THE DISRUPTION MODEL OF INSPIRATION:

TOWARD A GENERAL MODEL OF

"BEING INSPIRED TO ACT"

by

Isaac H. Smith

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STATEMENT OF DISSERTATION APPROVAL

The dissertation of   **Isaac H. Smith**

has been approved by the following supervisory committee members:

Arthur P. Brief	, Chair	5/6/14
		Date Approved
Kristina A. Diekmann	, Member	5/6/14
		Date Approved
Adam M. Grant	, Member	5/6/14
		Date Approved
Joshua D. Margolis	, Member	5/6/14
		Date Approved
Kristin Smith-Crowe	, Member	5/6/14
		Date Approved

and by   **William Hesterly** , Associate Dean of the   **David Eccles School of Business**   and by David B. Kieda, Dean of The Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

For many—from prophets and poets to athletes and activists—experiencing inspiration is a fundamental part of the human condition. Specifically, inspiration can be a powerful tool in motivating people to act morally, help other people, and become their best selves. However, despite the power of inspiration to help people fulfill their potential, surprisingly little is known about when and why individuals are actually inspired to action. Drawing from schema incongruity theory and recent conceptualizations of inspiration as a psychological construct, I develop and test a general model of being inspired to act (the *disruption model of inspiration*). I assert that individuals will be more likely to experience inspiration—that is, feel inspired to act—to the extent that an evoked potential action is perceived as (1) *disruptive* to the continuity of their current mental schemas (i.e., it forces them to think about things differently), (2) *relevant* to the fulfillment of their core human motives (i.e., agency, communion, and coherence), and (3) *attainable* (i.e., they believe they can successfully accomplish the action or actualize the possibility). While this model has implications for theory and research on leadership, social influence, motivation, and other topics of organizational import, I focus on the role of inspiration in the moral domain—specifically related to prosocial behavior. Accordingly, I examine the human experience of inspiration in a survey of U.S. adults, an online experiment, and a field experiment in a Fortune 100 company.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

"*It came*. I doubt if we shall ever know more of the process called "inspiration" than those two monosyllables tell us." – C. S. Lewis (Lewis, 1979)

Gandhi inspired his fellow citizens to nonviolently struggle for independence in India. Martin Luther King, Jr. inspired thousands to fight for civil rights in the United States. Jack Welch is said to have inspired employees to dream big, leading General Electric to become the world leader in multiple industries. Throughout history, inspiration has often been cited as a powerful tool for driving change and achieving success. Surprisingly, however, as implied by the above epigraph from C.S. Lewis, we know very little about what truly inspires people to action and why. At a psychological level, what is it about a leader, an idea, or a possibility, that inspires one to action? To address this question, I develop a generalized model of being inspired to act, with a specific focus on inspiration in the moral domain as a motivator of prosocial behavior.

For example, what inspired Henri Landwirth, a holocaust survivor, to found *Give Kids the World*—a nonprofit organization dedicated to fulfilling the wishes of children diagnosed with life-threatening illnesses? At the age of 13, Landwirth and his Jewish family were forced into concentration camps during World War II. His father was shot and killed almost immediately, but his mother survived nearly 5 years, until—just weeks before the end of the war—she and 1,000 other female prisoners were set afloat at

sea in a large boat rigged with explosives. She presumably died in the explosion. Henri Landwirth himself, however, miraculously survived the terror of multiple death camps, including Auschwitz, Matthausen, and Gusen, as well as an underground work camp where he lived for more than a year without seeing the sun (Landwirth, 1996).

After the war, Landwirth fled to America with $20 in his pocket and a sixth-grade education. Over the course of several decades, he worked his way up in the hotel industry—from night clerk and cashier to eventual manager and owner. It was in 1986, as a hotel owner in Orlando, Florida, that Landwirth was approached by a wish foundation asking him to donate a room for a 6-year-old girl named Amy whose dying wish was to meet Mickey Mouse at Disney World. Excited by the possibility of helping grant Amy's wish, and intimately knowing what it was like for a child to stare death in the face, Landwirth gladly agreed. A short time later, however, he was informed that the hotel reservation had been cancelled; it had taken too long to make all of the arrangements for Amy and her family to visit, and Amy had passed away (Glauser, 1999; Landwirth, 1996). "Though I never knew her," Landwirth later explained, "Amy's death became the catalyst for building Give Kids the World and has affected everything in my life since" (Landwirth, 1996, p. 181).

The tragedy of Amy's death and her "unfulfilled wish *inspired* [Landwirth] to make a vow that no child in need would ever be failed again" (Give Kids the World, 2013; italics added). He learned that a vast number of children with life-threatening illnesses similarly wished to visit Disney World, and he was inspired to do everything in his power to help fulfill those wishes. In 1989, he opened the Give Kids the World Village in Central Florida, which has since grown into a 70-acre resort with over 140

Villa accommodations where children with life-threatening illnesses and their families can stay for a week, completely cost-free, and visit many of the nearby theme parks. The village itself has entertainment venues and attractions, and it provides meals for free. In partnership with corporations, wish-granting organizations, and thousands of individual volunteers, Give Kids the World has now hosted more than 120,000 families from over 74 countries (Give Kids the World, 2013)—all at zero cost to the families themselves. Thinking back to Amy's unfulfilled wish, Landwirth remarks, "As painful as her loss was, I hoped her parents would someday visit the Village and see what she had inspired for other children, the difference her young life had made" (Landwirth, 1996, p. 186). To a large degree, Landwirth attributes his charitable actions to the moment of inspiration he experienced as Amy's death led him to consider new possibilities—potential actions he could take to bless the lives of thousands of other children in similar circumstances.

Currently, we know very little about when and why such experiences of inspiration occur. By increasing our understanding of inspiration, particularly when it influences individuals to do good in the world— to help others, to contribute to society, to make a difference, etc.— scholars can begin to develop and refine theories of inspiration that meaningfully impact individuals' lives. To date, however, beyond generalized descriptions of inspirational and charismatic leaders (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Bass, 2008; Shamir, House, & Arthur, 1993), organizational research has only tangentially explored individual experiences of inspiration—which are rarely, if ever, measured or investigated directly. One of the major roadblocks to such theoretical and empirical precision has been the lack of a consistent and reliable definition of what, exactly, inspiration is. Over the past decade, however, building on earlier, qualitative

efforts to describe inspiration (e.g., Hart, 1998) and related experiences (e.g., *peak experiences*; Maslow, 1964), Thrash and Elliot (2003; 2004) have synthesized findings from disparate literatures (e.g., theology, anthropology, psychology, literary criticism) to theoretically derive and empirically support a tractable, tripartite definition of inspiration as consisting of evocation, transcendence, and an approach motivation. By evocation, they mean that inspiration must be evoked by a stimulus object (e.g., an idea, a person, or an act). In other words, partial or full responsibility for feelings of inspiration must be ascribed to an outside object or agent, or to a nonconscious source deep within an individual's being. Transcendence refers to becoming aware of possibilities that transcend the ordinary or mundane—a focus on things that are better or more important than one's previous concerns. An approach motivation pertains to the desire to transmit, express, or actualize a new idea or vision. When all three of these characteristics are present, an individual is experiencing inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

I adopt Thrash and Elliot's (2003, 2004) conceptualization as a starting point from which to further explore and unpack the experience of inspiration, with a particular focus on what it is about certain ideas, potentialities, and possibilities that inspire people to act. Drawing from a variety of literatures, I develop a general model of being inspired to act, in which I argue that individuals will be more likely to experience inspiration—that is, feel inspired to act—to the extent that an evoked potential action is perceived as (1) *disruptive* to the continuity of their current mental schemas (i.e., it forces them to think about things differently), (2) *relevant* to the fulfillment of their core human motives (i.e., agency, communion, and coherence; see Swann & Bosson, 2010), and (3) *attainable* (i.e., they believe they can successfully accomplish the action or actualize the possibility).

I examine this model in multiple contexts, using a variety of cues and stimuli (including the meaning-making capacity of leadership; see, Podolny, Khurana, & Hill-Popper, 2005) as potential sources of inspiration. While the general model I present can be applied broadly to many domains, I specifically examine the model within the moral domain—that is, what inspires individuals to engage in prosocial (e.g., helping) behavior, a form of prescriptive morality (i.e., what people *should* do; Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, & Hepp, 2009)?

With this research, I offer two primary theoretical contributions. First, by introducing a generalized model of being inspired to act, I help extend research on inspiration from merely defining it to examining specific instances of when it occurs and why, thereby broadening the theoretical scope of inspiration as a human experience. In doing so, I introduce a key mechanism by which inspiration is facilitated (i.e., the disruption of mental schemas) and suggest two important moderating factors (i.e., perceived relevance to core human motives and perceived attainability). Second, this research opens the door to specifically investigating inspiration as a motivational mechanism that can help bridge the gap between moral judgments and moral behavior (see Chiu, Dweck, Tong, & Fu, 1997; Rest, 1983), which has important implications for the promotion of ethical behavior in and of organizations. Taken together, these contributions can help us better understand the conditions most conducive to promoting inspiration, as well as how and why various cues and stimuli can be powerful sources of that inspiration—even to the point of inspiring others to become their best moral selves.

Inspiration as a Psychological Construct

Inspiration is a human experience with which many, if not most, of us are familiar. Having literal roots in the Latin term *spirare,* meaning to breathe or to blow (Leavitt, 1997), inspiration has figuratively come to mean "a breathing in or infusion of some idea, purpose, etc. into the mind; the suggestion, awakening, or creation of some feeling or impulse, especially of an exalted kind" (*Oxford English Dictionary,* Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p. 1036). From its earliest usage to the present, the figurative notion of inspiration has implied an elevated or transcendent experience (sometimes fleeting) wherein a new truth, idea, possibility, or awareness is somehow evoked in an individual's mind and/or heart.

Historically, the experience of inspiration has often been associated with the realization and communication of supernatural truths. Ancient Greek poets were said to have been inspired by the divine song of the Muses (9 daughters of Zeus believed to be goddesses over the arts and sciences), receiving hidden truths and the ability to communicate them (Leavitt, 1997). A tradition of inspired poetry even surfaced in the 18th and 19th centuries—William Blake once remarking that his poetry was "dictated to him by angels and spirits" (Leavitt, 1997, p. 20). Other Romantic poets from France and Germany also sought inspiration from God (Abrams, 1953; Weinberg, 1974). From a religious perspective, being inspired with divine truths is central to revelation and prophecy (Heschel, 1962). Many Biblical accounts of Hebrew prophets, for example, are believed to be divinely inspired, reflecting God's will and omniscience (Avni, 1968).

In modern usage, inspiration is not an experience exclusive to poets and prophets; the opportunity to experience inspiration—to be inspired—has been extended to all

people. Sources of inspiration, moreover, are no longer limited to the supernatural or divine. Painters, writers, and musicians, for example, still figuratively invoke the muse in search of creative inspiration (e.g., McCutchan, 1999), and some individuals seek spiritual inspiration from nature (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999). At other times, inspiration is received when not being sought at all—as depicted by the proverbial light bulb going on in someone's head while showering. Importantly, inspiration has recently been recognized as an everyday, human experience (Hart, 1998) that has the potential to promote individual well-being by imbuing people's lives with gratitude and purpose (Thrash, Elliot, Maruskin, & Cassidy, 2010a).

Over the past 2 decades, scattered interest in the concept of inspiration has surfaced in the organizational and management literatures. Inspiration has been discussed as a component of decision making (e.g., Langely, Mintzberg, Pitcher, Posada, & Saint-Macary, 1995), a source of creativity (e.g., Lampel, Lant, & Shamsie, 2001), an influence tactic (e.g., Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Yukl, Kim, & Falbe, 1996; Yukl & Tracey, 1992), a performance motivator (Grant & Hofmann, 2011), and as a style or dimension of leadership (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1994; 1995; Bono & Judge, 2004; Shapiro, Boss, Salas, Tangirala, & Von Glinow, 2011; Vinkenburg, van Engen, Eagly, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2011). However, the specific treatment of inspiration in these cases has exhibited neither a common definition nor a shared theoretical foundation. Langley and colleagues (1995), for example, called for the incorporation of inspiration into decision-making models but acknowledged that they used the term in ignorance (i.e., without a clear conceptual understanding). Other researchers, those who are not interested in examining inspiration specifically, use the term in undefined—and thus unmeasured—ways, like individual

inspiration as a source of creativity (Lampel et al., 2001) or apologies that *inspire* victims

to forgive others (Fehr & Gelfand, 2010). The experience of inspiration itself, however, is

rarely measured; rather, it is often implied, assumed, or discussed as roughly synonymous

with motivation (e.g., Cotton, Shen, & Livne-Tarandach, 2011).

   For example, the leadership literature, in which the notion of inspiration has

perhaps been treated with the most seriousness, includes theories of charismatic and

transformational leadership that describe sets of leadership behaviors that are potentially

inspiring (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Bass, 2008; Shamir et al., 1993)—

inspirational motivation being a subscale in the measurement of the latter (e.g., Bass,

1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994). However, these theories focus on broad leadership types, or

styles (i.e., what inspiring leaders do, in general), rather than examining specific

instances of inspiration per se. Measurement of inspirational leadership is usually based

on followers' perceptions of a general set of leader behaviors that might include

articulating a vision and encouraging enthusiasm[1] (e.g., Joshi, Lazarova, & Liao, 2009).

Within these streams of leadership research, individual experiences of inspiration are not

investigated directly, which leaves many questions unanswered regarding the actual

psychological experience of inspiration. For instance, certainly not all followers will be

similarly inspired by an articulated vision and an expression of enthusiasm. Given the

same stimulus (e.g., leader), what are the psychological mechanisms that affect when and

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[1] For example, Joshi, Lazarova, and Liao (2009) recently adapted items from Bass (1985) to measure
inspirational leadership with the following six items: *my leader excites us with his/her visions of what we
may accomplish if we work together as a team*, *my leader is an inspiration to me*, *my leader encourages me
to express my ideas and opinions*, *my leader has a sense of mission that he/she transmits to me*, *my leader
makes everyone in the team enthusiastic about the team's assignments*, and *my leader makes us believe we
can overcome anything if we work together as a team*.

why an individual will be inspired? What is it about a specific vision (or other stimulus) that makes it inspiring—or even uninspiring?

Theories of motivation can help begin answering the above questions, but they do not tell the whole story. It is important to note a distinction between motivation and inspiration. Whereas inspiration entails a motivational component (as mentioned above and to be elaborated upon below), not all motivation stems from being inspired. An array of motivations—whether based on needs (e.g., Maslow, 1943), goals (e.g., Locke & Latham, 2002), expectations (e.g., Vroom, 1964), fairness (e.g., Adams, 1965), etc.— might help explain why a given cue or stimulus leads to a given behavior, but theories of motivation alone do not sufficiently address the extent to which a stimulus awakens an individual's understanding or causes them to see possibilities of which they were previously unaware. Given the transcendence component of inspiration, it is reasonable to expect that inspiration as a source of motivation is qualitatively different from other sources of motivation. Its consequences, for example, might be stronger, longer lasting, and/or more meaningful. That said, it is not simply the strength or depth of one's motivation that characterizes inspiration, but the nature of the motivational source as well.

Returning to the example of Henri Landwirth, founder of Give Kids the World, a number of theories related to prosocial motivation offer partial explanations for why Landwirth proactively sought to help terminally-ill children. For example, according to the negative-state relief model (Cialdini, Darby, & Vincent, 1973), upon hearing the news that young Amy had passed away before visiting Disney World, Landwirth likely experienced a negative affective state, motivating him to help other similar children in an

effort to reduce his negative feelings. Or, a more positive interpretation might be that of the empathy-altruism hypothesis (Batson, 1987; 1991), which would attribute Landwirth's motivation to feelings of empathic concern for terminally-ill children in need, which, in turn, induced a desire to help. Moreover, the "identifiable victim effect" (Schelling, 1968; Small & Loewenstein, 2003) would add that Landwirth was motivated to help because Amy was an identifiable victim and not just a nameless statistic.

However, while each of the above explanations might help in understanding Landwirth's initial prosocial motivation, they do not sufficiently explain why the experience caused him to make statements such as, "With Amy's death, the seed that would grow into Give Kids the World had been planted in my heart and soul" (Landwirth, 1996, p. 181). Theories of motivation—and in Landwirth's case, prosocial motivation—help explain the motivation criterion of inspiration, but they fall short when it comes to the transcendence criterion (described in greater detail below). The psychology of inspiration is worthy of study in its own right, because there is something unique about inspiration that helps people see things in new ways, causing them to internalize ideas on a transcendent level. A better understanding of the experience of inspiration may help us understand why Landwirth devoted much of his life and fortune to building Give Kids the World, rather than just sending Amy's family a generous gift basket and sympathy card.

In sum, while research on leadership, motivation, and prosocial behavior has examined the motivational and performance outcomes of potentially inspiring cues and/or leader behaviors, the lack of conceptual clarity surrounding "inspiration" as a construct has prevented researchers from focusing specifically on the experience of inspiration per

se (for an exception, see O'Grady & Richards, 2010, although they limit their investigation to "divine" inspiration exclusively) and, in particular, when or why inspiration occurs. Recently, however, advancements in social psychological research have led to the formulation of a theoretical definition of inspiration as a psychological construct, paving the way for a more direct examination.

Tripartite Definition of Inspiration

Although vague conceptions of inspiration have sometimes been used to describe the potentially positive effects of upward social comparisons (e.g., Lockwood & Kunda, 1999; Lockwood, Jordan, & Kunda, 2002), a clear definition of inspiration as a psychological construct had not, until recently, been presented in the literature. Whereas inspiration has typically been narrowly conceptualized within specific content domains (e.g., creativity, religion, etc.), Thrash and Elliot (2003; 2004) have taken a phenomenon-based approach (Sternberg & Grigorenko, 2001)—integrating theoretical perspectives on inspiration from multiple disciplines (e.g., theology, psychology, literary criticism, etc.) and incorporating a lay understanding of the term—to develop a conceptual definition that can be broadly applied.

Thrash and Elliot's (2003; 2004) efforts resulted in a tripartite conceptualization of inspiration composed of the following characteristics: evocation, transcendence, and approach motivation. Regarding *evocation,* inspiration must be evoked by a stimulus object (e.g., an idea, a person, or an act, etc.). In other words, the experience of inspiration cannot be consciously willed into existence (Hart 1998)—a notion captured by sociologist Andrew Metcalfe (1999):

> Inspiration is received, not attained….When I'm in the shower, for example, safe, enclosed, relaxed, my mind surrendered to the water flowing over me, ideas often occur to me like revelations—clear, whole and unbidden. I cannot force these flashes, yet they occur because I've opened myself to them and because I've been actively pursuing my concerns before the shower. (p. 225)

Partial or full responsibility for feelings of inspiration must be ascribed to an outside object or agent, or to a nonconscious source deep within an individual's being. While one can prepare for and even seek inspiration, ultimately, inspiration must be evoked. For example, the untimely death of Amy served as Landwirth's source of inspiration in founding Give Kids the World. Her death evoked an awareness of the possibility that children may pass away before their dying wishes are fulfilled, and that he could potentially help avoid such tragedies.

Transcendence refers to becoming aware of possibilities that transcend the ordinary and mundane (Thrash, Maruskin, Cassidy, Fryer, & Ryan, 2010b)—a focus on or connection to things that are better or more important than one's normal preoccupations. Metaphors related to vision—such as illumination and insight—are often used to describe the transcendence component of inspiration (Thrash et al., 2010a). Inspiring experiences cause people to see things in a new light, to connect to a thought, an idea, or a possibility beyond one's usual concerns. Transcendence thus implies a connection—to something beyond the self or greater than the limits of the status quo (Ashforth & Pratt, 2002). In describing character strengths associated with transcendence (e.g., spirituality, appreciation of beauty, gratitude, and hope), Peterson and Seligman (2004) concluded that "…the common theme running through these strengths of transcendence is that each allows individuals to forge connections to the larger universe and thereby provide meaning to their lives" (p. 519). Experiences of inspiration entail

transcendent thoughts or feelings that connect an individual to the possibility or awareness of something greater than the ordinary or mundane. Henri Landwirth's vow to fulfill the wish of every dying child who wants to meet Mickey Mouse, for example, gave his life meaning and purpose. Recognizing the possibility of helping children with life-threatening illnesses transcended his life's usual, everyday concerns.

The third component of inspiration, *approach motivation,* refers to the desire to express, transmit, or actualize a new idea, vision, or possibility. Inspiration involves an energizing effect, a re-direction of effort and action (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). For example, consider the action-oriented motivation experienced by a woman upon witnessing the compassionate service of another:

> It had been snowing since the night before and the snow was a thick blanket on the ground. As we were driving through a neighborhood near where I lived I saw an elderly woman with a shovel in her driveway. I did not think much of it, when one of the guys in the back asked the driver to let him off here….I had assumed that this guy just wanted to save the driver some effort and walk the short distance to his home (although I was clueless as to where he lived). But when I saw him jump out of the back seat and approach the lady, my mouth dropped in shock as I realized that he was offering to shovel her walk for her….I felt like jumping out of the car and hugging this guy. I felt like singing and running, or skipping and laughing. Just being active. I felt like saying nice things about people. Writing a beautiful poem or love song. Playing in the snow like a child. Telling everybody about his deed….My spirit was lifted even higher than it already was. I was joyous, happy, smiling, energized. (Haidt, 2002, p. 3)

After witnessing the man's virtuous actions (evocation), the woman described feeling as though her spirit were lifted higher (transcendence) and as if she wanted to jump, run, be active, and emulate the act of virtue she had observed. The experience of inspiration has an energizing effect, instilling a desire to engage, to express, to act (i.e., approach motivation). Henri Landwirth, for example, after his inspiring experience related to Amy's death, was motivated to work tirelessly to fulfill his vision for Give Kids the

World: "the months that followed were a whirlwind," he described. "I spent every single day going from one business to another urging people to participate in the foundation" (Landwirth, 1996, p. 183).

