Narratives to Increase Prosociality Toward Refugees

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Narratives can be effective tools for improving attitudes toward minority groups. The current study tested the potential for restorative narratives—stories of recovery that show the character strength and meaningful progression of an individual—to increase prosocial attitudes toward refugees. This experiment (N = 597) compared narratives with and without restorative elements in a 2 (character strength: present vs. absent) × 2 (narrative ending: positive versus negative) design, including a no-message control group. Results suggested that narratives in general improved explicit attitudes toward refugees, as well as attitudes toward helping refugees, compared to the no-message control. Although the strength/positive ending restorative narrative was not more effective than other narratives, specific components of restorative narratives (e.g., strength-focus; positive ending) influenced the overall emotional experience.

Keywords: narrative persuasion, restorative, prosocial, refugees

Though refugees continue to enter America and successfully integrate into society, negative attitudes toward these individuals remain. A survey by global research group Ipsos (2021) found that more than 20% of all Americans considered immigration to be one of the most worrying topics facing the country, up from 11% and 14% in earlier 2020 polls. Moreover, these problems are not specific to the United States; refugees are also a prominent issue in Europe and other parts of the world. Refugees in many countries

endure trauma, face discrimination, and need assistance. The current research investigates how to use narratives, specifically *restorative narratives*—stories of recovery that show the character strength and meaningful progression of an individual—to change attitudes toward refugees to decrease hostility and increase prosocial behavior toward this population.

Narratives

Narratives (stories that include characters and describe sequences of events over time) can be helpful tools for improving attitudes about minority groups by decreasing prejudice and increasing perspective-taking (Johnson, Jasper, Griffin, & Hubman, 2013; Oliver, Dillard, Bae, & Tamul, 2012). Indeed, theories of narrative influence such as the extended elaboration likelihood model (Slater & Rouner, 2002) and the entertainment overcoming resistance model (Moyer-Gusé, 2008), focus on the important role that involvement or identification with characters plays in narrative persuasion. Identification, liking, and parasocial interaction with characters can reduce reactance, counterarguing, and other negative reactions to a narrative. In particular, emotionally engaging narratives are more likely to persuade readers and motivate story-consistent behaviors (Appel & Richter, 2010). Given that emotional experiences are important components of what makes narratives persuasive, it is likely that different story structures will evoke different emotions.

Research has shown that an individual does not need to interact face-to-face with outgroup members to promote positive attitudes toward different groups (Banas, Bessarabova, & Massey, 2020; Wojcieszak, Kim, & Igartua, 2020). In fact, positive attitudes can be created/increased through indirect methods such as mediated contact (Park, 2012). Narratives have often been studied as indirect mediated strategies to improve attitudes toward stigmatized groups. For example, Wojcieszak and colleagues (2020) demonstrated that narratives and imagined contact are able to reduce prejudice, a finding that was further bolstered by a meta-analysis by Banas and colleagues (2020). Evidence from another study suggested that for prejudiced individuals, imagined contact with a member of the outgroup before reading the narrative stimuli and perceived similarity between the narrative character and the audience member were effective strategies to increase positive attitudes toward stigmatized immigrants (Igartua, Wojcieszak, & Kim, 2019).

Others have examined the effects of different types of narratives, for example, by examining the impact of first-person and third-person perspective on attitudes and helping behavior. Results suggested that first-person perspectives increase the feeling of closeness with a character and lead to support for story-consistent policies and behaviors (Kim, Kim, Wojcieszak, Igartua, & Lim, 2020). We examine the role of narrative design in altering attitudes toward refugees within a new context by using a specific type of narrative, restorative narrative, which may be particularly effective for engaging readers with information about refugees and motivating helping behavior after the story.

Restorative Narratives

Recent work has begun to study a type of story structure referred to as "restorative narratives" (Dahmen, 2019; Fitzgerald, Green, & Paravati, 2020; Fitzgerald, Paravati, Green, Moore, & Qian, 2020; Tenore, 2016). These narratives share experiences of recovery and hope after difficult events or

circumstances (e.g., natural disasters, illness, violence), rather than focusing on the physical, emotional, and/or financial costs associated with those circumstances. Restorative narratives communicate the experiences of adverse situations in a truthful manner, including the emotional and psychological experience of the individual who is suffering. Importantly, these stories simultaneously highlight the strengths of the individual (such as resilience, compassion for others, or optimism) and demonstrate a meaningful progression toward recovery or a more positive state (Fitzgerald, Green, & Paravati, 2020; Tenore, 2016). Whereas a traditional news report might focus on the destruction caused by a hurricane, a restorative narrative would acknowledge that damage but focus on the process of rebuilding after the storm. For the refugee crisis, restorative narratives may appear in traditional news sources (e.g., stories of refugees' experiences settling in a new community) or may be circulated by refugee assistance groups or other organizations, either on websites or through social media.

In line with current theorizing, we propose that restorative narratives have two central components: They are strengths-based and highlight a meaningful progression. By *strengths-based*, we mean that restorative narratives emphasize the character traits or virtues of the focal individual (or community) that allowed them to persevere in difficult times, such as optimism, gratitude, and determination (e.g., Peterson & Seligman, 2004). This strengths-based focus allows restorative narratives to convey the same general information as other forms of media while concurrently emphasizing themes of strength and psychological resilience (Fitzgerald, Green, & Paravati, 2020; Tenore, 2016). By *meaningful progression*, we mean that restorative narratives highlight the process of recovery following a traumatic or difficult event, rather than simply describing the event itself or the end result. Although restorative narratives may include obstacles and challenges, the general path or trajectory is positive.

