2013

The Phenomenological Experience Of Narrative Transportation

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THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPERIENCE OF NARRATIVE TRANSPORTATION

by

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B.A., University of Central Florida, 2009

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies
in the College of Graduate Studies
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Florida

Spring Term
2013

ABSTRACT

Previous research has attempted to identify consequences of mental transportation into narrative worlds. While scales have been developed and validated to measure readers' levels of transportation, the objective quantification has left researchers at a descriptive disadvantage for the full range of qualitative responses to this phenomenon. This study presents a qualitative method of inquiry designed to get at the experience of narrative transportation as it is lived: the phenomenological interview. Interview transcripts were inductively analyzed for common themes that indicate intersubjective features of narrative experience. Four main themes were identified, which were composed of 22 base-level experiences reported by participants. These findings corroborated the extant literature and provided a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon as it is lived.

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, who always told me I could do anything I set my mind to; to my father, who told me to always do my best no matter what the task was; and to my fiancée, who, without a second thought, selflessly supported me through this challenging process.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

"This is the greatest moment in scientific history! At last, there are no more questions left to answer!" – Prof. Hubert J. Farnsworth

I would like to express my deepest appreciation for my thesis committee chair, Dr. Steve Fiore, who was there at the birth of this idea, for his unending curiosity and his continuous support through the entire evolution of this work. Without his guidance and enthusiasm for the science, this thesis would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Harry Weger and Dr. Ann Miller, for all their time, knowledge and assistance during the many hours spent creating this work.

I thank the University of Minnesota for permission to include the Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire as part of my study.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

There are so many places to discover in this world, and yet storytellers create new ones every day. Earth is the planet, but the worlds that exist here are too enumerable to count. They exist somewhere between the words on paper and the minds of the people who read and write them. These narrative worlds are where people go to get away from reality, to experiences far off lands with interesting cultures or mysteries to be solved. The heroes of these lands are known to many of us by name, such as Jay Gatsby, Indiana Jones, or Harry Potter. We know them because we've met them, lived beside them and experienced their worlds through them. Their worlds are but a page turn or a movie click away. So that is where so many of us go day after day, to experience something fantastic.

What is it, exactly, that a person experiences when they enter a narrative? What does it feel like, and how could it be explained to someone who has never felt it? For more than three decades scientists have investigated what it means to become transported into a story world. Many theories have broken *narrative transportation* down into measurable components, but they have not helped us to fully understand the "raw feeling" of getting lost in a story. We all know that a narrative is more than words printed on a page or actors walking on and off camera. It is a story told in a way that puts the audience in the center of the action, feeling the same terror as

Indiana Jones when surrounded by snakes and the same thrill as Andy Dufresne when he escapes from Shawshank State Penitentiary. What is at issue here is the disconnect between the standard empirical method of studying stories in experimental psychology and the more reflective analytical methods used in traditional narrative studies.

On the one hand, the objective distance employed to observe and document the phenomenon has left researchers at a descriptive disadvantage. They have missed the quintessential part of being human, the lived experience – the sensations and perceptions of new characters, environments, and adventures. Researchers in the past have identified some key components of narrative transportation. They have theorized and created scales to quantify the various elements that make up the experience, but this parsing of mental and emotional responses reduces the adventure of narrative transportation from a phenomenological whole into an impersonal checklist of impressions. While this is useful for objective measure, it falls short of a complete description of the optimal narrative experience: transportation into a narrative world. Thus, although these methods provide us with objective and quantifiable input, they lack the ability to translate that data to something that helps us understand the underlying experience.

On the other hand, narrative analysts who investigate the experience of reading by reflecting upon the story world and extrapolating from the text provide their own interpretations

of what it means to be transported. But they lack the generalizability that comes from collecting data and interpretations from multiple readers. While some have tried to document the "experience" of transportation from readers, the methods employed have lacked the rigor that comes from systematic data collection.

