CHAPTER 1

Beyond metaphors and traditions

Exploring the conceptual boundaries of narrative engagement

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Scholars have used a range of labels to describe the subjective experience of entering a narrative and losing awareness of the actual, immediate world (e.g., absorption, transportation, engagement). This chapter begins by considering these labels at metaphorical and conceptual levels, suggesting that metaphoric descriptions of the phenomena are insufficient for understanding the experience at conceptual and theoretical levels. The chapter then conceptually describes constructs that are central to research on narrative engagement and locates them as core to a narrative experience, partially overlapping with narrative experience or distinct from but correlated with the experience. It concludes with considerations related to the measurement of different aspects of experiences with narratives.

Keywords: narrative engagement, transportation, absorption, immersion, narrative comprehension, narrative persuasion, enjoyment, flow, realism, mental models

1. Introduction

After more than two decades of research into narrative experience, a plethora of terms and concepts have been developed. The goal of this chapter is to explore theoretically the nature of narrative engagement, to contribute towards its understanding by distinguishing or otherwise relating it to similar phenomena. By narrative experience we denote experiences with a narrative in a broad sense that contain the perception of content and form, and interpretation of the text. Narrative engagement – perceiving a story in an immediate, emotionally and cognitively intense fashion – is one form of narrative experience.

2. Metaphorical and traditional levels of distinction

There are two ways to distinguish different notions of narrative experience: the metaphorical and the traditional. While both are quite common, we will demonstrate that neither is sufficient to define narrative experience or to distinguish it from other sensations.

2.1 Metaphorical levels

At the level of metaphor, readers and viewers use everyday language to describe the subjective experience of being highly engaged with a narrative. As scholars explore the verbal reports readers provide, the scholarly language has adopted the metaphorical tone of everyday language: people report how they are "lost" in a book (Nell, 1988), "transported" into a narrative (Green & Brock, 2000; see also Chapter 3 of this volume), "absorbed" by a text (Kuijpers, Hakemulder, Tan, & Doicaru, 2014, see also Chapter 2 of this volume), "immersed" in a computer game (Qin, Rau, & Salvendy, 2009), and "entranced" (Holland, 2008). All of these metaphors carry the connotation that the story is a powerful entity, which controls and appropriates the reader who moves from his or her original location into the narrative world. For example, getting "lost" in a book implies that the reader enters the world of the book, becomes disoriented and has trouble finding his or her way back; "transportation" indicates that the reader changes his or her location from the actual world to the story world; "absorption" implies that the reader or viewer is encased and ingested by the more potent entity of the story; "immersion" too has this connotation of the story as the larger entity that envelops the reader like water in a bath tub. Finally, "entrancement" carries the association of a magical power exerted by the story over the reader who is transfixed and paralyzed by it, possibly against his or her will. When considering these metaphors, two aspects attract attention:

1. Being engaged in a story is a highly active process on the part of the reader. Yet none of these metaphorical terms express this, suggesting that the terms for the phenomenon are not ideal, as they imply a fairly passive role of the reader vis-à-vis the more powerful story. It is worth noting that this is only true for the metaphorical terms; the more detailed theoretical descriptions behind these metaphors, however, often do emphasize the activity of the reader. This is true of both transportation (see Green & Brock, 2000) and narrative engagement (see Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008).
2. Other phenomena that do not primarily describe narrative experiences, use a similar set of metaphors: "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 1990) indicates that someone is fully preoccupied with an activity; spatial "presence" is described

as "being there" in a virtual world. Although neither is specific to narratives, they use similar metaphors to describe a deep preoccupation with an activity.

To sum up, descriptions of the narrative experience on a metaphorical level offer problematic connotations about audience activity. Moreover, the different terms seem to be interchangeable (in the sense that "transportation" is the same as "absorption"), and do not provide a demarcation from non-narrative experiences like feeling presence with a virtual world or feeling flow while dancing – it is all "being there" or being "in the flow".