Given these characteristics, we propose that a restorative narrative format will counteract the emotionally taxing effects that stories about negative experiences would otherwise have on audiences. In particular, reading about negative events can evoke the need for emotion regulation, the attempt to manage one's own emotions, as audiences may attempt to minimize negative feelings. For example, reading about a refugee who has experienced the loss of loved ones, loss of home, or violence can evoke feelings of sadness. This emotional experience may be unpleasant or overwhelming, and individuals may consciously or unconsciously engage in emotional regulation processes to control or reduce these feelings. However, suppressing negative feelings can sometimes lead to a reduction in empathy, as demonstrated in the collapse of compassion literature (Cameron & Payne, 2011; Shaw, Batson, & Roper, 1994; Small, Loewenstein, & Slovic, 2007).

Because the upward progression and character strengths portrayed in restorative narratives provide positive, hopeful counterpoints to the negative events, readers may be less motivated to suppress their emotions, allowing them to feel more positive emotions in response to the story, as well as more empathy toward the characters. Past research has found evidence in line with this, suggesting that restorative narratives can evoke more positive emotions (e.g., happiness) compared with nonrestorative narratives (Fitzgerald, Green, & Paravati., 2020; Fitzgerald, Paravati, et al., 2020).

Past research also suggests that restorative narratives can induce a state of moral elevation because of their focus on strengths (Fitzgerald, Paravati, et al., 2020). Moral elevation is the feeling of

warmth and inspiration experienced from witnessing compassion or prosocial behavior (Haidt, 2000). Ample research on moral elevation has demonstrated that exposure to exemplars of moral beauty (such as altruism) leads to a state of moral elevation (Aquino, McFerran, & Laven, 2011; Haidt, 2003; Oliver, Hartmann, & Woolley, 2012). This state is associated with mixed affect (both sadness and happiness), a belief in the goodness of humanity, and prosocial motivations (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Ellithorpe, Ewoldsen, & Oliver, 2015; Schnall, Roper, & Fessler, 2010). Thus, consistent with past work, we propose the following hypothesis about positive emotion, empathy, and elevation:

H1:   *Participants in the restorative condition will report more positive emotions, empathy, and moral elevation as compared with all other conditions.*

By reducing the need to regulate negative emotions and evoking a greater experience of empathy, restorative narratives may subsequently increase prosocial behavior and attitudes toward refugees (Fitzgerald et al., 2020a; Tenore, 2016). Returning to the literature on the collapse of compassion, suppressing negative feelings can include the suppression of empathy, which can reduce the willingness to help, particularly when the costs of helping appear overwhelming (Cameron & Payne, 2011; Shaw et al., 1994; Small et al., 2007). By shifting these expectations, restorative narratives may increase willingness to help (Fitzgerald, Green, & Paravati, 2020; Fitzgerald, Paravati, et al., 2020). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2:   *Participants in the restorative condition will report a greater likelihood to help refugees (e.g., donate, volunteer) as compared with all other conditions.*

Furthermore, more empathy and character strengths may improve attitudes toward characters in the story. Previous research has found a positive association between willingness to help and empathy toward victims, including feelings of sympathy, compassion, and feeling moved by their experiences (Batson et al., 1991; Kogut & Ritov, 2005). Previous research has also suggested that by increasing empathy toward a stigmatized individual, attitudes toward stigmatized groups may also be improved (Batson et al., 1997). By emphasizing these character aspects, we may therefore improve readers' attitudes toward refugees. We thus propose the following hypothesis related to positive attitudes toward refugees:

H3:   *Participants in the restorative condition will report more positive attitudes toward refugees compared with all other conditions.*

These outcome variables are not only theoretically relevant but also related to improving conditions for refugees. Changing attitudes is important because refugee populations face discrimination, and more positive attitudes may help create acceptance on both the political and individual levels. Helping behavior such as donating or volunteering is important because refugees have limited resources.

Although both strengths and progression are considered to be elements of restorative narratives, these elements may function differently to evoke separate effects. Thus, we also explore whether there are main effects for either of the two components. We propose the following research questions related to the restorative narrative components:

RQ1:   Are there main effects of the character strength component on any of the outcomes?

RQ2:   Are there main effects of the meaningful progression component on any of the outcomes?

Need and Deservingness

Previous theories of prosocial action have also suggested that helping behavior is a function of individuals' perceptions of the recipient's need and deservingness (Batson, Eklund, Chermok, Hoyt, & Oritz, 2007). As an exploratory research question, therefore, we examined whether the story variations used here affected these variables. It could be the case that individuals who demonstrate strengths would be considered more deserving of help, which would encourage helping behavior in others. On the other hand, demonstrating strength may decrease perceptions of need, which could decrease the prosocial efforts of others. Thus, we also consider the perceptions of an individual's need and deservingness in the context of different types of narratives.

RQ3:   How do the restorative narrative components influence perceptions of need and deservingness?

Method

Participants and Design

The current study investigates restorative narratives in the context of prosociality toward refugees. We manipulated both the narrative trajectory (positive versus negative) and the presence or absence of character strengths of a story about a Syrian refugee acclimating to life in the United States. We conducted an experiment online through ResearchMatch, a website that allows individuals throughout the United States to volunteer to participate in research studies (www.researchmatch.org). Participants (total recruited *N* = 810) completed the survey on the external website Qualtrics. Participants were randomly assigned within a 2 (*Strength*: strength or no strength of character) × 2 (*End*: positive or negative ending) or no-message control group design.[1] The no-message control group provided a condition with baseline attitudes about refugees without presenting any particular stimulus that could impact participants' beliefs.

