

## The Social Connection Effect of Being Moved and Its Theoretical Explanation

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### Abstract

Being moved is a non-voluntary, instant emotional state triggered by external stimuli. After being moved occurs, it has a social bonding effect, which not only strengthens the connection between the individual and the direct trigger, but also has a broader spillover effect, making the individual's social bonding tendency transcend the specific situation. The shared relationship reinforcement theory and the meaning salience theory respectively explain the bonding effect of being moved from the perspectives of automaticity and cognitive construction: the former emphasizes that being moved originates from evolutionary adaptive mechanisms, promoting social bonding by activating communal sharing relationships; the latter posits that being moved triggers individuals' identification with core values, prompting them to actively seek social connection. Based on reviewing the manifestations of direct bonding and extended bonding of being moved, this paper analyzes the similarities, differences, and intertwined characteristics of the aforementioned two psychological mechanisms, and points out that future research can further deepen the understanding and application of the social functions of being moved from directions such as the extended boundaries of the bonding effect of being moved, the differentiation and integration of theoretical mechanisms, and the moderating role of individual differences.

### Full Text

## The Social Connection Effects of Being Moved and Their Theoretical Explanations

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## Abstract

Being moved is an involuntary and immediate emotional state triggered by external stimuli. Upon its occurrence, it exerts a pronounced social connection effect, strengthening not only individuals' bonds with the direct elicitors but also extending their inclination toward broader social affiliation beyond the immediate context. Communal Sharing Strengthening Theory and Meaning Salience Theory offer two complementary perspectives on the psychological mechanisms underlying this effect: the former emphasizes an evolutionarily adaptive process that promotes social bonds through activation of communal sharing, while the latter highlights cognitive processes whereby the recognition of core values motivates voluntary social connection. This paper reviews the manifestations of both direct and extended connection effects induced by being moved, analyzes the similarities and differences between the two explanatory frameworks, and suggests that future research should further explore the boundary conditions of connection expansion, the distinction and integration of theoretical mechanisms, and the moderating role of individual differences, in order to deepen the understanding and application of the social functions of being moved.

**Keywords:** being moved, social connection, attachment, communal sharing relationships

Being moved arises from external stimuli acting upon subjective experience, representing an involuntary and immediately generated emotional state triggered by highly motivating events such as communal behaviors, moral actions, and aesthetic experiences (Yue Tong et al., 2025; Zickfeld et al., 2020). In academic research, this psychological phenomenon is typically referred to as “being moved” or “being touched,” with some scholars adopting the Sanskrit term “Kama Muta” (meaning “moved by love”) to describe it (Fiske, 2019). It is important to note that when studying this uniquely human psychology, researchers generally conceptualize being moved as an emotional state rather than a prolonged affective experience or mood (Fiske, 2019), and proceed to examine its antecedents, experiential content, and functions.

Currently, researchers largely view being moved as a complex yet distinctive emotion that can be effectively differentiated from other emotions in terms of appraisal patterns, phenomenological feelings, physiological responses, and behavioral consequences (Cova & Deonna, 2014; Fiske et al., 2017; Herting & Schu-

bert, 2022; Zickfeld et al., 2019). This uniqueness manifests in several aspects. Regarding subjective feelings and physiological reactions, being moved exhibits a distinctive pattern of alternating emotional arousal and physiological calmness (Yue Tong et al., 2025). For instance, individuals frequently report experiencing chills during moments of being moved, accompanied by physiological responses such as goosebumps and increased heart rate, reflecting heightened sympathetic nervous system activity that represents emotional arousal (Martínez-Molina et al., 2016). Simultaneously, being moved often produces tearfulness and feelings of inner warmth, which are thought to be associated with the parasympathetic nervous system and provide temporary calming effects that facilitate emotion regulation, similar to cathartic functions (Gračanin et al., 2018). In terms of emotional valence, although being moved can be evoked by sad situations (Eerola et al., 2021), it ultimately manifests as a positive subjective state, with reward-related hormonal and neural response patterns (Eerola et al., 2021; Herting & Schubert, 2022; Wassiliwizky et al., 2017), constituting a unique and complex positive emotional state.

