

Rebecca (Riva) Tukachinsky Forster

Character Engagement and Identification

Abstract: Character identification constitutes one of the most profound narrative experiences, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and motivational dimensions. Although related to other forms of engagement, such as transportation, identification constitutes a unique psychological process. Various audience and narrative characteristics (e.g., reader-character similarity, narrator's point of view) have been hypothesized to facilitate identification. In turn, identification contributes to persuasion and guides audiences' reactions to the narrative overall. Historically, identification has been assessed using post-reading self-report measures. However, as the validity of this approach comes under increased scrutiny, there is a growing interest in alternative operationalizations of identification as a continuous, dynamic process.

Introduction

It stands to reason that character identification has been dubbed “a key to literature” (Bley, 1945, p. 26). A powerful, potentially self-transformative experience, identification has been viewed as an important draw for reading and the key to aesthetic appreciation of literature (Alsup, 2015; Keen, 2011). However, scientific interest in this phenomenon extends well beyond literary studies. Researchers across disciplines from psychology to communication and education strive to gain greater understanding of how and to what effect do people relate to characters. Due to the inter-disciplinary and multi-faceted nature of this body of work, the term “identification” has been used to denote different psychological forms of engagement with characters, resulting in conceptual ambiguity (Tukachinsky & Tokunaga, 2013). Thus, this chapter begins by defining identification relative to other phenomena and examining the dimensions that comprise this experience. Next, the antecedents and possible consequences of identification are discussed. The chapter concludes with a review of methodological considerations and outlines directions for future research.

Ontology of Character Identification

Identification constitutes one of multiple ways in which individuals may become involved with narratives. Oatley (1995; 1999) draws a distinction between engagement with the narrative from the outside versus the inside. In the outside mode of engagement, readers experience the narrative world as invisible and silent spectators, passive, and possibly omnipresent, observers. Alternatively, engagement from inside the narrative occurs through identification with a character. In this process, readers psychologically merge with the character, adopt the character's position within the narrative, and vicariously experience the fictional world through that particular character.

Importantly, both types of involvement can elicit a range of emotional responses. Situated outside the narratives, readers can experience curiosity and suspense. Moreover, they can feel profound sympathy towards the character. This entails: (a) supportive emotions *about* the character's feelings (e. g., pity, liking) and (b) *self-directed* feelings, such as when the reader is distressed by observing the character's tribulations (Keen, 2006; 2010). Conversely, in identification, the audience member psychologically transforms to *become* the character him or herself. In other words, by stepping into the character's shoes the reader feels as if he or she *is* the character (Cohen, 2001).

Kaufman and Libby (2012) stress that identification is not perspective taking but "experience taking." This distinction highlights the different role that the reader's self-concept plays in reading. In *perspective taking* the reader's self-concept is expected to be very active, as the reader imagines him or herself in the other's situation. In sharp contrast, identification (as *experience taking*) involves a temporary suspension of one's own self-concept and assumption of the identity of that character (Slater et al., 2014). In support of this theory, research has demonstrated that, upon exposure to a narrative, individuals' self-concept grows to absorb (at least temporarily) some of the characteristics of the character with whom they have identified. For example, Sestir and Green (2010) demonstrate that in a reaction-time task, readers who identified with the character were slower to respond to attributes of their own self-concept that did not overlap with the attributes of the character.

In its purest form, identification is a state of low self-concept accessibility (Kaufman & Libby, 2012). In other words, as narrative consumers center their attention on the character and project themselves into her or him, their own self-concept becomes temporarily more difficult to retrieve (in a matter of dozens or hundredths of milliseconds). However, the extent of this "self-loss" not only varies between people but also fluctuates over the course of one person's

exposure to a given narrative. In other words, identification is a highly dynamic process. Narrative consumers psychologically function on two simultaneous (zero-sum) levels – both as themselves and as the characters with whom they identify. This experience has been referred to as “dual empathy,” wherein readers alternate between co-experiencing the character’s emotions and feeling self-directed and character-directed emotions (Dill-Shackleford, et al., 2015). As the audience members engage with the narrative, they can shift their position along the continuum ranging from purely observational to fully “merged” with the character. In other words, the readers can experience emotions from within the narrative by identifying with the character, but they can also pull closer to their own self to reflect on these experiences – and then fuse back with the character.

Components of Identification

The experience of “becoming the character” occurs on several levels. Cohen’s (2001) taxonomy differentiates three identification dimensions: (a) cognitive perspective taking, which entails sharing the character’s perception of the events (also referred to as “character transparency”; Bortolussi et al., 2018); (b) emotional perspective taking, which involves co-experiencing the character’s emotional states; (c) and motivational perspective taking, namely, adopting the character’s goals.

Van Krieken et al. (2017) further break down identification into six dimensions, adding to the above-listed factors also (d) spatiotemporal identification – mentally adopting the character’s physical location in time; (e) perceptual identification – mentally representing the scene from that character’s physical perspective; and (f) embodied identification – mentally simulating the actions and motions of the character. Notably, Van Krieken et al.’s moral identification dimensions overlap with Cohen’s motivation-sharing but are defined more broadly to account for sharing the character’s goals, attitudes, values, and morals.

The exact relationships between the different components of identification are not fully understood. Some aspects of identification may be lower-level processes that occur more automatically and more uniformly across audience members. For instance, readers seem to track the movement of characters in fictional space and their mentalizing of the fictional world is tied to the location of the character in it (O’Brien & Albrecht, 1992).

It is also not clear to what extent the different aspects of identification arise simultaneously or facilitate each other. In line with the longstanding affective

vs. cognitive primacy debate in psychology, competing theories can be proposed. For instance, Tan (1995) argues that cognitive identification precedes the emotional response – viewers of a movie first imagine themselves in the character’s circumstances, which, in turn, generates emotions consistent with the character’s affective state. Zillmann (1995), too, suggests that moral judgments of the character’s actions give rise to positive dispositions and empathic responses, implying that cognitive identification (accepting and sharing the character’s moral stance) is a prerequisite for affective identification. Conversely, from a primacy of affect standpoint, emotional components of empathy lead to cognitive processes (Israelashvili & Karniol, 2018). In the case of character identification, narrative consumers may first have an automatic emotional identification with the character elicited by the character’s facial expression. This emotional empathetic response, in turn, can direct the viewer to adopt the character’s goals and way of thinking about the situation.

Identification as a Discrete Form of Engagement

Identification is not only comprised of multiple sub-processes but is also intertwined with other forms of narrative engagement and processing social information. Thus, it is important to understand how identification is both a discrete phenomenon and related to, and potentially enabled by, other psychological processes.

Transportation. Transportation refers to experiencing the narrative from within the narrative, albeit not necessarily from the perspective of any given character. Whereas identification is marked by merging with a particular character, transportation is defined as a “more general absorption in the story world” (Cohen & Tal-Or, 2017 p. 139). Transportation entails (a) allocation of attention to the setting and events occurring in the narrative and the characters that populate it; (b) generation of mental imagery that simulates the narrative reality, and (c) emotional responses to the characters and events portrayed in the story (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2017). Thus, despite being conceptualized as distinct psychological processes (e. g., Bilandzic & Busselle, 2017; Cohen & Tal-Or, 2017; Moyer-Guse, 2008), transportation partially overlaps with identification. Specifically, the empathetic and cognitive perspective taking dimensions of identification also rely on mental simulation; empathy encompasses emotional reactivity; and cognitive and motivational perspective taking are facilitated by attention allocation (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2017). Indeed, empirical evidence demonstrates that the two constructs are consistently and strongly correlated with each other (Tukachinsky & Tokunaga, 2013).