2.2 Traditional levels

Another way to distinguish among sensations of narrative experience is to look at the origins of the concepts: for example, "flow" comes from the psychology of happiness and was created to explain joyful and sustained execution of diverse types of activities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975); "transportation" comes from the psychology of reading and was developed for use with written stories (Gerrig, 1993); "presence", conversely, originates from virtual reality research and computer-generated worlds (Lombard & Ditton, 1997); "absorption" was originally a trait describing one's disposition to pay full attention to situations or objects (Tellegen & Atkinson, 1974), before it was used to denote situational (state) narrative experience (Kuijpers et al., 2014). While this explains their existence, it is hard to argue on the basis of traditions that the different terms are necessary.

In conclusion, neither the metaphors used nor their tradition is sufficient for distinguishing among narrative experiences, or for determining which sensations are core components and which are merely related. We propose that it is necessary to make these distinctions on the conceptual level by examining underlying theory, unique meaning, and the individual advantages and disadvantages of each term.

3. The conceptual level of distinction

Our goal is to distinguish the feeling of being engaged with a narrative from other related and similar experiences. Reviewing the constructs that are often used to describe the phenomenon, we identify four domains (see Figure 1):

1. Concepts that directly and explicitly describe the experience that one has when reading or watching a narrative ("core narrative experience": transportation, narrative engagement, story world absorption).

2. Sensations that share some, but not all properties of the core narrative experience ("partial overlap with core narrative experience": flow, presence, identification).
3. Phenomena that are usually strongly correlated with narrative engagement, but rather than focusing on the experience, they represent some sort of judgment about the media text ("correlates of core narrative experience": realism and enjoyment).
4. A concept that often is used interchangeably with the core narrative experiences but resembles them only on the surface and in fact represents an phenomenon that is qualitatively different and independent from narrative ("true difference": involvement).

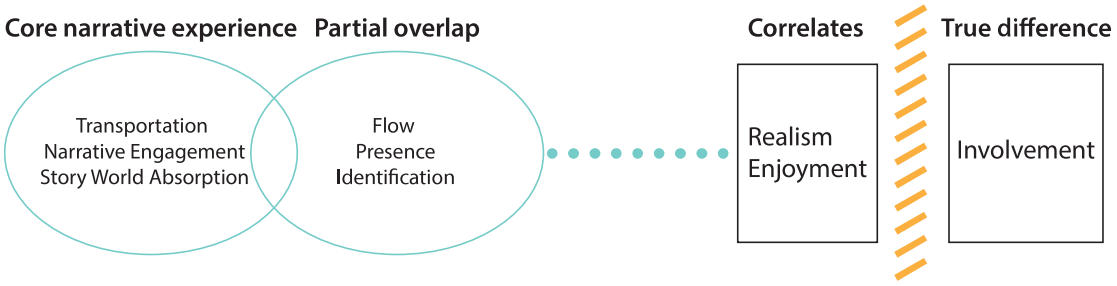

Figure 1. Phenomena of narrative experience

3.1 Core narrative experience: Transportation, narrative engagement, absorption

In this section, we will outline and compare three approaches that explain narrative experience: transportation (Green & Brock, 2000); narrative engagement (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008); and story world absorption (Kuijpers et al., 2014). We have selected these three because, to a greater extent than other constructs and scales, they are specifically intended to measure engagement with stories and are the products of significant scale development and testing.

The oldest of the three concepts, transportation, is defined as a "distinct mental process, an integrative melding of attention, imagery, and feelings", and as "a convergent process, where all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative" (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 701; Green & Brock, 2002; see also Chapter 3 of this volume). Although transportation is often treated as a single, unidimensional construct in empirical research, it is sometimes divided into dimensions that reflect the three components of the underlying theoretical model. The first is the *attentional focus* that is withdrawn from the actual world and redirected to the story; the second is the *emotional reaction* to characters and events;

the third, *imagery*, is the generation of mental images from descriptions contained in the text (Green & Brock, 2000; Mazzocco & Brock, 2006).

