass communication and director of the

Digital Media Attention and Cognition Lab, University of Georgia.

According to the researchers, who report their findings in a recent issue of the *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, meaningful [media](#) may produce warm, uplifting—or elevated—feelings that lead to these altruistic actions.

"Elevation is characterized as a moral emotion," said Bailey. "Scholars have defined it as a warm, uplifting emotion that people experience when they see acts of human kindness or compassion, for example."

Bailey said that the research also suggests that media, which is often studied for its role in negative events, such as violence and prejudice, can also have a positive influence on [people's](#) lives.

"As a media researcher, this study was a little refreshing," said Bailey. "Media does get a bad rap—and, often, rightfully so—but, this seems to show that media isn't all bad."

The researchers recruited 106 college-age participants for the study and divided them into two groups. One group watched a [television show](#) clip where the main character - a firefighter—reflects on his divorce and the loss of his cousin during the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. The other group watched a clip showing the main character and other firefighters playing practical jokes on each other.

After watching the clip, the participants were randomly assigned the option to help either a younger white researcher from the university where the study was conducted, or an older black researcher from a rival university. About 77 percent of the participants were white, 10 percent were Asian, 5 percent were Hispanic and 5 percent registered as other.

Bailey said the next step for the research would be to better understand

how the meaningful clips prompt this behavior and to determine which differences prompt the biggest response.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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