In recent years, researchers have begun to focus on the “social connection effect” that being moved demonstrates in social life—namely, its capacity to connect individuals and groups through emotional bonding to strengthen social relationships (Hajnosz, 2024; Petersen & Martin, 2021; Vuoskoski et al., 2022). This social connection effect of being moved has attracted widespread attention across disciplines. For example, the evocation of being moved is not only a goal in rhetoric, aesthetics, religion, and art, but has also become a widely employed communication strategy in media and marketing (Hanich et al., 2014). Numerous artistic works in music, film, and literature attempt to create moving atmospheres to trigger emotional resonance among audiences (Kuehnast et al., 2014; Menninghaus et al., 2015; Seibt et al., 2017). Additionally, being moved has been applied in social advocacy and emotional governance (Ai Juan, 2020). Programs such as “Touching China” have generated widespread social response, profoundly stimulating public resonance with positive emotions and achieving significant persuasive and guiding effects.

In psychological empirical research, scholars have primarily focused on the social connection effects of being moved in promoting prosocial behavior (Ai Juan & Jia Xiyao, 2021; Lyshol et al., 2020), strengthening social bonds (Menninghaus et al., 2015; Lyshol et al., 2020), and enhancing social engagement (Landmann & Rohmann, 2020; Lizarazo-Pereira et al., 2022). In summary, although many researchers have begun to apply this social connection effect to address social issues such as promoting interpersonal relationships, resolving group conflicts, enhancing collective action, and encouraging environmental protection behavior, the underlying psychological mechanisms remain inadequately and unsystematically explored, which significantly hinders the translational application of being moved research. Therefore, this paper will systematically review and summarize existing research findings, examine the specific manifestations of the social connection effect of being moved, further analyze its underlying mechanisms in conjunction with existing theories, and propose future research directions, aim-

ing to provide theoretical reference and inspiration for subsequent research in this field.

## 2 Manifestations of the Social Connection Effect of Being Moved

Existing research on the social connection effect of being moved has primarily focused on connection objects at different levels. To more systematically organize and present these findings, this paper distinguishes two categories of social connection effects: direct connection effects and extended connection effects. Direct connection effects refer to being moved prompting individuals to develop stronger intimacy, belongingness, and trust toward the elicitors themselves (e.g., specific others, groups, or entities). Extended connection effects, conversely, refer to the experience of being moved enabling individuals to transcend the original eliciting context and generalize their connection motivation to broader social objects, such as larger social groups, cultural symbols, or the natural environment.

### 2.1 Direct Social Connection with Elicitors of Being Moved

Following the generation of being moved, the most direct manifestation of its social connection effect is the enhancement of relational closeness with the elicitor. Specifically, individuals may be moved by certain behaviors, traits, or situations of other individuals, groups, or even non-human entities, subsequently strengthening their direct psychological connection with these elicitors.

First, being moved by specific others can effectively enhance subjective feelings of intimacy in interpersonal relationships. For example, Seibt et al. (2019) demonstrated that in U.S. political campaign advertisements, constructing moving narratives around candidates and successfully evoking emotional resonance among supporters could effectively enhance voters' perceived social connection and emotional identification with the candidate, thereby significantly increasing their voting intention. Grüning and Schubert (2022) further found that being moved is closely related to voters' partisan orientation: advertisements matching voters' party affiliation elicited stronger feelings of being moved. When voters experienced being moved while watching political ads, they felt enhanced emotional resonance and connection with the candidate, leading to greater intimacy and increased willingness to vote for the candidate. In more intimate interpersonal contexts, being moved similarly demonstrates the function of strengthening direct relationships. For instance, Alessandrini and Kristyna (2024) conducted semi-structured interviews with clients and counselors, finding that in counseling processes, counselors could effectively evoke clients' feelings of being moved through "small things" (such as making tea, gentle shoulder touches), which triggered profound emotional resonance and strengthened emotional bonds with the counselor. Moreover, the long-term effects of being moved in intimate relationships have received preliminary verification. Recently, Ha-

jnosz (2024) systematically examined the positive impact of being moved on relationship intimacy with others through four experiments. In the first two experiments, researchers induced being moved through touching video clips and found that participants reported stronger feelings of belongingness and more fulfilling relationships with others. In the latter two experiments using romantic partners as participants, results further revealed that the frequency and intensity of being moved experienced by individuals on a given day could predict their perceived partner responsiveness (e.g., feeling understood, cared for) and also influence their partner's perception of being cared for and understood by the participant. This indicates that being moved not only promotes mutual connection and intimacy but also exhibits cross-time and cross-partner transmission effects. In summary, whether in political communication, psychological counseling, or intimate relationship contexts, being moved directly facilitates social connection between individuals and specific others by enhancing feelings of belongingness and intimacy.