Evocation, transcendence, and approach motivation—when all three characteristics are present, an individual is experiencing inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). An aspiring artist might revel in the beauty of a breath-taking landscape and determine to paint a masterpiece. A religious seeker of truth might have a powerful spiritual experience while meditating that motivates a life change. A young college student might read a newspaper article highlighting the goodness of humanity that sparks a desire to volunteer at a local food bank. In each of these examples, a trigger stimulus (i.e., the landscape, the divine, the newspaper article) evoked transcendent qualities, thoughts, or ideas (i.e., beauty, truth, goodness) that resulted in a motivation to actualize or emulate a new idea or vision (i.e., paint, live a spiritual life, volunteer).

A number of studies have provided strong support for Thrash and colleagues' conceptualization of inspiration (e.g., Thrash & Elliot, 2003; 2004; Thrash et al., 2010a). For example, using a vivid recall methodology, differences have been demonstrated between individuals' baseline experiences (i.e., recalling representative life experiences) and experiences of inspiration (i.e., recalling personal experiences of inspiration). Compared with their baseline experiences, individuals reported inspiration to involve enhanced meaning and spirituality (transcendence), more passive descriptions of the self in terms of the experience (evidence of evocation), and a greater approach motivation. Similar comparisons to experiences of activated positive affect revealed that inspiring experiences involve higher levels of insight and illumination (transcendence), lower

levels of self-responsibility and volitional control over the experience (evocation), but comparable levels of approach motivation (see Thrash & Elliott, 2004). Furthermore, construct validity studies have shown that inspiration fits well into a nomological network of theoretically-related concepts such as behavioral activation system (BAS), intrinsic motivation, creativity, self-determination, and optimism (Thrash & Elliot 2003).

Thrash and Elliot (2004) further posit that inspiration is actually a hybrid construct consisting of two component processes: being inspired *by* and being inspired *to*. Being inspired *by* refers to the appreciation and accommodation of a stimulus trigger, whereas being inspired *to* refers to the motivation to transmit, express, or actualize the qualities or ideas evoked by the stimulus. The evocation and transcendence characteristics of inspiration are associated with being inspired *by*, while approach motivation is associated with being inspired *to*. For the purposes of the present research, I will use the term inspiration in reference to the composite tripartite definition (i.e., evocation, transcendence, and approach motivation), consisting of both the *by* and the *to* component processes. Specifically, I will examine the role of inspiration—from its sources to resulting behavioral responses—in motivating individuals to action.

The Transmission Function of Inspiration

Consistent with the tripartite conceptualization, Thrash et al. (2010b) demonstrated that inspiration serves a transmission function—that is, it motivates the transmission of the perceived intrinsic value of evoked and transcendent ideas, qualities, or possibilities:

> The transmission process may take a variety of forms. One may be
> inspired to *imitate* the virtuous aspects of a role model's actions, to *record*

the content of a spiritual revelation, or to *actualize* a creative idea. Each type of transmission may be conceptualized as a meditational model. (p. 472, italics in the original)

Inspiration, as a transmission function, thus becomes the link between ideas or possibilities evoked by an inspiring source and subsequent action by the one who experiences inspiration—action that is intended to express or actualize the idea or possibility.

Recognizing Unmet Potential: The Disruption

Model of Inspiration

Thrash and Elliot's (2003, 2004) conceptualization has helped elucidate and add precision to the definition of inspiration as a psychological construct, but a broader question remains: what leads to inspiration? Thrash and his colleagues have helped us better understand what the experience of inspiration is, but when and why does it happen? The answers to these fundamental questions have broad implications for both theory and practice, potentially providing important insights regarding how to inspire others to action. Adopting Thrash and Elliot's (2003, 2004) conceptualization of inspiration, I focus specifically on the perceived nature and characteristics of ideas, potentialities, and possibilities that inspire people to act.

At its core, the notion of being inspired to act implies the identification or recognition of a new possibility or potential action to be undertaken. I use the term action very inclusively, acknowledging that such action can be construed at various levels of abstraction. For example, one might feel inspired by the possibility of being a better friend—the implied *action* of being a better friend having innumerable behavioral

manifestations. In contrast, one might feel inspired to send an encouraging note to a friend—the specific action of note-sending being very concrete. In both instances, however, the individual recognizes the possibility or potential of an action and is inspired to act—if only abstractly, in the case of the former. According to the evocation criterion of inspiration, such an identification or recognition of a possible or potential action must be facilitated by an outside source,[2] be it another person, Deity, music, or a beautiful landscape. If an individual's recognition of an evoked potential action is associated with a sense of transcendence and an approach motivation, by definition, the individual experienced inspiration—that is, was inspired to act.

The question then becomes, what is it about a given idea, potentiality, or possibility (and associated action) and how it is perceived that will lead to inspiration (i.e., will be experienced as transcendent and result in an approach motivation)? To address this question, I apply a modified version of a conceptual approach advocated by Hackman (2012) for the study of groups. He suggested that scholars studying groups move from a focus on the *causes* of group outcomes to a focus on the *conditions* under which groups are most likely to be effective. Since inspiration is experienced based on the perceptions of the individual being inspired, it becomes conceptually muddy to talk about factors external to the individual that *cause* inspiration to occur, since different people may perceive the same external factors differently. Adopting Hackman's (2012) approach, the relevant questions become (1) what perceived characteristics of a given idea, potentiality, or possibility are most important to inspiring someone to act, and (2)

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[2] As described by Thrash and Elliot (2003), the source of inspiration can also be *intrapsychic*, meaning that the source of inspiration comes from deep within the nonconscious self. This type of inspirational source still satisfies the evocation criterion, because the inspiration was not consciously willed into existence; rather, it was evoked by something outside of conscious awareness. Similarly, I acknowledge that intrapscychic mechanisms can serve as a source of being inspired to act.

how much of a difference do those perceived characteristics actually make? Drawing

heavily from schema incongruity theory—as well as theory and research related to social

comparison theory, human motives, transcendent emotions, workplace spirituality, and

even music perception—I present a simple, generalized model to address the first

question, which sets the stage for empirically testing the second. In the remainder of the

current chapter, I develop a *disruption model of inspiration*, and I present a number of

propositions. In Chapter 2, I set forth a series of specific hypotheses and describe the

methods by which I test them. Finally, in Chapter 3, I report the results of three empirical

studies and discuss their implications for theory, practice, and future research.

Transcendence, Schema Incongruity Theory, and Inspiration

As mentioned previously, a sense of transcendence is one (if not *the*) important

factor that distinguishes inspiration from other forms of motivation. At the heart of

transcendence is a heightened awareness of new ideas or possibilities of elevated

importance. Transcendence implies a new understanding of or connection with things

more significant than one's ordinary concerns. In the parlance of cognitive psychology,

then, being inspired and experiencing a sense of transcendence involves a shift or

adjustment to one's cognitive *schemas*, such that one begins to see things differently,

having made new mental connections.

Schemas refer to a person's mental maps—organized cognitive structures based

on prior knowledge and experience that direct one's information processing and retrieval

(Fiske & Linville, 1980). As individuals acquire knowledge and gain experience, they

develop certain expectations and attitudes about the world around them and the things in

it; these expectations and attitudes are stored as cognitive knowledge structures, which, in turn, influence interpretations and perceptions of future experiences (Crockett, 1988; Fiske & Taylor, 1991). When people are presented with new ideas, events, or even objects that are incongruent with their mental schemas, they seek to reconcile the discrepancy by either integrating the new idea or object into existing schemas (assimilation), or by modifying the structure of schemas themselves to account for the new idea or object (accommodation) (Piaget, 1970). Any schema incongruity thus falls on a continuum, from a negligible schematic interruption requiring very little assimilation, to a major disruption of existing schemas that requires complete accommodation (Mandler, 1982). I posit that the transcendent element of inspiration that broadens people's proverbial horizons and results in illumination or insight is associated with an adjustment to their current mental schemas, following an incongruity.

Transcendent experiences of inspiration, however, do not likely fall exclusively within the domain of cognition; inspiration also entails an affective component, as suggested by the common phrase, "I *felt* inspired." Indeed, a stream of research on transcendent emotions (see Keltner & Haidt, 2003) is beginning to emerge in the literature. Therefore, to account for both the cognitive and affective aspects of inspiration, I draw on Mandler's (1982) theory of schema incongruity to begin developing a model of being inspired to act.

Traditionally, schema incongruities that challenge one's assumptions or question one's world views have been shown to have aversive consequences, leading people to experience distress (Festinger, 1957; Heine, Proulx, & Vohs, 2006; Park, 2010). Mandler (1982), however, astutely theorized that people can actually respond favorably to schema

incongruities, especially when the incongruity can be resolved in the perceiver's mind, and when the resulting new mental connection has positive implications. According to Mandler (1982), people generally evaluate situations of cognitive congruity (when everything makes sense as expected) as familiar, acceptable, and thus favorable. This favorable evaluation is relatively mild, however, devoid of significant affective intensity or emotionality. Conversely, when faced with schema-incongruent stimuli, people engage in greater cognitive processing and experience physiological arousal and activation of the autonomic nervous system, resulting in higher affective intensity. Then, upon successful assimilation or accommodation, the psychological reward for having successfully resolved the incongruence—combined with the increased affective intensity—results in a more positive and emotionally-laden evaluation of the situation or stimulus than had there been cognitive congruity from the beginning (Mandler, 1982; Meyers-Levy, Louie, & Curren, 1994). Furthermore, Mandler (1982) suggests that favorable reactions to schema incongruities will depend on (1) the nature of the new mental connections, and (2) whether the incongruities can be resolved.

First, when the incongruity or disruption leads to a change in a person's schematic structure, a favorable reaction will largely depend on the nature of the new mental connection and the "broader evaluation of the context in which it occurs" (Mandler, 1982, p. 23). For example, learning for the first time about an amazing medical procedure known as a "heterotopic heart transplant" (Konertz, Sheikhzadeh, Weyand, Friedl, & Bernhard, 1988; Roberts, 2009) would be a very different experience for an average individual hearing about it on the evening news versus the mother of a young toddler suffering from cardiomyopathy (i.e., a deterioration of the heart muscle). In a heterotopic

heart transplant, rather than removing and replacing the patient's heart, a donor heart is inserted and connected to the blood vessels and chambers of the patient's original heart—literally giving the patient a double heart. In some cases, the donor heart can eventually be removed after the original heart has had time to recover (see Roberts, 2009). This notion of a double heart likely disrupts the way many people think about human anatomy and heart transplants, and after working through it in their minds, they may respond favorably to the schema incongruity, marveling at the wonders of modern science. Importantly, the nature and context of this incongruity would be quite different for a mother being told by a doctor that such a transplant could save her child's life. The more it matters, the more important the context of the schema incongruity is, the stronger the positive reaction to the incongruity is likely to be. However, a new mental connection that is inherently negative (e.g., when one first discovers that the crime rate in his or her local neighborhood is three times higher than previously thought), negative cognitive and emotional reactions to schema incongruities can also result. Therefore, regarding the nature and context of schema incongruities, people will react favorably to the extent that the implications of a disruption are viewed as positively-valenced and carrying a sense of importance.

Second, disruption can actually lead to negative, instead of positive, evaluations and emotional reactions if the schema incongruity cannot be resolved in the perceiver's mind. A strong disruption leads to high affective intensity, and "if the accommodation is unsuccessful…the unavailability of an appropriate response to the environment is likely to generate an anxiety experience" (Mandler, 1982, p. 24). Thus, the more likely the schema incongruity can be reconciled or resolved, the more likely one is to react

positively. In sum, Mandler's theory argues that schema incongruities will be responded to favorably depending on the nature and context of the incongruity (e.g., is it positively-valenced and important or significant) and whether the incongruity can be resolved in the perceiver's mind.

Empirical support for schema incongruence theory is found chiefly in the marketing literature. For example, counter to findings suggesting the importance of brand-congruent marketing efforts (e.g., Misra & Beatty, 1990; Reingen, Foster, Brown, & Seidman, 1984), unexpected and *incongruent* advertising messages were found to be more memorable (Heckler & Childers, 1992) and more favorable (Lee & Mason, 1999), but only when they were perceived as relevant to the product or message being communicated. Incongruities that were unimportant or seemingly insignificant did not have a positive effect. Other researchers have demonstrated that brand messages with incongruent information did, indeed, lead to more favorable product evaluations, but only up to a point. In the extreme, when brand messaging was incongruent to the point that consumers were purportedly unable to resolve or reconcile the incongruity in their own minds, product and brand evaluations were less favorable (Halkias & Kokkinaki, 2012; Meyers-Levy et al., 1994). Consistent with schema incongruity theory, empirical evidence thus supports the notion that people respond favorably to schema incongruities when the incongruity can be resolved, and when the nature and context of the new mental connection deems it important or significant in some way.

Applying the theoretical insights from schema incongruity theory to the psychological experience of being inspired to act, I develop and propose a *disruption model of inspiration,* composed of disruption, perceived relevance to core motives, and

perceived attainability. In terms of inspiring potential actions, a new idea or potential action that is incongruent with an individual's current mental schemas is disruptive in the sense that it forces people to reconcile the new potentiality with his or her prior views of reality. I propose that evoked possibilities and potential actions will be more inspiring to the extent that they disrupt the way one typically thinks about things, leading people to see previously unforeseen possibilities. However, consistent with schema incongruity theory and research, the model also accounts for the importance of the nature and context of the incongruity. As people change previously held assumptions and make new mental connections about things that are significant to them at a fundamental level, they are more likely to experience a sense of transcendence, and thus be inspired (see Figure 1).
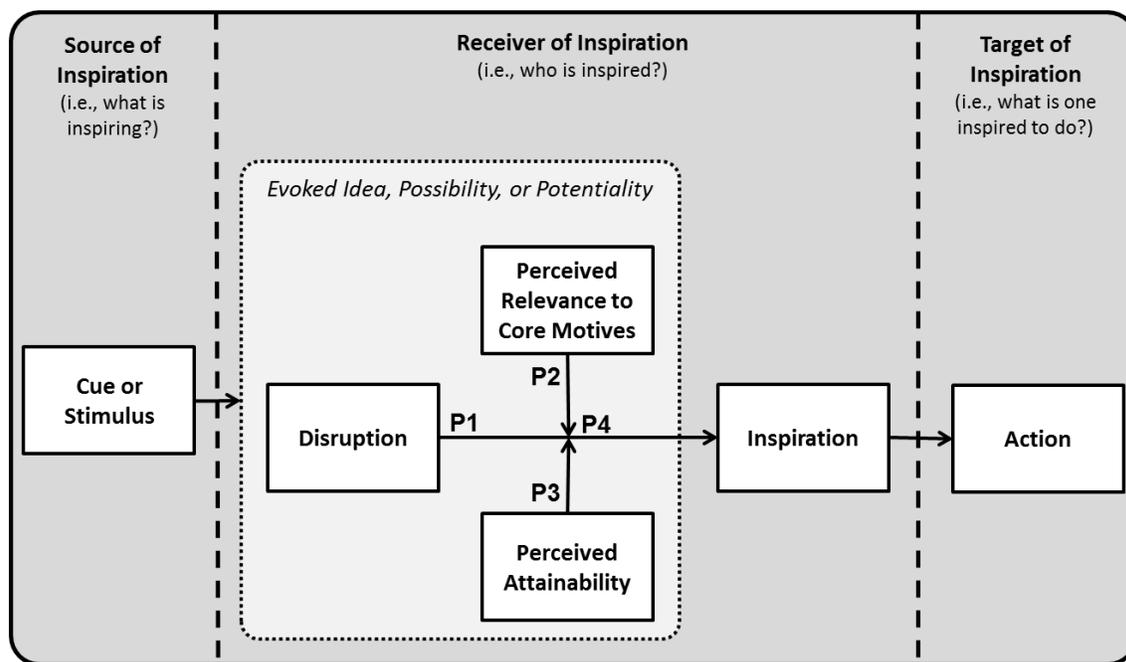
Note. P = Proposition.

Figure 1. The Disruption Model of Inspiration

I assert, and further explain below, that when disruptive possibilities are perceived as relevant to one's *core human motives* specifically, transcendence is more likely to result. Finally, in terms of resolving schema incongruities, I argue that the more *attainable* a new potential action is perceived to be (either in terms of accomplishing a specific action or progressing toward the goal of that action), the more likely an individual will be able to reconcile the schema incongruity, thus increasing the likelihood of a positive reaction. In short, the disruption model of inspiration predicts that an external cue or stimulus will more likely inspire action to the extent that it evokes a possibility or potential action that is (1) *disruptive* to mental schemas, (2) perceived as *relevant* to core human motives, and (3) perceived as *attainable*. I address these three factors in more detail, below, and explain the theoretical relationships among them.

Disruption

Applying the concept of schema incongruence (Mandler, 1982) to the psychological experience of inspiration, I define disruption as an interruption to the continuity of one's current mental schemas. I posit that schema disruption—in addition to contributing to greater affective intensity and positive evaluations—can help create a sense of transcendence, as it leads people to see the world with new eyes (or schemas, as it were). I use the term disruption to refer to the extent that an evoked idea, potentiality, or possibility disrupts the continuity or structure of an individual's preconceived ideas or alters the mental frameworks from which they view the world and their place in it. For example, in a qualitative diary study, Rourke (1983) asked participants to record moments of inspiration in a journal over a period of 4 months. The following excerpt

from one of her participants reflects a deep sense of disruption and its associated affective intensity:

> Today I was inspired by [astronomer] Carl Sagan. I experienced in myself an inner stretching. I felt binders [*sic*] being removed from my mind's eyes. I felt blocks being blown apart and a sudden thrust to move out of myself. I was forced out of a mental set that I had occupied for 37 years. I felt free and warm like a bud being warmed into full bloom. Suddenly, in a flash, I was seeing with different eyes and hearing with different ears. (p. 134)

In its strongest form, disruption implies a need for accommodation, moving an individual to forge new mental connections—to make adjustments to mental maps in response to a stimulus. In a weaker form, disruption implies a need for assimilation, integrating new external stimuli into existing mental frameworks. I argue that evoked ideas, potentialities, and possibilities are more likely to inspire individuals to act when they are disruptive—when they either cause people to recognize a previously unforeseen possibility or unmet potential (i.e., make a new mental connection), or remind them of a previous goal or possibility and enable them to see it with a fresh perspective (i.e., integrate with existing mental connections). Evidence suggesting that disruption plays a role in experiences of inspiration can be found in both the literature on transcendent emotions and music perception.

First, drawing from the literature on transcendent emotions—that is, emotions that invoke a feeling of connectedness to things greater or more important than the ordinary and mundane—helps demonstrate how disruption relates to the transcendence criterion of inspiration. Keltner and Haidt (2003) describe the transcendent emotions of awe, admiration, and elevation as being activated in response to stimuli that require accommodation (i.e., the strong form of disruption wherein an individual is unable to assimilate a stimulus into current mental structures) and that exhibit vastness, skill, or

virtue, respectively. Elevation (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Haidt, 2003a; 2003b; Schnall, Roper, & Fessler, 2010), for example, is defined as a moral emotion experienced upon witnessing the virtuous act of another that "usually includes a warm and pleasant feeling in the chest and a desire to become a better person, or to lead a better life" (Keltner & Haidt, 2003, p. 205). Experiences of elevation prototypically involve the perception of moral virtue and a need for accommodation (i.e., disruption).

Reconsider the previous example of the woman who was inspired by the man who helped shovel an elderly woman's snowy sidewalk: "...when I saw him jump out of the back seat and approach the lady, my mouth dropped in shock as I realized that he was offering to shovel her walk for her" (Haidt, 2002). The woman's description of her "mouth dropping" and her use of the term "in shock" reflect the disruptive nature of the incident, which elevated her awareness to the possibility of emulating the moral goodness she had observed. Such experiences of elevation can be considered one—of many— forms of inspiration, because they are elicited by observing acts of human goodness and displays of virtue (evocation) that induce feelings of being uplifted or 'elevated' (transcendence) and give rise to a desire to emulate and follow the example of the observed actor (approach motivation). Disruption plays an important role in feeling elevation and experiencing inspiration, by heightening one's physiological arousal (Mandler, 1982), and triggering a sense-making process (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005) wherein an individual more strongly takes that stimulus into consideration.

Second, research on music perception also helps demonstrate the role of disruption in experiences of inspiration. Studies have shown that "inspiring" music most often leads to physiological responses, such as the chills and shivers, when full of

unexpected harmonies and surprising changes (Sloboda, 1991). In a recent review of the literature, a listener's experience of the chills was found to be most reliably predicted by musical selections that exhibit abrupt shifts in energy—such as sudden volume increases and the entry of new instruments—or that violate a listener's expectations (Nusbaum & Silvia, 2011). Guhn, Hamm, and Zentner (2007), for example, measured participants' self-reported chills, while simultaneously measuring levels of their skin conductance, in response to listening to various musical pieces. They found that subjective measures of chills and actual levels of skin conductance were both higher in response to hearing pieces with musical characteristics including a sudden or gradual increase in volume, an expansion in register, or harmonically or melodically peculiar progressions. The unexpected, sudden, and peculiar nature of inspiring music that elicits chills is consistent with the notion of disruption as an important characteristic of inspiring stimuli.[3]

As a specific example, the inspiring story of Rachel Beckwith's birthday wish helps to further demonstrate the link between disruption and inspiration. On June 12, 2011, Rachel turned 9 years old. Instead of having a birthday party and asking for presents, she started a webpage through the nonprofit organization 'charity: water.' "I found out that millions of people don't live to see their 5th birthday," she wrote on her webpage. "And why? Because they didn't have access to clean, safe water, so I'm celebrating my birthday like never before. I'm asking from everyone I know to donate to my campaign instead of gifts for my birthday" (charity: water, 2013a). Rachel set a goal of raising $300, and she asked her friends and relatives to donate $9 each, in place of any gifts she may have received otherwise. As her ninth birthday came and went, she was

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[3] It is important to note, however, that these examples of inspiring music relate more specifically to being inspired "by," and not necessarily to being inspired "to."

slightly disappointed to have only raised a total of $220. She told her mom that she would try harder the next year. Tragically, she would never have that chance. Just over a month later, 9-year-old Rachel was riding in a car with her family when two trucks collided, initiating a 13-car pileup on an interstate highway in Bellevue, Washington. One of the trucks smashed into Rachel's car, severing her spinal cord. After 3 days on life support, Rachel died—the only fatality from the accident (charity: water, 2013b; Elkin, 2011; Kristoff, 2011).

