

Inspiration: Core Characteristics, Component Processes, Antecedents, and Function

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The authors examined the core characteristics, component processes, antecedents, and function of state inspiration. In Studies 1 and 2, inspiration was contrasted with baseline experience and activated positive affect (PA) using a vivid recall methodology. Results supported the tripartite conceptualization of inspiration. Confirmatory factor analysis indicated that inspiration may be decomposed into separate processes related to being inspired “by” and being inspired “to.” Study 3 found that daily inspiration is triggered by illumination among individuals high in receptive engagement, whereas activated PA is triggered by reward salience among individuals high in approach temperament. Approach temperament was also implicated in being inspired “to.” Inspiration and activated PA appear to serve different functions: transmission and acquisition, respectively.

In 1926, Howes (see Howes, 1926) noted that the field of psychology had contributed little to the study of inspiration. Unfortunately, because of a paucity of research, relatively little progress has been made since 1926. To help bring the concept of inspiration to the attention of psychologists, we recently reviewed the nascent inspiration literature, offered a conceptualization of the construct, and conducted a series of studies validating a measure of inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

A limitation of our research was that it focused primarily on the trait of inspiration (i.e., individual differences), a level of analysis that is somewhat removed from the experience itself. In the present research, our first aim was to document the core characteristics of state inspiration, relative to both a neutral state (baseline experience) and a positive state (activated positive affect [PA]). Our second aim was to demonstrate that inspiration may be decomposed into separate processes related to being inspired “by” and being inspired “to.” Finally, we examined a mediational model of the distal and proximal antecedents of inspiration and activated PA. Activated PA is the strongest known correlate of trait inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003) and represents a basic appetitive motivational construct. Thus, contrasting inspiration with activated PA permits a stringent test of discriminant validity and an opportunity to demonstrate that inspiration cannot be explained by prevailing theories of the nature and function of approach motivation. In the following sections, we articulate hypotheses related to the three aims of our research.

The State of Inspiration

Our first aim was to document the core characteristics of the state of inspiration. We have argued previously that inspiration has three core characteristics: (a) transcendence, (b) evocation, and (c) motivation (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). *Transcendence* refers to the fact that inspiration orients one toward something that is better or more important than one’s usual concerns; one sees better possibilities. *Evocation* refers to the fact that inspiration is evoked and unwilling; one does not feel directly responsible for becoming inspired. Finally, inspiration involves *motivation* to express or make manifest that which is newly apprehended; given the positive valence of this aim, inspiration is conceptualized as an appetitive motivational state. This tripartite conceptualization specifies inspiration’s formal properties rather than its content. Indeed, the value of the construct lies, in part, in its ability to integrate phenomena that are diverse in surface content (e.g., religious, creative, interpersonal), because of a coherent underlying conceptual and psychological core (i.e., transcendence, evocation, motivation). We now provide a brief overview of the literatures on which our conceptualization is based.

Inspiration originally denoted supernatural influence. The Muse of ancient Greece was said to impart ideas to poets and artists (Leavitt, 1997), and revealed religions hold that scripture was inspired by God (Canale, 1994). Even in modern times, creative insights and personal transformations are often ascribed to supernatural influence (Harding, 1948; Miller & C’DeBaca, 1994). Inspiration as supernatural influence provides a prototype for our conceptualization: the individual apprehends something ordinarily beyond his or her capacities (i.e., transcendence), because of an influence from beyond the self (i.e., evocation), and he or she is moved to communicate or implement that which is newly apprehended (i.e., motivation).

Psychologists have ascribed inspiration to naturalistic sources. Those interested in creative or religious inspiration typically emphasize its nonconscious origins (e.g., Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993; Kris, 1952). Other researchers have examined inspi-

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We thank Rich Ryan, Paul Duberstein, Madeline Schmitt, and Jim Fryer for their helpful comments on a previous version of this article.

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ration from the external environment. Nature, music, and literature are commonly cited as sources of inspiration for creative activity or spiritual growth (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; McCutchan, 1999). Motive, emotion, and social comparison research suggests that exposure to exemplary others can evoke positive motivational states, at least under certain conditions (Haidt, 2003; Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; McClelland & Kirshnit, 1988). These various forms of inspiration resemble the prototypical case described above, except that inspiration is ascribed not to supernatural influence but to other sources external to the conscious self.

Other research has examined inspiration as a general construct, whatever its origin (e.g., Davitz, 1969; Hart, 1998; Thrash & Elliot, 2003; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The most reliable finding of these studies is that inspiration involves activation and positive valence, consistent with our conceptualization of inspiration as an appetitive state. Our prior set of studies (Thrash & Elliot, 2003) is the only research to examine the tripartite conceptualization. These studies found that *individuals* high in inspiration tend to be high on a range of positive traits relevant to transcendence, evocation, and motivation and that inspiration tends to occur on the same *days* as other positive experiences. However, these studies did not address the more fundamental question of whether discrete *states* or episodes of inspiration are characterized by transcendence, evocation, and motivation. Furthermore, the individual and day levels of analysis precluded a direct operationalization of inspiration's core characteristics. For instance, evocation implies that one would deny control of or causal responsibility for the state of inspiration, but it does not follow that inspiration would be more prevalent among individuals who characteristically lack control or on days on which one feels a lack of control. A direct documentation of evocation is possible only at the state level of analysis.

In the present research, we hypothesized that discrete experiences of inspiration are characterized by elevated levels of variables representing transcendence (e.g., spirituality), evocation (e.g., denial of responsibility), and motivation (e.g., task involvement). Because the term *evocation* refers to a process of initiation rather than a quantifiable characteristic per se, we hereafter refer to our operationalizations of evocation, collectively, as denial of *responsibility*. The hypothesis that inspiration involves above-baseline levels of motivation and transcendence and below-baseline levels of responsibility was tested in Studies 1 and 3.

Even if this hypothesis were supported, the possibility would remain that other appetitive motivational constructs would yield similar results if tested in the same manner. Therefore, we also contrasted inspiration with a prototypic appetitive motivational construct—*activated PA*, an affective state characterized by high activation and positive valence (Watson, Wiese, Vaidya, & Tellegen, 1999). Activated PA involves feelings of energy, confidence, and enthusiasm and is posited to arise in response to cues of the attainability of, or progress toward, desired goal objects (Carver, 2001; Watson et al., 1999). Theorists have argued that the function of activated PA, or the appetitive motivational system that underlies it, is to motivate approach toward or acquisition of desired goal objects, particularly those of evolutionary significance (e.g., food, shelter, relationships, and sexual partners; Cacioppo, Gardner, & Berntson, 1999; Watson et al., 1999). As Watson et al. (1999) stated, “the positive feeling states associated with the PA dimension appear to serve both as a motivating source of—and as an

affective reward for—[evolutionarily significant] goal-directed behaviors” (p. 830). We hypothesized that inspiration and activated PA would not be distinguishable with regard to most motivation-relevant variables, because both inspiration and activated PA are appetitive motivational states. However, we expected these two states to differ in terms of transcendence and ascriptions of responsibility.

Several factors suggest that inspiration involves more transcendence than does activated PA. First, whereas activated PA is posited to reflect basic concerns, such as resource acquisition, inspiration concerns higher human longings, such as creativity and knowledge of the divine; inspiration thus involves a transcendence of the more animalistic side of human nature. Second, whereas activated PA implies progress toward one's goals, inspiration implies an awakening or accommodation to something new, better, or more important; inspiration thus implies transcendence of one's previous conscious concerns. Third, inspiration is more cognitively complex than is activated PA. Clore, Ortony, and Foss (1987) expressed doubt that inspiration is an emotion and classified it empirically as a cognitive condition. Higher cognition, in general, frees humans from primitive biological imperatives and permits more flexible adaptation (Panksepp, 1998). In the case of inspiration, higher cognition appears to permit the appraisal of objects as worthy of emulation or extension rather than merely desirable and worthy of acquisition.

Greater transcendence, in turn, implies less causal responsibility. By definition, one cannot transcend oneself through an act of will; one is dependent on the press of an evocative object that awakens one to better possibilities. Whereas activated PA is presumed to be reasonably attainable through intentional efforts (e.g., studying leads to academic success and thus to activated PA), inspiration appears to be less contingent on one's behavior. Indeed, in the traditional, prototypical case, inspiration reflects divine grace rather than (or in conjunction with) human will. In Studies 2 and 3, we tested the hypothesis that inspiration, relative to activated PA, involves comparable motivation, greater transcendence, and lesser responsibility.

The “By” and “To” Components of Inspiration

Although our tripartite conceptualization provides a useful characterization of the state of inspiration, important questions remain regarding the processes that give rise to these characteristics. We propose that inspiration is a hybrid construct that emerges from the juxtaposition of two component processes, one involving an appreciation of and accommodation to an evocative object (hereafter referred to as being *inspired by*), the other involving motivation to extend the qualities exemplified in the evocative object (hereafter referred to as being *inspired to*). Inspiration's core characteristics appear to be differentially attributable to these processes, such that being inspired by is associated with transcendence and denial of responsibility and being inspired to is associated with appetitive motivation. In Study 2, we used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the hypothesis that the “by” and “to” components demonstrate distinct patterns of relationships to transcendence, responsibility, and motivation.