In contrast to the holistic concept of transportation, narrative engagement is an explicitly multidimensional construct and scale. The overall construct falls into four distinct but related dimensions that together describe the sensation of being engaged: as in transportation, "attentional focus" and "emotional engagement" are important. In addition, "narrative understanding" describes that readers or viewers follow the plot, understand motivations and actions of characters, and "narrative presence" reflects the impression that a reader or viewer is present in the narrative rather than the actual world (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). The subscales have good reliabilities and can be used as stand-alone instruments. They mediate effects of the narrative with different power. So far, emotional engagement has emerged as the strongest mediator of effects among the four dimensions (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). The definition of narrative engagement is closely related to the way in which people process and understand a story. When people make sense of a story, they create a mental representation (mental model) of the story world, its events and characters (see Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Segal 1995; Zwaan, Langston, & Graesser, 1995). Incoming information from the text is assembled into a mental structure that captures the chronology of events, event causality, space and time – a situation model. When comprehension progresses smoothly and automatically, readers or viewers feel flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). We address the role of flow in narrative engagement further in the following sections. Finally, in using the term "narrative engagement" rather than transportation, immersion, absorption, entrancement, engrossment, etc. the concept avoids the problematic connotations about audience activity outlined above. Engagement expresses a personal investment in an activity, which can be scaled from low to high. While some of the metaphorical terms such as absorption, immersion, etc. label the phenomenon through the intensive side; engagement is more neutral and explicitly includes the possibility that people are less engaged.

The Story World Absorption Scale (SWAS; Kuijpers et al., 2014; see also Chapter 2 of this volume) was designed with a focus on textual narratives. Conceptually, story world absorption addresses perceived weaknesses in the transportation and narrative engagement scales. Specifically, the transportation scale is thought to capture cognition, emotion, and imagery, but the items of the scale do not reliably constitute subscales (e.g., Johnson & Rosenbaum, 2015). The narrative engagement scale was developed using filmic stimuli and does not contain an imagery dimension. Like the narrative engagement scale, SWAS contains four dimensions: attention, emotional engagment, mental imagery, and transportation. It is noteable that transportation is a dimension of the SWAS, while the Transportation-Imagery-Model sees transportation as the overarching concept.

In all three instances, the intensive sensation originates from a narrative. It is certainly possible to be absorbed in a number of other activities – some people are immersed in housecleaning, creating art, or running. However, the specific focus of narrative experience must be a *narrative*. This leads us to the definition of a narrative. Two aspects usually compose the definition: first, a narrative is a series of events that are causally related (Abbott, 2002; Ryan, 2007); second, it presents the inner world of protagonists and their human consciousness (ideas, thoughts, intentions, motivations: "experientiality"; Fludernik, 2010). Bruner (1986) considers the two aspects as "landscapes" of a story: the landscape of the plot and the landscape of consciousness. Both aspects are regarded more or less explicitly in transportation with the notion that people "see the action of the story unfolding before them" (Green & Brock, 2002, p. 317) and the dimension of affect. In narrative engagement, the events are accounted for in the situation model that readers construct; experientiality comes into play when people feel emotionally engaged.

The dimensional concept of narrative engagement is conducive to exploring mechanisms of narrative experience and persuasion. For example, emotional engagement has been most successful so far in explaining effects (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009; de Graaf et al., 2009). Certain properties of the narrative may trigger a specific component of narrative engagement and be responsible for mediating effects. For example, a strong visual form in film or a 3D-presentation may facilitate a sense of narrative presence rather than emotional engagement; or, a character-driven story may stimulate emotional engagement rather than narrative presence. Also, disentangling the dimensions of narrative engagement enables us to identify hierarchies. For example, understanding and attentional focus may be necessary (yet not sufficient) conditions for narrative presence and emotional engagement (Sukalla, Bilandzic, Bolls, & Busselle, 2015).

3.2 Partial overlap with the core narrative experience: Flow, presence, and identification

Flow has often been connected to narratives: Green and Brock (2002) consider it similar to transportation, and Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) explicitly define narrative engagement through flow. Indeed, many properties used to describe deep narrative experience are shared with the essential characteristics of flow:

- intense and focused concentration on the present moment;
- merging of action and awareness;
- loss of reflective self-consciousness (i.e., loss of awareness of oneself as a social actor);

- a sense that one can control one's actions; that is, a sense that one can in principle deal with the situation because one knows how to respond to whatever happens next;
- distortion of temporal sensation (typically, a sense that time has passed faster than normal);
- perception of the activity as intrinsically rewarding, such that often the end goal is just an excuse for the process.