As news of Rachel's unselfish birthday wish and heartbreaking death began to spread, complete strangers started to visit her webpage and make contributions. A corporate foundation donated $1,000. A 5-year-old girl emptied her piggy bank to donate $1.28. Media outlets such as the *Seattle Times* and *CNN* began reporting that people from all over the world were inspired to give to Rachel's cause (Elkin, 2011; Wogan, 2011). At the close of Rachel's online campaign—with an original goal of just $300—a total of 31,997 individuals had donated a combined $1,265,823 (charity: water, 2013b).

After making their contributions, thousands of the donors posted comments on Rachel's webpage, praising and thanking her for being an inspiration (charity: water, 2013a). A young donor of $9 stated, "I am nine years old. Rachel's life has inspired me to give to help other people have clean water around the world." Another donor ($46.20) said, "My young daughters and I were so inspired by Rachel's story. They decided to have a bake sale in her honor!" A $60 donor added, "To say you are an inspiration is an understatement…to inspire thousands of people around the word to give…astounding." Hundreds of similar donor comments reflected Rachel's inspiring example, such as "The kids in the neighborhood got together and decided to do a Koolaid/lemonade/cookie stand

to raise money for Rachel's cause….Rachel was our inspiration" (donated $15); and "Thank you Rachel for your inspiration! You have touched more lives in a few short years than most people could in 100. You are further proof that Angels exist" (donated $50).

Regarding disruption, some additional comments from those who donated to Rachel Beckwith's 'charity: water' campaign specifically reflect the link between disruption and inspiration: "my paradigm has shifted because of you," "thank you for opening my eyes," "thank you Rachel for waking up the world," "thank you for reminding me what I already knew, but had forgotten at times" and "I am 11 and I never thought a 9-year-old could be so thoughtful" (charity: water, 2013a). People found Rachel's unselfish birthday wish to be surprising, unexpected, and uncharacteristic of such a young girl—which is potentially disruptive in its own right. Combined with the tragic nature of her subsequent death, however, Rachel's story was likely even more disruptive to the continuity of their mental schemas, challenging traditional views like *children selfishly relish birthday presents* and *children shouldn't die young*. Such disruption led them to see things in a new way, increasing the likelihood that they would experience the insight, illumination, and transcendence associated with inspiration. In sum, I argue that an idea or possibility will be more inspiring to the extent that is it surprising, assumption-violating, unexpected, or otherwise disruptive to one's current focus or view of reality—as it jolts, shocks, or perhaps merely nudges one to a heightened awareness, above the ordinary and mundane.

Relevance to Core Human Motives

In isolation, however, there may be times when disruption is not a sufficient condition for inspiration. An evoked stimulus will be more likely to inspire one to action when it is surprising, unexpected, and disruptive, only to the extent that it heightens one's awareness in a transcendent manner. When the nature of a disruptive stimulus highlights action related to future possibilities and unmet potential—specifically when such action is perceived as relevant to the fulfillment of core human motives—an individual will be more likely to experience inspiration, with its associated transcendence and approach motivation.

As described above, transcendence refers to the characteristic of inspiration that awakens individuals to new possibilities and broadens their focus beyond the ordinary or mundane. Transcendence is associated with enhancement, positivity, and clarity (Thrash & Elliot, 2003) and implies an awakening "to something new, better, or more important" (Thrash & Elliot, 2004, p. 958). I contend that such transcendence—and an associated approach motivation to pursue unmet potential (e.g., being inspired to be a better person, write a poetic masterpiece, or develop a budding talent)—is more likely when an evoked idea, potentiality, or possibility is not only disruptive, but also perceived as relevant to the fulfillment of one's core human motives. While relevance at any level (to an individual's values, stated goals, etc.) might increase the likelihood of experiencing inspiration, I specifically focus on relevance to core human motives for two reasons. First, I treat core motives as being relatively universal in nature (discussed below). For a leader trying to inspire followers, for example, when intimately knowing all followers' personal values, goals, and interests is difficult or impractical, targeting core human

motives has a greater potential to reach all people, in general. Second, as underlying drivers of human thought and behavior, core motives represent what individuals deem important at a central level. A cue or stimulus that evokes an idea that is perceived as relevant to core human motives is thus more likely to lead to transcendence, and thus inspiration, as it heightens one's awareness to issues of fundamental importance to the individual. Specifically, there are three core human motives that underlie much, if not most, of human behavior, as outlined by Swann and Bosson (2010): agency, communion, and coherence.

First, *agency* refers to the human motive to strive for autonomy and competence. Rooted originally in philosophy (e.g., Hegel, 1807/1977), the agency motive has since been recognized by psychologists (e.g., Bakan, 1966; Bandura, 1989) as a driving force in people's desire to act with intentionality and capability. People pursue agency by creating, mastering, expanding, and asserting (Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). Personal values reflected in the agency motive include pleasure, influence, wealth, competence, achievement, power, autonomy, and ambition (Trapnell & Paulhus, 2012). McAdams (1993) describes agency as composed of status/victory, achievement/responsibility, self-mastery, and empowerment. In short, the essence of the agency motive is the desire to intentionally act of one's own volition (i.e., autonomy) and to do so with skill, ability, capability, and/or mastery (i.e., competence). Agency, as a fundamental human motive, is thus rooted in self-determination theory's basic psychological needs of autonomy and competence (see Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000), and may serve as the underlying foundation for more specific motives (Swann & Bosson, 2010)—like self-enhancement and self-improvement (see Fiske,

2004; Higgins, 1987; Kunda, 1990; Taylor & Brown, 1988; Wood, 1989).

Nomologically, it is also likely related to needs for growth (Alderfer, 1969), achievement, and power (McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982).

Second, *communion* is the motive that drives people to desire social worth, acceptance, and belongingness (Swann & Bosson, 2010). People pursue communion by contacting, attaching, connecting, and uniting (Rosso et al., 2010). Personal values reflected in the communion motive include forgiveness, trust, altruism, loyalty, harmony, compassion, civility, equality, and tradition (Trapnell & Paulhus, 2012). McAdams (1993) describes communion as composed of caring/helping, love/friendship, dialog, and unity/togetherness. In short, the essence of the communion motive is the desire to have meaningful interpersonal relationships and be a member of a valued group or community. Biologically, humans lacking sufficient interpersonal connections tend to have poorer physical health (e.g., House, Landis, & Umberson, 1988). Psychologically, people with few positive relationships report lower levels of life satisfaction (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Moreover, in addition to seeking interpersonal relationships, the social nature and seemingly tribal impulses of humans are demonstrated in the numerous studies that reveal an apparent motivation for people to categorize themselves and others into in-groups and out-groups—even when there is not a particular incentive for doing so (e.g., Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). Communion, as a fundamental human motive, is rooted in self-determination theory's basic psychological need of relatedness (see Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000) and is consistent with notions of belonging, relatedness, and affiliation as core social motives and human needs (e.g., Alderfer, 1969; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Fiske, 2004; McClelland & Boyatzis, 1982).

Third, the *coherence* motive refers to the human drive for understanding, as manifested in the desire to have meaning and purpose, as well as control and predictability, in one's life. From an early age, infants naturally seek to identify regularities (Baillargeon, 2002; Popper, 1963) and patterns that enable them to understand their environment, observe, and learn (Swann & Bosson, 2010). As they grow into adulthood, people often seek meaning in and purpose to their lives—striving to understand the reasons for their existence in the world. In addition to making sense of the world and their place in it, people are motivated to make sense of themselves—as reflected in their need for consistency between their attitudes and behaviors (Festinger, 1957). In short, the essence of the coherence motive is the search for understanding and purpose—the desire people have to understand themselves and the world around them, and to find purpose and meaning in their lives. Coherence, as a core human motive, thus encompasses the search for purpose and meaning and the need for one's life to make sense (e.g., Baumeister, 1991; Frankl, 1959; 1997; Rokeach, 1960). The coherence motive also likely underlies the inherent needs people seem to have for closure (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996), structure (Neuberg & Newsom, 1993), and uncertainty reduction (Hogg, 2000). It has even been argued that the overall meaning in people's lives is derived from having a sense that life is coherent (Reker & Wong, 1998).

Together, agency, communion, and coherence represent three broad, core human motives that drive people to action. They closely mirror the three basic human motivations presented by Hogan and Shelton (1998)—to get ahead, get along, and find meaning, respectively. Admittedly, there are individual differences related to which motive is most prominent in a given person's life, but I submit that all people exhibit or

are driven to action by all three core motives—at least to some degree. Moreover, it is important to note that the three motives outlined above are not mutually exclusive—or necessarily exhaustive—in relation to their influence on human behavior (i.e., a given action can be driven by multiple motives, simultaneously).

Recently, Performance Inspired, Inc.—a consulting and training firm—surveyed over 2,000 consumers in an effort to identify the 25 most inspiring companies in the United States. Respondents were asked to list the five companies they found most inspirational and explain why. Apple topped the list, with accompanying comments demonstrating the link between inspiration and relevance to core motives. For example, reflective of the agency motive, respondents made comments like, "Apple makes me feel entrepreneurial" and "Apple makes me feel more creative." Regarding communion, "Apple fans also said they felt like they were a part of a special community" (Smith, 2012). Reflecting the coherence motive, other companies were often highly rated as inspirational due to their commitment to a greater cause or purpose. Toms Shoes, for instance, donates a pair of shoes to the needy for every pair it sells, and the chief executive of Whole Foods extolls the virtues of "what he calls 'Conscious Capitalism,' an emphasis on grounding business around a profound purpose" (Smith, 2012, para. 14). Companies that relate to consumers in a way that is perceived as relevant to the core human motives of agency, communion, and coherence thus appear to be some of the most inspiring.

The relationship between the three motives and being inspired lies in the transcendence criterion of inspiration. I assert that evoked possibilities or ideas that are perceived as relevant to the fulfillment of agency, communion, and/or coherence motives

will take on a greater—even transcendent—significance, more important than people's usual concerns. Drawing on the workplace spirituality literature, for example, Ashforth and Pratt (2002) inductively identified three types of transcendence related to transcending the here-and-now (or status quo) and connecting to something greater than oneself. Specifically, they describe human experiences of transcendence in terms of self-development (i.e., transcending one's current state or limits to achieve greater potential), connection (i.e., transcending the self through attachment to a greater cause, purpose, other people, or nature), and integration (i.e., transcending fragmentation and chaos by integrating oneself and one's universe into a coherent and harmonious system) (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). I propose that the greater the extent to which a disruptive idea, possibility, or potential action is perceived as relevant to one's core human motives, the more likely an individual will experience transcendence: a transcendence of self-development stemming from action and possibilities that satisfy the agency motive, a transcendence of connection stemming from action that satisfies the communion or coherence motives (e.g., coherence related to purpose), or a transcendence of integration stemming from action that satisfies the coherence motive (e.g., coherence related to understanding).

Returning to the example of Rachel Beckwith's unselfish birthday wish and the subsequent movement she inspired, many of the donors' comments further explained why they were inspired to contribute—citing reasons relevant to core human motives. For example, reflecting the perceived relevance of Rachel's story to the agency motive, donors made comments related to their personal growth and development as human beings, such as, "you make me want to be a better person," "your big heart and

generosity changed me….I promise I will continue to strive to become even more compassionate and generous," and "I'll try to think about ways to be a better human every time I drive by the [location of your accident]." A recently married woman wrote, "I promised that I would become a better person for knowing about Rachel….We donated a while ago and we asked for donations to come here in lieu of wedding gifts" (charity: water, 2013a). Rachel's unselfish birthday wish thus seemed to inspire some donors, in part, because it was relevant to their agency motive—their desire to become their best selves.

Other donors seemed to be inspired to donate by the sense of connectedness or belonging they felt by being a part of Rachel's campaign. They made comments reflective of the communion motive, such as, "thank you Rachel for making the global community a little more closely knit," "I know that those of us connected through this tragedy will find a way to stay connected and continue Rachel's dream," and "I am so amazed at how the world has come together in unity over this." Moreover, donors also made comments reflective of the coherence motive, suggesting that Rachel's story inspired them because they perceived donating as relevant to their desire for purpose, meaning, and understanding in life: "thank you for reminding us all what is truly important in life and inspiring people to 'pay it forward' for years to come," "Here's [$20] for a great cause inspired by the coolest 9-year-old girl ever," and "not only is [Rachel's webpage] a great place to come to continue to have faith in something much bigger than ourselves, but it also gives us a place to give and know it is going to a great cause" (charity: water, 2013a). These donors' comments—related to life's true

importance, a worthy cause, and connecting to something greater than oneself—reflect their internal desire to have purpose, meaning, and coherence in their lives.

Taken together, the donors' comments exemplify how perceiving a new possibility or potential action (e.g., joining Rachel's campaign and donating to charity: water) as relevant to core human motives can inspire people to act. Rachel's story inspired thousands of people to contribute, because they perceived donating as a means of becoming a better person (agency), connecting with a broader community (communion), and/or finding purpose and understanding in their lives (coherence). As I argued previously, possibilities or potential actions that are perceived as relevant to people's core motives are more likely to be viewed with a heightened awareness that transcends their usual preoccupations, because core motives represent what is important and significant to individuals at a central, fundamental level. Therefore, perceiving a possibility as relevant to the agency, communion, and/or coherence motives is more likely to lead to a transcendent awareness—a transcendence of self-development (e.g., being a better person), connection (e.g., belonging to a broader community), and/or integration (e.g., discovering what is truly important in life), respectively (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003)—and thus more likely to lead to inspiration. In sum, while I posit that the disruption of cognitive schemas is central to the experience of inspiration, I further assert that the more relevant an evoked idea, potentiality, or possibility is perceived to be to one's core human motives, the more likely such cognitive disruption will lead one to experience inspiration.

Proposition 1: Greater disruption (related to an evoked possibility) will lead to stronger experiences of inspiration.

Proposition 2: The positive effect of disruption on the experience of inspiration is moderated by the perceived relevance of the possibility or potential action to the

fulfillment of (a) agency, (b) communion, and/or (c) coherence motives, such that the effect is stronger the greater the perceived relevance.

Attainability

At times, however, transcendent possibilities (resulting from relevant disruptions) might not necessarily result in inspiration. For instance, when dominated by self-doubt or a lack of confidence, people may actually view such evoked possibilities and potential actions as uninspiring and discouraging—as they envision a desired future state but feel incapable of reaching or achieving it (Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). For example, research on social comparison theory found that people tend to react negatively to relevant comparisons with other people (e.g., potential role models) when they feel they lack sufficient time (Aspinwall, 1997; Aspinwall, Hill, & Leaf, 2002) or adequate control over a situation (Major, Testa, & Bylsma, 1991; Testa & Major, 1990) to enact the modeled behaviors or achieve the desired outcomes. I therefore argue that an evoked possibility or potential action that disrupts the continuity of one's current mental schemas will be more inspiring to the extent that it is also perceived as attainable. By perceived attainability, I mean the perceived likelihood of being able to realize, actualize, or progress toward the evoked idea, possibility, or potentiality (e.g., become a better person, strengthen a relationship, or work toward an ideal or purpose); the more attainable a disruptive possibility is perceived to be, the more likely one will experience inspiration.

Prior research on leadership and influence tactics is also suggestive of the importance of perceived attainability in inspiring others. Berson, Shamir, Avolio, and Popper (2001), for instance, demonstrated that leaders' vision statements were rated as most inspirational when they expressed optimism and confidence related to achieving the

vision—both of which likely influence the perceived attainability of the vision, from a follower's perspective. Similarly, Yukl and colleagues (Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Yukl, Kim, & Falbe, 1996; Yukl & Tracey, 1992) argue that inspirational appeals, as an influence tactic, entail efforts to increase others' confidence that they can do a requested task. Moreover, a number of other theorists have also pointed to the importance of the perceived attainability of accomplishing a given task or action [e.g., expectancy (Vroom, 1964), and self-efficacy, (Wood & Bandura, 1989)] to one's resulting motivation—one of the three components of inspiration.

It is important to note, however, that while expectancy and self-efficacy are generally treated as beliefs about one's ability to successfully accomplish or perform *specific* tasks, my treatment of perceived attainability extends further, also encompassing abstract, non-task-specific beliefs about one's ability to enact new ideas or progress toward new possibilities (e.g., becoming a better person or fulfilling one's potential). This distinction is important for two reasons. First, as mentioned before, a given potential action can range from the concrete (e.g., donate to a charity) to the abstract (e.g., fight global poverty). Notions of expectancy and efficacy are less amenable to the abstract. Second, perceived attainability also encompasses the notion of progress, or working toward a goal. An example of a potential action that is both abstract and progress-oriented might be something like "changing the world." An individual might be inspired to change the world, without having any concrete tasks in mind regarding how to do it. And, realistically, a person may not feel capable of single-handedly solving all of the world's problems, but he or she may feel extremely confident in working and progressing toward that end. Perceived attainability thus encompasses notions of task-specific

efficacy and expectancy but extends beyond them to include abstract and progress-oriented actions or possibilities as well.

Donors to Rachel Beckwith's campaign to bring clean water to African villages, for example, made comments related to the perceived attainability of both abstract and concrete potential actions. As an example of the abstract, donors made statements such as, "thanks for reminding all of us that one person, no matter how young, can change the world," and "one small child…is teaching all of us that the impossible is possible when we work together." More concretely, one donor mentioned being inspired by Rachel to raise money for a children's hospital, saying, "I surpassed my goal by a longshot, all because I saw what you did, and knew it wasn't impossible to encourage others to give" (charity: water, 2013a). Thus, given an evoked idea or possibility that is disruptive to one's mental schemas, I propose that the resulting experience of inspiration will be influenced largely by the perceived attainability of actualizing, enacting, or progressing toward that possibility.

> *Proposition 3: The positive effect of disruption on the experience of inspiration is moderated by the perceived attainability of the possibility or potential action, such that the effect is stronger the greater the perceived attainability.*

Putting all three pieces of the disruption model together, I further predict that individuals will be the most inspired when all three conditions are met. As I have argued thus far, the positive relationship between disruption and inspiration will be influenced independently by both the perceived relevance and attainability of a possibility or potential action. I now further argue that relevance and attainability will interact simultaneously with disruption to affect inspiration, such that the interactive relationship between relevance and disruption on inspiration will be even stronger, the greater the

perceived attainability. As proposed previously, a disruptive possibility will be more inspiring to the extent that it is perceived as relevant to one's core human motives. I submit that this relationship will be even stronger when the possibility is also perceived to be attainable. However, when a possibility is viewed as unrealistic, greater perceived relevance may actually decrease the effect of disruption on inspiration—as an individual sees a relevant potential outcome with new eyes, but feels that it is out of reach. Indeed, for a possibility that is perceived as completely unattainable, extremely high perceptions of relevance will cause disruption to have a net negative effect on inspiration. Therefore, I specifically propose that the greater the perceived attainability of a potential action, the stronger the positive effect of perceived relevance on the relationship between disruption and inspiration. Conversely, when perceived attainability is low, I propose that high perceived relevance will actually lead to a negative relationship between disruption and inspiration.

> *Proposition 4: Disruption, perceived relevance to core motives, and perceived attainability interact to affect inspiration. Under conditions of high perceived attainability, the relationship between disruption and inspiration will be stronger (in a positive direction) at higher levels of perceived relevance (vs. low). Under conditions of low perceived attainability, the relationship between disruption and inspiration will be stronger (in a negative direction) at higher levels of perceived relevance (vs. low). Notably, when disruption, perceived relevance to core motives, and perceived attainability are all high, inspiration will be greatest.*

Give Kids the World: Revisited

As a full example of the disruption model of inspiration, turn again to the story of how holocaust-survivor Henri Landwirth was inspired to create Give Kids the World to help ensure that all children with life-threatening illnesses who wished to meet Mickey Mouse, Disney princesses, and other characters at Disney World, would be able to do so

before it was too late. The premature death of Amy—the 6-year-old girl for whom Landwirth had first agreed to provide a complimentary hotel room—evoked a recognition within him of the possibility that he could actively do something to make sure that no other child's dying wish would go unfulfilled.

Regarding disruption, Landwirth's successful career path—from night clerk to hotel owner—had instilled in him a belief that anything and everything was possible in America. Regarding Amy's unfulfilled wish, he said, "How could this happen? How could we allow a child to die before she could see Mickey Mouse? How in America could we not fulfill any child's last wish?" (Landwirth, 1996, p. 181). Such thoughts disrupted his mental schema about America. Moreover, he was shocked to learn that "it took six to eight weeks to process the many components, including hotels, transportation and tickets, necessary to arrange a trip for the families. Sometimes six to eight weeks can mean the difference between life and death. It was with this thought" he remarked, "that…the most remarkable part of my life's journey, began" (p. 181). Thus, Amy's death was also disruptive in the sense that it led Landwirth to recognize a completely new problem, and possible solution, that he had never before considered—it caused him to think about things in a new way, to see things in a new light.