Second, the social connection effect of being moved also manifests in enhancing individuals' identification with and belongingness to their groups, thereby strengthening emotional resonance and psychological connection with group members. For example, Landmann and Rohmann (2020) found that when participants were moved by group spirit during environmental protection protests, they developed closer emotional connections with social movements or collective goals, which enhanced their sense of belonging to these groups, boosted collective efficacy, and ultimately motivated individuals to act for shared objectives. Landmann and Naumann (2024) similarly found that when participants in climate protests (such as the "Fridays for Future" movement) were moved by the positive values and collective meaning expressed by the group, their group identity significantly strengthened, subsequently increasing their willingness to participate in future collective action. Landmann and Naumann argued that this emotional pathway not only enhances group identification but also provides more effective emotional motivation for peaceful collective action compared to anger, which often leads to negative consequences such as property damage and violent behavior. Lyshol et al. (2022) further explored how being moved could reduce affective polarization and inter-party distrust between supporters of the two major U.S. political parties (Democrats and Republicans) by strengthening shared group identity. The study found that after American citizens watched videos evoking being moved (such as scenes of Americans uniting and helping each other after natural disasters), participants' identification of Republican and Democratic members as belonging to the same group significantly increased, which in turn enhanced trust and closeness toward political opponents, providing an effective emotional pathway for alleviating political polarization in modern society. In conclusion, being moved at the group level directly promotes individuals' emotional investment in collective goals and social relationships by evoking belongingness, strengthening identification, and enhancing trust, demonstrating its important role in solidifying social connections across different social units.

Finally, the social connection effect of being moved is not limited to interpersonal relationships but also extends to connections between humans and non-human objects. For example, Steinnes et al. (2019) showed that when individuals observed intimate interactions between cute animals or between animals and humans, it not only evoked strong feelings of being moved but also motivated them to establish or deepen emotional connections with animals, thereby promoting the formation of close emotional relationships. Petersen and Martin (2021) asked university students to photograph moments in outdoor activities that moved them and conducted semi-structured interviews about these photos. Participants described emotional experiences such as “being immersed in nature” or “feeling one with nature,” indicating that being moved helps participants feel profound connections with the natural environment by evoking positive emotional responses. Seibt, Zickfeld, and Østby (2023) had participants watch emotionally resonant public service advertisements about the natural environment while recording their physiological responses and self-reported levels of being moved. Results showed that when participants experienced being moved, their emotional identification with nature significantly increased, and they exhibited stronger responsibility and willingness to protect nature, with this emotional connection to the natural environment demonstrating long-term effects. Thus, being moved can similarly evoke emotional identification and intimacy motivation when facing the natural environment and non-human animals, prompting individuals to establish direct social connection experiences that transcend interpersonal boundaries.

Overall, being moved can directly strengthen individuals’ emotional connection experiences across multiple levels of social objects, whether facing specific others, affiliated groups, or natural and non-human entities, consistently demonstrating pronounced social connection effects. This form of connection based on direct emotional resonance constitutes the core dimension of the social function of being moved. However, the social connection evoked by being moved is not limited to the initial context itself but also possesses the potential to transfer and expand to broader social objects.

## 2.2 Extended Effects of Social Connection from Being Moved

Ancient Chinese philosophy proposed concepts such as “being moved leads to connection” and “the benevolent person forms one body with all things in heaven and earth,” suggesting that being moved can produce extensive and deep-level connecting effects. Recent empirical research in psychology has discovered similar phenomena, wherein the social connection generated by being moved is not confined to specific elicitors but can further produce extended effects.

One manifestation of this extended effect is the generalization of social connection evoked by non-human entities to enhanced intimacy in broader interpersonal relationships. For example, Swarbrick et al. (2021) found that when audience members were moved by music or atmosphere at live or virtual concerts, their emotional connection with performers and other audience members

strengthened, thereby promoting increased intimacy and social relationship formation among participants. Building on this, Swarbrick and Vuoskoski (2023) further discovered that different musical works could evoke different emotional responses, with folk music most likely to elicit being moved, and that being moved induced through music would extend to feelings of social connection with others. Specifically, viewers of livestreamed concerts more easily felt connected to the performers, while live audience members more easily felt connected to other audience members. Moreover, being moved by nature also generalizes to strengthened interpersonal relationships. One finding from Petersen and Martin (2021) revealed that when participants reported being moved by natural beauty, their willingness and motivation to connect with others (such as group members) also strengthened. This suggests that nature connection promoted by being moved may serve as an important facilitator of subsequent other-oriented connection, leading Petersen and Martin to argue that this result holds potential therapeutic value for attachment disorders, depression, anxiety, and other psychological problems involving difficulties in establishing and maintaining social connections.