Materials

The narrative focuses on Maya, a refugee from Syria who came to the United States with her cousin Areen. All conditions tell the story of how Maya and Areen spend two years in a refugee camp in Greece before they are permitted to head to America, where they settle in Utica, New York. In the strengths-based condition, the story describes how Maya demonstrates character strengths (including perseverance, optimism, and gratitude, as suggested by Peterson & Seligman, 2004) to adjust to her new life in Utica. In the nonstrength-based condition, the story describes Maya's adjustment to her new life in Utica without emphasizing these traits. In the end, Maya and Areen are left with feeling either a sense of hope as Maya is offered a job in a restaurant that reminds them of home (positive ending condition) or a sense of

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[1] This study was preregistered on the Open Science Framework (OSF; see online supplement: https://bit.ly/3fsQ3t5). The complete narratives are also available on OSF.

uncertainty about where their future is headed (negative ending condition).[2] The narratives were reviewed by a group of narrative persuasion researchers to verify that they differed on the strength and ending dimensions. Based on the aforementioned literature, the restorative narrative was the story condition with a positive trajectory and the presence of character strengths of the main character.

Measures

Willingness to Help

Participants' willingness to help was measured using their self-rated likelihood of engaging in five helping behaviors: donating to organizations that help refugees, volunteering at an organization that helps refugees, searching online for ways to help refugees, "Do what I can" to aid refugees, and "Contribute my time and energy" to help refugees. Participants rated each item on a scale of 1 (*very unlikely*) to 7 (*very likely*). We averaged the responses to create a composite score of helping ($\alpha = .92$).[3]

As an additional measure of the willingness to help refugees, participants also responded to a hypothetical donation scenario. They were prompted to imagine a scenario in which they were given $20 to distribute among five different charities: one related to refugee aid, three unrelated (cancer research, endangered animals, and the homeless), and one blank for an alternate charity of their choice. The outcome was the amount of money allocated to the refugee charity.

Moral Elevation

To assess moral elevation, we used a scale from previous research that combines two subscales (Aquino et al., 2011). First, the *views of humanity* subscale consists of five items, such as "the world is full of kindness and generosity." Second, the *desire to be a better person* subscale consists of six items, such as "Maya has shown me how to be a better person." Participants were asked how often they were having those thoughts on a scale from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*; combined $\alpha = .85$).

Emotional Response

Immediately following the narrative, participants rated the degree to which they were currently experiencing a series of emotion adjectives adopted from previous research (Dillard & Shen, 2006; Myrick & Oliver, 2015; Oliver, Hartmann, & Woolley, 2012) on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*).

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[2] The story was written specifically for the purposes of the study; although the narrative did not describe an actual person, it was based on the experiences of real refugees. The authors thank Laura R. Holmes for sharing her expertise in refugee work to help craft the stories for this study.

[3] The helping items have been reported separately in previous studies (Fitzgerald, Green, & Paravati, 2020; Fitzgerald, Paravati, et al., 2020), which found that narrative conditions influenced some types of helping behavior but not others. However, that was not the case in the current study, so we report a composite variable for helping behavior. See online supplement for analyses of the individual helping items: https://bit.ly/3fsQ3t5

Participants in the narrative conditions read the prompt "How well do each of the following adjectives describe your feelings from reading the story," and those in the control condition read the prompt "How well do each of the following adjectives describe your feelings at this moment." We created four emotion scales following a principal component analysis with direct oblimin rotation: happiness (happy, cheerful, joyful, upbeat, humorous, amused; α = .85), sadness (tearful, sad, gloomy, depressed, melancholy; α = .80), fear (fearful, anxious, afraid; α = .82), and anger (angry, frustrated, annoyed, confused; α = .69.). We separated the emotion measures into categories beyond valence because previous research has shown that different emotions can elicit different responses from individuals. For example, among negative emotions, sadness promotes people to internalize the problem and look inward for solutions, fear promotes a flight response, and anger promotes fighting back against the cause of a wrongdoing (Nabi, 1999). We believe that all the emotions included in the study could have been experienced by a reader and were therefore included.

Empathy

We adopted four types of empathy measures from Bartsch and colleagues (2018): a general indicator of empathic feelings ("moved," "tender," "poignant"; α = .76), a general elevation factor ("awe," "admiration," "inspired"; α = .79), a closeness factor ("closeness," "caring," and "connection"; α = .78), and a pity factor ("pity," "sorry for," "worried for"; α = .75). All items were rated on a scale from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*).[4] Notably, the general elevation factor, though conceptually similar, is distinct from our measure of moral elevation. We differentiated among subtypes of empathic feelings in line with past research (Bartsch, Oliver, Nitsch, & Scherr, 2018), which pointed to important theoretical differences among the subtypes. For instance, empathy is considered to be a positive, other-oriented emotional response, whereas pity is an ambivalent emotion that can involve prosocial tendencies as well as negative aspects related to downward social comparison, such as a false sense of superiority (Bartsch et al., 2018).

Explicit Attitudes Toward Refugees

Participants' attitudes toward refugees were assessed by four items adapted from Batson and colleagues (1997). Example statements included, "How much do you personally care about refugees?" (1–7 Likert-type scale; *not at all* to *very much*) and "Rate the degree to which you agree with the following statement: For most refugees, it is their own fault that they are refugees" (1–7 Likert-type scale; *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*; α = .82).

Attitudes Toward Society Helping Refugees

We also measured participants' agreement with five statements adapted from Batson and colleagues (1997) about the belief that helping refugees is a social problem and that society should do more to help. The items, including "Our society does not do enough to help refugees" and "Compared with other social problems we face today, helping refugees is important," were rated on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*; α = .94).

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[4] In creating these composites, we dropped two items (compassion and sympathy) to be consistent with past work (Bartsch et al., 2018).

We measured attitudes separately for "explicit attitudes toward refugees" and "attitudes toward society helping refugees" to separate one's personal beliefs about refugees (with statements such as "How much do you personally care about refugees?") from one's beliefs about society's responsibility to help refugees (with statements including "Our society should do more to help refugees") to help determine if narratives increase positive attitudes toward refugees overall, or perhaps if narratives impacted only one's personal attitudes without impacting ideas about society's role in helping refugees (or vice versa). A principal component analysis supported this strategy; see supplemental material for details.