Regarding relevance to core motives, Landwirth—despite having healthy and successful children, an extremely profitable hotel business, and other lucrative investments—felt that "something was still missing." As he reflected on the possibility of helping other children like Amy, he remarked, "I had a sense of discovering that which had been missing from my life" (Landwirth, 1996, p. 182). Landwirth was finding a renewed sense of purpose and meaning in life (i.e., the coherence motive). Additionally,

Landwirth also described the evoked possibility of helping terminally-ill children in terms related to the communion motive (Glauser, 1999):

> I know what it's like to be waiting to die….I see a definite connection between me and the children. They have no control over their lives, and I had no control over my life in the camp. They are skinny and pale, and I see myself in their faces. This has really drawn me to them. I just want to devote my life to serving these families. (p. 41)

Similarly, Landwirth (1996) made the following comment in reference to all those involved in Give Kids the World: "We are all connected through the children. Their innocence and the burden of their suffering brings us together with a common goal" (p. 188). According to the disruption model of inspiration, the initial possibility, or potential action, of helping children's dying wishes come true was even more inspiring to Landwirth because he viewed it as relevant to his core motives of communion (as he perceived a sense of connection and relatedness with the suffering children, as well as with the others who would potentially join in his effort) and coherence (as he found a renewed sense of purpose and meaning behind his new goal).

Regarding attainability, Landwirth was uniquely qualified to develop a stream-lined system for making quick and efficient arrangements for children with life-threatening illnesses to visit Disney World. His own hotel business notwithstanding, Landwirth had a large network of contacts in the local hotel and transportation industries, as well as personal friendships with executives from Disney, Sea World, and other relevant organizations (Landwirth, 1996). Whereas some people in a similar situation might feel powerless—and thus uninspired or demotivated—Landwirth's professional background, experiences, and conviction led him to believe that successfully overcoming the challenges of expediting the arrangement-making process was attainable. This

perceived attainability, in conjunction with his perception that the possibility (i.e.,

creating Give Kids the World) was relevant to his core motives and disruptive to his

current mental schemas, inspired Landwirth to dedicate much of the rest of his life to

helping children fulfill their dying wishes.

<div align="center">**Inspiring Moral Behavior in Others**</div>

While the disruption model of inspiration can be applied broadly to multiple areas

of inquiry, the moral domain provides a useful context from which to explore inspiration

as a phenomenon, because better understanding how to inspire moral behavior in others

has significant practical and theoretical implications. For example, in 1997, Bill and

Angela Halamandaris co-founded The Heart of America, an organization dedicated to

inspiring youth to serve their communities. According to Bill Halamandaris, they began

with a philosophy of accentuating the positive: "you seek out the best people you can find

and give them visibility. The goal is to create an ever-increasing spiral of inspiration"

(Glauser, 1999, p. 98). One of Heart of America's several programs seeks to inspire

youth to help others by identifying great moral role models and linking them up with

schools. The implicit theory behind such an approach is that exposing students to moral

role models, or exemplars, can inspire them to actually engage in more prosocial (e.g.,

helping) behavior themselves.

Recent evidence suggests that exposure to moral exemplars, indeed, can motivate

individuals to engage in more prosocial and altruistic behavior (e.g., Freeman, Aquino, &

McFerran, 2009; Schnall et al., 2010). In an organizational setting, for example, the

moral excellence of leaders can elicit an emotional response indicative of inspiration (i.e.,

elevation; Haidt 2003a, 2003b) in followers that leads to more helping behavior at work (Vianello, Galliani, & Haidt, 2010). The specific functioning of inspiration in such examples, however, has not been investigated directly.

Inspiration as a Moral Motivator

Theory and research in moral psychology (e.g., Haidt, 2001), moral development (e.g., Kohlberg, 1969) and neuroscience (e.g., Greene, Nystrom, Engell, Darley, & Cohen, 2004; Moll, & De Oliveria-Souza, 2007) often focus on moral judgment as a primary dependent variable that is influenced by moral intuitions (including emotions), moral reasoning, or both. However, judgments do not always lead to actions and behavior that are consistent with those judgments. For example, consider the teenager who believes that shoplifting and cheating are immoral, yet steals a candy bar to satisfy immediate hunger and cheats on an exam in hopes of a better grade. The reasons for behaving in ways inconsistent with one's judgments—moral or otherwise—are many; historically, in the moral domain, the relationship between moral cognition and moral action has been shown to be low to moderate (Blasi, 1980; Kish-Gephart, Harrison, & Treviño, 2010; Mischel & Mischel, 1976). In a well-known example, Darley and Batson (1973) reported that Princeton seminary students largely passed over a needy man lying on the ground, despite being en route to deliver a sermon on the Good Samaritan. Even when primed with a biblical story about helping others in need, these seminary students—who were devoting their education to their religion—often failed to help.

It has been suggested that a critical component missing from many theories of morality is a motivational mechanism strengthening the link from moral judgment and

decisions to moral intentions and behavior (Chiu et al., 1997; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Rest, 1983). Whereas early cognitive theories of moral development (e.g., Kohlberg, 1969) focused primarily on explaining moral judgments—largely assuming that rational individuals would be compelled to act in ways consistent with their judgments—later models of moral reasoning better acknowledged the potential disconnect between judgments and behavior (Rest, 1983; 1986; Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999), suggesting that sufficient moral motivation is required to translate moral judgments into action. Recently, many scholars have begun to move beyond the study of moral judgment by examining actual moral and ethical behavior, but this literature largely focuses on how individuals inadvertently or unwittingly exhibit lapses in moral judgment—due to the human propensity to overlook moral implications, rationalize immoral choices, and disengage moral self-sanctions (e.g., Bandura, 1999; Chugh, Bazerman, & Banaji, 2005; Moore, Detert, Treviño, Baker, & Mayer, 2012; Tenbrunsel, Diekmann, Wade-Benzoni, & Bazerman, 2010; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 2004). However, there are also times when individuals consciously believe that they know the "right" thing to do, yet lack the moral motivation necessary to do it.

An emerging body of literature examining the role of emotions in moral and ethical decision making is beginning to investigate how emotions can affect both moral judgment (e.g., Warren & Smith-Crowe, 2008) and behavior (see Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). I submit that *inspiration*, which is both cognitive and affective in nature, can be an important source of moral motivation, serving as a mechanism that not only influences one's judgments but also motivates intentions and actions based on those judgments. In the specific context of moral behavior, inspiration provides an interesting

point of entry for addressing the question of how individuals can be influenced to act more morally, because, by definition, inspiration is associated with an approach motivation—which can help close the gap between judgment and behavior. While recent theorizing suggests that individuals have certain capacities and characteristics—such as moral identity, moral ownership, moral efficacy, and moral courage (Hannah, Avolio, & May, 2011; Hardy & Carlo, 2005)—that can increase one's motivation to act on moral judgments, a treatment of inspiration as a moral motivator shifts the focus of inquiry from the moral capacities one already possesses to the situational cues and external stimuli that may highlight the moral possibilities that lie ahead. Certainly, one's moral capacities will likely influence the degree to which one is inspired to act morally (e.g., moral efficacy is sure to affect one's perceived attainability related to a moral action), but, I suggest, the disruptive and transcendent nature of inspiration—that leads individuals to see things in a new light—can be a moral motivator for even those with low moral capacities.

Inspiring Prosocial Behavior

In particular, inspiration has the potential to play an influential role in motivating prosocial behavior—defined as actions intended to benefit others (see Dovidio, Piliavin, Schroeder, & Penner, 2006; Eisenberg, Fabes, & Spinrad, 2006; Hinde & Growbel, 1991). In addition to the practical importance of examining how to influence others to do "good," I have elected to examine inspiration as a moral motivator of specifically prosocial behavior for two reasons: (1) prosocial behavior is closely related to behavioral activation systems and approach motivational tendencies (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009),

which fits nicely and is consistent with the approach motivation criterion of inspiration; and (2) prosocial behavior has been somewhat understudied within the moral domain.

First, prosocial behaviors—such as helping, cooperation, and altruism—are examples of care-based (Carlo, 2005; Gilligan, 1982) actions intended to benefit others that fall squarely into the harm/care dimension of the moral domain (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010). Whereas a large body of morality and ethics literature focuses on *proscriptive* morality (i.e., what one should not do), prosocial behavior is form of *prescriptive* morality (Janoff-Bulman et al., 2009)—similar to Kant's (1991/1797) imperfect duties— focused on what individuals should do or ought to do. Janoff-Bulman and colleagues (2009) empirically demonstrated that prescriptive, as compared to proscriptive, morality is more closely related to behavioral activation systems and approach motivational tendencies (see Carver, 2006; Carver & White, 1994; Gray 1990). That is, prescriptive moral motivation (related to helping others, cooperating, etc.) is action-oriented, focused on achieving or approaching positive outcomes, whereas proscriptive moral motivation (related to not stealing, not cheating, etc.) is focused on inhibiting action and avoiding negative outcomes.

Therefore, given that inspiration specifically entails an approach motivation to enact or actualize an idea or possibility (i.e., a positive outcome), prosocial behavior—a form of prescriptive morality closely (although not exclusively) related to approach motivational tendencies—is a fitting candidate for being a target of inspiration. Furthermore, there are reasons to expect that engaging in prosocial behavior would be perceived as relevant to an individual's core motives. For example, it is plausible that helping others can provide purpose to one's life (e.g., coherence), increase a sense of

connection with others (e.g., communion), and produce feelings of being a good person or one's best self (e.g., agency). The intersection of inspiration and prosocial behavior thus seems to be a natural place for beginning an investigation of the role of inspiration in driving action, specifically moral action.

It is important to note, however, that not all action-oriented, prosocial behavior is necessarily moral. For example, research on unethical prosocial behaviors (Umphress & Bingham, 2011; Umphress, Bingham, & Mitchell, 2010) is beginning to emerge, and individuals have been shown to favor ingroups (Gino & Pierce, 2010) and break rules (Morrison, 2006) for purportedly prosocial reasons. That said, the promotion of prosocial behavior has important moral implications for individuals' lives and society as a whole, and while I acknowledge a potential dark side, better understanding how to inspire prosocial behavior is a morally relevant and important question.

The second primary reason for choosing to examine inspiration vis-à-vis prosocial behavior is due to the relative underrepresentation of prosocial behavior in theory and research related to ethics and morality. By exploring when and why people are inspired to engage in prosocial behavior, I hope to answer calls from moral (Lapsley, 1996) and developmental (Carlo, 2005; Eisenberg et al., 2006) psychology, as well as behavioral and business ethics (see Bradley, Brief, & Smith-Crowe, 2008; Mayer, 2010), to better incorporate prosocial behavior and doing "good" into investigations of morality and ethics.

Summary

In sum, the disruption model predicts that evoked possibilities and potentialities will more likely be inspiring when they are disruptive to mental schemas, perceived as relevant to core human motives, and perceived as attainable. Whereas previous research has alluded to relevance and attainability as important precursors to inspiration (see Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Yukl, Kim, & Falbe, 1996), these two factors alone primarily account for only the motivational component of inspiration (see Figure 2, Box A), in a manner theoretically similar to Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory— relevance reflecting valence, and attainability reflecting expectancy and instrumentality. I have therefore asserted that the disruption of mental schemas is a critically important but previously unacknowledged factor—critical because it helps account for the transcendence component of inspiration, especially when an evoked idea is also perceived as relevant to one's core human motives, which carry a fundamental but elevated sense of importance (See Figure 2, Box B). The sweet spot for an evoked possibility or potentiality to inspire action is thus when it is disruptive, relevant to core motives, and attainable (See Figure 2, Box C).

In Chapter 2, I describe a series of studies I conducted to examine the disruption model of inspiration in multiple contexts, with a variety of potentially inspiring cues and stimuli. Specifically, the studies focus on individuals' experiences of inspiration—with a focus on encouraging prosocial behavior—and the facilitating roles of (1) disruption, (2) perceived relevance to core motives, and (3) perceived attainability. In what follows, I formulate specific hypotheses reflective of the propositions outlined previously. Better
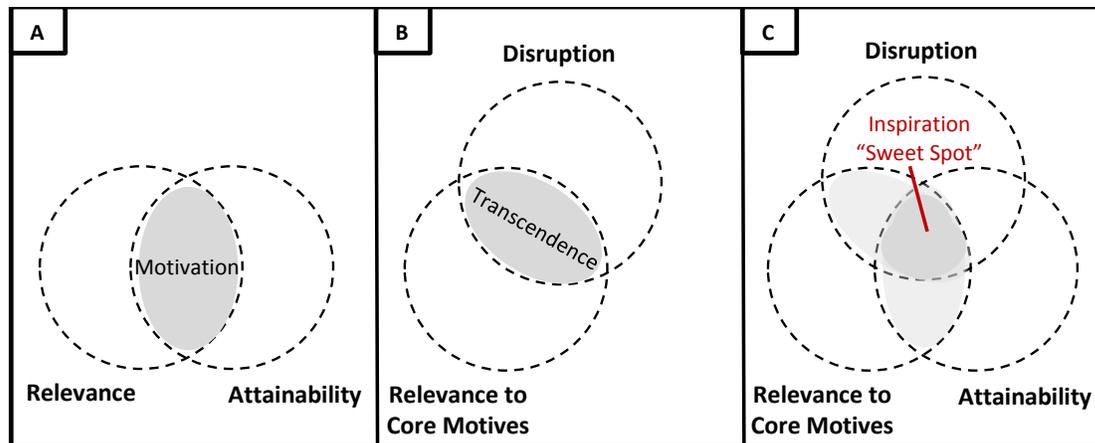
Figure 2. The Relationships Among Disruption, Relevance, and Attainability

understanding the experience of inspiration related to potential action, particularly in the

moral domain, can lead us one step closer to helping individuals become their best selves.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Using a multimethod approach, I test the disruption model of inspiration in a range of samples from numerous settings, using a variety of potentially inspiring stimuli. In the three studies that follow, a number of specific hypotheses are developed—all aimed at exploring the accuracy and applicability of the model's basic propositions, as outlined previously. Studies 1 and 2 focus on testing the basic relationships among the model's key concepts, by both measuring and manipulating the main predictor variables, respectively. In Study 3, a manager in a Fortune 100 financial services firm used the model in an attempt to actually inspire others to act prosocially.

In Study 1, a simple online survey, a sample of U.S. adults was exposed to a potentially inspiring cue (e.g., a short newspaper article) and then asked to complete several measures intended to assess the degree to which they were inspired and whether the cue caused them to recognize possibilities that were disruptive to the continuity of their current mental schemas, relevant to their core motives, and perceived as attainable. The relationships among constructs were then be examined statistically. In Study 2, to better establish the directionality of the model's relationships (i.e., causality), I conducted an experiment, in which the perceived relevance, attainability, and disruptive nature of a

stimulus was manipulated, with predicted differences in the resulting levels of inspiration experienced by participants.

In a field-experiment, Study 3, I specifically examined leadership as a source of inspiration in the field. A manager of an operations and client services center for a large financial services firm gave short presentations to his employees. A third of employees received an "inspiring" presentation, wherein the leader attempted to frame a desired action in terms of relevance to core motives, attainability, and disruption (as described previously). Another third of employees received a presentation based on principles of persuasion, wherein the manager sought to persuade his subordinates to engage in the desired action. The final third of employees received no presentation and served as a control group. An objective measure of whether the employees engaged in the prosocial action was then recorded and used as the dependent measure for analysis. Taken together, the collective purpose of the three studies was to contribute to a better understanding of what inspires people to act.

Study 1: A Test of the General Model (Survey)

The purpose of Study 1 was to examine the underlying relationships of the disruption model of inspiration. A fundamental premise of the model is that individuals are more likely to be inspired by a given stimulus or cue to the extent that it disrupts the continuity of their current mental schemas, leading them to see the world in a new way, with fresh eyes. An evoked possibility or potentiality is thus more likely to inspire one to act when it causes one to make new mental connections, heightening their awareness above the ordinary and mundane. Furthermore, I have argued, such disruption is more

likely to be transcendent, and thus inspiring, to the extent that the possibility or potential action is perceived as relevant to agency, communion, and/or coherence motives. When the prospect of actualizing an idea or achieving a possibility is related to the essence of who people are and what drives them to act (i.e., core human motives), it takes on an elevated sense of importance that transcends the ordinary and mundane. Accordingly, I hypothesize the following:

> *Hypothesis 1: The greater the disruption (related to an evoked possibility), the more likely one will experience inspiration.*

> *Hypothesis 2: Perceived relevance to core motives (i.e., (a) agency, (b) communion, and/or (c) coherence) strengthens the relationship between disruption and inspiration.*

However, I have also argued that the disruptive nature of a new idea or potential action will be less likely to inspire when the action (and/or its effects) is perceived to be impossible, unlikely, or simply out of reach. Conversely, the greater the confidence in one's ability to transform an evoked possibility into reality, the more inspiring the possibility may become:

> *Hypothesis 3: Perceived attainability of an evoked possibility strengthens the relationship between disruption and inspiration.*

Finally, taken together, the first three hypotheses lead to a fourth, wherein I predict that disruption, perceived relevance to core motives, and perceived attainability all interact to affect an individual's experience of inspiration. Specifically, I predict that inspiration will be the strongest when all three are high. In other words, people are most likely to be strongly inspired when an evoked possibility disrupts the way they usually think about things, is relevant to their core motives, and is believed to be attainable:

> *Hypothesis 4: There is a three-way interaction among disruption, perceived relevance to core motives, and perceived attainability, such that inspiration is the*

strongest when all three are high. Specifically, under conditions of high perceived attainability, the relationship between disruption and inspiration will be stronger (in a positive direction) at higher levels of perceived relevance (vs. low). Under conditions of low perceived attainability, the relationship between disruption and inspiration will be stronger (in a negative direction) at higher levels of perceived relevance (vs. low).

Sample

Two-hundred-thirty-seven adults in the United States were recruited to participate in the study through the Amazon Mechanical Turk, web-based platform (see Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011; Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010). The average age of participants was 35.60 (*SD* = 12.67), and 54% were female. Seventy-four percent reported their ethnicity as White, 8% as Black, 8% as Hispanic, 5% as Asian, 1% as Native American, and 4% as other. Each participant was asked to complete an online survey in exchange for monetary compensation. The selection criteria for Study 1 were purposely broad (i.e., U.S. adults), to provide an opportunity of examining the hypothesized relationships in an expansive, general population.

Procedures

All survey respondents were asked to read a potentially inspiring story (in the form of a newspaper article). The story described a man who was living in Scotland when he quit his job to start a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing meals to hungry children in developing countries (see Appendix A). After reading the story, respondents were asked to complete a survey with questions referring to their experience reading the assigned article. The survey included items intended to measure the extent to which the story caused them to recognize possibilities that were disruptive to the continuity of their

current mental schemas, perceived as relevant to their core motives, and attainable.

Respondents also reported the extent to which they were inspired by the story—the

primary dependent variable. Finally, all respondents were asked to answer basic

demographic questions and then read a debriefing form.

Measures

Inspiration. Respondents reported the level of inspiration they experienced while

reading the article according to the four items of the state version (Thrash et al., 2010) of

the Inspiration Scale (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Recalling their experience reading the

article, respondents recorded their level of agreement with the following statements: "I

experienced inspiration," "something in the article inspired me,"[4] "I was inspired to do

something," and "I felt inspired." Each item was rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7

(strongly agree). Responses to the four items were averaged to form a composite

inspiration score ($\alpha = .95$).

Relevance to core motives. There are a number of existing measures for human

needs (La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000; Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser,

2001), values (Trapnell & Paulhus, 2012), and aspects of psychological well-being (Ryff,

1989) that are reflective of the core human motives as outlined above. However, these

scales measure the degree to which one's needs and motives are perceived to be

fulfilled—in general or in relation to a specific event—whereas the present research

concerns the perceived *relevance* of a potential action to one's core motives. Therefore, I

adapted items from scales such as those listed above to create new measures of perceived

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[4] The word "film," in the second item of the State Inspiration scale (Thrash et al. 2010b), was replaced with the word "article" to accurately reflect the context of the present study.

relevance to the agency, communion, and coherence motives, respectively. For each measure, respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with a number of statements, using a Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). To measure relevance to the agency motive, respondents were given the stem, "the article I just read caused me to recognize possibilities that are relevant to…," followed by the items, "…my sense of being an independent person," "…my desire to be a competent individual," "and …my feelings as a capable person." For the communion motive, responding to the same stem, items included, "…my meaningful relationships with others," "…my sense of connection with other people," and "…my sense of closeness to others." Finally, the items pertaining to the coherence motive included, "…my deeper purpose in life," "…my sense of meaning in life," and "…my direction in life." Items for each motive were averaged to form a subscore for agency ($\alpha = .83$), communion ($\alpha = .88$), and coherence ($\alpha = .91$). To help assess the psychometric properties of the relevance to core motives measures, in addition to calculating reliability coefficients, I also performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to help validate the factor structure of the constructs. Measures of disruption, attainability (see below), and inspiration were also included in the CFA.

Disruption. Disruption to the continuity of current mental schemas was measured by asking respondents to indicate their level of agreement with three items: The article "…has made me see things in a new way," "…has caused me to make sense of things in ways I had not previously considered," and "…has caused me to refocus my attention in some way." Again, responses were reported using a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree,

7 = strongly agree), and the average of all items was taken to form the measure of disruption (α = .81).

Attainability. To measure perceived attainability, face-valid scale items similar to those used in perceived competence scales (e.g., Williams & Deci, 1996) were created. Respondents were given the stem, "The article caused me to recognize possibilities that…" and asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statements: "…I am confident in my abilities to pursue," "…I am capable of actualizing in some way," and "…I have the ability to successfully achieve." Statements were rated on a 7-point, Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree), and responses from the three items were averaged to form a composite measure for attainability (α = .92).