Being moved by interpersonal relationships can further extend to social connections with non-human entities. For instance, Xiong (2018) used an advertisement video telling a story about a father's love and care for his daughter to elicit being moved, concluding with "I love Dad, every child's future deserves every sacrifice" and displaying the MetLife insurance brand. Results showed that participants moved by the advertisement reported stronger self-brand connection (participants indicated their psychological connection to the brand by selecting the degree of overlap between two circles, with greater overlap indicating stronger connection), more positive brand attitudes, and higher word-of-mouth transmission intentions. Furthermore, being moved had significant long-term effects on brand identification, establishing profound and lasting consumer relationships that enhance brand value and market competitiveness. This demonstrates that the social connection effect of being moved triggered by the father-daughter affection extended to a brand consistent with their values, thereby creating stronger brand connection. Recently, Zhou et al. (in press) used two scenarios to elicit being moved (Study 1): one group was asked to recall a moving experience in interpersonal interaction, while the other recalled a nature-related moving experience. Results showed that being moved in either scenario significantly increased participants' willingness to engage in pro-environmental behavior. In a video induction experiment (Study 2), after watching a video with high interpersonal care emotion, participants' scores on the nature connection scale significantly increased, indicating that even when being moved originates from interpersonal relationships, the shared emotion it evokes can extend to human-nature connections.

Research has also confirmed that being moved can break through group barriers, enhance intergroup trust, and promote cooperative behavior, reflecting the richer connotations of the social connection effect of being moved. For example, Lyshol, Pich, and Seibt (2022) conducted a qualitative study and a quantitative

study, finding that when Norwegian immigrants experienced help from Norwegians, established close friendships, or perceived consistency between Norwegian cultural values (such as equality, freedom, inclusiveness) and their own values, the being moved they experienced motivated them to more readily accept Norwegian culture, language, and values, thereby facilitating smoother integration into Norwegian culture as an outgroup and promoting acculturation. Lyshol and Seibt (2020) experimentally investigated the effect of being moved on reducing outgroup bias. Researchers had white American participants watch videos of outgroup members (such as people of color, sexual minorities) displaying empathic behaviors (such as mutual care, support, or expressing love). Results showed that participants successfully induced to feel being moved were more likely to view outgroup members as possessing full humanity, a cognitive shift that significantly improved attitudes toward cross-group relationships. This suggests that future research should further explore the practical functions of being moved in reducing group bias, promoting cross-cultural dialogue, and even enhancing global identity, particularly in contexts of intense social conflict or significant cultural differences.

### 2.3 Summary

In summary, the social connection effect produced by being moved manifests at two levels. First, it demonstrates a direct social connection enhancement effect toward the immediate elicitors of being moved (whether specific individuals, larger groups, or non-human entities), such as increasing intimacy and connection in interpersonal relationships, strengthening group identification and belongingness, and promoting emotional connections between individuals and non-human entities. Second, this effect is not only direct but also characterized by extension—that is, generalizing from the initial elicitors to broader and more universal social connection networks, achieving multidimensional connection effects between people, between people and non-human entities, and between individuals and larger social environments or outgroups. This phenomenon achieves cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary theoretical resonance between empirical research in psychology and traditional philosophical concepts such as “being moved leads to connection” and “the benevolent person forms one body with all things in heaven and earth,” reflecting the deep psychological function of being moved in promoting social connection. What psychological mechanisms underlie this social connection effect of being moved? The next section of this paper will explore this question.

## 3 Theoretical Explanations of the Social Connection Effect of Being Moved

Currently, research has not yet formed a unified explanatory framework for the psychological mechanisms through which being moved produces direct or extended social connection effects. Based on existing research findings, the key to elucidating the psychological mechanisms behind the social connection effect of

being moved lies in understanding the causes and functional significance of being moved itself. Overall, two main theoretical explanatory pathways currently exist. One perspective is Communal Sharing Strengthening Theory, which emphasizes that being moved, similar to attachment mechanisms, has evolutionary adaptive functions that, once activated, generate broad connection tendencies. The other perspective is Meaning Salience Theory, which posits that the generation of being moved is closely related to individuals' perception of meaning and values, prompting them to more deeply understand and identify with certain core values, with the social connection effect being an important manifestation of this meaning-seeking process.