Perception of Need and Deservingness

Participants responded to a question asking them to describe the magnitude of Maya's need for help on a scale ranging from 1 (*very little*) to 8 (*very great*). Participants also rated how much they believed Maya deserved help on a scale ranging from 1 (*very little*) to 8 (*very great*).

Attention and Manipulation Checks

Participants completed several multiple-choice checks to ensure that they read and understood the story and were excluded if they failed either check. One check asked the participant what the story was about (options included either "A United States citizen traveling to Syria" or "A Syrian refugee traveling to the United States") to assess participants' attention to the story. No participants failed the story check. Another item assessed recall of the positive/negative ending manipulation by asking how the story ended. This check had four possible responses (correct answer for the positive ending conditions, "The main character considers applying for a job at a restaurant"; correct answer for the negative ending conditions, "The main character is nudged out of the way of a busy waitress in a restaurant"; incorrect answers regardless of condition, "The main character adopts a dog"; and "I did not read closely enough to answer"). A total of 81 participants failed this check and were excluded from analyses; all but one of the participants who failed this check were in the negative ending conditions.

As an additional check that the positive or negative ending suggested a meaningful progression for Maya, we asked participants to rate their predictions of Maya's future along three semantic differential scales ranging from −4 (*unpleasant*, *negative*, or *unhappy*) to 4 (*pleasant*, *positive*, or *happy*). We averaged these scores to create a single measure of the future prediction of Maya (α = .93).

We also included a measure of the character's resilience as a check to our strength manipulation. The five-item scale was adapted from the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC; Connor & Davidson, 2003) to refer to the main character of the story. Example items included "the main character maintains a positive attitude" and "the main character is not easily discouraged by failures" (α = .92).[5]

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[5] We also asked participants if they had read the specific narrative before (two responded with "yes") and if they had been personally affected by the refugee crisis (i.e., if they had ever been a refugee; 5 responded with "yes"). Because of the low N for both of these checks, we retained these participants.

Demographics

Finally, participants provided basic demographic information, including gender, race, and age.[6]

Results

Analysis Strategy

All scales were created by taking the mean of the items. For our primary dependent variables, we conducted two-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with the strength and end conditions as the fixed factors. We then conducted one-way MANOVA to compare each narrative condition with the no-message control.

Attention and Manipulation Checks

As previously reported, participants who failed either of the two checks were excluded from analyses ($n_{Dropped}$ = 81). We also excluded participants who likely did not read the story completely, based on time spent on the narrative. That is, their reading speed fell below the acceptable range for basic reading processes (based on Carver, 1992; we chose the most conservative option of 450 words per minute for skimming; n = 68 total, not including those excluded already). These exclusions left a total sample of N = 597; n_{male} = 139, n_{female} = 447, $n_{Trans/Other}$ = 10, 1 not reported; n_{White} = 522, 87.4%; $n_{Black/African American}$ = 25, 4.2%; $n_{Asian/Pacific Islander}$ = 9, 1.5%; $n_{Hispanic/Latino}$ = 12, 2.0%; $n_{American Indian/Alaska Native}$ = 2, 0.3%; $n_{Other/Unknown/Multiracial}$ = 25, 4.2%; 2 not reported; M_{Age} = 53.88, min = 17, max = 87, SD_{Age} = 15.54.

As expected, participants in the positive ending conditions predicted that Maya's future would be more positive overall (M = 1.48, SD = 1.76) than those in the negative ending conditions (M = 1.09, SD = 1.72), $F(1, 441)$ = 6.23, p = .01, η_p^2 = .014.

Results for the character resilience measure were also as expected; participants in the strength conditions perceived Maya to be more resilient (M = 5.15, SD = 0.76 with negative ending; M = 5.37, SD = 0.60 with positive ending) than those in the nonstrength conditions (M = 4.05, SD = 0.92 negative ending; M = 4.71, SD = 0.81 positive ending), $F(1, 441)$ = 141.15, p < .001, η_p^2 = .24. Unexpectedly, we observed a main effect of ending, $F(1, 441)$ = 35.45, p < .001, η_p^2 = .07, where Maya was perceived to be more resilient in the positive ending conditions. Additionally, there was an interaction effect, $F(1, 441)$ = 8.64, p = .003, η_p^2 = .02. Specifically, Maya was rated as being the most resilient in the strength/positive ending condition and the least resilient in the nonstrength/negative ending condition.

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[6] Participants also provided their political orientation. We include analyses related to political orientation in a supplement on OSF. Some additional measures were included in the survey (transportation, Green & Brock, 2000; identification, Cohen, 2001; participant resilience, and desire to engage with the story in the future); however, these measures were largely exploratory and were not pertinent to our central hypotheses. See our online supplement for details and supplemental analyses.

Hypothesis Testing

H1 predicted that the restorative condition would evoke more positive emotions, empathy, and moral elevation than the other conditions. In line with our hypothesizing, we found main effects for each of the narrative component manipulations on happiness and sadness emotions. Participants in the strength conditions reported feeling more happiness than those in the nonstrength conditions, $F(1, 439) = 10.31$, $p = .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$; and the positive ending conditions evoked more happiness than the negative ending conditions, $F(1, 439) = 84.95$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .16$. Sadness showed the opposite pattern, where those in the strength conditions reported feeling less sadness compared with the nonstrength, $F(1, 439) = 12.51$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$; and the positive ending conditions evoked less sadness than the negative ending conditions, $F(1, 439) = 26.15$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$. Further, one-way ANOVA showed that participants in the strength/positive ending condition expressed the most happiness of all narrative conditions ($M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.06$), $F(3, 441) = 31.40$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .18$, as well as the least sadness ($M = 2.58$, SD = 1.16), $F(3, 441) = 13.32$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$, and anger ($M = 2.04$, $SD = 0.88$), $F(3, 439) = 3.60$, $p = .01$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. See Table 1 for the means and standard deviation of all dependent variables, and see Table 2 for the complete one-way MANOVA results comparing all conditions.[7]

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[7] We also report a complete list of the main and interaction effects comparing narrative conditions on OSF.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of all Outcome Variables.