Social desirability. Finally, to account for the potential tendency of participants to respond to self-report items in a biased manner (i.e., consistent with social norms rather than indicative of one's sincere thoughts), respondents were be asked to complete a short form of the Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability scale (Reynolds, 1982), to be used as a control variable. The scale includes 13 true-false questions, including, "No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener," and "I sometimes feel resentful when I don't get my way" (reverse coded). The sum of all responses (false = 0, true = 1) was calculated to form a measure of social desirability (ranging from 0 to a high of 13; α = .80).

Results

First, I performed a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA; see Figure 3) of the items from the five adapted measures (i.e., agency, communion, coherence, disruption, and

.57

e₁ → V1 .64
Agency
e₂ → V2 .85
.88
e₃ → V3

.67 .59

Disruption
.85 V10 ← e₁₀
.81 V11 ← e₁₁
.65 V12 ← e₁₂

.66

.60   .55

e₄ → V4 .86
Communion
e₅ → V5 .90
.80
e₆ → V6

.52   .78

Perceived Attainability
.87 V13 ← e₁₃
.90 V14 ← e₁₄
.90 V15 ← e₁₅

.71   .55
.68   .61

e₇ → V7 .92
Coherence
e₈ → V8 .93
.77
e₉ → V9

.65   .52

Inspiration
.94 V16 ← e₁₆
.95 V17 ← e₁₇
.81 V18 ← e₁₈
.95 V19 ← e₁₉

.69

Note. V1 – V19 correspond to items in the order they were presented in the text above for each measure.

Figure 3. Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis

attainability) and the measure of inspiration. The full model with the five factors loading separately ($\chi^2 = 271.6$, $df = 137$, CFI $= .97$, GFI $= .90$, RMSEA $= .065$) demonstrated good fit with the data, and I compared it with the fits of three potentials alternatives: (1) a 1-factor model collapsing all six variables into a single factor, (2) a 4-factor model combining items from the three core motives into a single factor, with disruption, attainability, and inspiration as separate factors, and (3) a 5-factor model combining items from the communion and coherence motives, with agency, disruption, attainability, and inspiration as separate factors. The comparative CFA results for each model (see Table 1) demonstrate that the 6-factor model not only best fit the data, but it was also the only model with fit indices falling within generally accepted ranges. These results increase

Table 1. Comparison of Alternative Factor Structures (Study 1)

Structure	x^2	df	CFI	GFI	RMSEA
1-factor	1,483.1	152	.66	.54	.193
4-factor	676.6	146	.86	.76	.124
5-factor	479.4	142	.91	.82	.100
6-factor	**271.6**	**137**	**.97**	**.90**	**.065**

Note. In the 4-factor model, all three core motives were combined as a single factor. In the 5-factor model, coherence and communion were combined into a single latent variable, and the remaining four variables were included separately.

confidence in the validity of the measures, as well as suggest that the measures for the three core motives should likely remain and be included in analysis individually, and not be combined into a single measure of relevance to core motives.

Descriptive statistics and correlations among all study variables are listed in Table 2. To test Hypothesis 1—that disruption predicts inspiration—I performed an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analysis with inspiration as the dependent variable and disruption as the independent variable, while controlling for age, gender, and social desirability. The overall model was significant, $R^2 = .52$, $F(4, 232) = 62.02$, $p < .001$, and, as predicted, disruption positively predicted inspiration, $B = .68$, SE $= .05$, $t = 14.95$, $p < .001$. I thus found initial support for Hypothesis 1.

Next, to test Hypothesis 2—that perceived relevance to core motives moderates the positive effect of disruption on inspiration—I created interaction terms by multiplying disruption by relevance to each of the three core motives (i.e., agency, communion, and coherence). Because results from the CFA best supported a model measuring the three motives separately, I analyzed the interaction of disruption with each motive individually, rather than as a single composite measure. First, to analyze the potential moderating

Table 2. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

	M	SD	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
(1) Agency	5.04	1.19	(.83)								
(2) Communion	5.45	1.17	.54**	(.88)							
(3) Coherence	5.51	1.23	.47**	.65**	(.91)						
(4) Disruption	4.61	1.24	.46**	.52**	.57**	(.81)					
(5) Attainability	5.16	1.22	.59**	.62**	.58**	.47**	(.92)				
(6) Inspiration	5.34	1.23	.47**	.64**	.66**	.71**	.52**	(.95)			
(7) Age	35.62	12.67	-.00	.09	.01	.01	-.02	.01	—		
(8) Gender	.46	.50	.03	-.08	-.07	-.09	-.00	-.16*	.01	—	
(9) Social Desirability	6.66	3.35	.18**	.13*	.11	.08	.18**	.16*	.03	.02	(.80)

Note. N = 237. Gender is coded female = 0, male = 1. Scale reliabilities are given in parentheses.
*p < .05, **p < .01.

influence of relevance to the *agency* motive, in step 1 of a hierarchical regression analysis, I tested a model with inspiration as the dependent variable, and disruption, agency, and control variables (i.e., age, gender, and social desirability) as predictors, $R^2 =$ .54, $F(5, 231) = 54.56$, $p < .001$. In step 2, the interaction term disruption x agency was added to the model, $R^2 = .56$, $F(6, 230) = 48.25$, $p < .001$. The results of both steps are reported in Table 3. The interaction term was significant ($B = -.08$, $p = .005$) and adding it to the model increased the explained variance ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $p = .005$). However, conducting a simple slopes analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) revealed that the pattern of the interaction effect did not support Hypothesis 2 (see Figure 4). Whereas I predicted disruption would have a stronger effect on inspiration at higher levels of perceived relevance, the simple slopes suggest just the opposite: Higher levels of perceived relevance to the agency motive decrease the size of the effect of disruption on inspiration.

Table 3. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Examining Agency as a Moderator

	Step 1		Step 2	
Variables	B	t	B	t
Age	.00	.20	.00	.15
Gender	-.28	-2.54*	-.29	-2.61**
Social Desirability	.03	1.71†	.03	1.89†
Disruption	.60	11.95***	1.01	.72***
Agency	.19	3.53**	.50	4.13***
Disruption x Agency			-.08	1.89**
R^2	.54***		.56***	
ΔR^2			.02**	

Note. Dependent Variable = inspiration. B = unstandardized regression coefficient. Gender is coded female = 0, male = 1.
$^{\dagger}p < .10$, $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.
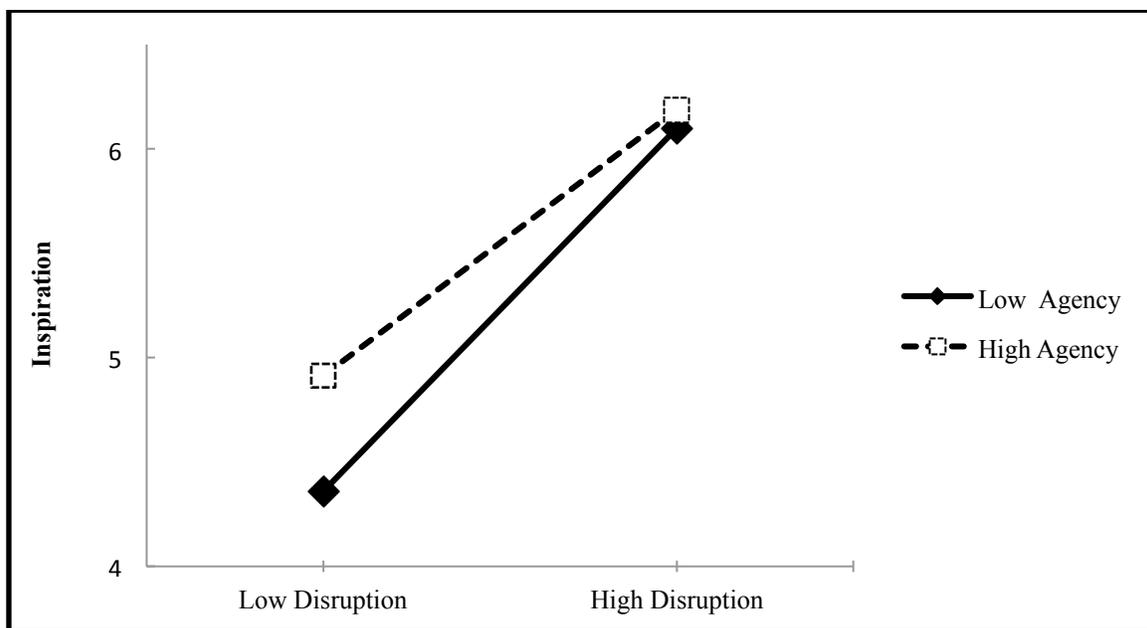
Note. Low and high represent one standard deviation below and above the mean, respectively, for each variable.

Figure 4. Simple Slopes for the Disruption x Agency Interaction

Next, to analyze the potential moderating influence of relevance to the

communion motive on the relationship between disruption and inspiration, I again

performed hierarchical regression analysis. In step 1, I tested a model with inspiration as

the dependent variable, and disruption, communion, and the same control variables as

predictors, $R^2 = .61$, $F(5, 231) = 72.77$, $p < .001$. In step 2, the interaction term disruption

x communion was added to the model, $R^2 = .62$, $F(6, 230) = 62.55$, $p < .001$. The results

of both steps are reported in Table 4. The interaction term was statistically significant (B

$= -.06$, $p = .025$), but a simple slopes analysis (Aiken & West, 1991) again revealed a

pattern of interaction opposite of Hypothesis 2 (see Figure 5), with the effect of

disruption on inspiration being slightly weaker when relevance to communion is high.

Furthermore, the increase in variance explained (ΔR^2) was only .01.

As a final test of Hypothesis 2, I analyzed the potential moderating influence of

relevance to the *coherence* motive on the relationship between disruption and inspiration.

Step 1 included a model with inspiration as the dependent variable, and disruption,

coherence, and control variables as predictors, $R^2 = .61$, $F(5, 231) = 71.95$, $p < .001$. In

step 2, the interaction term disruption x coherence was added to the model, $R^2 = .61$, $F(6,$

$230) = 60.85$, $p < .001$. The results of both steps are reported in Table 5. The interaction

term was not statistically significant ($B = -.04$, $p = .10$). Overall, then, I found no

supporting evidence for Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 3 predicted a moderating effect of perceived attainability on the

positive relationship between disruption and inspiration. Accordingly, I created another

interaction term between disruption and perceived attainability. Again, hierarchical

regression analysis was conducted with inspiration as the dependent variable. Step 1

Table 4. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Examining Communion as a Moderator

	Step 1		Step 2	
Variables	B	t	B	t
Age	-.00	-.61	-.00	-.52
Gender	-.22	-2.12*	-.22	-2.20*
Social Desirability	.03	1.69[†]	.03	1.78[†]
Disruption	.50	10.44***	.82	5.48***
Communion	.39	7.51***	.61	5.43***
Disruption x Communion			-.06	-2.25*
R^2	.61		.62	
ΔR^2			.01	

Note. Dependent Variable = inspiration. B = unstandardized regression coefficient. Gender is coded female = 0, male = 1.
[†]$p < .10$, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.
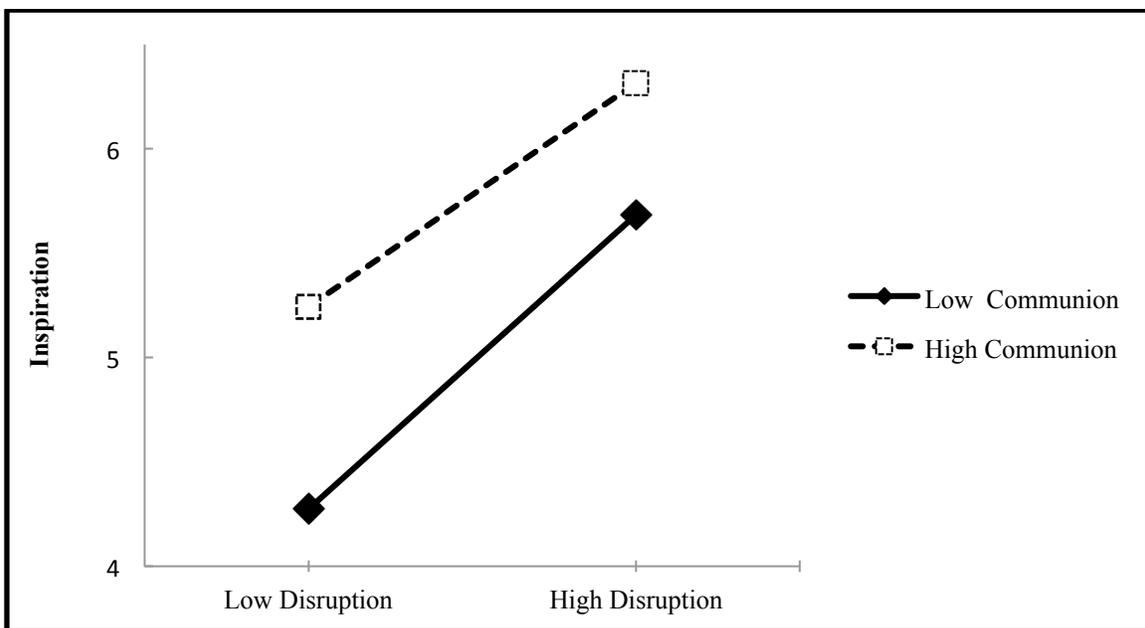
Note. Low and high represent one standard deviation below and above the mean, respectively, for each variable.

Figure 5. Simple Slopes for the Disruption x Communion Interaction

Table 5. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Examining Coherence as a Moderator

Variables	Step 1		Step 2	
	B	t	B	t
Age	.00	.13	.00	.19
Gender	-.23	-2.78*	-.23	-2.31*
Social Desirability	.03	$1.95^\dagger$	.03	2.04*
Disruption	.48	9.57***	.70	4.89***
Coherence	.37	7.38***	.52	4.95***
Disruption x Coherence			-.04	.10
R^2		.61		.61
ΔR^2				.00

Note. Dependent Variable = inspiration. B = unstandardized regression coefficient. Gender is coded female = 0, male = 1.
$^\dagger p < .10$, $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

included attainability, disruption, and control variables as predictors, $R^2 = .56$, $F(5, 231)$ = 58.46, $p < .001$, and step 2 included the addition of the interaction term disruption x perceived attainability, $R^2 = .56$, $F(5, 231) = 49.47$, $p < .001$. The results of both steps are reported in Table 6. The interaction term was not statistically significant ($B = -.05$, $p = .11$). I therefore did not find support for Hypothesis 3.

Finally, to test Hypothesis 4—a three-way interaction between relevance to core motives, attainability, and disruption—two final interaction terms were created: relevance x attainability[5], and disruption x relevance x attainability. With inspiration again serving as the dependent variable, step 1 of a hierarchical regression analysis included the following predictor variables: relevance to core motives, attainability, disruption, and control variables, $R^2 = .63$, $F(6, 230) = 64.24$, $p < .001$. Step 2 included the addition of

---

[5] While the results of the CFA supported the notion that relevance to the three core motives represented three distinct constructs, for ease of interpretation, I report the results regarding the three-way interaction by using the single, composite measure for relevance to core motives ($\alpha = .90$). The pattern of nonsignificant results when using each core motive individually in the analysis was the same.

Table 6. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Examining Attainability as a Moderator

	Step 1		Step 2	
Variables	B	t	B	t
Age	.00	.32	.00	.25
Gender	-.27	-2.49*	-.27	-2.51*
Social Desirability	.03	1.56	.03	1.64
Disruption	.57	11.60***	.81	5.22***
Attainability	.24	4.68***	.42	3.40***
Disruption x Attainability			-.05	-1.60
R^2	.56		.56	
ΔR^2			.00	

Note. Dependent Variable = inspiration. B = unstandardized regression coefficient. Gender is coded female = 0, male = 1.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

the three, two-way interaction terms: disruption x relevance, disruption x attainability, relevance x attainability, $R^2 = .64$, $F(9, 227) = 44.47$, $p < .001$. Finally, in step 3, the three-way interaction among relevance, attainability, and disruption was added to the model, $R^2 = .64$, $F(10, 226) = 39.90$, $p < .001$. The three-way interaction term was not statistically significant ($B = .01$, $p = .66$), as reported in Table 7. Thus, I did not find support for Hypothesis 4.

Discussion

The primary tenet of the disruption model of inspiration—that disrupting the way people usually think about things is fundamental to the experience inspiration—was largely supported by the results of study 1. Those who reported being inspired by the job-

Table 7. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Examining 3-Way Interaction

	Step 1		Step 2		Step 3	
Variables	B	t	B	t	B	t
Age	-.00	-.14	.00	.12	.00	.09
Gender	-.26	-2.56*	-.26	-2.63**	-.26	-2.58*
Social Desirability	.02	1.29	.02	1.36	.02	1.39
Disruption	.43	8.30***	.69	2.83**	.86	1.88†
Relevance	.51	6.46***	.94	3.50**	1.02	3.16**
Attainability	.02	.26	-.45	-1.94†	-.36	-1.17
Disruption x Relevance			-.17	-1.86†	-.17	-1.86†
Disruption x Attainability			.09	1.65	.05	.53
Relevance x Attainability			.02	.54	.00	.08
Disruption x Relevance x Attainability					.01	.44
R^2		.63		.64		.64
ΔR^2				.01		.00

Note. Dependent Variable = inspiration. *B* = unstandardized regression coefficient. Gender is coded female = 0, male = 1.
$^\dagger p < .10$, $*p < .05$, $**p < .01$, $***p < .001$.

quitting philanthropist also reported high levels of disruption. This strong support for

Hypothesis 1, however, is accompanied by a lack of support for Hypotheses 2 – 4. I

found no evidence to support the moderating roles of relevance and attainability, at least

not in the ways that I predicted. In fact, perceived relevance to some of the core motives

actually interacted with disruption in precisely the opposite way that I predicted. There

are a number of possible explanations for why these observed findings ran counter to my

predictions, to which I now turn.

First, the most straightforward explanation for the unsupportive findings is that

my model is wrong, plain and simple. Perhaps increases in perceived relevance to core

motives and attainability do not strengthen the relationship between disruption and

inspiration. It is quite plausible that disruption, relevance to core motives, and attainability have additive, rather than multiplicative, effects on inspiration. That is, perhaps each of the predictors of the disruption model has an individual main effect on inspiration, with no or negligible interaction effects. To explore this possibility, I conducted a post-hoc analysis regressing inspiration on disruption, relevance to each of the three core motives, attainability, and the same control variables used in all Study 1 analyses (see Table 8). As simply an additive model, the results from this exploratory analysis suggest that disruption and perceived relevance to the communion and coherence motives have unique effects on inspiration, while relevance to the agency motive and perceived attainability do not.

While the statistically significant interaction effects between disruption and perceived relevance to the agency and communion motives were opposite of the predicted directions, they suggest an alternative but intriguing possibility. As the simple slopes depicted in Figures 4 and 5 seem to indicate, high perceived relevance to these core motives might compensate for low levels of disruption in predicting inspiration. In other words, even when a potential action or possibility is congruent with one's current mental schemas, perceiving that action as relevant to core human motives can lead to a level of transcendence sufficient for the experience of inspiration—as one focuses on potentialities of central or fundamental significance. As a predictor of inspiration, then, it is thus possible that perceived relevance to core motives has both an additive and compensatory relationship with disruption—as opposed to the multiplicative relationship I originally hypothesized.

Table 8. Post-Hoc Analysis (Study 1)

Variables	B	t
Age	-.00	-.33
Gender	-.23	-2.25*
Social Desirability	.02	1.53
Disruption	.42	8.23***
Agency	.02	.41
Communion	.24	3.86***
Coherence	.23	4.05***
Attainability	.02	.38
R^2	.64***	

Note. Dependent Variable = inspiration. B = unstandardized regression coefficient. Gender is coded female = 0, male = 1.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

Based solely on the results of Study 1, however, I am not yet willing to abandon my model's predictions. It is possible that the discrepant findings are the result of the nature of the data (i.e., self-reports), but a more theoretically compelling reason might relate to the context of the potentially inspiring stimulus. The article to which participants responded was about a man trying to do "good" in the world by feeding starving children. On average, people found possibilities evoked by this story to be relevant to their core motives and attainable. So much so, that even people toward the bottom of the distribution (i.e., 1 standard deviation below the mean) still reported levels of relevance and attainability at close to the neutral response of 4, on a scale of 1 to 7 (i.e., agency = 3.9, communion = 4.3, coherence = 4.3, attainability = 3.9). It may be that the moderating roles of relevance to core motives and perceived attainability have something akin to a ceiling effect on the relationship between disruption and inspiration. Specifically, it may be that it matters less *how* relevant and attainable possibilities are perceived to be, but

more that the possibility *is* perceived as relevant or attainable at all. Perhaps increases in relevance and attainability only strengthen the relationship between disruption and inspiration when—in crude, 7-point-scale, self-reporting terms—relevance and attainability increase from levels below the neutral point (i.e., less than 4) to the neutral point or above (i.e., 4 or more), whereas in this study, there may have been something inherent in the potentially inspiring cue that led the majority of participants to perceive relevance and attainability at levels too high to interact with disruption as predicted.

In sum, results from Study 1 support the significant role of disruption in the experience of inspiration, but the roles of perceived relevance to core motives and attainability were less clear. To further examine the disruption-model of inspiration, I employed an experimental methodology in Study 2 to more directly test the model's predictions.