### 3.1 Communal Sharing Strengthening Theory

According to Relational Models Theory, Fiske et al. (1992, 2019) propose that being moved is an emotional response generated when individuals perceive intensification of communal sharing relationships: when individuals personally experience or witness strengthening communal sharing relationships between people (such as lovers embracing, expressing sufficient kindness to strangers), they experience being moved (Fiske et al., 2017). Simultaneously, being moved also evokes individuals' dedication and commitment to communal sharing relationships, prompting them to feel close connections with others, groups, or society and to further invest in creating sharing relationships, manifesting as a social connection effect—a bidirectional promoting relationship (Seibt et al., 2023).

Why, then, does being moved, which originates from strengthened sharing relationships, ultimately promote the formation of social connections? Researchers generally attempt to explain this from an evolutionary psychology perspective, proposing that being moved is a social emotion preserved by natural selection whose core function is to strengthen social connections among humans, particularly enhancing the stability of intimate and sharing relationships (Fiske et al., 2019; Vuoskoski et al., 2022). The evolutionary origin of being moved may be closely related to mother-infant attachment: mothers need to immediately form strong social connections after infants are born to ensure care and protection for the infant and increase offspring survival probability (Steinnes et al., 2019). In this process, emotional experiences that could rapidly activate mother-infant intimate connections would have tremendous evolutionary advantages, and being moved precisely fits this emotional need, thus being preserved and strengthened through evolution (Eerola et al., 2021; Zickfeld et al., 2019). As human society developed, being gradually extended from initial parent-child attachment relationships to broader social contexts, though its core mechanism remains strengthening social sharing relationships (Fiske, 2019; Cullhed, 2020). From the perspective of eliciting situations, factors that can evoke being moved are often closely related to sharing relationships: not only mutual support, care, and selfless behaviors in specific interpersonal relationships (such as kinship, love, friendship) can elicit being moved, but even abstract group interactions

or interactions between individuals and non-human objects can trigger similar emotional experiences (Menninghaus et al., 2015; Clark & Mills, 2011). This supports the evolutionary significance of being moved as a communal sharing strengthening mechanism: by repeatedly activating individuals' communal sharing experiences across different contexts, being moved continuously strengthens intimate connections between individuals and others, thereby providing a stable emotional foundation for human cooperation. In essence, being moved is an “attachment emotion,” and its social connection effect is an evolutionary function, thus manifesting not only as direct connection with elicitors but also as extended social connection.

Existing research supports this hypothesis from two aspects. On one hand, from a physiological mechanism perspective, physiological responses accompanying being moved (such as chest warmth, tearfulness, goosebumps) are highly similar to typical response patterns in attachment and intimate relationships. These physiological mechanisms are believed to be preserved through evolution to strengthen social connections between individuals and promote prosocial behavior (Eerola et al., 2021; Inagaki et al., 2016; Vuoskoski et al., 2022). For example, chest warmth may be related to oxytocin (OT) release, a hormone closely associated with attachment and social connection (Inagaki et al., 2016). Tearfulness may promote social connection by enhancing emotional resonance, while chills may strengthen group cohesion by evoking emotional resonance. Mori and Iwanaga (2021) further proposed that the common tearful response in being moved may correspond to soothing mechanisms in attachment processes, as both are physiologically accompanied by significant decreases in heart rate (HR) and respiratory rate (RR), with the evolutionary logic of these physiological responses being their contribution to establishing and maintaining deep social connections, particularly in intimate relationships among family members.

On the other hand, from the perspective of subjective reports and behavioral measures, most social connection effects produced by being moved are related to individuals' perceived strengthening of communal sharing relationships. Regarding interpersonal connection, Seibt et al. (2019) found that moving political candidate advertisements enhanced voters' emotional connection and support motivation toward the candidate by evoking being moved, an effect mediated by communal sharing perception (e.g., “I felt an incredible bond” ). Vuoskoski et al. (2022) induced being moved through music and found that the level of being moved was highly correlated with sense of connection, manifested as intimate relationships formed between listeners and the music, performers, or other audience members—a typical manifestation of strengthened communal sharing relationships. Regarding group connection, Lyshol et al. (2022) found that being moved evoked by American themes significantly enhanced participants' communal sharing perception (e.g., “I feel closer to America” ), causing supporters of different political parties to begin viewing each other as the same group, manifested as greater warmth, trust, and social intimacy. Lyshol, Pich, and Seibt (2022) found that when Norwegian immigrants recalled help from Norwegians and established close friendships (i.e., strengthened communal sharing

relationships), they experienced being moved, which further prompted them to develop collective identification and integrate into Norwegian society and culture, achieving good group integration effects. Regarding connection with non-human entities, Petersen and Martin (2021) employed communal sharing theory to explain the broad social connection effect when people are moved by nature (such as trees, lakes, or animals), proposing that emotional connections formed with others, nature, artifacts, and even the self are homogeneous.