	Strength/ Positive End	Strength/ Negative End	Nonstrength/ Positive End	Nonstrength/ Negative End	No-Message Control
	M (SD)	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*	*M (SD)*
Variable Name					
Willingness to Help	3.51 a (1.55)	3.67 a (1.69)	3.76 a (1.69)	3.62 a (1.69)	3.59 a (1.67)
Hypothetical Donation	4.90 ab (4.38)	4.70 ab (4.73)	5.50 a (4.87)	4.80 ab (4.87)	3.60 b (4.80)
Moral Elevation	3.68 a (0.72)	3.68 a (0.65)	3.72 a (0.75)	3.54 a (0.73)	3.98 (0.60)
Affective Response					
Happiness	2.95 a (1.06)	2.01 b (0.90)	2.62 c (1.18)	1.71 b (0.94)	3.50 (1.54)
Sadness	2.58 a (1.16)	3.32 bc (1.29)	3.13 b (1.34)	3.64 c (1.26)	2.03 (1.30)
Fear	2.40 a (1.39)	2.73 a (1.40)	2.78 a (1.58)	2.70 a (1.47)	2.02 (1.35)
Anger	2.04 a (0.88)	2.30 ab (1.06)	2.34 ab (1.21)	2.51 b (1.17)	2.16 (1.41)
Empathy					
General Empathy	4.71 a (1.36)	4.97 a (1.39)	4.70 a (1.47)	4.65 a (1.39)	2.48 (1.34)
Elevation	4.71 a (1.45)	4.69 ab (1.38)	4.22 bc (1.45)	3.93 c (1.60)	2.67 (1.54)
Closeness	4.37 a (1.50)	4.70 a (1.42)	4.37 a (1.36)	4.30 a 1.36)	–
Pity	3.82 a (1.43)	4.55 b (1.51)	4.44 b (1.46)	4.80 b (1.18)	–
Attitudes					
Explicit, Refugees	5.99 a (0.93)	6.11 a (0.87)	6.00 a (0.96)	5.94 a (0.83)	5.56 b (1.06)
Societal Help	5.28 a (1.26)	5.33 a (1.30)	5.19 a (1.44)	5.07 ab (1.34)	4.70 b (1.52)
Perception of Need	6.10 a (1.34)	6.34 a (1.42)	6.39 a (1.32)	6.30 a (1.45)	–
Deservingness	6.99 a (1.34)	7.09 a (1.37)	6.84 a (1.46)	6.66 a (1.54)	–
Desire to Help Maya	4.98 a (1.51)	4.99 a (1.67)	4.95 a (1.65)	4.95 a (1.61)	–
Future Predictions	1.65 a (1.81)	1.48 a (1.54)	1.32 a (1.69)	0.65 b (1.81)	–
Character Resilience	5.37 a (0.60)	5.15 a (0.76)	4.71 b (0.81)	4.05 c (0.92)	–

In relation to the four subtypes of empathic feelings (Bartsch et al., 2018), we found a main effect of strength on elevation, with each of the strength conditions resulting in more elevation than the nonstrength conditions, $F(1, 441) = 19.71$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. For pity, a slightly different pattern emerged. We observed main effects of strength and end on pity, where those in the strength/positive ending condition expressed the least amount of pity for Maya, followed by the nonstrength/positive ending, the strength/negative ending, and the nonstrength/negative ending resulting in the most pity, $F(1, 441) = 10.14$, $p = .002$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$. No main effects emerged for the other empathy subtypes, and we found no

interaction effects on any of the empathy subtypes. Contrary to our hypotheses, there were no main or interaction effects for moral elevation.

Table 2. Results of One-Way MANOVA Comparing All Conditions.

Variable Name	Condition
Willingness to Help	$F(4, 592) = 0.42$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$
Hypothetical Donation	$F(4, 592) = 3.07$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$
Moral Elevation	$F(3, 441) = 1.21$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$
Affective Response	
Happiness	$\boldsymbol{F(3, 441) = 31.40^{***}, \eta_p^2 = .18}$
Sadness	$\boldsymbol{F(3, 441) = 13.32^{***}, \eta_p^2 = .08}$
Fear	$F(3, 439) = 1.72.$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$
Anger	$\boldsymbol{F(3, 439) = 3.60^{**}, \eta_p^2 = .02}$
Empathy	
General	$F(3, 441) = 1.04$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$
Elevation	$\boldsymbol{F(3, 441) = 6.83^{***}, \eta_p^2 = .04}$
Closeness	$F(3, 441) = 1.62$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$
Pity	$\boldsymbol{F(3, 441) = 9.80^{***}, \eta_p^2 = .06}$
Attitudes Toward Refugees	$\boldsymbol{F(4, 592) = 6.68^{***}, \eta_p^2 = .04}$
Attitudes Toward Societal Help	$\boldsymbol{F(4, 592) = 4.52^{***}, \eta_p^2 = .03}$
Perception of Need	$F(3, 441) = 1.06$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$
Perception of Deservingness	$F(3, 441) = 1.65$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$
Desire to Help Maya	$F(3, 441) = 0.02$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$
Future Predictions	$\boldsymbol{F(3, 441) = 6.06^{***}, \eta_p^2 = .04}$
Character Resilience	$\boldsymbol{F(3, 441) = 56.92^{***}, \eta_p^2 = .28}$

Note. Comparisons were across all five conditions, including no-message control condition for the willingness to help and the hypothetical donation. Comparisons were across the four narrative conditions only for moral elevation, the affective response items, and the empathy items, which were not comparable between narrative conditions and the control. Significant effects are bolded. $^*p \leq .05$. $^{**}p \leq .01$. $^{***}p \leq .001$.