(from Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009, pp. 195–196)

Sustained concentration, loss of awareness of self, surroundings and time, and the sense of effortlessness are components of both high narrative engagement and transportation (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Green & Brock, 2002; see also Chapter 3 of this volume). However, the activity is not as obvious as it is in the typical examples of flow – dancing, climbing, chess playing – any physical activity that demands certain mastery. In general, flow occurs when the challenge of the task (the action opportunity) matches individual skills (action capabilities); this state of equilibrium is an optimal balance between task challenge and skill, neither too difficult (resulting in anxiety), nor too easy (resulting in boredom) (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009, p. 196). It is not trivial to translate "challenge" and "skill" into a situation of media use. Sherry (2004) points out that processing regular mass media content is usually not associated with difficulty or challenge, or seen as requiring special "skills". However, he argues, there are considerable differences between media products, some conforming to format and genre conventions, while others do not; adherence of the media content to and familiarity with the conventions on the side of the reader or viewer facilitate flow (Sherry, 2004). Similarly, control does not have an obvious application to stories. It implies that performers know how to deal with a situation and how to respond appropriately. This is roughly resonant to media, narrative or genre literacy – the skills associated with familiarity with the rules of specific media formats, schemata of stories, and patterns of genres. However, in contrast to self-directed actions such as dancing, climbing, or interactive video games, the viewers or readers do not have proper control over what happens next. But they do have a sense of their own ability to comprehend, perceive, and appreciate the narrative.

For narratives, Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) argue that a flow sensation emerges from the activity of construction of meaning from a text – if readers or viewers are challenged by the text (it is interesting and suitably complex), if they are able to build mental models in a fluent and smooth way, and if they do not perceive any difficulty or notice inconsistency that cannot be explained they feel flow and thus narrative engagement. This means that as far as the activity is constructing mental models of a story, flow sensations are not *similar* to narrative engagement, but are *identical* to it. Readers or viewers can construct mental models without

feeling flow/narrative engagement, but they cannot feel engaged/flow without constructing mental models. Indeed, the former would be an example of low narrative engagement.

However, it is only in the special case of high narrative engagement where the two concepts converge. Flow does not depend on a story. But high narrative engagement does depend on some level of flow. Further, while flow can result from an unlimited number of physical activities, narrative engagement can occur only within a narrative encounter and as a result of constructing mental models. Most importantly, it is the construction of mental models that constitutes the fundamental difference between flow in any other activity (e.g., dance or tennis) and high narrative engagement, because narrative engagement is the only flow phenomenon that results in the creation of an alternative world with characters and events that may occupy the imagination.

Presence was first introduced in virtual reality, computer-mediated communication and videogame research. Generally, it means that, although an object or a complex environment is mediated through a screen or some other medium, users do not notice the artificial transmission; they have "the perceptual illusion of non-mediation" where a user reacts as if the object or environment were not mediated (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). The common metaphor for presence is "being there" (e.g., Wirth et al., 2007), that is, feeling of being in the media-generated rather than the actual world. While presence is often connected to sensory stimuli that make the virtual object look and feel real, experiencing objects in "non-sensory ways" also has been discussed as evoking presence (Lee, 2004, p. 37), which refers to media that function by telling (diegesis) rather than showing (mimesis), for example, books.

In theoretical models, presence has been narrowed to spatial presence. This concept positions one's own body (perceived self-location) and one's perceived action possibilities (such as walking down a street, opening a door, shooting an alien, etc.) into the virtual environment which makes a user feel located in the space of the virtual environment (Wirth et al., 2007). The underlying activity is that people create a mental model of the space under virtual consideration; presence arises when users locate themselves in the mental model created for the virtual space and accept it as the "primary egocentric reference frame" – that which is relevant for on-going perception (Wirth et al., 2007).

It is obvious that presence bears considerable resemblance to accounts of narrative experience. For example, the metaphor "being there" expresses the same movements from the actual into the artificial world as transportation – after readers are "transported" into the story, they "are there". Also, the creation of a mental model is common to both presence and narrative engagement. Another aspect that is shared is the self-localization of the user within the mental model. This process is called

the deictic shift: users transfer the center of their experience from the actual world into the story world, switch to the time and location of the story and understand the characters' point of view (see Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008).