### 3.2 Meaning Salience Theory

Some researchers argue that the social connection effect of being moved stems not so much from communal sharing relationship strengthening as from individuals pursuing value and meaning through the social connection process—that is, this broad social connection is a manifestation of the meaning salience effect induced by being moved. Specifically, Cova and Deonna (2014) propose that being moved originates from the salience of certain core values in specific situations, triggered by the universal values and deep meanings behind things, such as friendship, unity, peace, health, and beauty. Like awe, being moved is also a self-transcendental emotion that, after generation, can prompt people to further pursue and realize the highlighted deep values and meanings (Cova & Deonna, 2014; Strick & Soolingen, 2018). In this process, establishing social connections with others aligns with most people's value and meaning priorities, thus manifesting in this form.

From the perspective of analyzing the causes of being moved, some studies have found that in certain situations, the meaning salience hypothesis may indeed be more suitable than the communal sharing strengthening hypothesis for explaining the occurrence of being moved. First, if events or situations that can evoke being moved are not based on communal sharing relationships, this would largely support the correctness of the meaning salience explanation. Regarding this point, Landmann et al. (2019) specifically categorized situations in their research and found that although social relationship-related situations most strongly evoked feelings of being moved, events expressing personal achievements (such as building wealth from nothing through struggle) could also trigger being moved. Second, the generation of being moved is influenced by context, with negative situations (such as threats, predicaments, or life's finitude) making individuals more likely to perceive the preciousness and meaning of things or values, thus more easily evoking being moved—something difficult for communal sharing theory to explain. For example, Kato (2024) showed that when individuals become aware of life's finitude, the contrast between limited life and infinite core values makes individuals more likely to perceive the eternity and transcendence of core values, thus more intensely experiencing being moved. Koh et al. (2025) also demonstrated that natural disasters, as negative situations, highlight the preciousness of interpersonal relationships and personal values, causing positive values to be more strongly perceived and appreciated against the backdrop of adversity, thus more easily evoking being moved. Third,

if the meaning salience explanation is more valid, then due to differences in how people examine meaning, the same moving situation should elicit different levels of being moved. Xiong (2018) found similar phenomena, discovering not only that video clips more congruent with participants' personal values evoked stronger being moved, but also that manipulating participants' value rankings through suggestion triggered different levels of being moved, again demonstrating that being moved may be closely related to individuals' perception of the value and meaning of things.

In theoretical explanations of the social connection effect of being moved, the meaning salience perspective has gradually become an important analytical framework. At the interpersonal connection level, Hänninen and Koski-Jännes (2023) analyzed Finnish participants' moving experiences and found that events such as weddings, funerals, or children's growth are moving because individuals perceive social and emotional meaning in them—for example, they can re-examine and confirm the importance of life and kinship, subsequently cherishing connections with family and social groups more deeply and exhibiting increased intimacy with others. At the group identification level, Landmann et al. (2020, 2024) pointed out that people are moved by participating in collective actions such as ecological protection or climate protests because these actions themselves contain positive social meaning and can bring about highly moral social change. This meaning perception enhances people's group identification and collective action willingness. Lyshol and Seibt (2020) also found that the reason being moved after watching sharing behaviors among outgroup members (such as care, support, love) can reduce individuals' bias against outgroups and promote intergroup integration while weakening barriers is that participants, after being moved, more readily perceived outgroup members as more humanized—that is, they sensed human value and meaning. Regarding connection with non-human entities, Xiong (2018) found that when consumers are moved by advertisement plots, they more strongly recognize shared values between themselves and the advertised brand, which enhances their perception of overlap between self-identity and brand identity, thereby increasing psychological intimacy with the brand. Steinnes et al. (2019) also found that when participants observed intimate interactions between cute animals or between cute animals and humans, the being moved evoked made these animals appear “more human”—that is, it eliminated dehumanized cognition, enhanced the value and meaning of life, and subsequently promoted intimate connection and interaction with them. Zhou et al. (in press) also argue that individuals in a moved state tend to anthropomorphize nature, a psychological mechanism that endows nature with deeper social meaning: nature is no longer an external object but a subject with emotions and life like humans, thereby psychologically narrowing the distance with nature.