The purpose of this thesis is to develop a contextual and intersubjective description of the experience of narrative transportation. To accomplish this task, I hold the subjective experience of each participant as rich, viable information that can contribute to an intersubjective understanding of this phenomenon. More specifically, I utilize the phenomenological interview as a tool to investigate the range and depth of consequences of narrative transportation from the first-person point of view. In addition, some quantitative techniques from experimental psychology, such as surveys, are used to corroborate past findings and support this qualitative analysis. By employing the phenomenology of narrative transportation, I seek to describe what exactly transportation into a story world feels like, how people makes sense of the experience, and what the common qualitative features of narrative transportation are.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I provide a brief overview of narrative as described in psychology. Next, I describe the concept of narrative transportation and what theorists have argued about this construct. Then, I explore the proposed consequences of narrative transportation and how researchers have quantified this experience. I conclude with a description of phenomenology as a method of inquiry, and explain how to analyze the data collected via one-on-one interviews. This review lays the foundation for the primary components of the investigational basis for this thesis. The following chapter provides a detailed description of how the study was conducted.

Narrative

Before discussing the sensations and perceptions perceived by those lost in a narrative, it is important to define what exactly is meant by the term "narrative" and how it differs from the term "story." Although these terms are often used interchangeably, they do have discrete denotations.

A story is a sequence of events. Given that humans observe time as moving forward, events are typically ordered chronologically with the oldest events occurring at the beginning of the story and progressing to more and more recent events until the end is reached. By recording events in such a way it is possible to analyze and interpret causes and their resulting effects.

A narrative is the account of a sequence of events. Once recorded, events can be organized and communicated in various ways both non-fictionally, as historical chronologies, scientific procedures, and driving directions; and fictionally, as myths, novels, and video games. How events are organized depends on certain factors, such as the relationship of the storyteller and audience, and conventions of the society, and culture in which they are created (Pavlenko, 2002). People choose what elements of experience to attend to and structure them in whatever way helps them make sense of events over time (Bruner, 1991); this concept is common to every society worldwide (Duff & Bell, 2002; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Nelson, 2003; Rowland, 1987;). Narratives help people cast their identity and give meaning to the world (Flanagan, 1994).

In their search for meaning, people began using narratives to explain why humans exist in the universe. These creation myths, or origin myths, describe how humankind came to inhabit the world, and they were justified by citing sacred forces (Dundes, 1997) "In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a fragment of reality – an island, a species of plant, a particular kind of human behavior, an institution," (Eliade, 1963, pp. 5-6). As they are the most common form of myth in human culture (Kimball, 2008), these symbolic narratives can be found in nearly all religious traditions (Johnston, 2009).

Joseph Campbell (1949) also discovered the similarities among myths from many different cultures, which he combined into the *monomyth*: a widely distributed pattern of structures and stages that exist in narratives worldwide. Also known as "the hero's journey," Campbell's monomyth identifies 17 fundamental steps protagonists endure to complete the journey. Not all myths contain every single step, and the steps can be organized in varying ways. Commonly, heroes first leave home and enter the supernatural world. Once there, heroes face many challenges while other characters either assist or impede the adventure. Upon their return, heroes often bring wisdom or gifts to share with their fellow man. Although Campbell's model has been criticized as lacking support in mainstream mythology (Northup, 2006), its presence can be seen in ancient narratives, such as the myth of Prometheus (Campbell, 1949), and modern narratives, such as in the *Star Wars* films (Larsen & Larsen, 2002).

The distinction between a narrative and a story is essential because a story can be expressed through a variety of media in a variety of different modes, or narratives. For example, an author writing a novel uses various tools to convey information to the reader such as action, dialogue, description, narrative summary, and interior monologue and emotion (Ingermanson & Economy, 2009). A movie director does not have the same access to interior monologue and emotion as an author and must instead rely on camera techniques and actors' performances to

express emotions. Despite these differences, the same story can be told independent of medium (Ryan, 2007), which may be one reason why so many screenwriters are adapting novels into movies. The story is "what happened;" the narrative is the means of expressing what happened within a story, and the tools of narrative can be manipulated to describe those events in numerous ways.

With an understanding of how narratives are used to tell stories, I would like to return to the concept of narrative as a meaning-making tool. In his paper "The Narrative Construction of Reality," Bruner (1991) describes man's attempt to find "true" knowledge of the world. He contends the predominant theories of knowledge, empiricism and rationalism, are centrally focused on finding how the mind collects data from the world and assembles it into a working knowledge, but neither group provides an unquestionable explanation of how we achieve "reality." To this, Bruner suggests the real world is not completely "out there" to be observed and measured, but through culture and language we create our reality as much as we discover it. By collecting thoughts and recounting events, humans organize experience in the form of narratives (Duff & Bell, 2002). "We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, plan, revise, criticize, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative,"

(Hardy, 1968, p. 5). In doing so, reality changes from a discoverable physical world into a constructed social world.