However, similar to flow, presence does not need a story, only a represented or mediated space. Space, however, is not sufficient (nor necessary) for a deep narrative experience to occur: if no story elements are displayed (no events, no characters), people may feel presence, but not narrative engagement. Conversely, some stories provide scant or no information about the space, such as novels with a focus on experientiality. They provide minute details on a person's inner world, thoughts, ideas, motivations and emotions but not sufficient information for the construction of a spatial mental model.

Nonetheless, presence is still important for narratives in two ways. Even though spatial presence is neither a sufficient nor necessary condition for narrative experience, the presentation of space may still be an important component of a narrative in some cases and make the narrative unique. For example, films with strong visuals may evoke the feeling of spatial presence that add to the narrative experience; books may offer detailed descriptions of landscapes and buildings that evoke mental imagery, which is identified as one of the central components of book reading in the Transportation-Imagery Model (Green & Brock, 2002). In this sense, spatial presence and mental imagery are related, but not identical. The latter may include imagining the space of a narrative, but also entails imagining how people, objects and actions look. But both stress that visual components may be an important part of experiencing a narrative.

However, the story world is not only composed of space. It also contains information about the setting (place, time period, and general contemporary state of affairs), as well as "story world logic" – a set of rules that indicates how the specific world functions. Story space as well as the extended story world logic is represented by a mental model (story world model) that people create from the text (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). For example, in the world of James Bond technical gadgets abound and the protagonist survives the most impossible situations; in the world of the TV series *The Walking Dead* there are zombies that do not die when shot in the chest, but only when their head is destroyed; in the series *Heroes*, one superhero can absorb and accumulate superpowers from other superheroes; the crime genre usually dictates that criminals get caught in the end. Every narrative has a specific setting and story world logic with which we grow familiar (see Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Segal, 1995). Thus, being present does not only refer to space, but the entire mental model of the story world. And locating oneself in this mental model creates what we call narrative presence (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009).

Identification has been explicated as the process of taking on a character's identity and situational perspective (Cohen, 2001; see also Chapter 7 of this volume). It

encompasses both affective – "feeling empathy and affinity towards [a] character" and cognitive processes – "adopting the character's goals and point of view" (Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010, p. 404).

Cohen and colleagues conceive identification as a specific mechanism that facilitates absorption or transportation: audience members are "absorbed into the story through the position and role of the character with whom one identifies" (Cohen, Tal-Or, & Mazor-Tregerman, 2015, p. 240). In addition, the affective component of identification creates another connection with concepts of narrative experience: in transportation, narrative engagement, and story world absorption, the stimulation of emotions in the reader or viewer is an important component.

Just like presence and flow, identification originates from a non-narrative context (e.g., social interaction: Tajfel & Turner, 1986). However, unlike presence and flow, when identification is used in a media context, it is almost always tied to narrative. Thus, identification can be considered to have a greater overlap with the core narrative experience (as visualized in Figure 1).

3.3 Correlates of the core narrative experience: Realism and enjoyment

Perceived realism has been defined in different ways (e.g., Busselle & Greenberg, 2000); at its core, however, are reader or viewer evaluations of a portrayal's correspondence to the actual world, plausibility within the confines of a specific world, or internal consistency such that events and characters' behaviors make sense given situations, traits or motivations (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Hall, 2003; Shapiro & Kim, 2012). It is important to point out that realism is not restricted to agreement with the actual world, which is only one possible dimension of realism (external realism, Bilandzic & Busselle, 2011). Another important dimension is narrative realism or consistency, which describes that a narrative world is plausible in itself; in this way, works of fantasy, science fiction and horror can be realistic, if the text makes sense and sticks to the rules of the particular fictional world (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2011).

Perceived realism is positively correlated with measures of engagement (e.g., Bilandzic & Busselle, 2011; Green, 2004; Hoeken & Sinkeldam, 2014). However, the nature of the relationship is not entirely clear. On the one hand, realism likely facilitates engagement; stories that are more realistic are easier to engage with, and those that are not, are less easily comprehended and therefore less engaging. On the other hand, we have proposed elsewhere that readers and audience members may evaluate realism only when prompted to do so by either a questionnaire item or a perceived flaw in the story (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2012). If so, greater realism may not increase engagement, but a lack of realism would undermine or interrupt it. It

also is possible that the sensation of engagement may lead one to retrospectively conclude that a story was realistic.

