

Dys-Steenbergen, O. & Wright, S. C. (May, 2014). Self-Expansion Improves Cross-Group Interactions and Enhances Self-Growth. Social Psychology Mini-Conference, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C.

Rather than seeing outgroup members as targets of fear, conflict or even tolerance, the Self-Expansion Model proposes that outgroup members might be seen as attractive opportunities for self-growth. The current study utilizes an experimental manipulation to raise (or lower) self-expansion motivation prior to a positive interaction with a stranger from a different ethnic group. The results show that priming high self-expansion motivation leads to higher quality interactions, greater interpersonal closeness, greater feelings of self-growth, and higher feelings of self-efficacy. In addition, these outcomes show a meditational pattern consistent with the predictions of Self-Expansion Theory. These findings point to a potentially valuable tool for improving the quality of cross-group contact experiences and more broadly, they focus attention on the genuinely positive functions that relationships with outgroup members can have for the self.