H2 predicted that participants in the restorative condition would report a greater likelihood to help compared with the other conditions. The 2 (Strength) × 2 (End) ANOVA showed no significant main or interaction effects for narrative condition on the willingness to help or hypothetical donating (all *F*s < 1.00). Similarly, one-way ANOVA did not reveal any significant differences between narrative conditions and the no-message control on the willingness to help. However, in the one-way ANOVA, there was a significant difference in hypothetical donation, where those in the nonstrength/positive ending condition donated more

to a charity that helps refugees (M = \$5.50, SD = 4.87) as compared with the control (M = \$3.60, SD = 4.80), F(4, 592) = 3.07, p = .02, η_p^2 = .02.

H3 predicted that participants in the restorative condition would report more positive attitudes toward refugees compared with all other conditions. Contrary to this hypothesis, there were no significant main or interaction effects of the narrative conditions on explicit attitudes toward refugees. However, results of one-way ANOVA demonstrated that all narrative conditions yielded significantly more positive attitudes toward refugees compared with the no-message control condition, F(4, 592) = 6.68, p < .001, η_p^2 = .04 (see Table 1 for means). Similarly, there were no main or interaction effects for the narrative components on attitudes toward society helping refugees; yet all narrative conditions yielded significantly more positive attitudes toward society helping refugees compared with the no-message control condition, F(4, 592) = 4.52, p = .001, η_p^2 = .03 (see Table 1). Overall, all of the narratives improved attitudes toward societal help and explicit attitudes toward refugees in participants, though the type of narrative did not seem to make a difference.

*Perception of Maya's Need and Deservingness*

For RQ3, there was a main effect of strength on deservingness, such that the strength narratives led to higher ratings of deservingness than the nonstrength narratives, F(1, 441) = 4.54, p = .03, η_p^2 = .01. No other main or interaction effects emerged for the narrative component manipulations on perceptions of need or deservingness.

Post Hoc Model Tests

Given our results and the associations between our main variables, we continued to probe our findings through a series of post hoc model tests. Specifically, we examined the effect of the narrative components (strength, ending, and the interaction) on helping and attitudes through positive emotions, empathy, and elevation. We conducted tests using maximum likelihood estimation in IBM Amos (Version 28; Hayes, 2013). We based our model on our ANOVA results and the associations among our variables (see supplement for a correlation matrix and discussion of the correlations among variables). Indirect effects were tested using bootstrapping procedures with 2,000 bootstrap samples and 95% bias-corrected CIs.

We first tested a complete path model with the restorative, ending, and interaction term as the predictor variables. We set all emotion (happiness, sadness, fear, anger), empathy (empathy, elevation, closeness, pity), and moral elevation variables as latent variables, and helping as the outcome variable. The model did not fit the data, χ^2 (degrees of freedom [df] = 39) = 2262.72, p < .001, Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .32, (90% CI [0.31, 0.34], PCLOSE < .001), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .31, Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) = .27. Therefore, we dropped the variables with regression weights at a significance level > .10. This left us with happiness, sadness, and the elevation empathy subtype as latent variables (see Figure 1).

We retested the model, and this time the model fit the data very well, χ^2 (df = 3) = 6.50, p = .090, χ^2/df = 0.46, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .05 (90% CI [0.00, 0.10]), PCLOSE = .47, SRMR = .02. Figure 1 presents the unstandardized regression weights for all hypothesized paths.
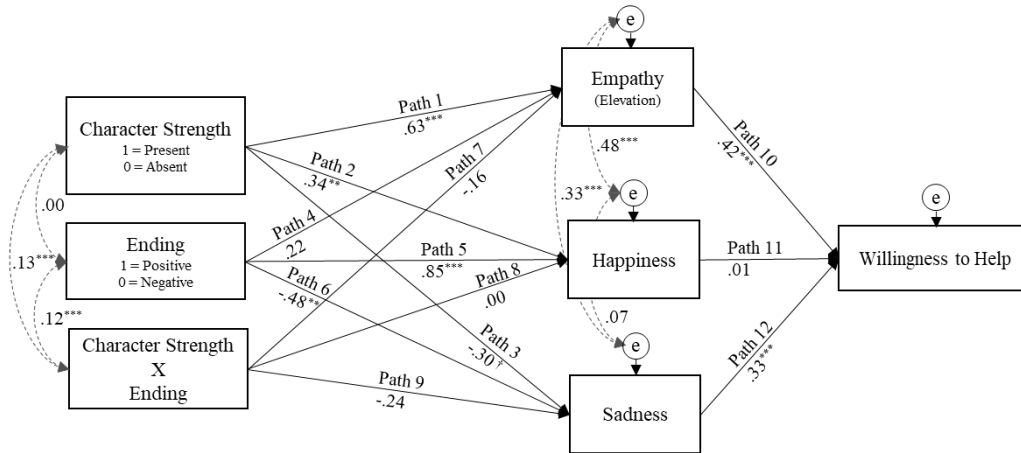
Figure 1. Path model with helping entered as the outcome variable.
e = terms for error variance. $^\dagger p$ ≤ .07, $^*p$ ≤ .05, $^{**}p$ ≤ .01, $^{***}p$ ≤ .001.

The first half of the model represents the effects of the manipulations on empathy, happiness, and sadness. Paths 1 and 2 were significant and positive, indicating that the presence of character strengths elicited greater empathy and happiness. Path 3 was negative and marginally significant, indicating that the strength narratives elicited marginally less sadness. For the ending manipulation, the significant Paths 5 and 6 indicate that ending positively led to more happiness and less sadness. The path from ending to empathy was not significant (Path 4). Further, none of the paths from the interaction was significant.