However, it is debatable which of these two interrelated processes occurs first. Some suggest that transportation leads to identification – as individuals transport into the fictional world, they merge with the character. Others argue that identification is the vehicle for transportation – once the readers adopt the character's perspective, they become immersed in that story universe. Alternatively, there is an ongoing interplay between the two experiences. According to this view, some minimal level of mentalization and identification is needed to interpret and process the narrative, which in turn fosters character identification, which then further strengthens transportation (Hoeken & Sinkeldam, 2014).

Theory of Mind (ToM). ToM governs the process of inferring others' internal states. In turn, mentalizing has been hypothesized to facilitate empathetic responses. Studies that identified partially overlapping neural circuits underlying both ToM and empathy concluded that these shared neural networks are recruited in both processes (Powell et al., 2017; Völlm et al., 2006). Following this logic, ToM should constitute a necessary, albeit insufficient, condition for character identification, since only after the emotional states of the character are correctly identified can the narrative consumer co-experience them with the character. While the empathy-ToM (and by extension, identification-ToM) association is intuitively appealing, it has been recently called into question (Jacobs & Willems, 2018) as several studies have found that mentalizing and empathy do not necessarily co-occur (Kanske et al., 2016) and their neural circuits can be teased apart (Preckel et al., 2018).

Self-reflection. Whereas ToM perspective suggests that identifying the character's emotion gives rise to experiencing that emotion (as if mimicking the character's emotional state), the self-reflection identification mechanism offers an alternative explanation. Self-reflection is a two-way process that both fosters identification and provides a feedback loop. According to this theory, empathetic responses to the character's experiences are triggered by the readers' episodic and autobiographic memories. In turn, identification feeds back into the audience member's sense of self. Narrative consumers continuously evaluate the characters, matching their perspective to that of the character and moving both closer and further away from the character in response to specific events or character actions (Bortolussi, et al., 2018). From this perspective, identification is considered as a dynamic process, with audiences constantly shifting their perspective.

Mental Simulation. Mental simulation involves vivid imagination of the narrative world. Generating such rich mental imagery purportedly plays a key role in understanding characters and facilitating transportation (Polichak & Gerrig 2002). Specifically, brain regions associated with scene construction, as well as retrieval of episodic memories used for imagining future events and self-projec-

tion, have been identified as possibly involved in identification (Cheetham et al., 2014).

That is not to say that mental simulation necessarily involves complete, continuous, and “explicit” generation of mental imagery for all readers throughout the entire reading experience. That would be unrealistically time consuming and laborious (Jacob & Willems, 2018). Rather it appears that some still unknown level of mental simulation is involved in identification. Indeed, experiencing empathetic emotional responses slows down the readers’ pace (e. g., László & Cupchik, 1995), raising the possibility that taxing and time-consuming mental simulation fosters greater character identification (Mar et al., 2011). Jacobs and Willems’ (2018) review of the literature leads them to the conclusion that mental simulation is voluntary and varies across readers, depending on their individual preferences. This could, therefore, explain, the varying levels of identification and narrative absorption experienced by audience members, as some but not all narrative consumers opt to engage in mental simulation.

Self-Other Merging. Interpersonal relationships provide opportunities for individuals to expand their self-concept and merge with others with whom they are close (Aron et al., 1991). As in self-other merging, identification enables audience members to share their identity with the character and integrate the protagonist’s characteristics into their own self-concept (Sestir & Green, 2010). However, self-other merging is not synonymous with identification. In fact, research that measured both constructs found that while they are, indeed, correlated ($r = .46$), identification correlates even stronger with transportation ($r = .74$) (Shedlosky-Shoemaker, Costabile, & Arkin, 2014). Moreover, measures of self-other merging with the character and identification with the character operate differently in relation to other variables, such as self-expansion and character evaluation (Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al., 2014). This is perhaps because self-other merging only taps into one of the multiple dimensions of identification.

Neural Networks Underlying Identification

Neural networks involved in character identification can be ascertained from the individual mental processes underlying this experience. These include brain regions involved in the processing of information about other individuals, mentalizing, and empathizing (e. g., neural networks underlying ToM). Additionally, character identification employs regions recruited in processing narrative information. Thus, multiple neural structures are involved. First, the right temporal parietal junction (RTPJ) is involved in mentalizing and the processing of charac-

ters' emotional states (Xu et al., 2005). Further, the dorsomedial prefrontal cortex (dmPFC) is activated in narrative processing and is thought to connect parts of the self and the narrative by allowing the reader to draw from his or her own self-knowledge (e.g., emotional memories) and integrating this information with the story comprehension process (Mason & Just, 2009). Additionally, research has examined individual differences in propensity for identification and physical variations in brain anatomy (Cheetham et al., 2014). Character identification was found to be negatively associated with CT volume, but it was positively associated with the volume of the left hippocampus and the volume of gray matter in the left and right DLPFC. Lateralization to the left hippocampus has been attributed to management of narrative memories as individuals track the character's actions and project themselves into the narrative scene.

Taken together, then, character identification is a profound experience. Although it is conceptualized as a discrete form of engagement, identification is a complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon, and is closely related to other forms of involvement.

Antecedents of Identification

Factors contributing to identification can be roughly divided into individual differences (both trait and state) and narrative- and character-specific variables. First, variables that can explain individual differences in propensity to identify with characters are reviewed, followed by a discussion of text-related variables.

Audience-level Variables

Self-consciousness. To mentally become the character through identification, narrative consumers must temporarily redirect their attention away from their own identity, making it less accessible. Thus, Kaufman and Libby (2012) theorized that the more an individual focuses on his/her own identity, the harder it will be to step into the shoes of the character. In line with this hypothesis, in a series of studies, Kaufman and Libby demonstrated that both trait (chronic self-consciousness) and state self-awareness (self-concept accessibility) impede character identification.

Empathetic Ability. Perspective taking encompasses the ability to infer others' cognitive (beliefs, thoughts) and affective (feelings, emotions) states. This ability, in turn, drives empathetic responses (Healy & Grossman, 2018).

Similarly, perspective taking ability is linked to the extent of mentalizing while reading a narrative (Mak & Willems, 2018). Empathetic individuals are presumably more skilled in perspective taking and thus could be more capable of engagement with characters (Bourg, 1996). Indeed, research shows a correlation between the two constructs. The intensity of emotional responses to a narrative was positively correlated with emotional empathy on the “Balanced Emotional Empathy Scale” (Wallentin et al., 2013). However, there was no such correlation considering responses to the most emotionally intense parts of the story. This suggests that although all of the readers were moved by emotionally intense segments of the narrative, highly empathetic individuals were more reactive in places that did not provoke strong responses in individuals who scored lower on empathy.