A decomposition of inspiration into separate “by” and “to” components is critical conceptually, because it highlights the fact that the evocative object is appreciated in its own right, indepen-

dent of its relevance to one's motivational concerns. Indeed, it is possible to be inspired by without being inspired to. For instance, one who views the Grand Canyon is likely to be inspired by it (i.e., be awoken to its beauty) but unlikely to be inspired to do anything in particular, given that beautiful scenery tends not to have obvious implications for action. Our differentiated construct may be contrasted with the undifferentiated construct of Lockwood and Kunda (1999), who argued that "to be inspired by an outstanding other, one must be able to imagine an equally outstanding possible future self" (p. 214). In principle, it should be possible to be inspired by (i.e., admire) an outstanding other even if the unattainability of his or her success precludes being inspired to, much as one's appreciation of the Grand Canyon is not contingent on one's ability to envision a future self (or painting) so grand.¹ Indeed, an intrinsic valuation of the evocative object is necessary if being inspired to is to represent a transcendence of one's prior concerns rather than an activation of them.

Antecedents of Inspiration and Activated PA

Whereas the motivational "to" component of inspiration resembles other appetitive motivational constructs (e.g., activated PA) in some respects, the "by" component that initiates inspiration does not have a counterpart in other forms of appetitive motivation. Therefore, if being inspired by an evocative object indeed reflects the object's intrinsic value and not its motivational significance, then the antecedents of other appetitive motivational constructs should be relatively unimportant in facilitating inspiration and, conversely, the antecedents of inspiration should be relatively unimportant in facilitating other appetitive motivational constructs. Thus, our third aim was to demonstrate that inspiration and activated PA arise through fundamentally different antecedent processes. In the following section, we present hypotheses about the antecedents of inspiration and activated PA, addressing within-subject variables that *proximally* trigger particular instances of inspiration or activated PA as well as between-subjects variables that *distally* predispose particular individuals to experience one state or the other. This aim addresses calls for research examining the processes through which traits have their effects (Diener & Scollon, 2002; Lucas & Fujita, 2000; Watson & Clark, 1997a).

Antecedents of Inspiration

Inspiration was posited to be proximally triggered by an epistemic event in which new or better possibilities are revealed by, or revealed in, an evocative stimulus object. The metaphor of gaining vision is widely invoked to describe this event. Creative inspiration is often associated with "illumination" or "insight," in which ideas emerge into awareness (Wallas, 1926). In theology, inspiration is associated with "revelation," in which God or God's will is made known (Canale, 1994). Miller and C'DeBaca (1994) reported that the item most often endorsed as descriptive of life-changing experiences was "An important truth was revealed to me" (p. 262). The gaining-vision metaphor is also prominent in collections of autobiographical accounts of inspiration (Harding, 1948). We use the term *illumination* to refer to this epistemic event in which one comes to see better possibilities.

If inspiration is evoked by illumination, then it should be most prevalent among individuals capable of putting aside habitual

patterns of thought and engaging receptively with the stimulus environment. Von Hartmann (1884) argued that creative inspiration requires receptivity to aesthetically rich ideas from the unconscious (see also Kris, 1952). James (1902/1999) emphasized the importance of receptivity in sudden religious conversion. A number of theorists have emphasized the importance of an open, absorbed object relationship and a sensitivity to intrinsic value (Haidt & Keltner, in press; Maslow, 1976; May, 1975; Schachtel, 1959). In short, inspiration was posited to be distally facilitated by a capacity for *receptive engagement* with intrinsically valued objects in the internal or external stimulus environment.

A capacity for receptive engagement is represented in most major personality inventories. Three corresponding (although not isomorphic) constructs appear to reflect receptive engagement most directly. *Openness to aesthetics* is a facet of openness to experience and reflects a sensitivity to intrinsic value (Haidt & Keltner, in press; McCrae & Costa, 1997). *Absorption* represents a capacity for engrossed attention and cognitive restructuring (Roche & McConkey, 1990; Tellegen, 1982). *Self-forgetfulness* is a component of self-transcendence and represents a capacity to become fascinated by and focused on one thing (Cloninger, Svrakic, & Przybeck, 1993). Empirical evidence supports the convergence of these constructs (DeFruyt, Van DeWiele, & Van Heeringen, 2000; Radtke & Stam, 1991; Wild, Kuiken, & Schopflocher, 1995). In the present research, we operationalized receptive engagement using these three conceptually related indicators.

Antecedents of Activated PA

Whereas inspiration was posited to be proximally triggered by illumination, activated PA was posited to be proximally triggered by *reward salience*, the perception that something desired is attainable. This hypothesis was derived from functional and evolutionary perspectives, which emphasize the role of activated PA in facilitating approach and acquisition (Watson et al., 1999). Previous research has documented a link between activated PA and cues of reward, goal progress, and positive events more generally (e.g., Gable, Reis, & Elliot, 2000; Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991).

If activated PA is elicited by reward salience, then it should be most prevalent among individuals who are sensitive to the presence of reward (Lucas, Diener, Grob, Suh, & Shao, 2000; Zelenski & Larsen, 1999). Reward sensitivity is central to the approach

¹ In practice, the unattainability of another's success may tend to interfere with being inspired by, as Lockwood and Kunda's (1997, 1999) findings imply. The important point is that if unattainability interferes with being inspired by, it is because defensive social comparison processes have interfered with the inspiration process and not because unattainable successes lack the potential to inspire or are intrinsically demoralizing. Indeed, it is unattainable rather than attainable successes that, in principle, provide the greater potential for transcendence and for being inspired by. We speculate that such potential is realized only in individuals who are sufficiently open and nondefensive or under conditions in which social comparison is minimized. The difference between our position and that of Lockwood and Kunda (1997, 1999) appears to reflect the fact that we are investigating inspiration per se, whereas Lockwood and Kunda (1997, 1999) have been investigating a positive consequence of social comparison that is reasonably labeled *inspiration* (for lack of a better term) but not identical to the construct that we have described.

temperament construct we recently proposed (Elliot & Thrash, 2002). *Approach temperament* is defined as “a general neurobiological sensitivity to positive/desirable (i.e., reward) stimuli (present or imagined) that is accompanied by perceptual vigilance for, affective reactivity to, and a behavioral predisposition toward such stimuli” (Elliot & Thrash, 2002, p. 805). Thus, activated PA was posited to be distally facilitated by approach temperament.

We argued that approach temperament is reflected in three corresponding (although not isomorphic) personality dimensions (Elliot & Thrash, 2002). *Extraversion* is characterized by sociability, activity, and a tendency to experience positive emotion (McCrae & Costa, 1987). *Positive emotionality* is a tendency to experience positive emotion and to engage life in a positive manner (Tellegen, 1985). The *behavioral activation system* (BAS) is a motivational system that facilitates approach behavior and positive affect (Carver & White, 1994; Gray, 1970). We summarized the literature documenting convergences among these constructs and provided additional empirical evidence (Elliot & Thrash, 2002). In the present research, we operationalized approach temperament using these three conceptually related indicators.

In sum, inspiration was posited to be proximally predicted by illumination and distally predicted by receptive engagement, and activated PA was posited to be proximally predicted by reward salience and distally predicted by approach temperament. Given that inspiration and activated PA share significant variance, there is likely to be some overlap in their antecedents. Therefore, we hypothesized that the posited antecedents of inspiration would be better predictors of inspiration than activated PA and that the posited antecedents of activated PA would be better predictors of activated PA than inspiration. We examined antecedent processes in Study 3.

Study 1: Inspiration Versus Baseline Experience

The purpose of Study 1 was to validate our conceptualization of state inspiration. We used a vivid recall methodology in which participants recalled a personal experience of inspiration, wrote a narrative account, and completed self-report measures regarding the experience. Participants provided their own baselines by also completing the procedure with respect to a representative experience in their lives. We hypothesized that inspiration would involve above-baseline levels of motivation and transcendence and below-baseline levels of responsibility. We tested this hypothesis using direct self-report measures as well as indirect measures based on the content of the inspiration and baseline narratives.

Regarding self-report measures, we operationalized the broad category of motivation using measures of activated PA, activated negative affect (NA), and task involvement. Given that inspiration is theorized to be an appetitive state, we expected it to involve elevated activated PA and task involvement, without an accompanying elevation in activated NA. Transcendence was operationalized as spirituality and meaning, and responsibility was operationalized as (low) volitional control.

We examined narrative content using the program Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC; Pennebaker, Francis, & Booth, 2001). LIWC examines word frequencies and reports the percentage of words falling into each of a number of categories. Several categories are relevant to motivation or transcendence. Regarding motivation, the inspiration narratives were expected to involve

more positive emotion words (e.g., *happy*) but not more negative emotion words (e.g., *afraid*). Regarding transcendence, the inspiration narratives were expected to involve higher levels of insight (e.g., *realize*) and metaphysical concerns (e.g., *death*). LIWC does not report any categories relevant to responsibility; however, responsibility may be operationalized in terms of how self and other are represented linguistically.

Researchers have distinguished between pronoun indicators of self, such as *I* and *me*, and of other, such as *hershe* and *him/her* (e.g., Greenwald & Farnham, 2000). The distinction between self and other is less relevant to responsibility than is the relation between self and other. On the basis of a linguistic interpretation of dialogical theorizing (Buber, 1996; Van Staden, 1999), we distinguish two modes of self–other relation: one represented by *I* and *him/her*, the other by *hershe* and *me*. Inspiration’s evoked quality implies the latter mode, in which the self is relegated to the relatively passive object position (e.g., “A creative urge came over *me*”) and others, if inspiring, are promoted to the relatively active subject position (e.g., “*She* has had an impact on *me*”). Thus, the inspiration narratives were expected to involve an increased frequency of the words *me* and *hershe*, without increases in *I* and *him/her*. Two factors related to pronoun usage would obscure the results if not taken into account. First, *her*, unlike *him* and *me*, is used not only in the objective case (e.g., “He loves *her*”) but also in the possessive case (e.g., “He loves *her* smile”). Second, subject and object are functionally reversed in passive voice (e.g., “*I* was amazed by his wit”). We examined deep rather than surface linguistic structure (Van Staden, 1999), taking these factors into account.