Enjoyment is a second correlate of narrative experience, and may be an outcome of an engaging narrative (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2011; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). While enjoyment was initially conceptualized as a function of arousal and suspense, theorizing about both underlying processes and experiential manifestations has evolved (Johnson & Rosenbaum, 2015). The three conceptualizations of engagement discussed in this chapter (transportation, narrative engagement, and story world absorption) each have been linked to enjoyment as predictors. Krakowiak and Oliver (2012) find that transportation, measured using the full scale, predicts measures of both affective and cognitive enjoyment of written, short stories. Johnson and Rosenbaum (2015) conclude that cognitive, affective, and imagery dimensions of transportation are positively related to audiences' judgments that a story is "moving", "fun", "suspenseful", and leaves "a lasting impression". Hall and Zwarun (2012) find that an adapted, nine-item measure of transportation relates to both fun and meaningfulness. In studying the reactions to films from three different genres, Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) find all four dimensions of narrative engagement correlated to a four-item enjoyment scale that includes affective, cognitive and behavioral intention items. In developing their SWAS, Kuijpers et al. (2014) report that the scale's transportation, mental imagery, and attention dimensions predicts respondents' enjoyment when reading a short story. Ultimately, enjoyment is seen as an outcome of an engaging narrative.

3.4 True difference to the core narrative experience: Involvement

In some cases, intensive narrative experiences are referred to as a form of "involvement" (e.g., Murphy, Frank, Moran, & Patnoe-Woodley, 2011; Wild, Kuiken, & Schopflocher, 1995). In fact, involvement has a broad and a narrow definition. We argue that neither, albeit for different reasons, suitably describes the narrative experience.

The broad definition expresses activity in a general and varied sense and covers aspects such as attention, recall and elaboration (Perse, 1990; Wirth, 2006), active participation in an information exchange process (Williams, Rice, & Rogers, 1988), or even interest (e.g., Freedman, 1964). The use of involvement as a substitute term for activity and general arousal has led to severe criticism of the entire concept as a "vague meta-concept that subsumes a class of related concepts that have both affective and cognitive derivations" (Salmon, 1986, p. 244).

The narrow definition is clearer and much more precise, but it veers away from narrative experience. In this version, involvement is mental engagement with an

issue or object, triggered by personal relevance. This concept goes back to the notion of Ego-involvement in the social psychology of Sherif and Cantril (1947). Ego-involvement, the mental, emotional and behavioral engagement in a given situation, increases when a person's ego is directly concerned. "Ego" describes a set of attitudes and beliefs that relate to the way in which someone defines themselves as a person (Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965). Other definitions put less emphasis on relevance as a relatively stable trait directly linked to ego, and rather focus on involvement with issues that have personal importance (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979).

In conclusion, the wide definition of involvement leaves the concept open for application in narratives, but it becomes too vague. Involvement in the narrow sense goes beyond mere activity. It has the specific sense of being more engaged because a topic is relevant for a person, because it concerns an aspect of one's real life and identity. However, it is neither identical to narrative experience, nor is it a necessary condition or component. In narrative engagement, the activation of the Ego or self-concept or, in fact, any type of personal relevance is not necessary. It may be activated, but it is not essential. While involvement describes how a person's own relevancies are activated, in narrative engagement it is more important that a reader assumes the character's relevancies and understands their fate from the character's point of view, not their own (Bilandzic, 2006). The two relevancies may coincide, or diverge; in both cases, narrative engagement is possible.

4. Measurement of narrative experience

Finally, we reflect on two aspects of measurement related to narrative engagement: its self-report nature and its relations to stimuli. First, because engaging with a narrative is a phenomenological state, it is dependent upon the viewer's interpretation. Thus, indicators other than post-exposure, self-report questionnaires should be used with caution, and with controls that allow for comparison to post-exposure self-reports. Responses to the narrative engagement and transportation scales have been linked to psychophysiological measures (Nomura, Hino, Shimazu, Liang, & Okada, 2015; Sukalla et al., 2015). However, measures such as heart rate, skin conductance and eye-blink rate provide correlates that while informative about related processes are causally further from the phenomenological sensation itself. Similarly, using self-report measures during reading or viewing may result in reactivity and prompt reactance. For example, asking respondents to complete a questionnaire in the middle of a text interrupts engagement, requires the viewer or reader to re-engage, and may prime the respondent to continue processing the story with the engagement questions in mind.