Motivation for Self-expansion and Search for Meaning. One of the motivations for engaging in fiction is self-exploration. Media offers a space for experiencing things that one cannot, or would not want to endure in real life – but can safely experiment with vicariously through entertainment narratives (Tan, 2008). In particular, character identification affords an opportunity for playful role-taking, as readers temporarily assume alternative identities and explore various possible selves. In so doing, engagement with characters was hypothesized to expand the boundaries of the narrative consumers’ self-concept (Slater, et al., 2014).

Although theoretically compelling, two empirical studies that examined this hypothesis did not find support for it. Manipulations of both self-depletion and self-affirmation did not lead to changes in identification (Johnson et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2016). However, it is conceivable that these findings stem from the particular choice of stimuli used in those studies. Specifically, self-expansion may require a longer and more in-depth experience with the character than is afforded in experimental studies that use a single exposure to a novel character. Indeed, while Shedlosky-Shoemaker, et al. (2014) found no relationship between self-expansion and identification with a character in a narrative that participants read for the first time, self-other inclusion with a long-term liked character was correlated with the readers’ self-expansion.

Trait Absorption, Narrative Engageability and Transportability. Individuals vary in their propensity to become engrossed in various activities, including in narratives they consume. Individuals with high trait absorption tend to allocate more resources to the message and shift their sense of self (Kuiken, Phillips, et al., 2004). Thus, predictably, trait absorption was found to be positively associated with the intensity of experiencing presence in a virtual reality world (Banos et al., 1999; Wirth et al., 2012). Trait absorption also correlates with openness to new experiences, visual imagery, and motivation to read for insight (e. g., Wild

et al., 1995), all of which are likely to facilitate motivation and the ability to identify with characters.

Another construct that resembles trait absorption is transportability. Transportability is theorized as a trait, or a consistent disposition to become transported into the narrative (e.g., Bilandzic & Busselle, 2008). Since narrative transportation may promote character identification, it is not surprising that the two variables are correlated (e.g., Mazzocco et al., 2010). Recently, Bilandzic et al. (2019) proposed a multidimensional construct – narrative engageability – that is comprised of four factors, including the propensity to identify with characters. Validation of this scale revealed that trait engageability is associated with related constructs (e.g., empathy, suspense), is predictive of state-engagement, and moderates narrative consumers' involvement with a given text.

Narrative/Character-level Variables

It has long been postulated that various narrative devices can be used to facilitate an observational perspective or fusion with the character throughout the reading experience (Oatley, 1999, p. 446). The following section outlines the most commonly examined textual and character-related variables that theoretically elicit identification.

Character Virtue. Building on the notion that affective dispositions are driven by evaluations of the characters (Zillmann, 1995), virtuous and morally sound characters are thought to evoke greater identification. This tendency has been used as a consistently successful manipulation of character identification in a number of experimental studies. In one of the first studies to do so, character virtue was manipulated by providing background information about the character prior to exposure to the narrative. Participants were either told that they were about to watch a movie about a loving and devoted husband or were informed that the movie featured a compulsively adulterous husband (Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010). Although all the participants watched the same video narrative, identification levels varied depending on the background information viewers were privy to. Similar effects of character virtue on identification were found using print stimuli that embedded information about the character's positive or negative traits and behaviors (e.g., honesty, generosity) within the narrative itself (Cohen et al., 2015; Hoeken & Sinkeldam, 2014).

Notably, Brusse et al. (2017) did not find positive or negative character consequences to affect identification. However, presumably, this was because the character's behavior in question (biking under the influence of alcohol vs. avoiding doing so) occurred later in the story after identification had already

been established. As Kaufman and Libby (2012) have shown, a revelation of identification-damaging characteristics of the protagonist later in the narrative is not as detrimental to identification as an early revelation. Thus, disclosures made early in the narrative play a particularly critical role in setting the stage for identification. However, more research is needed into how identification evolves and fluctuates as the narrative unfolds.

How favorable or unfavorable information is revealed can also be important in this impression formation process. Characterization can occur through direct description of traits (e. g., the narrator states that the character is lazy), revealed through dialogue (another character says that the character is lazy), or implied by the actions of the character herself (in the narrative, the character procrastinates during task completion). Some have suggested that impression formation relies more heavily on descriptions of the character's actions than on the character's stated traits (Bortolussi et al., 2018). However, it also has been argued that sometimes narrative consumers may have difficulty inferring character traits from specific behaviors (Keen, 2006; 2010), implying that direct characterizations will be more effective in eliciting identification.

Narrator Perspective. Two related factors can impact readers' mental simulation of the narrative: the perspective of the narrator (i. e., who is telling the story, as is evident from the use of personal pronouns) and the narrator's point of view (i. e., construction of the narrative from that perspective, providing insight into the inner world of characters) (Hartung et al., 2016).

The narrator's point of view is readily manipulated in literary texts but it is less applicable to audiovisual narratives (Oatley, 1999). In fact, Tan (1995) maintained that identification is very limited in the context of film viewing. In his view, cognitive identification (i. e., sharing the character's concerns) is a prerequisite for eliciting emotions that mirror the character's emotions. However, with rare exceptions, events are not depicted from the perspective of a particular character, but rather viewers follow the characters from the perspective of an invisible witness situated within the narrative world. As viewers do not physically share the character's point of view and have limited access into the character's inner mental world, they are likely to experience sympathetic responses (witness emotions, such as pity) without being confined to the protagonist's emotional point of view.

An attempt to manipulate the narrator's perspective in cinema using voice over of either an external narrator or first-person narration by the character herself did not produce the intended effect (Andringa et al., 2001). Contrary to the predictions, intradiegetic (off screen first person) narration did not increase and even hindered identification. Empathetic responses were the strongest when additional background information about the character was provided by an extra-

diegetic (third-person) narrator. These results, however, have to be considered with caution as they may be specific to the narrative employed in the study, particularly since it featured a morally ambiguous character.

Research on written narratives also produced mixed findings. For instance, Chen et al. (2016) did not find evidence that first (vs. third) person point of view provoked more self-referencing during reading. Conversely, De Graaf et al. (2012) reported that manipulation of first person perspective increased character identification. Keen (2006) argues against the crude first/third person manipulation, calling for a more nuanced understanding of the role of point of view in identification. As the argument goes, the richness of the character's inner world can be produced not only through internal monologue quoting the character's thoughts but also through narration in which an omniscient narrator describes the character's inner world in third person. Moreover, readers gain meaningful guidance from the narrator to form dispositions towards characters (Bortolussi et al., 2018). Here, important considerations include assessing the credibility of the narrator (another character or an omniscient narrator) and checking for inconsistencies between what the narrator says about the character and the character's actions. Consonance between these various sources of information is critical for audiences' judgment formation and, ultimately, for developing identification (Keen, 2006).

Richness. Following the notion that access to the character's inner world is critical for understanding the character's perspective, round characters are supposed to be more identification-provoking than flat characters. Moreover, richness of the mental event description facilitates mentalizing (Mak & Willeins, 2018). Nonetheless, it is important to note that even minor and stereotypical characters may elicit identification (Keen, 2010).