Method

Procedure

Participants attended two small-group sessions held 1 week apart. In each session, participants completed one of two within-subject conditions, the order of which was counterbalanced. In the *inspiration* condition, participants were asked to recall and relive an experience of inspiration (“a time when you were inspired or experienced inspiration”), to write a narrative account of the experience, and to complete dependent measures regarding the experience. A definition of *inspiration* was not provided, because we were interested in the folk concept of inspiration that is meaningful in the lives of individuals (see Thrash & Elliot, 2003). In the *baseline* condition, participants followed the same procedure, except that the target experience was an experience that is representative of the participant’s daily life (“a specific experience [at a particular time] that you feel is a good example of the kinds of experiences that you have in your everyday life”). In the inspiration condition, participants were given directions for an alternative task in case they would not be able to recall an experience of inspiration.

Participants

A total of 172 undergraduates participated in return for extra credit in a psychology course.² Sixteen participants did not complete the second session, and 8 participants were dropped because they reported that they had never been inspired or could not recall a particular experience of

² The data for Study 1 were collected in the context of a larger project (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). However, none of the findings reported herein have been published previously.

inspiration. The final sample consisted of 148 (49 male, 99 female) participants.

Measures

See Table 1 for the reliability coefficients of the measures used in this study.

Activated PA and activated NA. We used the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson et al., 1988) to assess activated PA (10 items) and activated NA (10 items). Participants rated each item on a scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very strongly*). Evidence of reliability and validity was reported by Watson and Clark (1997b).

Task involvement. We assessed task involvement using Elliot and Harackiewicz's (1996) 7-item measure. Items assess absorbed involvement or distraction (reverse coded). Items were rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Evidence of reliability and validity was reported by Elliot and Harackiewicz.

Spirituality. We assessed spirituality using the 4-item Meaning subscale of Pekala's (1991) Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory. Items concern the presence versus absence of spiritual or transcendent experience and consist of two statements that define the endpoints of a 7-point scale. Evidence of reliability and validity was reported by Pekala.

Meaning. We assessed meaning using Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, and Kass-er's (2001) 3-item measure of Self-Actualization/Meaning. Items were rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all true*) to 7 (*very true*). Evidence of reliability and validity was reported by Sheldon et al.

Volitional control. We assessed volitional control using the 3-item Volitional Control subscale of the Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory. Items concern willful control (vs. receptivity/passivity) during the

experience and consist of two statements that define the endpoints of a 7-point scale. Evidence of reliability and validity was reported by Pekala (1991).

Linguistic representations of self and other. Three research assistants examined the narratives and coded each occurrence of the word *her* for whether it was used in the objective or possessive case. The assistants also coded all occurrences of the pronouns *I*, *me*, *he*, *she*, *him*, and *her* (excluding possessive *hers*) for whether they were used in conjunction with a verb in active or passive voice. For each narrative, the following four indexes were computed as the proportion of total words represented by the pronoun-voice combination listed in parentheses: (a) active self (*I*-active + *me*-passive), (b) passive self (*I*-passive + *me*-active), (c) active other (*he*-active + *she*-active + *him*-passive + *her*-passive), and (d) passive other (*he*-passive + *she*-passive + *him*-active + *her*-active). In this study and the next, the interrater agreement among coders was high (mean pairwise $r = 1.00$ for all categories), and discrepancies were resolved through discussion.

Other linguistic dimensions. We used LIWC to code the narratives for positive emotion, negative emotion, insight, and metaphysical concerns. Reliability and validity information was reported by Pennebaker and King (1999).

Results and Discussion

Narrative Themes

The inspiration narratives were quite diverse in surface content, covering topics such as becoming animated by an artistic or scientific insight, the discovery of one's vocation or calling, the

Table 1
Study 1: Descriptive Statistics and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results

Dependent variable	Inspiration			Baseline			t^a	η_p^2
	M	SD	α	M	SD	α		
Motivation								
Self-report								
Activated PA	41.59	6.50	.85	28.56	9.27	.92	16.49***	.65
Activated NA	16.78	6.56	.86	19.29	8.81	.91	-3.20**	.07
Task involvement	40.79	6.14	.71	32.24	8.39	.75	10.04***	.41
Narrative content								
Positive emotion	4.00	2.08		2.23	1.75		8.47***	.33
Negative emotion	1.05	1.06		1.33	1.30		-2.31*	.04
Transcendence								
Self-report								
Spirituality	18.72	6.29	.81	11.42	5.70	.81	12.98***	.54
Meaning	15.20	5.01	.90	8.91	5.02	.88	12.03***	.50
Narrative content								
Insight	2.71	1.50		1.57	1.30		8.02***	.31
Metaphysical concerns	0.33	0.94		0.09	0.54		3.07**	.06
Responsibility (evocation)								
Self-report								
Volitional control	14.76	4.15	.75	14.41	4.07	.70	0.91	.01
Narrative content								
Active self	6.05	2.49		5.90	2.77		0.48	.00
Passive self	1.24	1.16		0.75	1.01		4.01***	.10
Active other	0.81	1.41		0.49	1.09		2.16*	.03
Passive other	0.25	0.51		0.24	0.58		0.12	.00

Note. PA = positive affect; NA = negative affect.

^a ANOVA effects of condition are presented as t values rather than F values so that the direction of the effect may be readily comprehended. Positive t values indicate that the inspiration mean is greater, whereas negative t values indicate that the baseline mean is greater. The original F values may be recovered using the equation $F = t^2$. Degrees of freedom vary from (1, 145) to (1, 146).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

influence of role models who lead one toward virtue or success, and the realization that greatness is possible in response to an unexpected success. Despite differences in surface content, the narratives were highly consistent in their underlying themes. The dominant theme may be described as having one's eyes opened, often in an emotionally meaningful encounter with a person, object, or idea, and wishing to capture, communicate, actualize, or transmit one's new vision. The baseline narratives also covered a broad range of experiences. Common topics included studying; going to class; going to parties; spending time with friends, partners, or family; and engaging in sports or leisure activities.

Gender and Order Effects

Descriptive statistics for each dependent variable are presented in Table 1. We conducted a 2 (condition: inspiration vs. baseline) \times 2 (order: inspiration first vs. baseline first) factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) for each dependent variable, with condition specified as a repeated-measures factor and order as a between-subjects factor. In this and subsequent studies, gender main effects and interactions were tested in preliminary analyses and retained when significant. Main effects of gender emerged for three dependent variables. Women reported more task involvement, meaning, and passive self.

Condition \times Order interactions were observed for four variables. As explained by Reese (1997), Condition \times Order interactions are mathematically equivalent to main effects of position (i.e., Time 1 vs. Time 2). The following variables each decreased from Time 1 to Time 2: activated PA, activated NA, negative emotion, and passive self. There were no significant main effects of order, which are equivalent to Condition \times Position interactions (Reese, 1997). Therefore, the between-subjects effects of condition were the same at Times 1 and 2.

The State of Inspiration Versus Baseline Experience

ANOVA results for condition effects are shown in Table 1. Regarding self-reported motivation-relevant variables, inspiration was found to involve elevated levels of activated PA and task involvement and modestly lower levels of activated NA. The inspiration narratives contained more positive emotion and modestly less negative emotion.

Regarding self-reported transcendence-relevant variables, inspiration involved an enhancement of spirituality and meaning. The inspiration narratives were found to involve more content related to insight and metaphysical concerns, suggesting that inspiration is grounded in higher cognition and that it concerns issues of ultimate or existential importance.

A null finding emerged for the self-reported responsibility-relevant variable of volitional control. The inspiration narratives were found to involve increased representation of the self as passive and of others as active, without increased representation of the self as active or of others as passive. The fact that the denial-of-responsibility hypothesis was supported with indirect measures but not with direct self-report measures may reflect a reluctance on participants' part to knowingly deny responsibility for a positive experience such as inspiration.

Study 2: Inspiration Versus Activated PA

Study 1 demonstrated that inspiration differs from baseline in a manner highly consistent with our conceptualization. In Study 2 we raised the bar by posing the following question: Can inspiration be discriminated from activated PA, which is not only the strongest known correlate of trait inspiration but also the variable that best distinguished state inspiration from baseline in Study 1 ($\eta_p^2 = .65$)? We hypothesized that inspiration, relative to activated PA, would involve comparable motivation, greater transcendence, and lesser responsibility.

In Study 2, we supplemented the dependent measures from Study 1 with several additional measures. Three additional motivation-relevant variables were included: (a) interest, (b) motivation strength, and (c) goal clarity. The last two variables were assessed with face-valid items intended to capture the energization and direction aspects of motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Regarding responsibility, the volitional control measure from Study 1, which focuses on control during the experience, was supplemented with an attribution measure that concerns control over the cause of the experience. A measure that assesses both self- and other-responsibility was also included. Regarding transcendence, we included measures of state Openness, state Extraversion, illumination, and reward salience. Openness and illumination were expected to be higher in the inspiration condition, whereas Extraversion and reward salience were expected to be higher in the activated PA condition. Fleeson, Malanos, and Achille (2002) showed that Extraversion varies within persons and covaries with state levels of activated PA.