### 3.3 Comparison of the Two Theoretical Explanations

In summary, existing research has not yet reached a unified conclusion regarding how being moved elicits social connection effects. Currently, two main explanatory pathways exist, with overlapping yet distinct internal mechanisms. On one hand, Communal Sharing Strengthening Theory posits that being moved originates from individuals' perception of intimate interactions and communal sharing relationships, with its evolutionary adaptive function causing this emotion to automatically trigger broad social connections once activated. According to this perspective, being moved is similar to an attachment emotion—a mechanism preserved by natural selection whose automatic characteristics enable individuals to establish not only direct connections with elicitors but also extended connections to larger social groups (Fiske et al., 2019; Seibt et al., 2015). On the other hand, Meaning Salience Theory focuses on individuals' perception of deep meaning and core values in situations. According to this theory, the elicitation of being moved does not depend solely on relationship strengthening but originates from individuals' profound identification with universal values (such as friendship, unity, peace) embodied in situations (Cova & Deonna, 2014). In this process, being moved prompts individuals to reflect on their own life meaning and values and to seek higher-level social connection effects based on this foundation. In other words, under this explanation, the social connection effect more actively manifests as a meaning-seeking and value-confirming process, representing an extension of internal cognitive and emotional experiences (Strick & Soolingen, 2018).

Based on the above analysis, Communal Sharing Strengthening Theory and Meaning Salience Theory are not mutually exclusive mechanisms but can largely complement each other in explaining how being moved elicits social connection effects. Being moved often accompanies perceived strengthening of communal sharing relationships while simultaneously triggering identification with core values and social meaning, with these dual pathways frequently intertwining in actual experience. Therefore, in most natural situations, connection mechanisms based on sharing relationships and identification mechanisms based on meaning-seeking are often difficult to distinguish completely, likely representing different theoretical foci of researchers rather than essential differences in the being moved experience itself. Whether relying on automatic connection processes activated by intimate attachment or meaning construction processes originating from core value perception, both may ultimately manifest as individuals' strengthening of communal sharing relationships and extension of social connections. However, in certain specific contexts, these two pathways may still have theoretically distinguishable characteristics. For example, Landmann et al. (2019) found that in addition to situations based on intimate relationships, experiences centered on personal struggle and achievement could also elicit being moved. This finding provides important inspiration for theoretical testing: if the social connection effect of being moved depends solely on communal sharing relationship strengthening, then being moved evoked by per-

sonal achievement situations should similarly promote increased interpersonal intimacy; conversely, if personal achievement situations primarily activate identification with meaning and values rather than attachment-style connections, then the social connection resulting from being moved should manifest more as value identification-based social belonging rather than specific relationship intimacy. Therefore, future research could manipulate the nature of being moved elicitation situations to further investigate the relative roles and boundary conditions of communal sharing strengthening mechanisms and meaning salience mechanisms in social connection formation, providing more discriminating empirical evidence for theories of the social functions of being moved.

#### 4 Summary and Future Directions

This paper systematically reviews the connection characteristics demonstrated by being moved across different object levels and connection layers, proposing a more hierarchical organizational framework based on existing literature. Being moved can not only rapidly enhance individuals' emotional connections with others in specific intimate interactions but also possess extensibility that transcends initial contexts, promoting broader social belongingness and identification. Regarding its psychological mechanisms, this paper integrates the communal sharing strengthening pathway and the meaning salience pathway, suggesting that the social connection effect of being moved may operate synergistically through two complementary mechanisms—attachment activation and meaning construction—which may present as intertwined or distinguishable across different being moved situations. The communal sharing strengthening mechanism emphasizes being moved as an evolutionarily preserved emotional response that automatically promotes social connection, while the meaning salience mechanism reveals the deep psychological process through which being moved, via core value cognition, triggers self-transcendence and social empathy. Overall, as a social emotion possessing both evolutionary functionality and cultural construction, being moved demonstrates unique and important psychological functions in promoting multiple connections within individual-group-society systems. Although current research has preliminarily outlined the contours of the social connection effect of being moved, numerous critical issues require deeper exploration. Future research can advance theoretical construction and empirical testing in the following directions.