Empirical support for the richness hypothesis has been mixed. For example, Tukachinsky et al. (2019) manipulated the extent to which the narrating character divulged his thoughts and emotions. However, these variations did not impact the readers' level of identification with that character. Bortolussi et al. (2018) found that *reducing* the amount of inner-world information about the main character allowed readers to develop stronger cognitive identification with minor characters. These results allude to the possibility that the rich description of the main character's inner world blocked the readers' ability to take the perspective of another character. By reducing cues for main-character identification, without altering the amount of minor-character information, readers were more inclined to side with that character.

The way in which information is conveyed can also moderate its contribution to identification. Bortolussi and Dixon (2003) have found that character transparency (i.e., sharing the character's understanding of the narrative

world) requires making active inferences during reading. When the same information is presented in an explicit way that does not require drawing inferences, character transparency is diminished.

Social Categorization. It is intuitively compelling to assume that character identification is facilitated by similarity between the character and the consumer of the narrative. It is assumed that such similarity shortens the leap that the audiences have to make to place themselves into the character's shoes. Indeed, a meta-analysis revealed a strong and consistent correlation between how similar the audience members see themselves to the character and the intensity of their identification with that character (Tukachinsky & Tokunaga, 2013). Nonetheless, according to another meta-analysis, on average, experimental manipulation of objective character-audience similarity by matching the character's demographic background to that of the media consumer, yielded only a small and insignificant effect (Tukachinsky, 2014). This seemingly surprising finding can be explained in several ways.

First, the gap between the experimental and correlational findings can be due to reverse causality. Conceivably, it is not homophily that drives identification, but the other way around. Once narrative consumers have identified with the character, they tend to note more similarities with that character or simply judge the character to be more similar to themselves. Indeed, some researchers model identification as a predictor of perceived similarity with the character (e. g., So & Nabi, 2013).

Second, Tukachinsky's (2014) meta-analysis found that the effect of similarity manipulation on identification was heterogeneous. Some studies uncovered a significant and sizable contribution of similarity to identification, while many other studies failed to find an effect. Thus, it is possible that the discrepancy in the similarity-identification literature stems from different operationalization of similarity. It is possible that some dimensions of similarity are more consequential in facilitating identification. To test this hypothesis, Cohen et al. (2018) systematically varied character traits that are either central to the readers' self-identity (sex and nationality) or to the narrative (the character's age and city of residence that were particularly central to the narrative used in that study). However, both manipulations failed to elicit identification.

Since Cohen et al.'s (2018) study was not designed to test for interactions between the two factors, perhaps a combination of the two dimensions (centrality to the narrative and to one's self-concept) is driving identification. In other words, the dimension of character-reader similarity should be salient and central to the reader's self and also play an integral role in the narrative to elicit higher identification. This is most likely to be the case in past studies that did uncover a similarity-identification association. When social group membership

and experiences are central to both the self and the narrative, similarity appears to enhance identification. For instance, in correlational studies, viewers' LGBT status fosters identification with gay characters (e.g., Gillig & Murphy, 2016). Similarly, in another experiment, law and medical students tended to report higher identification with a lawyer or a physician than with non-professional characters in the narrative, while humanities students did not exhibit such a deferential identification pattern (Hoeken et al., 2016).

Third, it is possible that similarity plays a role in identification for some individuals or in some circumstances. Various moderators of the similarity-identification link have been explored. For instance, several studies reported that women identify with both male and female characters, whereas men tend to report stronger identification with a male character (e.g., Shedlosky-Shoemaker, et al., 2014). Several studies also provided evidence to suggest that similarity interacts with the narrator's point of view to elicit identification. Kaufman and Libby (2012, Study 4) found that character identification was highest when the protagonist was similar to the reader (a student in the same institution) and the story was narrated from a first-person perspective. Hoeken et al. (2016) also found an interaction between similarity and point of view. While it exhibits an additive effect, point of view did not override the effect of similarity in that study. Although narrator's point of view seems not to trump similarity, it could diminish it to some extent. Tukachinsky et al. (2019) found that healthy readers of a narrative about opioid addiction tended to identify more strongly with the ingroup (healthy) character than with the character struggling with the addiction. However, telling the narrative from the outgroup's perspective did narrow the discrepancy, making individuals more likely to identify with the outgroup character.

Fourth, it is possible that similarity contributes to certain dimensions of identification but not others. For instance, Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al. (2014) found that when participants read a short story about a character that they had no prior familiarity with, the readers' character-self overlap was consistently associated with perceived similarity between the character and their actual (but not ideal) self. However, in the same data set, character-self overlap was not significantly related to identification. This finding highlights the critical differences between various components of the character identification construct. If self-other overlap is a dimension of identification, it is possible that similarity only contributes to this particular sub-component of identification. Thus, the relationship is detectable when this measure is used, but it is not consistently observed when examining the correlation between similarity and global identification (without separating its various dimensions). On a related note, Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al. (2014) suggest that identification is driven in particular not by

actual similarity but the similarity to one's ideal self. This similarity (dubbed wishful identification; Cohen, 2001) presents the character as a "self-guide" and audience members are more likely to expand their self-concept and merge with that character.

Finally, it is critical to consider the importance of other, non-demographic dimensions of similarity. In examining other forms of engagement with media figures, Turner (1993) found that only perceived attitudinal similarity (but not demographic similarity) is correlated with character liking. It is possible, therefore, that attitudes rather than demographics drive the effect of similarity-identification. Indeed, Cohen, et al. (2015) found that students identified more strongly with characters whose stance on political issues they shared. Moreover, identification manipulation only enhanced identification with characters that individuals were already prone to identifying with on the basis of attitudinal similarity (Cohen et al., 2015). Conceivably, character demographic information is used by readers to infer the character's attitudes. When the character's demographic characteristics are informative in this way, identification may align with demographic similarity not because of the demographics per se, but because of the inferred attitudinal similarity. For instance, in Hoeken et al.'s (2016) study, medical and law students may have assumed that they share their narrative-relevant values with the physician/lawyer character more so than they share the values and worldviews of the patient/client characters. That being said, readers still can feel empathy (albeit not as much as other aspects of identification) towards characters they disagree with when the character is virtuous, suggesting potential interactions between various antecedents of identification and different identification components (Cohen et al., 2015). Collectively, these findings warrant more nuanced examination of the role of different identification components, dimensions of similarity, and interactions between variables previously linked to identification.

Other Stylistic Variables. Keen (2006) lists multiple additional narration-style variables that may facilitate identification but have yet to be empirically examined. These include structure (e.g., nested narratives can be harder to comprehend), pace of events, anachronies (event order), use of supposedly more engaging present tense (compared to past tense), and moving beyond first/third narrator perspective to consider second person perspective and plural first person ("we").

In sum, multiple variables have been postulated to facilitate character identification. However, many of these theoretical propositions did not receive consistent empirical support. Even examination of some of the most intuitively appealing theories, such as the notion that reader-character similarity and first-person narration should foster identification, yielded mixed results. This could

be due to the fact that many factors, pertaining both to the audience and the narrative, interact and work in orchestration to produce the effect. Moreover, readers are able to interpret the narratives against the grain. Because characters exist in the readers' imagination as much as they live between the pages of the book, audiences generate idiosyncratic experiences beyond the authors' control (Keen, 2011). This complexity inherent to reading, therefore, renders it more difficult for researchers to isolate the individual contribution of each narrative/reader characteristic without considering the broader context of other, simultaneously operating variables.