We also aimed to decompose inspiration into its "by" and "to" components. We expected the "by" and "to" components to demonstrate unique patterns of relationships to other constructs.

Method

Procedure

Participants attended two small-group sessions held 2 to 4 days apart. The procedure was the same as in Study 1, except that the baseline condition was replaced by an activated PA condition. Because participants were unlikely to be familiar with the concept of activated PA, the following definition was provided: "Positive affect is defined as 'being enthusiastic, interested, determined, and excited.'" These four descriptors are the four items from the PANAS that load more strongly on the activated PA factor than does the item "inspired" (Watson et al., 1988). To make the inspiration and activated PA conditions comparable, we provided a definition of *inspiration*: "Inspiration is defined as '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.'" This is the first general, figurative definition of *inspiration* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (Simpson & Weiner, 1989, p. 1036). Previous research has demonstrated a strong convergence between folk conceptions of inspiration and this definition, even when this definition is not labeled as inspiration (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). Participants in both conditions were given directions for an alternative task in case they would not be able to recall an instance of inspiration or activated PA.

Participants

A total of 237 undergraduates participated in return for extra credit in a psychology course. Twelve participants did not complete the second session, and 4 participants were dropped because they reported that they had

never been inspired or could not recall a particular experience. No participants reported never having experienced activated PA. The final sample consisted of 221 (81 male, 140 female) participants.

Measures

See Table 2 for reliability coefficients of the measures used in this study.

Activated PA and activated NA. We assessed activated PA and activated NA using the same measures as in Study 1, but participants responded on a scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*).

Task involvement. We assessed task involvement using the same measure as in Study 1.

Interest. We assessed interest using the 3-item Interest subscale from the Differential Emotions Scale (Izard, 1977). Items were rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very strongly*). Evidence of reliability and validity was reported by Izard (1977).

Motivation strength. We assessed motivation strength using the item “motivated,” which was embedded among the PANAS items and rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*extremely*).

Goal clarity. We assessed goal clarity using the item “I felt I had clear goals” (Waterman, 1993), which was rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

Spirituality. We assessed spirituality using the same measure as in Study 1.

Meaning. We assessed meaning using the same measure as in Study 1.

State Openness and Extraversion. We used the Big Five Inventory (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991) to assess Openness (10 items) and Extraversion (8 items). We adapted the measure to assess states rather than traits by changing the item stem from “I see myself as someone who. . .” to “I saw myself as someone who. . .” The items consist of short phrases that complete the stem and were rated on a scale that ranged from 1

Table 2
Study 2: Descriptive Statistics and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Results

Dependent variable	Inspiration			Activated PA			<i>t</i> ^a	η^2_{P}
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α		
Motivation								
Self-report								
Activated PA	56.67	9.00	.85	58.75	7.39	.80	-3.12**	.04
Activated NA	21.24	10.10	.86	21.03	8.82	.83	0.28	.00
Task involvement	40.19	5.89	.66	39.87	5.68	.61	0.72	.00
Interest	15.86	3.27	.59	16.08	3.19	.57	-0.88	.00
Motivation strength	6.16	1.14		6.00	1.15		1.62	.01
Goal clarity	5.68	1.41		5.75	1.31		-0.54	.00
Narrative content								
Positive emotion	4.20	2.26		4.96	2.41		-3.75***	.06
Negative emotion	0.89	1.03		1.04	1.06		-1.57	.01
Transcendence								
Self-report								
Spirituality	17.81	6.12	.81	15.02	5.94	.80	6.40***	.16
Meaning	14.87	4.62	.85	13.01	4.69	.83	5.08***	.11
State Openness	49.97	10.55	.83	48.10	10.65	.82	3.01**	.04
State Extraversion	39.42	9.02	.84	42.95	8.42	.85	-5.90***	.14
Illumination	25.74	6.24	.78	21.16	7.45	.84	8.81***	.26
Reward salience								
Wanting	23.52	8.51	.89	26.89	7.03	.87	-5.17***	.11
Getting	8.19	3.48	.59	10.65	3.03	.57	-8.98***	.27
Doing well	9.54	4.00	.90	10.84	3.42	.93	-3.67***	.06
Overall	41.26	13.58	.89	48.37	11.09	.87	-6.75***	.17
Narrative content								
Insight	2.94	1.88		2.51	1.67		2.84**	.04
Metaphysical concerns	0.32	1.19		0.09	0.42		2.64**	.03
Responsibility (evocation)								
Self-report								
Volitional control	14.68	3.61	.60	15.37	3.62	.67	-2.21*	.02
Controllability	15.57	6.95	.79	18.88	5.61	.72	-5.89***	.14
Self-responsibility	5.46	2.58		6.65	2.03		-5.52***	.12
Other-responsibility	5.54	2.62		4.84	2.34		2.87**	.04
Narrative content								
Active self	6.31	2.80		6.47	2.72		-0.73	.00
Passive self	1.38	1.22		0.96	0.97		4.18***	.07
Active other	0.62	1.20		0.31	0.87		3.08**	.04
Passive other	0.26	0.57		0.23	0.81		0.44	.00
Inspiration intensity	24.71	3.61	.81					

Note. PA = positive affect; NA = negative affect.

^a ANOVA effects of condition are presented as *t* values rather than *F* values so that the direction of the effect may be readily comprehended. Positive *t* values indicate that the inspiration mean is greater, whereas negative *t* values indicate that the activated PA mean is greater. The original *F* values may be recovered using the equation $F = t^2$. Degrees of freedom vary from (1, 218) to (1, 219).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

(*disagree strongly*) to 5 (*agree strongly*). Evidence of reliability and validity was reported by John and Srivastava (1999).

Triggering events. Measures of illumination and reward salience were developed in pilot research. The measures consist of a stem phrase ("My experience was triggered or initiated. . .") followed by items that complete the stem. Each item was rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Illumination items concern insights or revelations. Reward salience items were adapted from the Reward Responsiveness and Drive subscales of Carver and White's (1994) BAS measure. The original BAS items have a stimulus-response format, and the new items were adapted from the stimulus portions only.

A principal-components analysis of the pilot data ($N = 258$) yielded four components according to both a scree test and the Kaiser criterion: (a) an *Illumination* component ($\alpha = .81$; five items: e.g., "by a revelation or insight concerning what is important") and three Reward Salience components, which represent (b) *Wanting* ($\alpha = .87$; five items: e.g., "by a chance to get something I wanted"), (c) *Getting* ($\alpha = .60$; two items: e.g., "by getting something I wanted"), and (d) *Doing Well* ($\alpha = .93$; two items: e.g., "by doing well at something"). An overall nine-item Reward Salience scale was also internally consistent ($\alpha = .81$). In the present research, we report results for each of these indexes but focus primarily on Illumination and overall Reward Salience.

Volitional control. We assessed volitional control using the same measure as in Study 1.

Controllability. We assessed controllability using a revised version of the three-item Controllability subscale of Russell's (1982) Causal Dimension Scale. Items were revised slightly to assess personal controllability rather than controllability by anyone (self or other). For instance, the item "Is the cause something for which someone was responsible?" was changed to "Is the cause something for which you were responsible?" Items were rated on a 9-point scale with anchors specific to each item. Evidence of reliability and validity was reported by Russell, McAuley, and Tarico (1987).

Responsibility appraisals. We used two single-item measures adapted from Mauro, Sato, and Tucker (1992) to assess self-responsibility appraisals ("How responsible did you feel for having caused what was happening?") and other-responsibility appraisals ("To what extent did you feel that someone or something else was responsible for having caused what was happening?"). These items were rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 9 (*extremely*).

Linguistic representations of self and other. Three research assistants coded the narratives using the same procedure as in Study 1. Active-self, passive-self, active-other, and passive-other indexes were computed as in Study 1.

Other linguistic dimensions. As in Study 1, the narratives were analyzed with LIWC. The same categories were examined as in Study 1.

Inspiration intensity and the "by" and "to" component processes. We assessed the intensity of the recalled inspiration experiences using the Intensity subscale of the Inspiration Scale (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). This scale consists of four items that were converted to past tense for the present study in order to assess the state of inspiration (Item 1i: "I experienced inspiration," Item 2i: "Something I encountered or experienced inspired me," Item 3i: "I was inspired to do something," and Item 4i: "I felt inspired"). Items were rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very deeply or strongly*). Items 2i and 3i assessed the intensity of the "by" and "to" components, respectively. We have provided evidence of the reliability and validity of this measure (Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

Results and Discussion

Narrative Themes

The inspiration narratives were highly similar to those of Study 1. The activated PA narratives covered a range of topics, such as

striving for or achieving success in sports or academics, indulging in enjoyable activities, pursuing new or enriching experiences, falling in love, and being with friends or family. The dominant theme may be described as excitement as one moves toward or gets something that one desires.

Gender and Order Effects

Descriptive statistics for each dependent variable are presented in Table 2. As in Study 1, we conducted a 2 (condition: inspiration vs. activated PA) \times 2 (order: inspiration first vs. activated PA first) ANOVA for each dependent variable. A main effect of gender was found for state Extraversion, indicating higher Extraversion among female participants. A Condition \times Order interaction was observed for active self, indicating an increase in active self across time. There were no significant main effects of order, indicating that the between-subject effects of condition were the same at Times 1 and 2.