Study 2: A Test of the General Model (Online Experiment)

The purpose of Study 2 was to provide further tests of Hypotheses 1 through 4 and to better establish causal inferences among the key relationships predicted by the disruption model of inspiration. In doing so, I also extended my examination of the psychological experience of being inspired to act to actual behavioral outcomes. Consistent with the motivational component of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003; 2004)—as well as theories and empirical evidence linking motivations, desires, and intentions to subsequent behaviors (e.g., Ajzen, 1991; Armitage & Conner, 2001; Perugini & Bagozzi, 2001)—I predict that an individual who feels *inspired to act* will, also, be more *likely to act*. In terms of prosocial behavior and the disruption model of

inspiration, then, I predict that as disruption increases one's inspiration to act prosocially, one will be more likely to actually engage in prosocial behavior:

> *Hypothesis 5: The greater the disruption of an evoked possibility (related to prosocial behavior), the more one will engage in prosocial behavior.*

> *Hypothesis 6: The positive relationship between disruption and prosocial behavior is mediated by inspiration, such that disruption increases inspiration, and inspiration increases prosocial behavior.*

In Study 2, to test all six hypotheses, an experimental design was employed to allow for the manipulation of disruption, perceived relevance to core motives, and attainability. Furthermore, a behavioral measure of prosocial behavior was also collected as an additional dependent variable, allowing for the test of the mediation hypothesis.

Sample and Design

Two-hundred-forty-four U.S. adults were invited to participate in the study (via Amazon's Mechanical Turk), in exchange for a small payment of 50 cents. After beginning the study online, participants read that they would be given an additional $1 bonus payment (which they actually received) to encourage them to take the study seriously. The average age of participants was 33.19 ($SD = 10.97$), and 59% were female. Seventy-eight percent reported their ethnicity as White, 9% as Asian, 6% as Black, 5% as Hispanic, and 2% as other. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of eight conditions in a 2 (disruption vs. control) by 2 (relevance vs. control) by 2 (attainability vs. control) factorial design.

Procedures

Upon being randomly assigned to an experimental condition, each participant read a brief set of instructions (in which part of the study manipulations were embedded) and then read a potentially inspiring newspaper article. The article briefly recounted the story of 9-year-old Rachel Beckwith, described previously, who was killed in a car accident just weeks after asking for charitable donations in place of birthday presents. The article describes the story of her tragic accident, and discussed the increasing number of donations that poured in as a result (See Appendix B).

Similar to past research using mindset priming (for a review, see Bargh & Chartrand, 2000) and guided writing prompts (e.g., Galinsky, Gruenfeld, & Magee, 2003) to prime motivations, processing goals, and/or mental representations, participants were given explicit instructions and engaged in follow-up writing tasks aimed at manipulating perceptions of relevance, attainability, and disruption regarding the article. The following instructions were presented in various combinations, based on a participant's assigned condition. In the "disruption" condition, prior to reading the article, participant read instructions that included the following text aimed at eliciting disruption:

> *As you read the article, try to notice any new ideas or insights you may have. Think about how the story makes you see things in a new light, or understand things in a new way. After reading the article, you will be asked to list a few ways that the story made you think about things differently.*

In the "relevance" condition, participants were given instructions focused on the core motives of agency, communion, and coherence:

> *In the article, pay particular attention to how the story depicted applies to you personally. Try to think about what the story means for you in terms of your personal growth and development, your relationships with other people, and the overall purpose of and meaning in your life. After reading the article, you will be asked to list a few of the ways that it was <u>applicable</u> to you.*

Participants in the "attainability" condition read the following as part of their instructions:

> *The article shares the story of everyday people—just like you—who were able to accomplish amazing things. As you read the story, notice how ordinary people were able to do extraordinary things. Think about how people can do anything if they put their minds to it. After reading the article, you will be asked to list a few reasons why it might be possible to do something similar.*

In control conditions, participants were not be given any specific instructions.

After reading the instructions, participants in all conditions were instructed to read the article, which was displayed on their computer screen. Directly afterward, to complete the manipulations for each condition, participants were prompted to write their reactions to the clip—in terms of relevance to core motives, attainability, and disruption—(see Appendix C for the specific prompts).

Next, participants completed a measure of inspiration and were given an opportunity to donate part of their payment to 'charity: water' (the organization discussed in the article). They then all completed a short survey including manipulation checks and a demographic questionnaire. Finally, participants were debriefed and thanked for their involvement in the study (via online debriefing form).

Measures

Inspiration. The same four items from the state version (Thrash et al., 2010b) of the Inspiration Scale (Trash & Elliot, 2003) used in Study 1 were again used to measure inspiration.

Prosocial behavior. The actual amount of money donated to 'charity: water' served as a behavioral measure of prosocial behavior.

Manipulation checks. The same scales used in Study 1 to measure perceived relevance to core motives, attainability, and disruption were used as checks for the current study's manipulations, respectively.

Results

Means and standard deviations, by condition, of all study variables and manipulation checks are reported in Table 9. Dummy codes for disruption (disruption = 1; control = 0), relevance (relevance = 1; control = 0), and attainability (attainability = 1; control = 0) were created for all participants, based on their randomly assigned experimental conditions. Manipulation checks revealed that the disruption and relevance manipulations seemed to work, but the attainability manipulation did not. Participants in the disruption condition ($M = 4.99$, $SD = .12$) reported higher levels of disruption than those in nondisruption conditions ($M = 4.41$, $SD = .12$), $F(1, 242) = 11.55$, $p = .001$. Similarly, participants in the relevance condition ($M = 5.07$, $SD = .12$) reported higher levels of perceived relevance than those in nonrelevance conditions ($M = 4.72$, $SD = .12$), $F(1, 242) = 4.40$, $p = .037$. However, those in the attainability condition ($M = 5.00$, $SD = .13$) did not differ in levels of perceived attainability from those in nonattainability conditions ($M = 4.99$, $SD = .13$), $F(1, 242) = .00$, $p = .964$. Therefore, due to the failed attainability manipulation, I do not report the results of hypothesis tests 3 and 4, which include attainability as a predictor.

To test Hypothesis 1—that disruption increases inspiration—a simple OLS regression analysis revealed that a statistically significant, positive relationship exists between the disruption dummy variable and inspiration, $B = .34$, $t(242) = 2.36$, $p = .019$.

Table 9. Means and Standard Deviations by Condition

Condition	Manipulation Check						Variable			
	Disruption		Relevance		Attainability		Inspiration		Donation	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Control (33)	3.91	1.60	4.06	1.54	4.26	1.64	5.48	1.29	.25	.36
Disruption (33)	5.14	1.11	4.98	1.24	5.24	1.31	5.99	0.77	.28	.34
Relevance (29)	5.00	1.01	5.30	0.92	5.38	1.15	6.10	0.87	.33	.37
Attainability (33)	4.26	1.63	4.59	1.59	4.53	1.55	5.33	1.35	.28	.39
Disruption & Relevance (30)	4.77	1.20	5.12	1.18	5.16	1.22	5.84	0.82	.39	.38
Disruption & Attainability (29)	5.08	1.16	5.31	1.13	5.44	1.10	5.83	0.97	.29	.35
Relevance & Attainability (29)	4.56	1.56	4.61	1.45	4.79	1.61	5.30	1.66	.23	.33
Disruption, Relevance, & Attainability (28)	4.98	1.05	5.27	1.01	5.33	1.09	5.86	0.91	.27	.35

Note. Numbers in parentheses represent the number of participants in each condition.

Hypothesis 1 was thus supported. To test Hypothesis 2—that perceived relevance to core motives moderates the positive effect of disruption on inspiration—I created an interaction term by multiplying the disruption and relevance-to-core-motives dummy variables together, and then ran an OLS regression analysis with inspiration as the dependent variable and the two dummy variables and the interaction term as predictor variables. The interaction term was not statistically significant, $B = -.37$, $t(240) = -1.27$, p

= .21; Hypothesis 2 was thus not supported. Hypotheses 3 and 4 were not tested due to the failed attainability manipulation.

Finally, I conducted a mediation analysis using a bootstrapping approach (see Preacher & Hayes, 2004) to test Hypotheses 5 and 6. Although OLS regression analysis did not result in a significant effect of disruption on prosocial behavior, $B = .03$, $t(242) = .76$, $p = .45$, the absence of a main effect of an independent variable on a dependent variable does not preclude the existence of an indirect effect through a third variable (see Collins, Graham, & Flaherty, 1998; MacKinnon, Krull, & Lockwood, 2000; Shrout & Bolger, 2002). Indeed, employing the bootstrapping method (5,000 iterations) produced a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval of [.005, .049] for the indirect effect (.02) of disruption on prosocial behavior, through inspiration (see Figure 6). Since the CI excludes zero, I conclude that the indirect effect is statistically significant. Therefore, while I did not find support for Hypothesis 5, I did find support for Hypothesis 6—that there is an indirect effect of disruption on donating behavior, through inspiration.
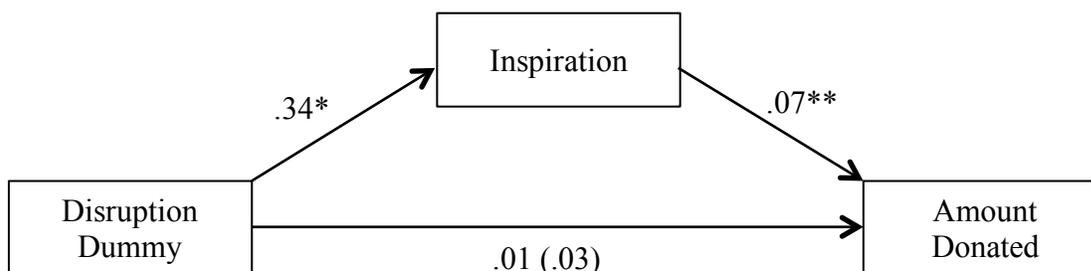
Note. N = 244. All values are unstandardized regression coefficients. The value in parentheses represents the coefficient before the mediator was included in the model.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

Figure 6. The Indirect Effect of Disruption on Prosocial Behavior Through Inspiration

Discussion

Similar to the results of Study 1, the findings from Study 2 supported Hypothesis 1 but not Hypothesis 2: Disruption positively predicted inspiration, but perceived relevance to core motives did not significantly interact with disruption. Having manipulated disruption experimentally, these findings provide much stronger evidence for a causal link between disruption and inspiration. Moreover, I found preliminary evidence that disrupting the way people think about things can indirectly influence their actual behavior, by helping to inspire them (Hypothesis 6).

Interestingly, however, while I did find a statistically significant indirect effect of disruption (X) on donations (Y) through inspiration (M), there was not a significant total or direct effect of disruption on donations. Such an absence of an X-to-Y main effect is possibly the result of a counter-acting effect from an unidentified variable not included in the model (Hayes, 2009; Mathieu & Taylor, 2006; Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010). Whereas disruption was observed to increase inspiration, followed by an *increase* in donation size, disruption might also lead to an increase in some other unmeasured construct that leads to a *decrease* in donations. For instance, perhaps disruption leads to cognitive fatigue, which might subsequently increase one's susceptibility to status quo biases (Ritov & Baron, 1992) and preferences for default options (Johnson & Goldstein, 2003)—the status quo and default for participants in the present case being to keep their bonus payment, rather than choose to give it away. Or, perhaps the arousal triggered by the disruption of a schema incongruity (Mandler, 1982) has an adverse effect on prosocial behavior. In light of the significant indirect effect of disruption on donations, the lack of a

significant main effect opens the door to a number of possible theoretical explanations that might merit future study.

Turning next to the nonsignificant interaction effect between perceived relevance and disruption suggests that relevance does not moderate the relationship between disruption and inspiration. However, as in Study 1, perhaps the context of the potentially inspiring cue (i.e., a 9-year-old girl posthumously raising millions of dollars for charity) was inherently too relevant. Again, those toward the bottom of the distribution (i.e., those one standard deviation below the mean) still responded to manipulation-check measures of perceived relevance to core motives (3.5) at levels very close to the neutral value (i.e., 4 = neither agree nor disagree) of the 7-point scale. It is still possible that a moderating effect would emerge given a stimulus that evokes greater variance of perceptions (such as to include very low perceived levels of relevance). Future studies should explore this possibility.

It is also important to note that the manipulation for perceived attainability seemed to fail completely, rendering any results related to interaction effects that include the attainability dummy uninterpretable. In retrospect, the manipulation might have failed due to the nature and circumstances of the stimulus article (i.e., the posthumous impact of a 9-year-old girl). Since the groundswell of support for Rachel Beckwith's cause primarily stemmed from her tragic death, it is understandable that if participants interpreted the prompt to think about how they could accomplish something similar too literally (i.e., focusing on what Rachel did specifically), they would not likely perceive related possibilities and/or potential actions as increasingly attainable. Accordingly, future research examining the disruption model of inspiration would be better served by

more effectively manipulating both perceived attainability and perceived relevance to core motives. Perceived attainability, for instance, could be manipulated by giving participants positive or negative feedback on their task performance, or even on their general or abstract abilities related to a specific domain under examination. Such methods have been used in research on self-efficacy (e.g., Locke, Frederick, Lee, & Bobko, 1984). Furthermore, perceived relevance to core motives could be better manipulated by changing the actual content of an article, video, or other stimulus material across conditions.

In short, although the results of Study 2 intensify doubts as to the moderating role of relevance to core motives, they strengthen support for the critical role of disruption in the experience of inspiration. Building on the correlational results from Study 1, the findings of Study 2 increase confidence in the causal effect of disruption on inspiration, and provide initial evidence that the inspiration experienced due to disruption can affect actual behaviors. In Study 3, I extend the investigation of the disruption model to a field setting, where experimental conditions are "noisier," but where prosocial behaviors may have more practical significance.

Study 3: Leadership That Inspires (Field Experiment)

In an organizational context, when people think about inspiration, they often think about leadership. In a recent pilot study, I asked 85 working adults to complete an online questionnaire, in exchange for a small payment (via Amazon Mechanical Turk), regarding their experiences of inspiration at work. Respondents were an average age of 31.96 ($SD = 9.94$) with average full time work experience of 10.23 years ($SD = 9.52$). Of

the 85 participants, 34% listed their boss or manager as a source of inspiration at work. Indeed, leadership scholars have long recognized the inspiring effects that leaders can have on followers. As mentioned previously, a leader's ability to inspire, for example, is included in theories of charismatic and transformational leadership (e.g., Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Bass, 2008; Shamir et al., 1993). While there seems to be widespread agreement that leaders can, indeed, be inspiring, we know very little about how specific instances of leadership inspire others to act in specific ways. In terms of inspiring action, rather than asserting that a specific type or style of leader will be inspiring, I submit that it is the meaning-making capacity of any leader (both formal and informal) that can directly serve as a source of inspiration.

The Meaning-Making Capacity of Leadership

In the context of the meaning of work, Brief and Nord (1990) identified two primary aspects of meaning: purpose and understanding. Similarly, in an integrative review of the meaning literature in psychology, Park (2010) elaborates on a psychological model of meaning making originally presented by Park and Folkman (1997) that distinguishes between situational meaning and global meaning. Situational meaning refers to the appraisals and attributions individuals make to *understand* specific events, whereas global meaning refers to an individual's broader beliefs, goals, and sense of *purpose*. Individuals engage in meaning-making processes that try to bring appraised situational meaning and global meaning into alignment (Park 2010). In an organizational setting, leaders can thus play a proactive role in helping others make meaning at work (Rosso et al., 2010) by connecting followers' situations, activities, and actions to their

broader goals, ideals, and purposes. While the idea of leadership as meaning making has

been examined—although infrequently—in recent research (e.g., Grant, 2012;

Sonenshein & Dholakia, 2012), in many respects, it conflicts with predominant notions of

leadership that instead focus primarily on a leader's role in increasing productivity and

profits.

In contrast to the contemporary treatment of leadership as a driver of economic

performance, Podolny et al. (2005) sought to resurrect the notion of leadership's capacity

to infuse meaning and purpose into the lives of followers. They argue that the idea of

leaders as meaning-makers is consistent with the conceptualization of leadership by early

scholars—such as Weber (1946), Barnard (1938), and Selznick (1957/1984)—but has

taken a back seat over the last three decades to the idea of leaders as performance-drivers.

In the past, for example, Smircich and Morgan (1982) treated the management of

meaning from a leadership perspective in terms of framing and defining the reality of

others—an approach similar to ideas of earlier scholars who described concepts such as

the "bracketing of experience" (Schutz, 1967), "framing" experiences (Goffman, 1974),

"punctuating contexts" (Bateson, 1972; Weick, 1979), and using symbolic action to

create and maintain organizational paradigms (Pfeffer, 1981). More recently, an

emerging literature on sense-giving (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) has also focused on the

role of leaders as meaning makers: "Through evocative language and the construction of

narrative, symbols, and other sensegiving devices, leaders help shape the sensemaking

processes of organization members toward some intended definition of reality" (Maitlis

& Lawrence, 2007, p. 58).

More specifically, Podolny et al. (2005) contend that the very definition of leadership is tied to meaning-making; they assert that an act of leadership is any action that helps create meaning for others by helping them (1) connect to a broad ideal or end that they personally value, or (2) affirm their connection to the community of which they are a part. From this more nuanced perspective, the meaning that leaders infuse into the lives of others thus relates to both understanding and purpose—helping people not only understand a current situation or reality, but to engage in purposeful action and to perceive that action as meaningful (i.e., accomplishing goals, enacting values, strengthening relationships, etc.).

Viewing leadership as meaning-making highlights the importance of the actions in which leaders engage over simply the roles that leaders fulfill. Individuals without formal leadership titles can thus participate in leadership in a very real and substantial way—by helping to make meaning for others. Regarding inspiration, I contend that leaders can and do utilize their meaning-making capacity to inspire others to act by framing desired actions in terms of relevance to core motives, attainability, and disruption.

Meaning-Making as a Source of Inspiration

Although charismatic leaders are often inspiring, an individual does not have to be charismatic in order to inspire (Bass & Bass, 2008). Through the meaning-making capacity of leadership, anyone (whether formally appointed as a leader or not) can potentially inspire others to act—becoming an everyday hero or unheralded leader who inspires others to greatness. Leaders can be a source of inspiration by helping followers

make meaning in a way that potential actions are perceived as possibilities: as opportunities to fulfill unmet potential related to self-development, affiliating with other people, and/or understanding and achieving a greater purpose or ideal—opportunities that are relevant to an individual at the most basic (i.e., core motives) yet potentially transcendent level, as described previously.

Thus one of the ways that the meaning-making capacity of leadership can be utilized to inspire others is through the *framing* of specific potential actions as connecting to the fulfillment of followers' core human motives. This framing process can be deliberate or unintentional, but it refers to a leader's sense-giving or meaning-making efforts that help others understand a potential action's meaning. By framing, I evoke Goffman's (1974) notion of frames as *schemata of interpretation* that help individuals perceive, label, and make sense of stimuli and events in their lives and the world around them. From this perspective, framing can be viewed as a form of meaning construction (Benford & Snow, 2000; Molinsky & Margolis, 2005) whereby an individual's perceptions of reality are formed.

Potential actions framed as contributing to one's growth and self-development, for example, are relevant to the agency motive, giving people a greater sense of autonomy or competence (see Deci & Ryan, 2000). Actions framed in terms of building important relationships with others are relevant to the communion motive, giving people a greater sense of relatedness or belonging (see Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Deci & Ryan, 2000). And actions framed in connection to a greater purpose or ideal (see Yukl & Tracey, 1992) help fulfill the coherence motive, giving people reasons behind their actions, their efforts, and even who they are as a person (i.e., answering the "why"

questions). Through framing, the meaning-making capacity of leadership can thus be a source of inspiration (i.e., evocation) as it increases perceptions that a potential action is relevant to the core motives of agency, communion, and/or coherence. And as described previously, perceived relevance to core motives increases the likelihood of experiencing transcendence, with an associated approach motivation, as one considers the potential action at hand. Furthermore, as predicted by the general model of being inspired to act, leaders will be even more inspiring to the extent that they frame potential actions as possibilities that are attainable (Yukl & Tracey, 1992), and do so in a manner that is disruptive to the continuity of followers' current mental schemas. In sum, I posit that the greater the extent to which a leader frames an action, and the possibility it represents, as relevant to fulfilling or satisfying followers' core human motives, as attainable, and in a disruptive manner, the more likely those followers will feel *inspired* to engage in that action—that is, the more likely an evoked stimulus will lead to transcendence and an accompanying approach motivation.

> *Hypothesis 7: A leader's framing of a potential prosocial action in terms of high disruption, relevance to core motives, and attainability will increase the likelihood of a follower to engage in that prosocial action.*

> *Hypothesis 8: The positive relationship between a leader's framing of a potential prosocial action in terms of high disruption, relevance to core motives, and attainability and a follower's subsequent likelihood to engage in that prosocial action is mediated by the extent to which the follower is inspired.*

Sample and Design

Study 3 was conducted in cooperation with the manager of an operations and client services department of a Fortune 100 financial services firm. The manager is responsible for approximately 105 employees who staff a service center in a U.S.

location. Employees' primary responsibilities involve receiving (i.e., inbound calls) and processing service requests from clients (e.g., account change requests or money distribution requests). In a field-experiment, 89 of these employees were arbitrarily assigned to either a treatment (i.e., inspiration; $N = 30$), comparison (i.e., persuasion; $N = 30$), or control (i.e., no intervention; $N = 29$) condition. The average age of participants was 35.99 ($SD = 9.84$), and 21% were female. Seventy-eight percent reported their ethnicity as White, 7% as Hispanic, 6% as Asian, 1% as Black, and 8% as "other" or else did not respond. The average length of participants' employment within the company was 34.88 months ($SD = 55.15$), ranging from 1 month to approximately 33 years.

Procedures

The financial services firm holds regular blood drives, wherein all employees are encouraged to give back to their communities by donating blood. Employees receive emails from corporate headquarters related to the program—explaining the details and how to get involved. To encourage participation in the effort, the manager made a short, 5-minute presentation to all employees in the inspiration and persuasion conditions two days before the blood drive. While the manager does hold a formal leadership position, the focus of this study is on the meaning-making capacity of the manager to potentially inspire his employees—an act of everyday leadership that informal leaders can engage in as well.