Outcomes of Identification

The previous section discussed various antecedents of identification. The following section shifts attention to possible consequences of this experience. Specifically, drawing from several disciplines and theoretical approaches, three outcomes of character identification are examined: emotional reactions to and processing of the narrative, persuasion, and self-transformation.

Narrative Experience. Engagement with characters plays an integral part in processing narratives and generating emotional responses. As viewers align themselves with the characters, they experience anticipatory emotions – fearing negative outcomes and hoping for positive outcomes for the characters they empathize with (Zillmann, 1995). Ultimately, when the positive outcome is achieved, consumers experience joy and relief (Tan, 1995; Zillmann, 1995). In line with this theory, Oliver et al. (2019) found that identification with an anti-hero character in a television drama was associated with greater liking of that character. Similarly, testing the disposition model in the context of morally repulsive characters, Gerrig et al. (2016) found that empathetic responses predicted character liking in one of the two stimuli used in their study. In turn, liking significantly predicted rooting for that character's success.

Whereas Zillmann's disposition theory focuses on evaluation of character outcomes from a moral perspective, later research has expanded this notion to interpretation more broadly. For instance, Cohen (2002) found that identification with a television character attenuates perception of the text fostering interpretations that are more flattering to the character.

Persuasion and Attitude Change. In communication studies, identification is viewed as a catalyzer of media effects. Building on notions of social learning theory (Bandura, 2001) characters are theorized to serve as models that influence message recipients' attitudes and behaviors through identification. In-

deed, a meta-analysis (Tukachinsky & Tokunaga, 2013) revealed strong and robust effects of character identification on narrative-consistent attitudes and behavioral intentions across various domains spanning political issues (e. g., attitudes towards the death penalty; Slater et al., 2006), intergroup relationships (e. g., stigmatization of sexual minorities; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007), and health practices (e. g., safe sex; Moyer-Guse & Nabi, 2010).

Several theories articulate the mechanisms through which character identification generates these effects (Moyer-Guse, 2008; Slater & Rouner, 2002; Tukachinsky & Tokunaga, 2013). Collectively, they suggest that, through mentalization of the character, audience members adopt that character's cognitive perspective, including the character's attitudes, beliefs, risk assessment, and priorities. For instance, Moyer-Guse and Nabi (2010) found that college students more at-risk for having an unplanned pregnancy identified with a character who accidentally got pregnant. Moreover, in line with the goal contagion theory, identification with the character in a film attenuated viewers' behavior to be consistent with the unattained goals that the character pursued over the course of the narrative (Zhou et al., 2017).

Cognitive identification can also operate in more indirect ways by fostering narrative-consistent elaboration, generating thoughts consistent with the stance of the narrative, and suppressing counterarguing with the message. In other words, once individuals merge with the character and experience the story through the character's perspective, they no longer critically scrutinize the message and are compelled to accept it. Empirical research found partial support for this notion. As predicted, Moyer-Guse and Nabi (2010) found that identification reduced college students' counter-arguing with the health messages embedded in a video narrative. However, the study did not find identification to hinder reactance to the message. Similarly, Igartua and Vega Casanova (2016) found that identification enhances elaboration, which in turn mediates the effect of identification on narrative-consistent attitudes. Counter-arguing, however, was not negatively related to identification. In fact, identification with one of the main characters had a significant effect in the opposite direction.

Another layer of complexity is added by considering audience members' prior attitudes on an issue, since, as discussed above, similarity, and in particular attitudinal similarity, is likely to foster identification. Cohen et al. (2015) found that readers struggle to merge with noble characters they disagree with. Consequently, when polarized issues are considered, identification merely intensifies preexisting beliefs. These findings point toward the limitations of identification as a vehicle for promoting attitude change.

Expansion of Self. One motivation for engaging with narratives is expansion of one's self-concept (Slater, et al., 2014). It has been theorized that temporarily

taking on the character's identity and vicariously experiencing that character's circumstances will broaden one's own self. However, empirical studies provide mixed support for this hypothesis. On the one hand, readers are faster to recognize character traits and take longer to differentiate between self and character, suggesting that readers expand their "self" to incorporate character-traits (Sestir & Green, 2010). However, self-reported self-character overlap (that can be seen as a facet of identification) was not significantly correlated with self-reported self-expansion (Shedlosky-Shoemaker, et al., 2014). Interestingly, transportation may have been a better predictor of self-expansion. Conceivably, audience members experience self-expansion most not by assuming someone else's identity within the narrative but by bringing their own self-concept into the fictional world and experiencing the self-expanding events as themselves rather than as one of the characters.

Measurement

Measures of character identification are typically holistic, retrospective questionnaires. One such commonly used measure is Cohen's (2001) identification scale (short and revised version: Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010). Although items on the scale correspond to the cognitive, emotional, and motivational dimensions of identification, they are not treated as discrete factors. Rather, responses to all the items are averaged into a single composite identification score. While the relative parsimony and ease of admission of the scale make it widely popular, it has a number of limitations. First, the scale assesses identification globally, at the end of narrative exposure. Thus, it does not provide insight into how identification varies while consuming the narrative, how it evolves over the course of the narrative, and the interplay between identification and other forms of engagement such as transportation and perceived similarity as they feed into each other as the narrative unfolds.

To overcome this temporal limitation, Bortolussi et al. (2018) interrupted readers at different point of the narrative asking them to complete self-report measures. Unsurprisingly, these prompts altered readers' reported cognitive identification at the end of the reading session. Thus, it seems that self-report identification measures cannot be used for online assessment of identification without compromising the measure's validity.

Additionally, the scale is susceptible to self-report biases including social desirability demand characteristics. These artifacts could possibly contribute to some of the above-discussed gender differences, wherein men identify more

strongly with male characters while women identify with characters of both genders. Media research on fear revealed that although men reported lower levels of distress in response to scary media compared to women, these gender differences shrank when physiological markers of fears were used in lieu of self-report measures (in Cantor, 2011). Similarly, physiological measures may offer an insight into the extent to which gender differences in identification result from self-report bias rooted in gender norms.

Alternatives to Self-report Measures. Several identification measures that do not rely on self-report and that can be used online (during the narrative experience) have been proposed. First, eye tracking research suggests that mentalizing activity while reading is associated with increased gaze duration (Mak & Willems, 2018). Second, peripheral physiological measures, including heart-rate variability, electrodermal activity (Wallentin et al., 2013), temperature, and blinking (Kunze et al., 2015), can capture ongoing emotional reactivity and the mental effort involved in mentalizing, thus reflecting ongoing character identification. Van Krieken et al. (2017) propose concrete experimental designs that could confirm the role of various linguistic devices in eliciting identification using these peripheral physiological measures. While promising, it is important to consider the validity of these measures. It is unclear how well they uniquely capture identification, differentiating it from other forms of engagement, overall emotional reactivity (e.g., Nomura et al., 2015), and cognitive load (Potter & Bolls, 2012). Furthermore, research is needed to establish the sensitivity of these measures by demonstrating their ability to discriminate between various levels of identification.