The State of Inspiration Versus the State of Activated PA

ANOVA results for condition effects are shown in Table 2. Consistent with our hypotheses, null effects were documented for most of the self-reported, motivation-relevant variables: activated NA, task involvement, interest, motivation strength, and goal clarity. Activated PA was higher in the activated PA condition. The narrative analyses yielded similar findings: Inspiration narratives involved less positive emotion and comparable negative emotion.

Regarding self-reported transcendence-relevant variables, inspiration involved greater spirituality and meaning. Openness and illumination were higher in the inspiration condition, whereas Extraversion and reward salience were higher in the activated PA condition. The inspiration narratives included more content related to insight and metaphysical concerns.

Regarding self-reported responsibility-relevant variables, inspiration involved lower levels of volitional control, controllability, and self-responsibility and a higher level of other-responsibility. The inspiration narratives involved more references to the passive (but not active) self and active (but not passive) others. It is noteworthy that the denial-of-responsibility hypothesis was fully supported with both direct and indirect measures. In Study 1, the direct self-report measure of responsibility yielded a null effect in contrasting inspiration with baseline experience. Thus, the relative lack of personal responsibility for inspiration is most clearly demonstrated when inspiration is contrasted with another appetitive state.

The "By" and "To" Components of Inspiration

To examine the convergent and discriminant validity of the "by" and "to" components of inspiration, we tested a CFA model using maximum likelihood estimation. The specified model had four factors: (a) Inspiration Intensity, (b) Responsibility, (c) Transcendence, and (d) Approach Motivation. The Inspiration Intensity factor had four indicators—Items 1i, 2i, 3i, and 4i, as reported above. Items 2i and 3i represent the "by" and "to" components, respectively. As shown in Figure 1, all relevant self-report variables were used as indicators of Responsibility, Transcendence,

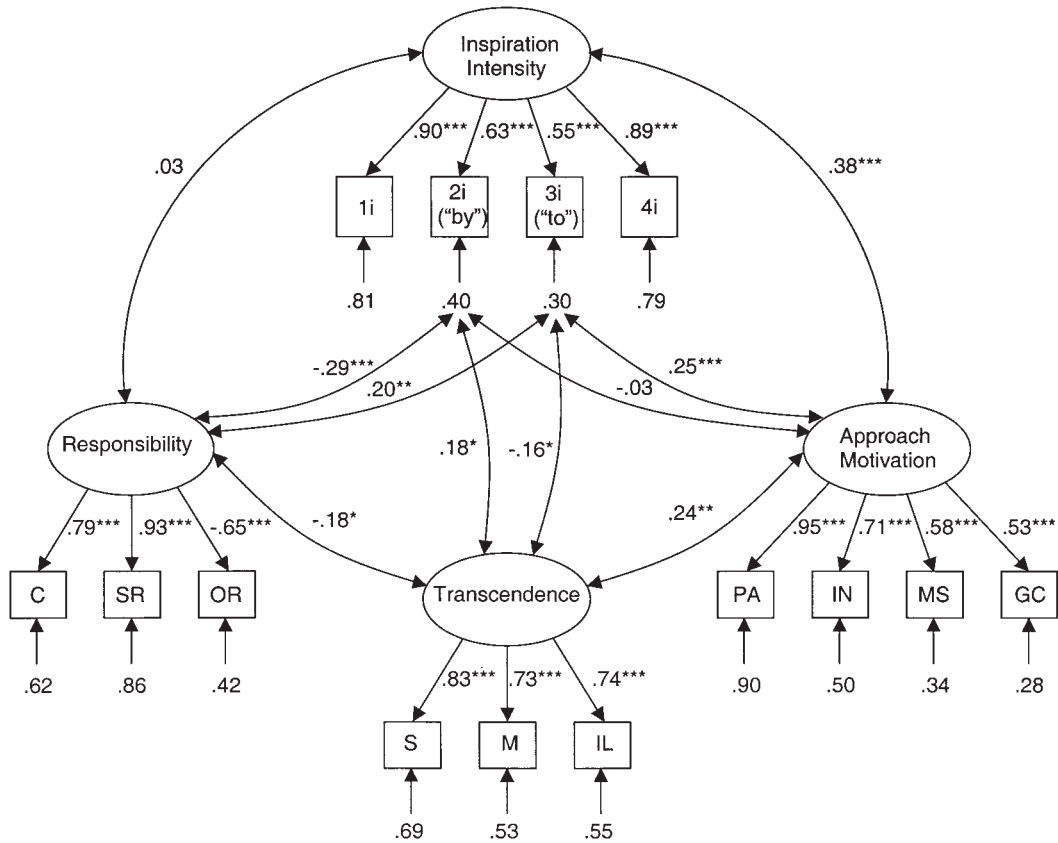


Figure 1. Confirmatory factor analysis of the convergent and discriminant validity of the “by” and “to” component processes. Two modeled correlations are not represented in the diagram for the sake of presentation clarity. The Inspiration Intensity and Transcendence factors were positively related, $r = .50, p < .001$, as were the Responsibility and Approach Motivation factors, $r = .25, p < .01$. 1i, 2i, 3i, and 4i = Inspiration Intensity items; C = controllability; SR = self-responsibility; OR = other-responsibility; S = spirituality; M = meaning; IL = illumination; PA = activated PA; IN = interest; MS = motivation strength; GC = goal clarity. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

and Approach Motivation, excluding three variables that had standardized loadings of less than .50 in a preliminary analysis (volitional control, $\lambda = .35$; Openness, $\lambda = .42$; task involvement, $\lambda = .34$).³ The uniquenesses of the “by” and “to” items were specified to covary with the Responsibility, Transcendence, and Approach Motivation factors. This model had good fit based on a two-index combinational rule recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999), $\chi^2(65, N = 219) = 111.92$, standardized root-mean-square residual = .06, incremental fit index = .97.

As shown in Figure 1, the Inspiration Intensity factor varied positively with Transcendence and Approach Motivation and was unrelated to Responsibility. Thus, not only do inspiration experiences, in general, involve above-baseline levels of Transcendence and Approach Motivation (see Study 1), but also particularly intense inspiration experiences involve especially high levels of Transcendence and Approach Motivation.

The uniquenesses of the “by” and “to” components displayed distinct patterns of relationships to other constructs (see Figure 1). The uniqueness of the “by” component was positively related to Transcendence and negatively related to Responsibility, whereas the uniqueness of the “to” component was negatively related to

Transcendence and positively related to Responsibility and Approach Motivation. These findings indicate that being inspired by and being inspired to are distinguishable processes and suggest that inspiration’s core characteristics are differentially attributable to these processes.

Together, the results of Studies 1 and 2 provide strong support for our conceptualization of inspiration and indicate that state inspiration may be meaningfully discriminated from both baseline experience and from inspiration’s strongest known correlate, activated PA. We also demonstrated that inspiration may be decomposed into “by” and “to” components.

Study 3: Inspiration Versus Baseline Experience and Activated PA—Daily Experiences and Antecedents

We had two aims in Study 3. The first was to replicate our findings regarding the core characteristics of inspiration. In this study we examined ongoing daily experiences, thus maintaining

³ Inclusion of these indicators does not change any of our findings.

ecological validity but reducing any memory biases that may be associated with the vivid recall methodology. We also included all three conditions—inspiration, baseline, and activated PA—in the same study. Furthermore, whereas Studies 1 and 2 had a within-subject design, this study had a between-subjects design. Although presumably less intense, daily experiences of inspiration were expected to be qualitatively similar to and have the same core characteristics as the more rare and memorable experiences examined in Studies 1 and 2 (see also Bradley, 1929; Hart, 1998). This study included a subset of the dependent variables used in Study 2.

Our second aim was to demonstrate that inspiration and activated PA arise through different antecedent processes. We hypothesized that receptive engagement and illumination are more important in facilitating inspiration than activated PA, because these variables should facilitate the nonmotivational process of being inspired by; conversely, we hypothesized that the motivation-relevant variables of approach temperament and reward salience are more important in facilitating activated PA than inspiration. Study 2 provided initial support for these hypotheses—inspiration was associated with higher state Openness (a Big Five indicator of receptive engagement) and illumination, and activated PA was associated with higher state Extraversion (a Big Five indicator of approach temperament) and reward salience. In this study, we examined the contribution of personality more rigorously by assessing receptive engagement and approach temperament as traits (rather than states), by assessing them prior to (rather than concurrent with) inspiration and activated PA and by using multiple indicators (rather than only Big Five indicators). We hypothesized that receptive engagement would predict the frequency of inspiration across a 2-week period more strongly than it predicts the frequency of activated PA, whereas approach temperament would predict activated PA more strongly than it predicts inspiration.

We also aimed to demonstrate that the trigger variables are differentially important as proximal antecedents and that they mediate the differential effects of the trait variables. Specifically, we hypothesized that the reason receptive engagement is a better predictor of the frequency of inspiration than of activated PA is that individuals higher in receptive engagement experience more illumination in daily life, and illumination on a particular day is a better predictor of inspiration than of activated PA on that day; and the reason that approach temperament is a better predictor of activated PA than of inspiration is that individuals higher in approach temperament experience more reward salience in daily life, and reward salience on a particular day is a better predictor of activated PA than of inspiration on that day.