The second half of the model represents the effects of empathy, happiness, and sadness on the willingness to help. The significant Path 10 indicates that the more empathy participants felt, the more willing they were to help. Interestingly, Path 12 was significant and positive, indicating that more sadness was associated with a greater willingness to help, whereas Path 11 was not significant such that happiness did not appear to affect helping willingness (Path 11). Finally, no indirect effects emerged for either manipulation (strength, p = .292; ending, p = .609), or the interaction (p = .125).

We then tested the same model again, this time with attitudes toward refugees as the outcome variable. This model again fit the data well, χ^2 (df = 3) = 3.48, p = .323, χ^2/df = 0.86, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .02 (90% CI [0.00, 0.08]), PCLOSE = .75, SRMR = .01. The pattern was consistent with helping: The paths from empathy to refugee attitudes (Path 10) and sadness to refugee attitudes (Path 12) were again positive and significant (see Figure 2a). This time, the path from happiness to refugee attitudes was significant but negative. This finding was surprising, as it suggests that more happiness in response to the

narrative was associated with more negative attitudes toward refugees. Once again, no significant indirect effects emerged for strength (p = .295), ending (p = .140), or the interaction (p = .104).

Finally, we tested the model with attitudes toward societal help as the outcome. The model fit the data well, χ^2 (df = 3) = 5.66, p = .129, χ^2/df = 1.89, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = .04 (90% CI [0.00, 0.09]), PCLOSE = .54, SRMR = .02. The pattern of effects replicated such that more empathy and sadness led to more positive attitudes toward societal help, whereas more happiness was associated with marginally more negative attitudes. No indirect effects emerged for this model: strength (p = .281), ending (p = .196), interaction (p = .169). Taken together, the results of the model tests showed that the strongest paths were the path from the strength manipulation to empathy and the path from empathy to the outcome variables.
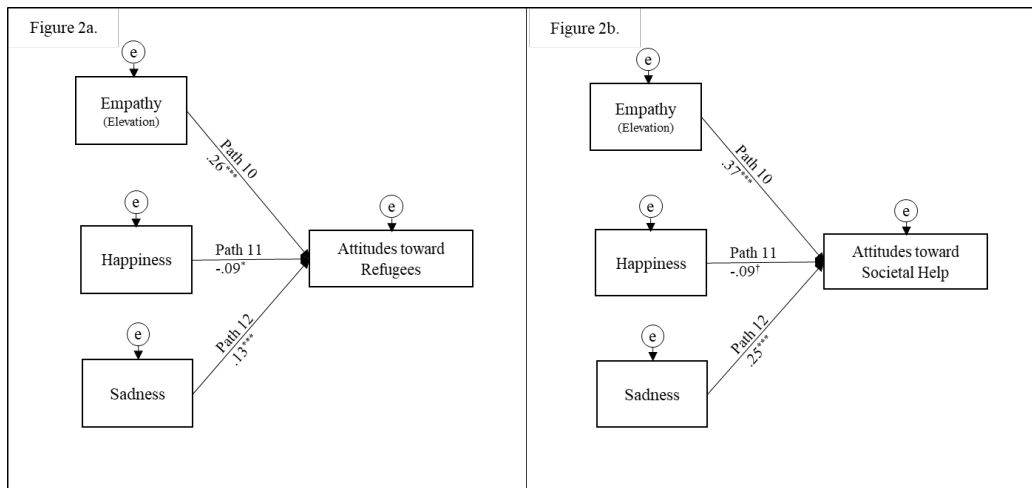
Figure 2. Second half of the path model (Paths 10−12) with attitudes toward refugees and attitudes toward societal help included as the outcome variables.
Note. e = terms for error variance. Note that Paths 1–9 in the model reported in Figure 1 do not change.
$^\dagger p \leq .07, ^* p \leq .05, ^{**} p \leq .01, ^{***} p \leq .001.$

Discussion

This work examined whether different types of narratives would uniquely influence prosocial attitudes and behavior toward refugees. In particular, we hypothesized that a restorative narrative—that is, a narrative with a strengths-based component (i.e., a focus on the individual's resilience) and a positive ending—would lead to greater likelihood to help (H1), more positive emotions, empathy, and elevation (H2), and more positive attitudes toward refugees (H3) compared with all other conditions. Our results regarding these predictions were mixed.

Narratives Affect Refugee Attitudes and Helping Attitudes

Perhaps our most central hypothesis was that some types of narratives would be more effective than others at evoking positive attitudes and intentions toward refugees. Specifically, we proposed that restorative narratives (including character strength components and positive endings) would have the greatest positive impact on explicit attitudes and helping attitudes toward refugees. However, we did not find support for this hypothesis. Instead, all four narratives (strengths-based versus not and positive versus negative ending) similarly improved attitudes toward refugees. On the positive side, these findings provide further evidence that narratives are capable of increasing attitudes toward minorities in need, which is consistent with past work (Johnson et al., 2013; Oliver, Dillard, et al., 2012). Furthermore, it appears that a range of different narrative structures can be effective in this way (e.g., a character does not have to demonstrate resilience or be on a positive trajectory to evoke positive reactions from readers). While this finding was not what we predicted, from a practical perspective, these results are exciting because they imply that many types of refugee narratives can create positive change.

However, this pattern of results also suggests that our research has not yet uncovered, or perhaps not effectively manipulated, the most effective combination of narrative components for differentially improving attitudes. In other words, while we were able to increase attitudes toward refugees overall, we were not able to significantly improve these attitudes by using specific components of stories proposed by restorative narrative theorists.

Positive Emotions, Empathy, and Elevation

Importantly, however, we did observe differences in emotions between our narrative conditions. First, we found that the strength of the character influenced feelings of empathy toward her. When Maya exhibited virtues of gratitude and determination, participants expressed more elevation than when she did not, regardless of how the story ended. Further in line with our hypothesizing, participants in the strength/positive ending condition expressed the most positive emotions (happiness) as well as the least negative emotions (sadness and anger) of all narrative conditions. Furthermore, our model test also suggests that emotional responses to the story are associated with stronger prosocial outcomes.