Third, there is growing interest in neural measures of character identification. If narrative consumers co-experience the events from the character's perspective, then their brain activation patterns should mimic the neural patterns that characters would have exhibited (e.g., activation of pain regions while observing the character in pain). Following this logic, EEG measures of empathy (latency of components of event related potentials, ERP) (Coll, 2018) could be a fruitful direction for investigating character identification. Similarly, Van Krieken et al. (2017) see a great promise in fMRI for assessing perceptual, cognitive, emotional, and embodied dimensions of character identification. Moreover, fMRI could be used to demonstrate overall recruitment of neural networks involved in mentalizing activity serving as a marker of identification. While more complex and costly than self-report measures, such physiological measures have the potential to offer online and less obtrusive indicators of identification.

Future Directions

Much of the discussion about character identification (including this chapter) cuts across profoundly different narrative consumption experiences, ranging from watching a suspenseful film to reading a poignant short story. However, a more nuanced understanding of the unique nature of identification with characters in various contexts begins to emerge.

One direction for theory development involves identifying potential narrative structure devices that facilitate identification. For example, narratives can follow a suspense, curiosity, or surprise disclosure format (Brewer, 1996). Each of these narrative structures is processed recruiting distinct neural pathways (for review, see Jacobs & Lüdtke, 2017). The next steps in this line of research will offer further theorization and empirical investigation of how these disclosure structures impact identification in the face of what is already known about timing of character information presentation (e. g., Cohen et al., 2015). In a similar vein, emerging research examined the effect of an anachronous narrative timeline on identification (Austin, 2019).

Processing of narratives presented in different formats (e. g., audio-book vs. reading) is fundamentally different (Jacobs & Lüdtke, 2017). The various modalities provide entirely different sensory input, which is processed using different neural structures and requires varying levels of mental simulation. Considering these differences, several attempts have been made to theorize and test differences in experiencing transportation (Green, 2008) and emotional involvement (Walter et al., 2017) in the consumption of written and audio-visual texts. However, further research is needed to shed additional light on how identification varies across narrative presentation modalities. In particular, it is valuable to conceptualize the differences in identification as a function of specific modality features rather than global “medium” differences.

Another important consideration pertains to how narratives are consumed in the contemporary media environment. Particularly noteworthy is the practice of “media marathoning” (also dubbed “binge watching”) wherein media users watch multiple episodes of television narratives that traditionally would have been consumed in weekly increments. Although this construct is typically studied in the context of audio-visual narratives (film and television), individuals can also “binge read” books or stretch the reading experience over time. The spaced-out narrative consumption mode allows readers and viewers to spend more “offline” time with the characters by reflecting on the narrative in between the media consumption sessions. However, this mode of narrative consumption potentially dilutes the narrative experience due to multiple withdrawals from

and re-entries into the character's fictional world. In contrast, it has been postulated that condensed narrative consumption experiences afforded by “binging”/“marathoning” may foster more intense and immersive experiences leading to variations in identification and transportation. Correlational data does not consistently find support for this line of reasoning in the case of character identification with television drama and comedy (Tukachinsky & Eyal, 2018). However, further experimental research is needed to further understand the potential of modes of media consumption.

Finally, the social context of consumption of audio-visual narratives (i.e., co-viewing) has recently received attention, underscoring how others' reactions (or even mere presence) may shift viewers' engagement and emotional responses to characters. Recent empirical research documented the effects of co-viewing on identification and its subsequent consequences for persuasion outcomes (Tal-Or, 2016; Tal-Or & Tsfaty, 2018), leading to first steps towards articulating the theoretical mechanisms underlying these effects (Tal-Or, 2019). These emerging efforts call for further investigation and deeper understanding of character identification within the broader social context of narrative consumption.

References

- Alsup, J. (2015). *A case for teaching literature in the secondary school*. Routledge.
- Andringa, E., van Horssen, P., Jacobs, A., & Tan, E. (2001). Point of view and viewer empathy in film. In W. van Peer & S. Chatman (Eds.), *New perspectives on narrative perspective*, (pp. 133–157), SUNY Press.
- Aron, A., Aron, E. N., Tudor, M., & Nelson, G. (1991). Close relationships as including other in the self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60(2), 241–253.
- Austin, S. (2019). *Time-travel and empathy: An analysis of how anachronous narrative structures affect character/reader empathy*. Unpublished MA Thesis, Stockholm University. <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1325220&dswid=-6223>
- Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory of mass communication. *Media Psychology*, 3(3), 265–299. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532785XMEP0303_03
- Banos, R., Botella, C., García-Palacios, A., Villa, H., Perpiñá, C., & Gallardo, M. (1999). Psychological variables and reality judgment in virtual environments: The roles of absorption and dissociation. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 2(2), 143–148. <http://doi.org/10.1089/cpb.1999.2.143>
- Bilandzic, H., & Busselle, R. W. (2008). Transportation and transportability in the cultivation of genre-consistent attitudes and estimates. *Journal of Communication*, 58(3), 508–529. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.00397.x>

- Bilandzic, H., & Busselle, R. W. (2017). Beyond metaphors and traditions: Exploring the conceptual boundaries of narrative engagement. In F. Hakemulder, M. M. Kuijpers, S. Tan, K. Bálint & M. M. Doicaru (Eds.), *Narrative absorption*, (pp. 11–28). Benjamins.
- Bley, E. S. (1945). Identification: A key to literature. *The English Journal*, 34(1), 26–32.
- Bortolussi, M., & Dixon, P. (2003). *Psychonarratology*. Cambridge UP.
- Bortolussi, M., Dixon, P., & Linden, C. (2018). Putting perspective taking in perspective. *Review of General Psychology*, 22(2), 178–187. <https://doi.org/10.1037/gpr0000131>
- Bourg, T. (1996). The role of emotion, empathy, and text structure in children's and adults' narrative text comprehension. In R. J. Kreuz & M. S. MacNealy (Eds.), *Advances in discourse processes*, Vol. 52. *Empirical approaches to literature and aesthetics* (pp. 241–260). Ablex Publishing.
- Brewer, W. (1996). The nature of narrative suspense and the problem of rereading. In P. Vorderer, H. Wulff, & M. Friedrichsen, (Eds.), *Suspense. Conceptualizations, theoretical analyses, and empirical explorations* (pp. 107–128). Erlbaum.
- Brusse, E. D. A., Fransen, M. L., & Smit, E. G. (2017). Framing in entertainment-education: Effects on processes of narrative persuasion. *Health Communication*, 32(12), 1501–1509. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2016.1234536>
- Cantor, J. (2012). The media and children's fears, anxieties, and perceptions of danger. In D. G. Singer & J. L. Singer (Eds.), *Handbook of children and the media* (pp. 215–229). Sage.
- Chen, M., Bell, R. A., & Taylor, L. D. (2016). Narrator point of view and persuasion in health narratives: The role of protagonist-reader similarity, identification, and self-referencing. *Journal of Health Communication*, 21(8), 908–918. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2016.1177147>
- Cheetham, M., Hänggi, J., & Jancke, L. (2014). Identifying with fictive characters: Structural brain correlates of the personality trait 'fantasy'. *Social cognitive and affective neuroscience*, 9(11), 1836–1844. <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nst179>
- Cohen, J. (2001). Defining identification: A theoretical look at the identification of audiences with media characters. *Mass Communication & Society*, 4(3), 245–264. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0403_01
- Cohen, J. (2002). Deconstructing ally: Explaining viewers' interpretations of popular television. *Media Psychology*, 4(3), 253–277. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532785XMEP0403_03
- Cohen, J., & Tal-Or, N., (2017). Antecedents of identification. In F. Hakemulder, M. M. Kuijpers, S. Tan, K. Bálint, & M. M. Doicaru (Eds.), *Narrative absorption*, (pp. 133–155). Benjamins.
- Cohen, J., Tal-Or, N., & Mazor-Tregerman, M. (2015). The tempering effect of transportation: Exploring the effects of transportation and identification during exposure to controversial two-sided narratives. *Journal of Communication*, 65(2), 237–258. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12144>
- Cohen, J., Weimann-Saks, D., & Mazor-Tregerman, M. (2018). Does character similarity increase identification and persuasion? *Media Psychology*, 21(3), 506–528. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2017.1302344>
- Coll, M. P. (2018). Meta-analysis of ERP investigations of pain empathy underlines methodological issues in ERP research. *Social cognitive and affective neuroscience*, 13(10), 1003–1017. <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsy072>
- De Graaf, A., Hoeken, H., Sanders, J., & Beentjes, J. W. (2012). Identification as a mechanism of narrative persuasion. *Communication Research*, 39(6), 802–823. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650211408594>