Employees were assigned to one of three conditions, in which their manager gave them an "inspiring" presentation, a "persuasive" presentation, or no presentation (i.e., control group) related to the blood drive. Employees in each condition then completed the

exact same paper-and-pencil survey. To approximate the methodological benefits of random assignment to the greatest extent possible, employees were sequentially assigned to conditions based on the random nature of each employee's workflow. Before the beginning of each intervention (including the control condition), employees were asked to participate based on their availability. Throughout each day, since inbound calls are routed to employees based on when the calls come in and who is the next available service specialist, a given employees' availability (i.e., when they are not on an inbound call or in the middle of processing a service request) is fairly random, at any given moment. The manager conducted all three sessions on the same day, and employees understood that the session they were asked to attend was based on their availability. Assignment to the inspiration condition began first; the session beginning once 30 employees had gathered in a meeting room after each had experience a sufficient lull in their workflow. Later in the day, from the employees who had not attended the first session, 30 additional employees were asked—based on availability—to gather in a meeting room where they received the persuasion intervention. Finally, a little while later, 29 employees were asked—based on availability—to gather in the meeting where they did not receive a presentation from their manager (i.e., control condition) but completed the same survey as those in the other two conditions.

To the employees who were arbitrarily assigned to the treatment condition, the manager gave an "inspiring" presentation (i.e., a presentation focused on framing the blood drive in terms of relevance to core motives, attainability, and disruption; see Appendix D). The presentation framed participation in the blood drive as relevant to employees (a) becoming their best selves and developing personally (i.e., agency), (b)

becoming a valued part of a company team (i.e., communion), and (c) making a meaningful difference in the community (i.e., coherence). The "inspiring" presentation also focused on attainability, demonstrating that while some individuals may not be in a financial position to donate money to a charity, almost anyone can help make a difference by donating blood. Finally, the "inspiring" presentation also framed the blood drive in a manner that was potentially disruptive to the continuity of employees' current mental schemas. For example, while many employees might feel that one person's blood donation won't really make much of a difference in the world, the manager quantified the numbers of lives potentially saved by a single blood donation, as well as by the collective donations if every employee were to participate.

In contrast, the manager gave employees assigned to the persuasion condition a presentation utilizing five of Cialdini's (2001) principles of persuasion: (1) liking—demonstrating similarities and giving praise, (2) reciprocity—giving what you want others to give, (3) social proof—using peer power when possible, (4) authority—demonstrating your expertise, and (5) scarcity—making opportunities seem less available (see Appendix D). To minimize demand characteristics, both presentations closed with a personal appeal by the manager, encouraging each of the employees to volunteer.

Following the presentation, employees in both conditions were asked to complete a short questionnaire to provide feedback on the company's blood drive program. They first completed a measure of inspiration, regarding how inspired they felt to participate. They were then asked for their opinions on the program, which included manipulation-check questions, followed by a demographic questionnaire. Employees in the control condition did not receive a presentation from the leader at all, but they were asked to

complete the same survey as those in the other two conditions. Finally, at the close of the blood drive, objective data were collected from the company regarding which employees did and did not participate in the program, which were then used as the primary dependent variable for analysis.

It should be acknowledged that due to the loss of experimental control when conducting experiments in a field setting, it is particularly important to attend to potential threats to internal validity related to the implementation of experimental treatments. Given the context of the present study (i.e., a setting wherein participants are co-workers who interact regularly), there is increased risk related to a number of implementation threats, such as those described by Shadish, Cook, and Campbell (2002) as compensatory equalization, compensatory rivalry, resentful demoralization, and treatment diffusion. The first three of these implementation threats can emerge when either participants or treatment providers perceive a relevant inequality in terms of benefits, goods, or services received by those in a given treatment group versus a control group (or groups with a different treatment). In such cases, outcome measures can be compromised if treatment providers alter the distribution of benefits or services to reduce the inequality (e.g., compensatory equalization); participants of a control group perceive others in another condition as advantaged in some way, thereby changing their behavior in an effort to "keep up" (e.g., compensatory rivalry); or participants feel demoralized for not having received as desirable a treatment as others—or any treatment at all—which influences their behavior (e.g., resentful demoralization). To minimize such threats, Study 3 was specifically designed to make the participant experience of those in each of the three conditions (including the control group) as similar as possible. For every condition,

participants gathered in a meeting room and were given the same survey to complete by the same manager. No material benefits, goods, or services of consequence were provided to any of the participants, making perceptions of inequality very unlikely. The only difference among conditions was the short verbal introduction given by the manager. In a follow-up interview I conducted with the manager, he believed that employees viewed each of the three meetings in equal terms—the purpose of which was to complete the survey (which, again, was the same for all participants).

Similarly, to reduce the risk of treatment diffusion (i.e., when participants in a given condition receive part or all of the treatment of a different condition), every effort was made to make the three sessions appear as identical as possible to the employees. Because of the setting of the study, however, it was impractical to completely isolate participants in one condition from those in another, following the interventions, so the threat of treatment diffusion could not be eliminated entirely. That said, the manager, who works in close proximity to his employees, said he never heard any employees discussing any differences in their experiences related to attending different sessions. Finally, an additional threat to validity relates to the possibility of an experimenter's expectancies (Rosenthal, 1964) affecting participants' responses and behaviors. To reduce this problem, as suggested by Rosenthal and Rosnow (1991), the manager who implemented the treatments (while obviously aware of the different content of each condition) was blind to specific hypotheses.

Measures

      Inspiration. The same four items and response options from the state version (Thrash et al., 2010b) of the Inspiration Scale (Thrash & Elliot, 2003) used in Studies 1 and 2 were again used to measure inspiration, but this time with respect to the possibility of participating in the blood drive. The items were thus adapted to the present context by rewording them as follows: *I experienced inspiration, something about the blood drive inspired me, I was inspired to participate in the blood drive,* and *I felt inspired.*

      Blood donation. After the end of the blood drive, whether employees actually participated in the blood drive was reported by the company, serving as a dichotomous dependent variable representing prosocial behavior.

      Manipulation checks. The same scales used in Study 2 for manipulation checks of perceived relevance to core motives, attainability, and disruption—adapted to the present context—were similarly used for the current study. All employees also completed a single-item measure gauging the degree to which they felt persuaded to participate in the blood drove (i.e., "I felt persuaded to participate in the blood drive; 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Results

      To get a preliminary indication as to whether the framing interventions had their intended effects, I compared the mean ratings of manipulation-check measures (i.e., disruption, relevance, attainability, and persuasion) across conditions. Means for each measure, reported by condition, are displayed in Table 10. First, as expected, mean ratings of disruption were higher in the inspiration condition ($M = 4.21$, $SD = 1.36$) than

Table 10. Means of Manipulation-Check Measures Across Conditions

	Condition		
Variable	Inspiration (*N* = 30)	Persuasion (*N* = 30)	Control (*N* = 29)
Disruption	4.21 a	4.15 a	3.63 b
Relevance	4.04 a	4.23 a	3.79 a
Attainability	4.33 a	4.89 a	4.38 a
Persuasion	4.10 a	4.10 a	3.27 b

Note. All variables were measured on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Different letters in the same *row* reflect statistically significant differences at *p* < .05.

both the control (*M* = 3.63, *SD* = 1.08) and persuasion (*M* = 4.15, *SD* = 1.04) conditions. However, results of one-tailed independent-samples *t* tests revealed that this expected difference was only statistically significant for comparison with the control condition, *t*(55) = 1.77, *p* = .04, but not the persuasion condition, *t*(57) = .20, *p* = .43. In fact, the mean differences between the inspiration and persuasion conditions were not statistically significant for any of the manipulation check measures, with no *t*-statistics being greater .20, and no *p*-values being lower than .43. Moreover, mean comparisons of relevance and attainability between the inspiration and control condition were similarly not significant. As for the persuasion intervention, mean ratings of persuasion were higher for employees in the persuasion condition (*M* = 4.10, *SD* = 1.65) than the control condition (*M* = 3.27, *SD* = 1.34), *t*(54) = 2.05, *p* = .02, but there was no difference in mean ratings between the persuasion and inspiration (*M* = 4.10, *SD* = 1.54) conditions, *t*(58) = 0.00, *p* = .50.

In short, employees in the inspiration condition reported greater disruption than those in the control but not persuasion condition, and those in the persuasion condition reported greater persuasion than those in the control but not inspiration condition. While the interventions seemed to have their intended effect (along these dimensions) when

compared to control conditions, the lack of any mean differences between those in the inspiration and persuasion conditions raises serious questions as to the effectiveness of the study's interventions; or, perhaps, it suggests that attempts to persuade and inspire can affect people's conscious perceptions in similar ways.

Considering the questionable manipulation checks, the results I report below should be interpreted with caution, but with two caveats. First, the self-report measures of disruption, relevance, and attainability are not manipulation checks in the purest sense. The checks were indeed intended to provide an indication of the effectiveness of the interventions, but the interventions were not manipulating perceptions per se; rather, they were manipulating the framing attempts of a leader. However, how those framing attempts are perceived is indeed an implicit part of the hypothesized predictions, which leads to the second caveat. It is quite possible that the effect of the framing interventions on employee behavior unexpectedly occurred through nonconscious processes (e.g., Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Bargh, Gollwitzer, Lee-Chai, Barndollar, & Trötschel, 2001), which would have been undetected by the self-report measures used as manipulation checks. In other words, even though employees in the inspiration condition did not report higher levels of perceived relevance and attainability, it is possible that framing a potential action in those terms still had the intended effect on behavior—through less conscious mechanisms. In any event, I report the results of the following hypothesis tests with caution, acknowledging that their interpretation is clouded by questionable manipulation checks.

First, as displayed in Table 11, the percentage of employees who actually donated blood was more than twice as high for those in the inspiration condition (23%) than those

Table 11. Blood Drive Participation by Condition

	Condition		
Variable	Inspiration ($N = 30$)	Persuasion ($N = 30$)	Control ($N = 29$)
Number of Participating Employees	7 (23%)	3 (10%)	2 (7%)

in the control (7%) or persuasion (10%) conditions. To see if these differences were statistically significant, and as a direct test of Hypothesis 7—that framing the blood drive in terms of disruption, relevance, and attainability would increase participation—I conducted a binary logistic regression comparing the inspiration and control conditions, using the inspiration (inspiration = 1, control = 0) dummy as an independent variable and blood donation (donated = 1, did not donate = 0) as a dichotomous dependent variable. The effect of the inspiration condition was marginally significant, Exp(B) = 4.11, p = .097, suggesting that employees in the inspiration condition had 4.11 times the odds of donating blood than those in the control. In other words, the odds of an employee in the inspiration condition donating were .304, compared to .074 for those in the control condition. The overall model was also marginally significant, χ^2 = 3.25, p = .072.

A similar pattern of results was found when comparing the inspiration and persuasion conditions, although the results were not statistically significant. Logistic regression analysis revealed a nonsignificant overall model, χ^2 = 1.97, p = .161, with employees in the inspiration condition having 2.74 times the odds of donating than those in the persuasion condition, Exp(B) = 2.74, p = .177. Finally, I also compared the donating behavior of those in inspiration condition with those in the control and persuasion conditions combined, resulting in a marginally significant model, χ^2 = 3.55, p

= .059, with an odds ratio [i.e., Exp(B)] of 3.29, *p* = .061. Overall, then, the pattern of data supports the prediction of Hypothesis 7, but the lack of statistical significance, combined with the inconclusive results of the manipulation checks, prevent any confidence in generalizing these findings beyond the specific sample of employees examined.

Finally, a test of Hypothesis 8 did not support the prediction that the effect of a leader's framing of a prosocial action in terms of disruption, relevance, and attainability on a follower's likelihood of performing that action is mediated by the extent to which the follower is inspired. First, there was not a statistically significant mean difference in reported inspiration among the inspiration (*M* = 4.33, *SD* = 1.51), control (*M* = 3.94, *SD* = 1.51), and persuasion (*M* = 4.61, *SD* = 1.29) conditions, $F(2, 86) = 1.52$, *p* = .225. Additionally, using the bootstrapping method (with 5,000 iterations) for analyzing mediating effects with a dichotomous dependent variable (see Hayes, 2012) produced a CI of [-.318, 1.244] for the indirect effect of the inspiration intervention on blood donations through followers' self-reported inspiration. Since the CI includes zero, the indirect effect was not statistically significant, and Hypothesis 8 was not supported.[6]

Discussion

The overall results of Study 3 were mixed. Hypothesis 7 was partly supported, in that trying to frame the blood drive in terms of disruption, relevance to core motives, and attainability led to a large increase in blood donations. However, the results were only marginally significant. This may have been due, in part, to insufficient statistical power.

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[6] The mediation analysis reported here included employees from the inspiration and control conditions only. The same analysis revealed similarly nonsignificant results when comparing employees from the inspiration and persuasion conditions.

Whereas the initial plan was to have 120 employees participate in the study, the number of employees in the department available at the time of the framing intervention was lower than that (i.e., $N = 89$).

However, while the *statistical* significance was only marginal, I consider the *substantive* (McCloskey, 1998), or practical, significance of Study 3 to be quite high. Blood-drive participants each donated approximately 1 pint of blood. According to the Stanford School of Medicine Blood Center (Media Tools, n.d.), one pint of donated blood can save up to three lives. Certainly not every pint will actually save three lives, but, in terms of potential, the possible number of lives saved by donations from those in the inspiration condition was therefore 21, compared to 9 potential lives saved from those in the persuasion condition and 6 potential lives saved from those in the control group. In addition, following the study, sponsors of the blood drive approached the manager of the department in which the study had been conducted and asked what they had done to increase participation to such unusually high levels.

However, whereas Hypothesis 7 thus was supported by substantively significant results (with only marginal statistical significance), I did not find support for Hypothesis 8—that inspiration mediates the effect of framing on blood drive participation. Surprisingly, self-reports of inspiration did not differ significantly across conditions. Considering the inconsistent manipulation-check results, it is unclear whether these null results are the consequence of failed manipulations, biases in self-report data, or flawed theory.

Due to the questionable effectiveness of the inspiration and persuasion interventions (as reflected in the inconsistent manipulation checks), I conducted several

post-hoc analyses, controlling for employees' experimental conditions, to explore the

relationships among the self-report measures of disruption, attainability, relevance, and

inspiration.

First, to examine the fundamental premise of the disruption model of inspiration, I

regressed inspiration on disruption, controlling for experimental condition. Replicating

the results from Study 1, the overall model was significant, $R^2 = .53$, $F(3, 85) = 30.26$, p

< .001, as was the effect of disruption on inspiration, $B = .88$, $t(85) = 9.22$, $p < .001$. In

two additional analyses with the same controls, I then tested whether relevance and

attainability served as moderators of this effect. Neither the interaction between

disruption and relevance, $B = -.08$, $t(80) = -1.28$, $p = .20$, nor disruption and attainability,

$B = .02$, $t(80) = .53$, $p = .60$, respectively, was statistically significant.

Next, considering the consistent lack of evidence for the moderating role of

perceived relevance and attainability, I ran a model to examine their potential additive

effects on inspiration, above and beyond that of disruption. I therefore regressed

inspiration on disruption, relevance, attainability, and the experimental condition

dummies. The overall model was significant, $R^2 = .58$, $F(5, 80) = 22.02$, $p < .001$, as were

the main effects of disruption, $B = .65$, $t(80) = 5.05$, $p < .001$, and attainability, $B = .28$,

$t(80) = 2.64$, $p = .010$. Relevance, however, was not significant, $B = .11$, $t(80) = .98$, $p =$

.328.

Finally, again controlling for experimental conditions, I performed a binary

logistic regression analysis with self-reported inspiration as the independent variable and

whether employees donated blood as the dependent variable. The overall model was

statistically significant, $\chi^2 = 14.41$, $p = .002$, as was the effect of inspiration on donating

blood, Exp(*B*) = 2.43, p = .005. Taken together, these post-hoc analyses suggest that perceived disruption positively predicted experiences of inspiration, which, in turn, positively predicted participation in the blood drive. However, perceived attainability and relevance were not found to moderate these effects; although perceived attainability did demonstrate a positive main effect on inspiration.

CHAPTER 3

GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

An underlying premise of the disruption model of inspiration is that being inspired to act reflects a disruption to the continuity of one's mental schemas. Across three studies, to varying degrees, I found consistent support for the important role of disruption in people's experiences of inspiration. In an on-line survey (Study 1), people were more likely to be inspired by a newspaper article if it made them to see things in a new way. Support for the causality of this relationship was better established in a follow-up experiment (Study 2), in which people were more likely to feel inspired by a different newspaper article if they were asked to focus specifically on how it makes them think about things differently. Not only did people in this "disruption" condition report higher levels of inspiration, they also donated more money to the charity described in the article. Finally, in a field experiment (Study 3), employees of a financial services firm were more likely to participate in their corporate blood drive after receiving a presentation from their leader designed to inspire by framing the blood drive in terms of disruption, relevance, and attainability. Taken together, these initial findings provide strong evidence that disruption does, indeed, help predict whether people will be inspired to act.

However, findings related to the perceived relevance to core motives and perceived attainability (especially regarding their potential moderating roles) were much

less consistent, and they were unsupportive of hypotheses. In general, perceived

relevance and perceived attainability did not significantly interact with disruption to

influence inspiration, or else interacted in a manner opposite to predictions. Such

conclusions should be tempered, however, by the failure of the attainability manipulation

in Study 2, and the questionable manipulation checks in Study 3.

In contrast to the *multiplicative* predictions of the disruption model of inspiration,

post-hoc analyses seem to suggest that disruption, perceived relevance to core motives,

and perceived attainability of a potential action *additively* affect whether someone will be

inspired to engage in that action. Rather than interacting with each other, the key

constructs of the disruption model seem to uniquely and independently influence

inspiration—although it is possible that some may do so nonconsciously, as was

suggested by the results of Study 3. Therefore, although the precise predictions of the

disruption model were not all supported, disruption, relevance to core motives, and

attainability do all appear to play an important role in inspiring people to act—with

disruption demonstrating the most consistent effects. Overall, then, although these

findings should be interpreted with caution due to several issues related to manipulation

checks, they make important initial contributions to theory, suggest numerous avenues

for future research, and have practical implications related to people's experiences of

inspiration at work, as well as and in their everyday lives.

Theoretical Contributions

With this line of research, one of the primary contributions I make is as simple as

increasing the precision with which scholars of management and organizations talk about

and examine the important human experience of inspiration. The theoretical model and empirical analyses I have presented help to move investigations of inspiration from broad definitions and vague conceptualizations to the actual psychological processes that underlie when people will be inspired to engage in action—particularly prosocial action. More than just uprooting research from psychology and replanting it in the field of management and organizations, however, my dissertation makes direct contributions to extant theory in both fields of inquiry. Below, I specifically highlight some of the theoretical contributions I make to three areas of research: the psychology of inspiration, leadership, and moral motivation.

The Psychology of Inspiration

In advancing research on the psychological experience of inspiration, Thrash and colleagues (Thrash & Elliot, 2003; 2004; Thrash et al., 2010a; 2010b) took important steps in theoretically defining inspiration and empirically examining some of its consequences (e.g., creativity, purpose in life, gratitude, and well-being). In an attempt to move from what inspiration is and why it is important to what causes it to occur, I contribute to this emerging body of literature by developing a model that identifies some of the influential antecedents of being inspired to act. Specifically, while research on social comparison theory (e.g., Lockwood & Kunda, 1997) and inspirational appeals (e.g., Yukl & Tracy, 1992) suggests that perceived relevance and attainability are important conditions for being inspired, I add perspective and color to the bigger picture by identifying the *disruption* of cognitive schemas is an important antecedent that has largely been overlooked. Moreover, guided by Thrash and Elliot's (2003; 2004)

definition of inspiration, I further specify particular targets of *relevance* that are likely to lead to a sense of transcendence (i.e., relevance to the core motives of agency, communion, and coherence). The notion of perceived relevance implies a sense of importance to the individual. I specifically focus on relevance to core motives, because I argue that they are important at a fundamental, even transcendent, level to many if not all people. In short, by identifying some of the psychological mechanisms and cognitive perceptions that may trigger inspired action, I hope to nudge the field toward an actual theory of inspiration—something beyond merely using inspiration in lay terms or as a synonym for motivation.

Leadership

Given that several researchers have attempted to directly incorporate notions of inspiration into theories of leadership (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass & Bass, 2008; Shamir et al., 1993), the disruption model has important implications for better understanding how inspiration operates in such theories. Inspirational motivation, for example, is one of the four components of transformational leadership—a type of leadership that supposedly helps individuals transcend self-interest for the good of the organization (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994). However, the theory (and its supporting empirical research) focuses broadly on what transformational leaders do, in general, to inspire and "transform" followers (e.g., articulating a vision and encouraging enthusiasm), but do not directly examine individual instances of inspiration. Thus, many questions remain unanswered regarding followers' actual experiences, such as why certain followers might be inspired by one vision over another, why visions are inspiring

in the first place, and why optimism and encouragement might lead to inspiration. The follower-centric approach implicit in the disruption model of inspiration begins to shed light on many of these questions. For example, the model predicts that visions and encouragement are inspiring to the extent that they are disruptive to followers' mental schemas (e.g., showing a possible future state previously unconsidered), relevant to followers' core motives (i.e., achieving the vision will help fulfill agency, communion, and/or coherence concerns), and attainable (i.e., the vision can actually become a reality). In short, the disruption model of inspiration helps to unpack the black box of inspiration that is largely left alone in current theories of leadership.

Moral Motivation

The growing trend in moral psychology, and even neuroscience, to examine the impact of intuition and emotion on moral decision making and behavior (e.g., Haidt, 2001, 2007; Greene et al., 2004; Moll & De Oliveria-Souza, 2007) has rekindled the flame of an old philosophical argument between David Hume and Immanuel Kant as to whether reason or intuition/emotion has primacy in guiding people's moral actions (see Haidt, 2010; Narvaez, 2010a, 2010b). Regardless of the ultimate victor, better understanding the human experience of inspiration has important implications for theory and research related to both moral reasoning and moral intuitions.