Willingness to Help

We expected the type of narrative would increase willingness to provide help such as volunteering or donating. However, this hypothesis was not supported. To better understand this result, we returned to previous prosocial behavior research, specifically, Batson's (2007) model of prosocial motivation. Batson argues that one must (1) perceive a need for help as well as (2) value the welfare of a victim (e.g., feel that the person is deserving) to experience empathetic concern, which then leads to prosocial behavior (Batson et al., 1991, 2007; Kogut & Ritov, 2005). Thus, one would not be motivated to help refugees without first placing value on the welfare of the refugees.

In this study, we asked participants to report perceived magnitude of Maya's need for help, as well as how deserving she was of help. We found a main effect of the strength manipulation on perceptions of Maya's

deservingness, such that those who read narratives that highlighted Maya's resilience rated Maya as more deserving than those who read narratives that did not highlight resilience. This finding was in line with our theorizing. However, we did not see a difference between conditions for perceived magnitude of need (all ps > .22). Moreover, we did not observe a change in the general indicator of empathic feelings ("moved," "tender," and "poignant") among conditions (all ps > .32). In other words, while our restorative version of the narrative may have increased perceptions of Maya's deservingness, it did not increase perceptions of her need for help above and beyond the other conditions. Thus, the lack of differences between narrative conditions on the desire and willingness to help could be explained as participants not perceiving Maya (and by extension, other refugees) as having a greater need for assistance, perhaps because ratings of need were high in all conditions.

Limitations and Future Directions

As noted above, we did not find our manipulations differently impacted participants' attitudes toward refugees; all four narrative conditions led to increased positive attitudes toward refugees compared with the no-message control condition. It could be the case that our narrative components were not different enough from one another to elicit measurable change. In other words, our manipulations of demonstration of Maya's strength might have been too subtle, or our differences in ending (which suggested a meaningful progression for Maya or a more somber future for her) did not contrast enough. It could also be the case that participants, after reading any material describing a refugee's challenging journey, feel compelled to express positive attitudes toward these individuals. Perhaps the narratives served to prime more prosocial attitudes toward this demographic, and therefore any narrative would be effective in this way. Future research should consider stimulus sampling (examining multiple narratives) to avoid any idiosyncratic effects that could be attributed to an individual narrative. It could be that some unmanipulated aspect of the character or story, such as the character's gender or location, created a strong connection to refugees for participants. Practically, this may help future efforts to create campaign materials; it seems to be the case that a variety of narrative types, regardless of story component, can effectively increase positive attitudes toward refugees.

Unexpectedly, our manipulation of the story ending (positive versus negative) seemed to impact how readers recalled Maya's resilience; while (as expected) those who read a narrative that emphasized Maya's strengths rated her as being more resilient than those who read a narrative without this emphasis, those who read a story about Maya with a positive ending also rated her as more resilient than those who read a story about Maya with a negative ending. It seems likely that readers attributed Maya's meaningful progression, signified by the positive narrative ending, as being diagnostic of her strengths as an individual, and thus they remembered her as being a resilient character. Importantly, then, future work should consider how components of restorative narratives may work in conjunction when influencing readers' perceptions and subsequent attitudes.

Additionally, readers who failed the story ending recall checks were disproportionately likely to misreport a negative ending as positive. Of course, it is possible that these individuals simply did not read the story carefully (the possibility that the check was intended to measure). However, it is also possible that individuals wanted to see a happy ending and misremembered the story conclusion because of motivated processing. Their expectations or hopes might have colored their interpretations or memories of the story ending. Future research might explore when this effect occurs and how to prevent it.

Another plausible limitation of this study is unmeasured potential moderators that may have affected our results. Personality variables and past experiences color the way we engage with a narrative and the subsequent effects it has on our attitudes and willingness to donate as a result (Koopman, 2015). Therefore, understanding attitudes toward refugees and willingness to help refugees require consideration of many individual differences. Indeed, past work has found a plethora of individual difference variables that can impact one's likelihood of helping refugees, including perceptions of justice (Kals & Strubel, 2017) and social dominance orientation (Esses, Veenvliet, Hodson, & Mihic, 2008). Thus, one should consider these variables regardless of what stimuli an individual is given.

It is also worth noting that our sample was an uncompensated convenience sample. Undoubtedly, the use of an online participant pool is less representative of the population as a whole than, say, the random selection of individuals throughout the country. Furthermore, the individuals within this study had self-selected to participate in the online research site. This might signify the unique nature of this group of individuals who are willing to participate in scientific research without any formal compensation for their time and efforts. Therefore, we recommend that the results of this work be replicated with more diverse samples to ensure the results can be successfully replicated as well as generalized to a broader population.

Finally, our inclusion of a no-narrative control condition may be viewed as a limitation of this study. For instance, some other characteristics of our narrative conditions may have influenced audience responses that did not have to do with our restorative manipulations but some other aspect of the narrative message. Future studies should test alternative control conditions that include a message to better assess the circumstances under which restorative narratives are more effective than other types of narratives.

In sum, these results may help guide future research on both prosocial attitudes and behavior as well as narrative components. While it remains unclear what particular components are most effective in changing attitudes, willingness to help, helping efficacy, and future engagement, it is evident that narratives can improve explicit attitudes and specific components can induce different emotional experiences. These findings are especially important considering that audiences might be able to encounter restorative narratives in a variety of media outlets, such as television, podcasts, or print. Additionally, restorative narratives could be circulated by aid groups or similar organizations. Thus, we hope this work can guide and inform future work in this emerging field so our understanding of prosocial narratives continues to progress.

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