- Dill-Shackleford, K. E., Hopper-Losenicky, K., Vinney, C., Swain, L. F., & Hogg, J. L. (2015). Mad Men fans speak via social media: What fan voices reveal about the social construction of reality via dramatic fiction. *The Journal of Fandom Studies*, 3(2), 151–170. https://doi.org/10.1386/jfs.3.2.151_1
- Gillig, T., & Murphy, S. (2016). Fostering support for LGBTQ youth? The effects of a gay adolescent media portrayal on young viewers. *International Journal of Communication*, 10, 3828–3850.
- Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2000). The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79(5), 701–721. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.5.701>
- Green, M. C., Kass, S., Carrey, J., Herzig, B., Feeney, R., & Sabini, J. (2008). Transportation across media: Repeated exposure to print and film. *Media Psychology*, 11(4), 512–539. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213260802492000>
- Healey, M. L., & Grossman, M. (2018). Cognitive and affective perspective-taking: Evidence for shared and dissociable anatomical substrates. *Frontiers in neurology*, 9, 491. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fneur.2018.00491>
- Hartung, F., Burke, M., Hagoort, P., & Willems, R. M. (2016). Taking perspective: Personal pronouns affect experiential aspects of literary reading. *PloS one*, 11(5), e0154732. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0154732>
- Hoeken, H., & Sinkeldam, J. (2014). The role of identification and perception of just outcome in evoking emotions in narrative persuasion. *Journal of Communication*, 64(5), 935–955. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12114>
- Hoeken, H., Kolthoff, M., & Sanders, J. (2016). Story perspective and character similarity as drivers of identification and narrative persuasion. *Human Communication Research*, 42(2), 292–311. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hcre.12076>
- Igartua, J. J., & Vega Casanova, J. (2016). Identification with characters, elaboration, and counterarguing in entertainment-education interventions through audiovisual fiction. *Journal of Health Communication*, 21(3), 293–300. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10810730.2015.1064494>
- Israelashvili, J., & Karniol, R. (2018). Testing alternative models of dispositional empathy: The Affect-to-Cognition (ACM) versus the Cognition-to-Affect (CAM) model. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 121, 161–169. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2017.09.036>
- Jacobs, A. M., & Lüdtke, J. (2017). Immersion into narrative and poetic worlds. In F. Hakemulder, M. M. Kuijpers, S. Tan, K. Bálint & M. M. Doicaru (Eds.), *Narrative absorption*, (pp. 49–68). Benjamins.
- Johnson, B. K., Ewoldsen, D. R., & Slater, M. D. (2015). Self-control depletion and narrative: Testing a prediction of the TEBOTS model. *Media Psychology*, 18(2), 196–220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2014.978872>
- Johnson, B. K., Slater, M. D., Silver, N. A., & Ewoldsen, D. R. (2016). Entertainment and expanding boundaries of the self: Relief from the constraints of the everyday. *Journal of Communication*, 66(3), 386–408. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12228>
- Kanske, P., Böckler, A., Trautwein, F. M., Parianen Lesemann, F. H., & Singer, T. (2016). Are strong empathizers better mentalizers? Evidence for independence and interaction between the routes of social cognition. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 11(9), 1383–1392. <https://doi.org/10.1093/scan/nsw052>

- Kaufman, G. F., & Libby, L. K. (2012). Changing beliefs and behavior through experience-taking. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 103(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027525>
- Keen, S. (2006). A theory of narrative empathy. *Narrative*, 14(3), 207–236. <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/narrative/v014/14.3keen.html>
- Keen, S. (2010). *Empathy and the novel*. Oxford UP.
- Keen, S. (2011). Readers' temperaments and fictional character. *New Literary History*, 42(2), 295–314. <https://doi.org/10.1353/nlh.2011.0013>
- Kuiken, D., Miall, D. S., & Sikora, S. (2004). Forms of self-implication in literary reading. *Poetics Today*, 25(2), 171–203. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1215/03335372-25-2-171>
- Kuiken, D., Phillips, L., Gregus, M., Miall, D. S., Verbitsky, M., & Tonkonogy, A. (2004). Locating self-modifying feelings within literary reading. *Discourse Processes*, 38(2), 267–286. https://doi.org/DOI:10.1207/s15326950dp3802_6
- Kunze, K., Sanchez, S., Dingler, T., Augereau, O., Kise, K., Inami, M., & Tsutomu, T. (2015, March). The augmented narrative: toward estimating reader engagement. In *Proceedings of the 6th augmented human international conference* (pp. 163–164). <https://doi.org/10.1145/2735711.2735814>
- Mak, M., & Willems, R. M. (2019). Mental simulation during literary reading: Individual differences revealed with eye-tracking. *Language, Cognition and Neuroscience*, 34(4), 511–535. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23273798.2018.1552007>
- Mar, R. A., Oatley, K., Djikic, M., & Mullin, J. (2011). Emotion and narrative fiction: Interactive influences before, during, and after reading. *Cognition & Emotion*, 25(5), 818–833. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2010.515151>
- Mazzocco, P. J., Green, M. C., Sasota, J. A., & Jones, N. W. (2010). This story is not for everyone: Transportability and narrative persuasion. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 1(4), 361–368. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550610376600>
- Moyer-Gusé, E. (2008). Toward a theory of entertainment persuasion: Explaining the persuasive effects of entertainment-education messages. *Communication Theory*, 18(3), 407–425. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2008.00328.x>
- Moyer-Gusé, E., & Nabi, R. L. (2010). Explaining the effects of narrative in an entertainment television program: Overcoming resistance to persuasion. *Human Communication Research*, 36(1), 26–52. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2009.01367.x>
- Nomura, R., Hino, K., Shimazu, M., Liang, Y., & Okada, T. (2015). Emotionally excited eyeblink-rate variability predicts an experience of transportation into the narrative world. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 447. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00447>
- Oatley, K. (1995). A taxonomy of the emotions of literary response and a theory of identification in fictional narrative. *Poetics*, 23(1-2), 53–74. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X\(94\)P4296-S](https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X(94)P4296-S)
- Oatley, K. (1999). Meetings of minds: Dialogue, sympathy, and identification, in reading fiction. *Poetics*, 26(5-6), 439–454. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-422X\(99\)00011-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0304-422X(99)00011-X)
- O'Brien, E. J., & Albrecht, J. E. (1992). Comprehension strategies in the development of a mental model. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition*, 18(4), 777–784.
- Oliver, M. B., Bilandzic, H., Cohen, J., Ferchaud, A., Shade, D. D., Bailey, E. J., & Yang, C. (2019). A penchant for the immoral: implications of parasocial interaction, perceived complicity, and identification on liking of anti-heroes. *Human Communication Research*, 45(2), 169–201. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hcr/hqy019>