Method

Procedure

Participants completed trait questionnaires at home and returned them before beginning the daily diary portion of the study, which began approximately 1 week after questionnaires were distributed. Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: (a) inspiration, (b) baseline, and (c) activated PA. Participants in all conditions were asked to complete a Web-based diary before going to sleep each night for 14 consecutive nights. Collecting data via the Web permitted an objective assessment of whether diaries were completed on time, as recommended by Reis and Gable (2000). Consistent with our previous study (Thrash & Elliot, 2003), diaries submitted after 5:00 a.m. were considered late and not analyzed.

In the baseline condition, the nightly diary asked participants to recall the one experience in the previous 24 hr that was most representative of their day overall, and the items concerned this representative experience. In the inspiration condition, participants were given the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition of *inspiration* used in Study 2 and were asked whether they had experienced inspiration in the previous 24 hr. If they had, they were asked to complete all questions with respect to their inspiration experience. Otherwise, they were asked to complete the questions with respect to the most representative experience of that day. The activated PA condition was identical to the inspiration condition except that activated PA was the target experience and was defined as in Study 2. On completion of the study, participants were asked whether there were any days on which they had answered the questions without reading them.

Participants

A total of 137 undergraduates participated in return for extra credit in a psychology course. Thirty-two of the participants were excluded from the analyses because they admitted to answering questions without reading them on at least 1 day. Data from participants who fail to comply with diary protocols are routinely excluded from analysis in diary research (e.g., Gable et al., 2000; Wood, Quinn, & Kashy, 2002). The sample thus consisted of 105 participants (40 male, 65 female), with 33 (14 male, 19 female) in the baseline condition, 35 (12 male, 23 female) in the inspiration condition, and 37 (14 male, 23 female) in the activated PA condition.

Measures

See Tables 3 and 4 for reliability coefficients of the measures used in this study.

Individual differences. We assessed *openness to aesthetics* using the eight-item Openness to Aesthetics subscale of the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Participants rated the items on a scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). We assessed *absorption* using the Absorption subscale from Tellegen's (1982) Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire. This scale consists of 34

Table 3
Study 3: Descriptive Statistics for the Daily Variables

Variable	M	SD		Reliability
		Level 1	Level 2	
Interest ^a	3.76	0.93	0.62	.74
Motivation strength ^a	3.76	0.95	0.68	.77
Spirituality ^a	2.32	0.94	0.81	.82
Meaning ^a	2.66	0.93	0.79	.82
Self-responsibility appraisals ^a	3.76	1.00	0.49	.62
Other-responsibility appraisals ^a	2.99	1.05	0.54	.64
Presence of target experience ^b	0.49	0.40	0.24	.82
Illumination ^b	2.58	1.02	0.63	.82
Reward salience ^b	2.98	1.20	0.67	.79

Note. "M," "Level 1 SD," and "Level 2 SD" reflect the intercept, standard deviation of r , and standard deviation of U_0 , respectively, in unconditional hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) models in which the listed variable is the dependent variable. Reliability estimates, which may be viewed as the average within-subject reliabilities across days, are reported directly by HLM.

^a Days on which the target experience was absent (inspiration and activated positive affect conditions only) were excluded before descriptive statistics were computed for these variables, as in the state analyses. ^b Data from the baseline condition were excluded (or, in the case of presence of target experience, not available) before descriptive statistics were computed for these variables, as in the antecedent process analyses.

Table 4
Study 3: Descriptive Statistics for the Trait Variables and Varimax Component Loadings

Trait measure	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	α	Loadings (varimax)	
				Component 1	Component 2
Approach temperament variables					
Extraversion	43.08	6.90	.83	.90	.12
Positive emotionality	20.54	3.60	.87	.90	.02
Behavioral activation system	27.96	3.56	.78	.65	.30
Receptive engagement variables					
Openness to aesthetics	28.26	5.88	.84	.01	.76
Absorption	17.93	7.43	.89	.14	.89
Self-forgetfulness	5.36	2.57	.69	.31	.82

Note. Primary loadings are in boldface type.

true–false statements. We assessed *self-forgetfulness* using the Self-Forgetfulness subscale from the Temperament and Character Inventory (Version 9; Cloninger, Przybeck, Svrakic, & Wetzel, 1994), which consists of 11 true–false items. We assessed *Extraversion* using the 12-item scale from the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1992). Items were rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). We assessed *positive emotionality* using Wills, Windle, and Cleary's (1998) 5-item measure. Items were rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*very true*). We assessed *BAS* using the 9 items from the Reward Responsiveness and Drive subscales of Carver and White's (1994) measure. Items were rated on a scale that ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). Evidence of reliability and validity of each of these measures is provided in the articles and manuals cited above.

Daily measures. As described above, participants in the inspiration and activated PA conditions responded to an item concerning the presence of the target experience: "Would you say that you experienced [inspiration/positive affectivity] in the past 24 hours?" Response options were "No, I did not experience [inspiration/positive affectivity]" and "Yes, I did experience [inspiration/positive affectivity]." This item was coded 0 (no) or 1 (yes). Motivation strength, self-responsibility, and other-responsibility were assessed with the measures used in Study 2. Interest, spirituality, meaning, illumination, and reward salience were assessed with the items from Study 2 that demonstrated the highest mean item–total correlations across conditions. These items are as follows: interest, "attentive"; spirituality, "To what extent did you experience sacredness or deep meaning in existence?"; meaning, "I felt a sense of deeper purpose in my life"; illumination, "[My experience was triggered by. . .] having my eyes opened to something new, better, or more important"; reward salience, "[My experience was triggered by. . .] the possibility of getting something I wanted." These variables were all rated from 1 to 5 using the same anchors as in Study 2.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

The median number of days that diaries were submitted on time was 10 ($M = 10.25$, $SD = 2.83$). On average across individuals, inspiration occurred on 34% of days, and activated PA occurred on 63% of days. Four participants in the inspiration condition did not experience inspiration during the study; these participants were

excluded from the state analyses and the ancillary analyses presented below. Descriptive statistics for the daily variables are reported in Table 3.

The State of Inspiration Versus Baseline Experience and Activated PA

We conducted all analyses involving daily data using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002) with the program HLM 5.04 (Raudenbush, Bryk, & Congdon, 2000). HLM can accommodate the multilevel structure of the data (i.e., days nested within persons) as well as missing data for some individuals on some days. Analyses involving dichotomous outcome variables were conducted using HLM's estimation procedure for Bernoulli distributions.⁴ Predictors were not centered unless otherwise indicated.

In the first set of analyses, we aimed to replicate the state results of Studies 1 and 2. Data from days on which the target experience was absent (inspiration and activated PA conditions only) were excluded. The following HLM model was run for each state dependent variable:

$$\text{Level 1: State variable}_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + r_{ij};$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(D_1) + \gamma_{02}(D_2) + u_{0j}.$$

In this model, the Level 1 intercepts, β_{0j} , represent each individual j 's mean level of the dependent variable across occurrences of the target experience. The Level 2 equation predicts each β_{0j} from two dummy coded variables that represent condition as follows: inspiration, $D_1 = 0$, $D_2 = 0$; baseline, $D_1 = -1$, $D_2 = 0$; activated PA, $D_1 = 0$, $D_2 = -1$. When used as simultaneous predictors, D_1 represents a contrast between the inspiration and baseline conditions, and D_2 represents a contrast between the inspiration and activated PA conditions (see Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Preliminary analyses indicated that female participants reported higher levels of spirituality and meaning.

The primary results are shown in Table 5. Compared with baseline (γ_{01}), inspiration was found to involve an enhancement of both motivation-relevant variables (interest, motivation strength) and both transcendence-relevant variables (spirituality, meaning). The inspiration and baseline conditions did not differ in either of the responsibility-relevant variables (self- and other-responsibility appraisals). These findings are fully consistent with those of Study 1.

In comparing inspiration to activated PA (γ_{02}), null effects were documented for both motivation-relevant variables, whereas inspiration involved enhanced levels of both transcendence-relevant variables. Other-responsibility appraisals were higher in the inspiration condition, and self-responsibility appraisals were nonsignifi-

⁴ In such cases HLM transforms the predicted value using the logit (log-odds) transformation, $\ln [P / (1 - P)]$, where P is the predicted probability of the dependent variable equaling 1 (occurrence) rather than 0 (nonoccurrence). Slopes reported in the text refer to expected changes in the log of the odds of occurrence, given a one-unit increase in the independent variable while controlling other predictors. Slopes may be converted to odds ratios using the following equation: odds ratio = e^B (see Thrash, in press, for details concerning the interpretation of parameters in logit models).

Table 5
Study 3: Hierarchical Linear Modeling Results Contrasting the State of Inspiration With Baseline and Activated Positive Affect (PA)

Dependent variable	Inspiration versus baseline			Inspiration versus activated PA		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>
Motivation						
Interest	0.44	0.16	2.69**	-0.27	0.16	-1.72
Motivation strength	0.79	0.15	5.25***	0.06	0.17	0.37
Transcendence						
Spirituality	0.91	0.19	4.81***	0.59	0.22	2.70**
Meaning	1.17	0.16	7.54***	0.72	0.19	3.87***
Responsibility (evocation)						
Self-responsibility appraisals	0.00	0.15	-0.03	-0.13	0.16	-0.78
Other-responsibility appraisals	0.28	0.18	1.58	0.38	0.18	2.10*

Note. Positive *t* values indicate that the inspiration mean is greater. Degrees of freedom vary from 97 to 98.
 * *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

cantly lower. These findings, aside from the nonsignificant result for self-responsibility appraisals, are fully consistent with the results of Study 2. Overall, these findings are highly consistent with those of Studies 1 and 2 despite the use of a very different methodology.