First, as discussed earlier, the correlation between moral cognition and moral action is low to moderate (Blasi, 1980; Kish-Gephart et al., 2010; Mischel & Mischel, 1976), leaving traditional theories of moral reasoning (e.g., Kohlberg, 1969) in need of identifying motivational mechanisms that can strengthen the link between moral

judgment and moral behavior (Chiu et al., 1997; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Rest, 1983). While recent theorizing suggests that individual characteristics—such as moral identity, moral efficacy, and moral courage (Hannah et al., 2011; Hardy & Carlo, 2005)—can increase one's moral motivation, a treatment of inspiration as a moral motivator extends the focus of such inquiry from simply having moral capacities to the situational cues and stimuli that may help them to develop. By demonstrating that inspiration can, indeed, motivate certain types of prescriptive moral behavior (e.g., prosocial behavior), as well as identifying disruption, perceived relevance to core motives, and perceived attainability as important antecedents of inspiration, I hope to have further opened the door to examining an important source of moral motivation—a source that can potentially even motivate those with relatively low moral capacities. By disrupting the way people see the world and helping them connect moral action to relevant aspects of their lives, it may be possible to inspire people to act in ways more consistent with their moral judgments.

Second, inspiration can likely play a role in the development or adjustment of moral intuitions. Research on moral intuition suggests that reasoning has only a limited influence on moral judgment and behavior. Haidt (2012), for example, frequently uses the metaphor of a person riding an elephant: the rider being deliberate reasoning and the elephant being intuition. He suggests that intuition is an outgrowth of both innate characteristics and childhood experiences with culture, customs, and peer socialization (Haidt, 2001). Similarly, others have suggested that moral intuitions are developed over time, much like expert intuitions (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1991; Hogarth, 2001; Musschenga, 2009). However, while intuitions develop gradually, the manner in which they automatically and nonconsciously function is largely influenced by cognitive schemas

(Damasio, 1994; Kahneman & Klein, 2009, Sinclair, 2011). People's mental maps affect the information to which they attend, as well as the associations (both intuitive and deliberative) that emerge and/or become salient given certain stimuli. In terms of influencing moral intuitions, therefore, the disruptive model of inspiration (and its proposed link between disrupted schemas and inspiration) suggests that inspiration may be a means of influencing people's moral intuitions.

Whereas the last 50 years of moral development research has focused heavily on stage theories of cognitive development (e.g., Kohlberg, 1969), the field is now at a "crossroads," incorporating new perspectives, such as the roles of self and personality and culture (Lapsley & Carlo, 2014). The disruption model of inspiration (applied to the moral domain) contributes to this resurgence of interest in how people develop, grow, and change in terms of moral functioning. Perhaps transcendent experiences of inspiration can shake people free from the inertia of certain intuitions that may negatively impact moral behavior. Perhaps it is through a process of disrupting cognitive schemas in relevant, transcendent ways that people fundamentally change the way they intuitively think and react to morally laden situations.

Limitations and Future Directions

To allow for a better assessment of the importance, impact, reliability, and validity of the findings I have presented, it is important to acknowledge several limitations inherent in the study designs I chose to employ. Study 1, for example, was strictly correlational, which limits any claims of causality. It also relied exclusively on self-report data (although an attempt was made to control for any social-desirability bias

in responses), which runs the risk of common-method bias. Furthermore, due to the online nature of the survey, its generalizability to "real-world" applications is questionable. Study 2 was designed, in large part, to overcome many of these limitations by employing an experimental design. By manipulating (versus measuring) the predicted antecedents of inspiration, I was better able to infer a causal relationship between disruption and inspiration. Moreover, by using a behavioral dependent variable (i.e., amount of money donated to charity), I was able to limit common-method bias, as well as demonstrate that the indirect effect of disruption, through inspiration, can actually affect behavior (not just perceptions and attitudes). However, being conducted online, Study 2 suffered from some of the same generalizability issues as Study 1. Therefore, in Study 3, I conducted a field experiment in a large financial services firm. The experimental paradigm allowed for causal inferences to be made, and the context of the blood drive provided a more externally valid setting to support the generalizability of the previous findings. The gains in real-world application, however, came at the cost of control over extraneous influences on inspiration. Overall, each study was susceptible to the limitations inherent in its respective design, but, taken together, the three studies collectively counteracted a number of these limitations, making a compelling case for the role of disruption in inspiring people to act.

One major concern of Studies 2 and 3 that should not be overlooked, however, is the questionable results from some of the manipulations checks. Specifically, in Study 2, the attainability manipulation did not significantly affect the perceived attainability reported by participants. Similarly, in Study 3, while employees in the "inspiring" presentation did report experiencing more disruption than those in the control group, they

did not differ in reports of perceived relevance or attainability. Moreover, there were no statistically significant differences in reported disruption, relevance, attainability, or persuasion between the employees in the inspiration and persuasion conditions. Therefore, results related to perceived attainability (in Study 2) were not reported, and differences between the inspiration and persuasion conditions (in Study 3) should be interpreted with extreme caution. Future research is necessary to continue refining measurements and manipulations of each of the disruption model's key components. Even the items used for the measurement of disruption could be refined by following the content validation procedures outlined by DeVellis (1991).

Another limitation worth noting relates to the nature of the inspiring stimuli used in each study. While the stimuli were selected on the basis of their potential to inspire, they all included elements that are almost stereotypically inspiring (i.e., demonstrations of personal sacrifice to feed starving children, provide water to impoverished villagers, and supply blood to save lives). The results from these studies thus reflect reactions to extremely positive cues. It remains to be seen whether the elements of the disruption model of inspiration that were supported in this research extend to experiences of inspiration triggered by strictly negative events, such as when Henri Landwirth was inspired to create Give Kids the World following Amy's death, as described earlier. Granted, the stimulus article used in Study 2 contained elements of tragedy (i.e., Rachel Beckwith's premature death), but it was unclear whether the inspiration participants experienced had more to do with her passing, her unselfish birthday wish, or the fact that thousands of people contributed to making her birthday wish of clean water for rural villagers come true—to the tune of over $1 million. Thus, there is a need for future

research to more deliberately explore the potential differences in experiences of inspiration triggered by positive versus negative stimuli.

Another important avenue for future research relates to better understanding the causes, consequences, and very nature of disruption. The most consistent and robust finding of this dissertation has been the positive effect of disruption on inspiration. However, certainly not all disruption of mental maps is created equal. Are there meaningful typologies of disruption, with divisions related to valence (e.g., positive vs. negative), cognition (emotional vs. rational; automatic vs. deliberative), levels of analysis (e.g., mental maps related to "me" as an individual, "us" as a group, or "it" as an organization, country, or planet), or other categorical distinctions? And how does one most effectively and appropriately disrupt another person's mental schemas in a manner amenable to inspiration? Perhaps the literature and methodological paradigms focused on "insight" and "eureka moments" can be applied to the study of disruption and inspiration. For example, Duncker (1945) pioneered what has now grown into a large body of problem-solving research showing that individuals often fail to think outside the box due to functional fixedness (i.e., fixating on the typical functions and features of objects that might otherwise be used for creative solutions). Breaking free from functional fixedness is thus an important key to receiving eureka-like insights necessary for solving certain types of problems. Exploring the theoretical links between insight and inspiration, as well as between disrupting mental schemas and overcoming functional fixedness, might be an excellent starting point from which to dig deeper into the nature of disruption as an antecedent to inspiration.

Additionally, future research might explore the differences between using persuasion versus inspiration as a means of social influence. Yukl and colleagues, for example, have found that rational persuasion and inspirational appeals are two of the more effective influence tactics, in terms of gaining commitment from target individuals (e.g., Yukl et al., 1996; Yukl & Tracey, 1992). However, by examining the psychological experience of inspiration and its associated antecedents—in conjunction with the psychological reactions of people on the receiving end of rational persuasion—interesting nuances and theoretical insights might emerge related to when and why persuasion versus inspiration is more effective in a given context. It may be that persuasion is better suited for more mundane, everyday influence, whereas inspiration is more effective for influencing behavior long-term, or behavior that requires more motivation. Or, perhaps there is an optimal pattern for using persuasion and inspiration together as influence tactics (e.g., persuade, persuade, persuade, then inspire, persuade, persuade, persuade, then inspire). In short, given the potential power of inspiration to motivate action, specific examination of the differences, similarities, and complementarities between persuasion and inspiration could be fruitful for both theory and practice.

Future research is also needed to gain a better understanding of the role that core motives play in experiences of inspiration. While I did not find support for the predicted moderating effect of perceived relevance to core motives on the disruption-inspiration relationship, I did find evidence of a main effect of perceived relevance on inspiration. However, further investigations could explore relevance to which motives are most important for inspiring action in specific domains. For example, it intuitively makes sense that perceived relevance to the communion motive would be more likely to inspire

prosocial behavior, whereas perceived relevance to the agency motive would be more likely to inspire hard work and dedication in developing a proficiency in an individual sport, like boxing. But what about athletes in team sports? Are they more inspired by possibilities related to team unity and collective achievement (communion) or personal growth and individual achievement (agency)? Moreover, future research is needed to more definitively assess whether perceived relevance to core motives has an additive or multiplicative effect, vis-à-vis disruption, on inspiration.

Abundant opportunities for future research will also likely emerge by extending the examination of inspiration to other contexts and domains; morality is just one of the many areas in which inspiration plays an important role in people's lives. At times, people are likely to be "inspired" to overcome adversity, to work harder, to strengthen commitment, to develop a skill, or to write poetry. Do disruption, relevance to core motives, and attainability similarly affect instances of inspiration in these various domains?

Even within the moral domain there is still a lot of uncovered ground. The present studies focus on prosocial behavior, a type of prescriptive morality (i.e., what people should do). Can people similarly be "inspired" to live in accordance to proscriptive morality (i.e., what people should not do)? Initial evidence related to approach motivation suggests that the qualitative differences between prescriptive and proscriptive morality may make the former more amenable to inspiration. For example, Janoff-Bulman et al. (2009) demonstrated that the strength of people's behavioral activation systems (BAS; Carver & White, 1994)—a behavioral approach system that regulates motives and desires to move toward desired ends—correlates positively with the moral weight or importance

people ascribe to prescriptive morality ($r = .31$, $p < .005$) but not proscriptive morality ($r = .07$, n.s.). Conversely, the strength of people's behavioral inhibition systems (BIS; Carver & White, 1994)—a behavioral avoidance system that regulates motives and desires to move away from undesired ends—correlates positively with the moral weight they ascribe to proscriptive morality ($r = .22$, $p < .005$) but not prescriptive morality ($r = .04$, n.s.). In short, prescriptive morality seems to reflect the approach tendencies of BAS, whereas proscriptive morality seems to reflect the avoidance tendencies of BIS: people want to approach what they should do and avoid what they should not do. Meanwhile, Thrash and Elliot (2003) found that trait levels of inspiration (i.e., the intensity and frequency with which one experiences inspiration in life in general) correlate positively with BAS ($r = .18$, $p < .05$) but nonsignificantly with BIS ($r = -07$, n.s.). Thus, given the approach motivation component of inspiration, these correlational findings suggest that inspiration might occur less frequently, be felt less intensely, and perhaps be experienced in an entirely different manner in the context of proscriptive (versus prescriptive) morality. Future research might explore such questions more thoroughly.

Practical Implications

In terms of implications for practice, better understanding how to inspire others to act has widespread and fairly straightforward applications. For leaders and managers hoping to inspire others to engage in a certain action (either concrete or abstract), the natural advice emanating from the disruption model of inspiration would be as follows: in attempts to *inspire* others to action, help them frame that action as *disruptive* to the way they usually think about things, *relevant* to the fulfillment of their core motives, and

attainable. A variety of such framing strategies are possible, but a review of literatures related to sense-giving and meaning-making suggests a list (although not exhaustive) of three primary methods that leaders might employ: (1) direct communication, (2) symbolic action, and (3) job design (see Grant, 2012; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Pfeffer, 1981; Smircich & Morgan, 1992). While I describe each of these methods in terms of leadership, it is important to recognize that they might just as likely apply to people who are not in formal leadership roles.

First, and perhaps most obviously, leaders might be able to inspire followers to act by framing those actions through direct managerial communication (see Sonenshein & Dholakia, 2012) and the effective use of language (Pfeffer, 1981). For instance, leaders can construct narratives and tell stories (Dunford & Jones, 2000; Snell, 2002); hold meetings to espouse visions or present hypothetical scenarios (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991); and question assumptions, test ideas, or raise important issues (Heller, 1998; McNulty & Pettigrew, 1999)—all in an effort to frame an action or course of action in a way that is disruptive and perceived as relevant and attainable.

Second, leaders might also be able to inspire followers by helping them create meaning around certain actions through the use of symbolism (Pfeffer, 1981) and symbolic action (Smith, Plowman, & Duchon, 2010)—including the setting of personal examples. As an illustration, a leader's self-sacrifice for the good of his or her organization—which has been shown to positively affect subordinate performance (van Knippenberg & van Knippenberg, 2005)—might not only be disruptive (in the sense that the leader was not expected to make such a sacrifice) but also symbolize a link between particular self-sacrificial actions and a commitment to the organization and its people

(i.e., relevance to the communion motive). Such action might also symbolize the possibility of others to similarly sacrifice (i.e., attainability).

And finally, leaders might be able to inspire followers by indirectly engaging in framing and meaning-making through job-design. For example, Podolny et al. (2005) emphasized that meaning-making, although more commonly associated with transformational leadership, is also relevant to transactional leadership. Transactional decisions, such as the day-to-day design of a particular job, can have an influential impact on employee meaning-making (Hackman & Oldham, 1976). For example, structuring a job to facilitate employees' contact with the beneficiaries of their work can increase motivation and performance (Grant, 2007; 2008; 2012)—sometimes even more so than direct ideological communication from leaders themselves (Grant & Hofmann, 2011). By effectively designing jobs to help employees connect their day-to-day actions with a higher purpose (e.g., coherence), engagement in a valued community (e.g., communion), a path toward growth and development (e.g., agency), leaders may be able to indirectly affect the inspiration employees experience related to certain job tasks.

Conclusion

Perhaps not surprisingly, as I attempted to inspire others through the series of studies presented in this dissertation, I found that participants' reactions to the surveys and experiments often ended up inspiring *me.* For example, in a comment section at the end of Study 1, a participant remarked, "...*fantastic survey! Really made me think and inspired me to expand my volunteer work.*" Regarding Study 2, after reading the story about 9-year-old Rachel Beckwith's birthday wish to raise money for 'charity: water,'

one participant wrote, "*It really hit home for me as a parent…. It made me hope for my 4-year-old to grow up with such an understanding and hopeful view of the world. It opened my eyes to my responsibility as a parent to provide the type of environment that would allow for such empathy. It made me think about what I could be doing more of towards charity myself.*" Another Study 2 participant responded, "*Since I retired, I have been looking for meaning in my life and coming up empty. I see now that there are ways I could make a difference if I would just try. Instead of sitting around feeling worthless, I need to find my passion and do what I can to make a difference. I am a retired Kindergarten teacher, and I love children. I'm sure there is some way I could help children.*"

With this dissertation, I hope to contribute to a better understanding of a unique phenomenon that is not only theoretically interesting but has important implications for how people live and experience their own lives. By testing the disruption model of inspiration, my goal has been to discover insights about and add to the clarity with which scholars and practitioners approach the psychological experience of inspiration. Across three studies, I found preliminary evidence suggesting that potential actions or possibilities are more inspiring to the extent that they (1) disrupt the way people typically think about things, (2) are perceived as relevant to people's core motives, and (3) are perceived to be attainable. While the results of my studies did not reveal a clear or consistent pattern of relationships between and among these three factors, they did provide evidence that all three can, indeed, be influential antecedents to the experience of inspiration. However, the studies I have presented are just an initial foray into this largely unexplored theoretical terrain. It is my hope that scholars will continue to investigate the

important phenomenon of inspiration, and thereby enable people to inspire others to

fulfill their unmet potential and become their best moral selves.

APPENDIX A

STIMULUS MATERIALS (STUDIES 1 AND 2)

Study 1

In Study 1, prior to completing the survey, participants read an article titled, "From beer-fueled brainstorm to life's work of helping others" accessed through the following link:

http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/europe/08/12/cnnheroes.marysmeals/

Study 2

In Study 2, after the initial manipulation, participants read an article titled, "9-year-old's memory inspires over $1 million in donations," accessed through the following link:

http://www.cnn.com/2011/US/08/01/washington.girl.death.donations/

APPENDIX B

WRITING PROMPT MANIPULATIONS (STUDY 2)

All Conditions (*except control*):   Thank you for reading the article. Now, please answer the following question(s).

Disruption Condition: Please list 2 or 3 ways that the story in the article made you think about things differently:

Relevance Condition: Please list 2 or 3 ways that the article was <u>applicable</u> to you in terms of your personal growth and development, your relationships with other people, and/or the overall purpose and meaning in your life:

Attainability Condition: Please list 2 or 3 reasons why it would be <u>possible</u> for an ordinary person to accomplish something similar to what was depicted in the article:

APPENDIX C

LEADER PRESENTATION SCRIPT (STUDY 3)

Inspiration Condition

Hi. I wanted to take a few minutes today to remind you of our upcoming blood drive, later this month. Last time, we had a great company-wide effort, and we're hoping to build on that again this year.

As you think about whether or not you want to participate this time, I wanted to share with you a few of the reasons why I really love our blood donation program.

[Coherence]
First, I love the sense of meaning and purpose that it can help bring to our lives. Now, I know that we are all busy and we work really hard every day, but taking just a little time to donate to a live-saving cause helps us to take step back from our hectic lives and everyday problems and to see outside of ourselves. Donating blood, in general, helps give each of us a chance to make a real difference in our communities. It can help to give our lives perspective and meaning.

[Communion]
Another thing I love about the blood drive is that it gives us a chance to come together, as friends and colleagues. We sit next to each other every day, but we sometimes get so focused on our own tasks and on getting things done that often we forget that we're all members of teams of amazing people. Joining together in a common cause, by donating blood, helps remind me that I work with incredible people, and it makes me proud to be part of a premier company that is dedicated to making a positive difference in the world.

[Agency]
And finally, donating blood, as strange as it may sound, helps me feel like I'm developing into the person I want to become. As we all work hard to grow and progress in our careers, I think that putting some of our efforts into giving back to our community can actually help us to become our best selves. In addition to caring about success and achievement, which are both important, the donating blood helps us become people who also care about our communities and helping those in need.

[Attainability]
One of the great things about this program is that it provides a way for everyone to get involved. For example, you may not feel like you're in a financial position to donate money to charity, but almost everyone is able to donate blood. Moreover, donating blood is a simple but profound way to actually help save people's lives—sometimes more so than simply writing a check.

[Disruption]
Now, some of you might feel like your participation in the blood drive isn't going to make that much of a difference, since you are just one person. But, collectively, our combined efforts can literally help save thousands of lives. According to the Red Cross, a single donation can help save up to three lives. In other words, YOU can help save up to three lives by donating. That means that if every employee in our company donated just once in a given year, we could potentially save over 170,000 lives.

So, with that said, I strongly encourage you to participate. It should be a lot fun.

And finally, one last thing. Some researchers at the <university name> are conducting a simple study on our blood drive program, and they'll provide us with some useful feedback. If you would, please take five minutes to complete this short survey [pass out surveys]. Your responses will be kept completely confidential. In fact, I won't even see the individual surveys at all; I will be giving these sealed envelopes directly to the researchers. To participate in the study, please sign the consent form, take five minutes right now to fill out the survey, and then just give it back to me in the sealed envelope. Thank you.

Persuasion Condition

Hi. I wanted to take a few minutes today to remind you of our upcoming blood drive, later this month. Last time, we had a great company-wide effort, and we're hoping to build on that again this year.

As you think about whether or not you want to participate this time, I wanted to share with you a few of the reasons why I really love our blood donation program.

[Liking: similarly and praise]
But first, I just wanted to say thank you, once again, to all of you for all of your hard work. Living here in <name of state>, like each of you, I sometimes look out the window and wish I were out there enjoying the weather, rather than cooped up in here working, but I want you all to know how great of a job you all do. Of course we're all here for a pay check, but the quality of your work demonstrates that you care about a job well done.

[Reciprocity]
Now, regarding the blood drive, I want to encourage you all to participate. The local community here has been good to us, and this is a chance for us to return the favor.

[Social Proof/Validation]
Last time we had a good effort with lots of participation. I haven't seen the totals recently, but a few years ago, we received a national award for collecting more than 2,500 employee donations. We had the largest increase in donations that year for the financial services sector. So, needless to say, many of your co-workers have been donating blood.

[Authority: expertise]
These individual blood drives are extremely important. For example, the American Red Cross's blood program was started in 1940 by a man named Charles Drew. They now supply 40% of the country's total blood supply, and 80% of their donations are collected at mobile blood drives set up at various organizations, like ours.

[Scarcity]
So, please donate in the upcoming blood drive. This may be your last chance for the next little while, so you don't want to miss out on this great opportunity.

So, with that said, I strongly encourage you to participate. It should be a lot fun.

And finally, one last thing. Some researchers at the <university name> are conducting a simple study on our blood drive program, and they'll provide us with some useful feedback. If you would, please take five minutes to complete this short survey [pass out surveys]. Your responses will be kept completely confidential. In fact, I won't even see the individual surveys at all; I will be giving these sealed envelopes directly to the researchers. To participate in the study, please sign the consent form, take five minutes right now to fill out the survey, and then just give it back to me in the sealed envelope. Thank you.

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