Second, the phenomenon of narrative engagement is, by definition, stimulus dependent. It does not only depend on the quality of the text (Green, 2004), but also on its nature. Attempts to measure engagement with stimuli such as television commercials and video games are appropriate only to the extent that such stimuli are narrative in nature and capable of engaging the viewer or player in that way. If stimuli are not inherently narrative then it is unlikely that any measure of narrative engagement is tapping what it purports to measure. We can illustrate this point by examining items contained in the narrative engagement scale. The item "The program created a new world, and then that world suddenly disappeared when the program ended," likely would not apply when the stimulus is a 30-second television commercial (even if the word "program" were replaced with commercial). The item, "During the program, when a main character succeeded, I felt happy…" may not apply to a video game avatar. At least, the extent to which an avatar in a game is similar to characters in a narrative should be considered carefully. Similarly, the transportation scale item "I found myself thinking of ways the narrative could have turned out differently" makes sense only if respondents have time to engage in such thinking. If a questionnaire immediately follows the stimulus, it is unlikely that respondents would have time to contemplate alternative endings. Our point is that participants and respondents will answer narrative engagement questions in reference to the experience they just had. If the underlying stimulus material was not a narrative one or was a narrative form that is logically inconsistent with the scale items, then the measure's validity is compromised.

5. Conclusion

On the metaphorical level, the concepts we analyzed in this chapter seem so close that one is tempted to dismiss them and judge the whole field to be crude and callow. As we have demonstrated, this temptation only presents itself if one remains at the surface level of metaphors. Also, the traditional level, for a different reason, is not suitable to distinguish the concepts – the reason here is that it is theoretically inadequate to maintain different labels for the very same phenomenon just because they exist in different traditions. The temptation to dismiss research on narrative experience even increases when combining metaphorical and traditional levels – if we content ourselves to these, we may rightly conclude that different labels mark the same phenomena, and nearly identical phenomena have different labels to mark their origin. Needless to say, this would lead to a massive underestimation of the field and its theoretical progress in the past two decades. Rather, we must look at the conceptual level and identify the core meaning of a construct to determine its legitimacy. The conclusions from the conceptual analysis are:

1. Transportation, narrative engagement and story world absorption can be used synonymously. However, they differ in some crucial aspects. Transportation is holistic, while narrative engagement is dimensional, which allows for specific exploration of distinct narrative sensations. Story world absorption falls into similar dimensions as narrative engagement and additionally includes a mental imagery dimension.
2. While flow, presence and identification may be deep experiences of processing media content and denote how much someone feels close to the media text, they only partly overlap with transportation, narrative engagement and story world absorption, and cannot be used synonymously or replace them. The unique meaning of flow is the intense focus on an activity, accompanied by less awareness of self, surroundings and time. Flow does not need a narrative, but it can happen on its basis. In this case, flow in comprehending a narrative is identical to narrative engagement. Likewise, spatial presence is neither sufficient nor necessary for narrative experience. However, (1) spatial presence may be an important component if the narrative provides spatial information and (2) in a wider sense, feeling present in the story world (narrative presence) is generally an important element of engagement. Narrative presence in this sense is not merely a spatial re-localization, but a more comprehensive feeling of being part of the narrative world with all its specific rules, characteristics and peculiarities.
3. Realism and enjoyment are not perceptions of the narrative experience, but instead are judgments or evaluation about the text.
4. Involvement should not be used for narrative experience at all, but in the narrow and original sense of Ego-involvement.

Ultimately, we can conclude that the choice of a term and concept for narrative experience has important theoretical and operational implications. Also, the text needs to be a narrative. This may seem trivial, but it is nonetheless an important point to consider. A text that does not contain representations of events and/or inner states of characters does not prohibit deep experiences; however, they will not be narrative in nature: if the text is not a narrative in form, there can be no narrative engagement in the audience.

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