Antecedent Processes

Principal-components analysis of the trait measures. Descriptive statistics for the trait measures are reported in Table 4. As expected, a principal-components analysis yielded two components, according to both a scree test and the Kaiser criterion (the first three eigenvalues were 2.83, 1.45, and 0.63). The first two components accounted for 47.2% and 24.1% of the total variance prior to rotation and 35.7% and 35.6% following varimax rotation. Varimax loadings are shown in Table 4. Extraversion, positive emotionality, and BAS loaded on the first component (Approach Temperament), and openness to aesthetics, absorption, and self-forgetfulness loaded on the second component (Receptive Engagement). For the following analyses, variables representing these two higher order constructs were created by summing the *z* scores of the variables loading on each factor. These composite variables were positively correlated (*r* = .33, *p* < .001).

Distal antecedents. We used the following model to examine the hypothesis that the receptive engagement and approach temperament variables are both differentially predictive of the frequency of inspiration and activated PA (data from the baseline condition were excluded):

$$\text{Level 1: Presence of target experience}_{ij} = \beta_{0j};$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{RE}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{AT}) + \gamma_{03}(\text{Condition}) + \gamma_{04}(\text{RE} \times \text{Condition}) + \gamma_{05}(\text{AT} \times \text{Condition}) + u_{0j},$$

where RE = receptive engagement and AT = approach temperament. Condition was dummy coded as follows: inspiration = 1, activated PA = 0. Of particular interest are the parameters γ_{04} and γ_{05} , which represent interactions between condition and the two trait variables. Receptive engagement interacted with condition (γ_{04}), *B* = 0.20, *t*(66) = 1.96, *p* = .05, indicating that receptive engagement was a more positive predictor of inspiration (*B* =

0.18) than activated PA (*B* = -0.02). Approach temperament interacted with condition (γ_{05}), *B* = -0.19, *t*(66) = -2.31, *p* < .05, indicating that approach temperament was a more positive predictor of activated PA (*B* = 0.09) than inspiration (*B* = -0.10).

Next, we examined the mediational processes that account for these differential trait effects. The hypothesized model is a case of multilevel mediated moderation, which combines the logic of mediated moderation (Wegener & Fabrigar, 2000) and multilevel mediation (Krull & MacKinnon, 2001). *Mediated moderation* (the first type described by Wegener & Fabrigar, 2000) is present when an interaction between two independent variables, *IV*₁ and *IV*₂, is attributable to the fact that *IV*₁ causes *M* (the mediator), which is the variable that directly interacts with *IV*₂. We aimed to demonstrate that the observed Trait × Condition interactions are attributable to the fact that the traits predict triggering events, which proximally interact with condition. *Multilevel mediation* refers to a mediational model that includes variables at more than one level of analysis. We examined a 2 → 1 → 1 model (Krull & MacKinnon, 2001) in which the independent variables (traits) are Level 2 variables and the mediators (triggering events) and outcome variable (presence of the target experience) are Level 1 variables. We used grand-mean centering for mediator variables, rather than group-mean centering (which would discard between-subjects variance, making cross-level mediation impossible), or no centering (which would lead to interpretational and convergence problems; Nezlek, 2001).

Distal links of the mediational model. We examined the distal links of the mediational model using the following model:

$$\text{Level 1: Triggering event}_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + r;$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{RE}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{AT}) + u_{0j},$$

where *triggering event* refers to illumination or reward salience. In the model predicting illumination, receptive engagement was found to be a significant predictor (γ_{01}), *B* = 0.08, *t*(69) = 2.48, *p* < .05, whereas approach temperament had a null effect. A follow-up analysis revealed that the effect of receptive engagement was not moderated by condition. In the model predicting reward salience, approach temperament was found to be a significant predictor (γ_{02}), *B* = 0.10, *t*(69) = 3.35, *p* < .01, whereas receptive

engagement had a null effect. A follow-up analysis revealed that the effect of approach temperament was not moderated by condition.

Proximal links of the mediational model. We used the following model to examine the proximal links of the mediational model while controlling the distal antecedents:

Level 1: Presence of target experience_{ij}

$$= \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(\text{illumination}) + \beta_{2j}(\text{reward salience});$$

Level 2: $\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{RE}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{AT}) + \gamma_{03}(\text{condition})$

$$+ \gamma_{04}(\text{RE} \times \text{Condition}) + \gamma_{05}(\text{AT} \times \text{Condition}) + u_{0j};$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11}(\text{Condition}) + u_{1j},$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20} + \gamma_{21}(\text{Condition}) + u_{2j}.$$

Of particular interest are the parameters γ_{11} and γ_{21} , which represent the moderating effect of condition on the relationship between the triggering events and presence of the target experience on the same day. Condition was found to moderate the relationship between illumination and the target experience (γ_{11}), $B = 0.34$, $t(70) = 2.45$, $p < .05$, indicating that illumination was a more positive predictor of inspiration ($B = 1.16$) than activated PA ($B = 0.82$). Condition was found to moderate the relationship between reward salience and the target experience (γ_{21}), $B = -0.42$, $t(70) = -4.53$, $p < .001$, indicating that reward salience was a more positive predictor of activated PA ($B = 0.37$) than inspiration ($B = -0.06$). Results were essentially identical if all predictors in the equation for β_{0j} were also included in the equations for β_{1j} and β_{2j} .

With the proximal interaction effects in the model, the distal interaction effects were no longer significant. The Receptive Engagement \times Condition effect (γ_{04}) decreased from $B = 0.20$ to $B = 0.11$ (*ns*), and the Approach Temperament \times Condition effect (γ_{05}) decreased from $B = -0.19$ to $B = -0.07$ (*ns*). MacKinnon, Lockwood, Hoffman, West, and Sheets's (2002) z' test indicated that the indirect effect from receptive engagement to illumination and from Illumination \times Condition to the presence of the target experience was significant ($z' = 1.75$, $p < .01$). Likewise, the z' test indicated that the indirect effect from approach temperament to reward salience and from Reward Salience \times Condition to the presence of the target experience was significant ($z' = -2.75$, $p < .01$).

Ancillary Analyses: Antecedents of State Variables in the Inspiration Condition

For exploratory purposes, we examined the role of receptive engagement and approach temperament as antecedents of each state variable during inspiration (i.e., inspiration condition only and excluding days in which inspiration was not present). The model was as follows:

$$\text{Level 1: State variable}_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + r;$$

$$\text{Level 2: } \beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(\text{RE}) + \gamma_{02}(\text{AT}) + u_{0j}.$$

Receptive engagement predicted spirituality, $B = 0.23$, $t(28) = 4.69$, $p < .001$, and meaning, $B = 0.11$, $t(28) = 2.51$, $p < .05$.

Thus, receptive engagement not only predisposes one to become inspired but also predicts a sense of transcendence while inspired. Approach temperament predicted motivation strength, $B = 0.09$, $t(28) = 2.16$, $p < .05$. Although approach temperament does not predispose one to become inspired, it appears to amplify motivation once inspired.

General Discussion

Our first aim in this research was to validate our conceptualization of inspiration at the state level of analysis. We demonstrated that inspiration differs from both baseline and activated PA in a manner consistent with our conceptualization. With one noteworthy exception (discussed below), our hypotheses received strong support: Relative to baseline, inspiration involved greater transcendence and approach motivation and lesser responsibility; relative to activated PA, inspiration involved greater transcendence, comparable approach motivation, and lesser responsibility. These findings were robust, whether examining memorable (Studies 1–2) or daily (Study 3) experiences, whether using a within-subject (Studies 1–2) or between-subjects (Study 3) design, and whether using direct (Studies 1–3) or indirect (Studies 1–2) measures. These findings attest to the generalizability of our conceptualization across reference states and methodologies.

The noteworthy exception was that inspiration did not differ from baseline on direct self-report measures of responsibility (Studies 1 and 3), although a difference did emerge on indirect measures (Study 1). Individuals may be reluctant to knowingly deny responsibility for a positive experience such as inspiration, particularly in American society, where agency is highly valued. In retrospect, it appears that baseline experience is not an optimal comparison condition for demonstrating a denial of responsibility, because the baseline–inspiration distinction is confounded with the absence–presence of approach motivation, which relates positively to responsibility (see Figure 1). It is important to note that explicit responsibility ascriptions unambiguously distinguished inspiration from a comparable appetitive motivational state, activated PA.

The second aim of this research was to examine the “by” and “to” components of inspiration. In a CFA, items focused on being inspired by and being inspired to were found to converge as indicators of a higher order Inspiration Intensity latent variable. Inspiration Intensity was positively related to Transcendence and Approach Motivation and was unrelated to Responsibility. Thus, much as inspiration experiences, in general, involve above-baseline levels of transcendence and approach motivation without increased ascriptions of responsibility, inspiration experiences that are particularly intense involve particularly high levels of transcendence and approach motivation, without increased ascriptions of responsibility.