- Ortiz, M. & Harwood, J. (2007). A social cognitive theory approach to the effects of mediated intergroup contact on intergroup attitudes. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 51(4), 615–631. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838150701626487>
- Potter, R. F., & Bolls, P. (2012). *Psychophysiological measurement and meaning: Cognitive and emotional processing of media*. Routledge.
- Powell, J. L., Grossi, D., Corcoran, R., Gobet, F., & Garcia-Finana, M. (2017). The neural correlates of theory of mind and their role during empathy and the game of chess: A functional magnetic resonance imaging study. *Neuroscience*, 355, 149–160. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroscience.2017.04.042>
- Preckel, K., Kanske, P., & Singer, T. (2018). On the interaction of social affect and cognition: empathy, compassion and theory of mind. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 19, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2017.07.010>
- Sestir, M., & Green, M. C. (2010). You are who you watch: Identification and transportation effects on temporary self-concept. *Social Influence*, 5(4), 272–288. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15534510.2010.490672>
- Shedlosky-Shoemaker, R., Costabile, K. A., & Arkin, R. M. (2014). Self-expansion through fictional characters. *Self and Identity*, 13(5), 556–578. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15298868.2014.882269>
- Slater, M. D., & Rouner, D. (2002). Entertainment – education and elaboration likelihood: Understanding the processing of narrative persuasion. *Communication Theory*, 12(2), 173–191. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00265.x>
- Slater, M. D., Johnson, B. K., Cohen, J., Comello, M. L. G., & Ewoldsen, D. R. (2014). Temporarily expanding the boundaries of the self: Motivations for entering the story world and implications for narrative effects. *Journal of Communication*, 64(3), 439–455. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12100>
- Slater, M. D., Rouner, D., & Long, M. (2006). Television dramas and support for controversial public policies: Effects and mechanisms. *Journal of Communication*, 56(2), 235–252. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00017.x>
- So, J., & Nabi, R. (2013). Reduction of perceived social distance as an explanation for media's influence on personal risk perceptions: A test of the risk convergence model. *Human Communication Research*, 39(3), 317–338. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hcre.12005>
- Tal-Or, N., & Cohen, J. (2010). Understanding audience involvement: Conceptualizing and manipulating identification and transportation. *Poetics*, 38(4), 402–418. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2010.05.004>
- Tal-Or, N. (2016). How co-viewing affects attitudes: The mediating roles of transportation and identification. *Media Psychology*, 19(3), 381–405. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2015.1082918>
- Tal-Or, N. (2019). The effects of co-viewers on the viewing experience. *Communication Theory*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtz012>
- Tal-Or, N., & Tsfaty, Y. (2018). Does the co-viewing of sexual material affect rape myth acceptance? The role of the co-viewer's reactions and gender. *Communication Research*, 45(4), 577–602. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650215595073>
- Tan, E. S. H. (1995). Film-induced affect as a witness emotion. *Poetics*, 23(1-2), 7–32. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X\(94\)00024-Z](https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X(94)00024-Z)
- Tan, E. S. H. (2008). Entertainment is emotion: The functional architecture of the entertainment experience. *Media Psychology*, 11(1), 28–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213260701853161>

- Tukachinsky, R. (2014). Experimental manipulation of psychological involvement with media. *Methods and Measures in Communication*, 8, 1–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19312458.2013.873777>
- Tukachinsky, R., & Tokunaga, R. S. (2013). The effects of engagement with entertainment. *Communication Yearbook*, 37(1), 287–322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2013.11679153>
- Tukachinsky, R., & Eyal, K. (2018). The psychology of marathon television viewing: Antecedents and viewer involvement. *Mass Communication and Society*, 21(3), 275–295. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2017.1422765>
- Tukachinsky, R., Brogan-Freitas, E., & Urbanovich, T. (2019). Promoting support for public health policies through mediated contact: Can narrator perspective and self-disclosure curb ingroup favoritism? *International Journal of Communication*, 13, 4553–4571.
- Turner, J. R. (1993). Interpersonal and psychological predictors of parasocial interaction with different television performers. *Communication Quarterly*, 41(4), 443–453. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463379309369904>
- Van Krieken, K., Hoeken, H., & Sanders, J. (2017). Evoking and measuring identification with narrative characters – A linguistic cues framework. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 1190. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01190>
- Völlm, B. A., Taylor, A. N., Richardson, P., Corcoran, R., Stirling, J., McKie, S., & Elliott, R. (2006). Neuronal correlates of theory of mind and empathy: A functional magnetic resonance imaging study in a nonverbal task. *Neuroimage*, 29(1), 90–98. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroimage.2005.07.022>
- Wallentin, M., Simonsen, A., & Nielsen, A. H. (2013). Action speaks louder than words: Empathy mainly modulates emotions from theory of mind-laden parts of a story. *Scientific Study of Literature*, 3(1), 137–153. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ssol.3.1.11wal>
- Walter, N., Murphy, S. T., Frank, L. B., & Baezconde-Garbanati, L. (2017). Each medium tells a different story: The effect of message channel on narrative persuasion. *Communication Research Reports*, 34(2), 161–170. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08824096.2017.1286471>
- Wild, T. C., Kuiken, D., & Schopflocher, D. (1995). The role of absorption in experiential involvement. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 69(3), 569. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.69.3.569>
- Wirth, W., Hofer, M., & Schramm, H. (2012). The role of emotional involvement and trait absorption in the formation of spatial presence. *Media Psychology*, 15(1), 19–43. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2011.648536>
- Xu, J., Kemeny, S., Park, G., Frattali, C., & Braun, A. (2005). Language in context: emergent features of word, sentence, and narrative comprehension. *Neuroimage*, 25(3), 1002–1015. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuroimage.2004.12.013>
- Zhou, S., Shapiro, M. A., & Wansink, B. (2017). The audience eats more if a movie character keeps eating: An unconscious mechanism for media influence on eating behaviors. *Appetite*, 108, 407–415. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.appet.2016.10.028>
- Zillmann, D. (1995). Mechanisms of emotional involvement with drama. *Poetics*, 23(1-2), 33–51. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X\(94\)00020-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/0304-422X(94)00020-7)