First, future research should examine the externalization characteristics and expansion patterns of social connections elicited by being moved across different social objects and group levels. Most current empirical research has focused on the direct connection effect evoked by being moved—that is, the enhancement of intimacy and belongingness toward specific individuals in the eliciting situation (Seibt et al., 2017; Landmann & Rohmann, 2020). However, the connecting function of being moved is clearly not limited to acquaintances or ingroups; its extensibility enables individuals to exhibit strong connection tendencies and social mobilization willingness when facing groups, symbolic objects (such as

nations, ethnicities, brands), or non-human entities (such as nature, animals) (Zickfeld et al., 2019). Worth further investigation is whether the social connection evoked by being moved possesses generalization and transfer mechanisms—that is, whether being moved can prompt individuals to project emotions from specific objects to similar social members or even abstract groups, thereby enhancing outgroup identification and trust. For example, when individuals are moved by helping behaviors among strangers, will their connection motivation generalize to broader other groups, subsequently reducing bias and promoting cross-group cooperation (Vuoskoski et al., 2022)? Additionally, it is necessary to deeply examine whether being moved not only enhances intimacy within ingroups but can also cross group boundaries to promote broader intergroup trust and cooperation, particularly whether its connection expansion function remains valid in contexts of high cultural heterogeneity or social conflict, and what boundary conditions (such as situational characteristics, individual traits) affect this expansion effect. Further, whether the connection effect of being moved has an immediate yet transient “peak-type” effect, or whether under specific conditions (such as repeated exposure, emotional sedimentation) it can transform into stable social attitudes and identity, is also a question worthy of in-depth verification.

Second, future research should focus on the construction and testing of mechanisms underlying the social connection effect of being moved, particularly regarding the integration and distinction between the “communal sharing strengthening pathway” and the “meaning salience pathway.” Based on existing theories, this paper argues that the social connection effect of being moved is influenced not only by the structural characteristics of eliciting situations (such as the intensity of intimate relationships, the moral nature of situations) but may also activate different connection pathways through individuals’ cognition of core values. However, current empirical research on the activation conditions, interactions, and processes of these pathways remains relatively scarce, and a mature theoretical model has not yet been formed. Therefore, future research could use situational manipulation experiments to compare whether being moved activates the communal sharing pathway and the meaning pathway respectively in different situations such as intimate interaction and moral manifestation, and explore the similarities and differences between the two pathways in connection targets, trust, and behavioral responses. Additionally, research should examine the interaction and intertwining effects between the communal sharing pathway and the meaning pathway. For example, in some situations, is it possible that automatic attachment mechanisms first activate basic connection feelings, which are then completed through perception of core values to achieve deeper social identification? Or do the two pathways have complementary functions or competitive preferences regulated by individual value orientations and cultural backgrounds (Seibt et al., 2017; Vuoskoski et al., 2022)? Finally, the theoretical boundary issues of the dual-pathway model are also worth exploring in depth. For instance, what types of being moved situations cannot be classified into the existing two pathways? Does a third type of connection mechanism exist, such

as social connection in aesthetic experience or collective action (Zickfeld et al., 2019)?

Third, future research needs to systematically investigate the moderating role of individual differences in the connection effect of being moved to reveal “why being moved does not produce the same connection effects in everyone.” Although being moved is generally considered a universal emotional experience, its function in social connection does not present consistently across all individuals. On one hand, some researchers have proposed the stable individual variable “disposition to feel moved” to describe individuals’ tendencies to perceive, experience, and respond to moving situations in daily life, and have developed corresponding measurement tools to assess individual differences in this psychological tendency (Cova et al., 2023; Wu et al., 2024; Zickfeld et al., 2017). Existing research has found that disposition to feel moved not only affects the frequency of being moved elicitation but may also be closely related to the selection of connection objects, identification intensity, and behavioral responses (Zhou et al., in press). Future research could use existing measurement tools to examine the role of disposition to feel moved in predicting other social functions of individuals and its possible psychological mechanisms, thereby further validating and expanding research findings based on state being moved. On the other hand, some individual difference variables closely related to being moved may also influence people’ s performance in social connection effects by moderating the selection of connection pathways. For example, Śmieja et al. (2022) found that individuals with higher loneliness are less easily moved, and the dimension of “trust” plays a mediating role between loneliness and being moved. This finding suggests that individual differences in loneliness levels may further regulate intimacy perception and trust construction in the social connection process by affecting the sensitivity and triggering probability of being moved, thereby leading to differences in the strength of social connection effects. Future research could combine trait measurement, situational manipulation, and multidimensional behavioral indicators to verify the pathway moderating effects of individual difference variables such as disposition to feel moved in the being moved–social connection process.

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