Although converging as indicators of Inspiration Intensity, the “by” and “to” components each had unique variance that related differently to other constructs. The unique portion of being inspired by was positively related to Transcendence and negatively related to Responsibility, whereas the unique portion of being inspired to was negatively related to Transcendence and positively related to Responsibility and Approach Motivation. These findings suggest that inspiration represents a juxtaposition of two component processes: (a) being inspired by, which involves transcendence and denial of responsibility on encountering an inspiring

influence (e.g., a role model), and (b) being inspired to, which involves motivation to transmit or extend the inspiring qualities toward a motivational object (e.g., a future self).

The fact that the unique portions of the “by” and “to” components related in opposite directions to Responsibility is consistent with a paradox observed by Bradley (1929): Inspiration “is something which we cannot attribute to ourself, it is given to us, and in it we lose ourself; that is the one aspect. It is something in which we find ourself, and are at last our true self; that is the other aspect” (p. 231). This paradox has implications for self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002). The inspired individual is not self-determined in the sense of being the origin of one’s behavior yet is highly self-determined in the sense of endorsing the experience and gaining volitional control on discovery of the true self. We encourage researchers to consider the possibility that, given imperfect self-knowledge (Thrash & Elliot, 2002), some non-origin experiences such as inspiration may play an important role in facilitating autonomy and self-determination (see also Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

It is noteworthy that we have found consistent evidence for an inverse pairing of transcendence and responsibility. For instance, the “by” component of inspiration involved greater transcendence in conjunction with lesser responsibility, and the “to” component involved lesser transcendence in conjunction with greater responsibility. Such findings speak to the unwilling nature of transcendent experience and, conversely, the boundedness of the act of will. In the context of a Western psychology that emphasizes the yang of agency, control, and active goal striving (e.g., Bandura, 1997; Rotter, 1966), our findings suggest that yang (being inspired to) without yin (being inspired by) is bounded and ill suited to meaning and spirituality. Motivational psychology may benefit from broadening its emphasis beyond agentic striving to include receptivity to the influences that reveal which goals are worth striving for.

The third aim of this research was to demonstrate that inspiration and activated PA have different antecedents. Regarding between-subjects antecedents, Study 3 found that the trait of receptive engagement was a more positive predictor of the frequency of inspiration than of activated PA, whereas approach temperament was a more positive predictor of activated PA. Regarding within-subject antecedents, illumination on a particular day was a more positive predictor of inspiration than of activated PA, whereas reward salience was a more positive predictor of activated PA. We also documented mediation. The reason that individuals higher in receptive engagement were more prone to inspiration than activated PA was that these individuals experienced higher mean levels of illumination, which, on a given day, was more likely to trigger inspiration than activated PA; and the reason that individuals higher in approach temperament were more prone to activated PA than inspiration was that these individuals experienced higher mean levels of reward salience, which, on a given day, was more likely to trigger activated PA than inspiration. Our multilevel mediation analyses address calls for research on the processes through which traits have their effects (e.g., Diener & Scollon, 2002) and, unlike traditional mediation analyses, incorporate the dynamic (within-subject) aspect of personality as it is manifest in daily experience. Furthermore, the antecedent findings document a *double dissociation* between inspiration and activated PA: They show that the antecedents of inspiration are specific to

inspiration rather than applicable to appetitive states more generally, and they show that inspiration cannot be explained by processes implicated in other appetitive states.

These findings elaborate on the portrait of inspiration provided by our core characteristic and component process findings. The fact that inspiration is triggered by illumination rather than reward salience explains why inspiration, particularly its “by” component, is experienced as transcendent and unwilling. Illumination is an epistemic event in which one is awoken to what is important. One cannot awaken oneself to what is important any more than one can awaken oneself from sleep; one is dependent on an evocative stimulus. Reward salience, in contrast, implies personal responsibility as one moves toward one’s goals, as well as gratification (rather than transcendence) of one’s established desires or concerns. The trait antecedent findings help complete our portrait of inspiration. Illumination and inspiration are not grounded in approach temperament, a phylogenetically ancient appetitive system that is sensitive to desired objects; rather, they are grounded in traits related to open and receptive engagement with the stimulus environment. Openness-related traits appear to be of relatively recent phylogenetic origin (Gosling & John, 1999) and permit an unmotivated appreciation of the stimulus environment (Haidt & Keltner, in press; Tellegen, 1981). Our findings demonstrate that reward-based models of approach motivation (e.g., Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Watson et al., 1999) provide an incomplete account of approach motivation in humans. What makes an object inspiring appears to be its perceived intrinsic value and not its reward value or attainability per se.

In Study 3, we found that receptive engagement predicts not only the tendency to become inspired but also transcendence while inspired, suggesting that receptive engagement plays a central role in being inspired by. Approach temperament did not predict the tendency to become inspired, but it did predict motivation strength while inspired, suggesting that approach temperament plays a central role in being inspired to. These findings extend the CFA findings and indicate that the “by” and “to” components have different underlying personality substrates. We propose that inspiration involves a rechanneling of the approach temperament system away from its usual desired objects and toward the pursuit of higher goods illuminated through a more recently evolved capacity for intrinsic valuation. Our position may be contrasted with our earlier view that “many of our loftiest, proactive strivings are rooted in basic, biological inclinations [i.e., approach and avoidance temperament] shared across phylogeny” (Elliot & Thrash, 2002, p. 815). Rather than being rooted in approach temperament, our loftiest strivings appear to be energized by approach temperament but stimulated through and directed by higher cognitive processes. Having discriminated inspiration and activated PA, we may now draw on our rechanneling model to reintegrate these constructs. Activated PA is associated with being inspired to (see Figure 1) and appears to be generated by the approach temperament system to facilitate inspired motivation, much as it facilitates approach motivation more generally.

We further propose that inspiration serves a function distinct from that of activated PA per se. Consistent with previous theorizing (e.g., Watson et al., 1999), we have argued that the function of activated PA is the *acquisition* of (or, more generally, approach toward) desired goal objects. Acquisition solves a fundamental problem: securing the resources, broadly defined, that will satisfy

one's physical needs (e.g., food) or psychological needs (e.g., competence; Elliot & Thrash, 2002; Thrash & Elliot, 2001, 2002). The acquisition function is so central a motivational issue that many theorists appear to identify it with approach motivation or with motivation more generally. Higgins and Kruglanski (2000), for instance, defined *motivation* as "wanting." However, we propose that the evolutionarily ancient acquisition function is not the only function of approach motivation in humans.

We propose that inspiration is a form of approach motivation that serves a different function: *transmission*. From time to time, individuals see or apprehend something deeply important (i.e., illumination). Illumination exerts a press on the individual to express, actualize, or otherwise transmit that which is newly apprehended. In some cases, the transmission is highly automatic, as in the immediate expression of creative insights; in other cases, the transmission is more controlled and requires the translation of the evocative stimulus into an actionable goal, as in the modeling of a future self after a role model. Regardless, inspiration is a striving to express something that one, in a sense, has already acquired epistemologically and wishes to concretize while it is clearly apprehended. Thus, whereas acquisition involves one object, an object of desire, transmission involves two: (a) an illuminating trigger object (e.g., a creative insight or a role model) and (b) a target object toward which the inspiring qualities are extended (e.g., a creative product or possible self). If effectance motivation (White, 1959) is "joy in being a cause" (Groos, 1901), then inspiration is joy in being a mediator.

If acquisition is adaptive because it permits need satisfaction, what is adaptive about transmission? The transmission function may also satisfy needs, particularly higher human longings such as creativity, meaning, and spiritual truth. Many of these goals are valued because they transcend oneself or one's state of knowledge. Direct acquisition is therefore hampered by the fact that one does not know what one is looking for, exactly. As James (1902/1999) noted, "A man's conscious wit and will, so far as they strain towards the ideal, are aiming at something only dimly and inaccurately imagined" (p. 231). Writer's block, emptiness in life, and other states of unfulfillment appear to be failures not of acquisition but of illumination and transmission; these are failures to participate, as mediator, in something beyond oneself (see also Frankl, 1992; Seligman, 2002). Whether or not fulfillment as such is adaptive in the evolutionary sense, the underlying capacity to accommodate to and mediate the transmission of exemplified goods would greatly expand the organism's behavioral repertoire, increasing inclusive fitness relative to the organism that can appraise objects only as sources of direct gratification or threat.

Second, transmission has broader sociocultural implications, in that transcendent knowledge is typically passed between parties. Often transmission involves more than two parties, flowing from a source, to a particularly receptive individual, and finally to the common person. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, inspiration mediates transmission of divine knowledge from God to the prophet and from prophet to the rest of humanity. Plato paraphrased Socrates as stating that the Muse inspires the poet, who in turn inspires his readers, thus forming a chain resembling a series of magnetized objects (Rothenberg & Hausman, 1976). Simonton (1994) noted the importance of admiration and emulation in the rise of eminent individuals, who in turn influence and inspire those who follow. Thus, inspiration is not a terminal or ineffable peak

experience but rather a transmission of the knowledge of higher goods, and such transmission appears to provide much of the moral, aesthetic, and intellectual fabric on which cultures are based.

A limitation of the present research was that we focused on undergraduate samples, and future research should examine the generalizability of our findings to other populations. It will also be important to manipulate evocative stimuli in future research, as some researchers have begun to do (e.g., Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). In a laboratory context, it may be difficult to evoke authentic inspiration experiences that are comparable to those examined in naturalistic studies. However, we hope that this task will be facilitated by our explication of this complex construct.

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Received November 10, 2003

Revision received June 15, 2004

Accepted July 12, 2004 ■