> Unlike the constructions generated by logical and scientific procedures that can be weeded out by falsification, narrative constructions can only achieve "verisimilitude." Narratives, then, are a version of reality whose acceptability is governed by convention and "narrative necessity" rather than by empirical verification and logical requiredness, although ironically we have no compunction about calling stories true or false," (Bruner, 1991, p. 4-5).

Before this shift in perspective, investigators were focused on parsing the natural world into neatly defined scientific divisions and the socially constructed world of human interaction went overlooked (Bruner, 1991). Despite efforts to structure reality via objective cataloging and categorizing, however, human experience and memory are organized mainly in narrative form (Bruner, 1991; Duff & Bell, 2002), and human knowledge is based on stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Therefore, a particularly compelling narrative that achieves verisimilitude can influence human behavior, reflecting the reality constructed within the narrative world. For example, after the 1975 theatrical release of the film *Jaws*, beachgoers stayed on dry land for fear of sharks despite the statistical rarity of attacks reported by the media (Gerrig, 1993). The

experience of the narrative world influenced how people behaved in the real world at least anecdotally if not in some quantifiable way. The implication that narratives can change people's real-world actions necessitates further investigation.

To help systematize the study of narrative as an instrument of reality construction, Bruner (1991) proposed 10 features of narratives. The goal was to describe the properties of this narrative "reality" as it is constructed by means of narrative principles. Using this as groundwork, Bruner stated the next task was to describe in detail particular instances where narrative organizes human experience. Although all 10 features comprise the reality constructed by narratives, three directly relate to how readers change words on paper into worlds in their mind. Specifically, these three features describe how people make sense of narratives because they also describe how people make sense of everyday experience.

Referentiality is the first step out of the comfort of reality into the unknown world of the story. It uses real-world references to bridge the gap between the natural world and the artificial world created in the reader's imagination. Because we immerse ourselves in the facts of reality, such as gravity, familiar people, and known locations, authors use these as anchor points in their stories. For example, in Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*, the protagonist explores many famous locations throughout Europe deciphering ancient puzzles to find clues to the truth behind one of

history's greatest treasures: the Holy Grail. Each of these locations, the modern time period, and the legend of the Holy Grail are all references the audience can use to safely step away from the real world and into the story world.

Of course, referentiality does not imply absolute agreement with reality, but merely suggests realism by use of realistic imagery and attributes. Maintaining a loose correspondence with reality helps the audience accept the fictional world as its own entity. It is a literary convention rather than a direct comparison to the external world. Similarly, readers who have prior experience with narrative elements, such as people who share characteristics with story characters, may perceive the narrative as more realistic than those without prior experience (Green, 2004). One possibility for this response is that readers may equate narrative content to their own past experiences (Schank & Abelson, 1995). Because the limit of what readers may accept as realistic may vary from person to person, referentiality lends itself to the acceptability of a narrative, and therefore its verisimilitude.

Another of Bruner's narrative features is *intentional state entailment*, which implies that all events and actions that transpire within a narrative do so to impact the intentional states of the characters. Narrative characters have beliefs, desires, and values—intentional states—and choose to act based on these just as people do in the real world. As readers become immersed in a

narrative world they get to know characters as if they were real people and react to them as such (Green & Brock, 2000). So if characters behave like real people and readers treat them like real people, readers may come to agree or disagree with characters' values and decisions, often leading to a more emotional experience (Bruner, 1991; Cohen, 2001), which in turn may lead to greater narrative transportation (Green, 2004). Although the characters' intentional states provide the underlying reasons characters make decisions, they do not constitute cause and effect relationships with characters' actions. That is to say, intentional states are not the direct source of an outcome, but rather the catalyst. For example, Bruce Wayne values justice, but valuing justice does not directly cause a person to dress up like a bat and fight crime. His choice to don the cowl must be interpreted from his fall down the well as a child, his witnessing his parents' murder, and his moral upbringing by his parents and butler, Alfred. Readers interpret why characters act the way they do and why they make the decisions they make based on the characters' intentional states.

To define what he means by *hermeneutic composability*, Bruner (1991) explains the purpose of hermeneutic analysis. With no empirical or rational method to identify the absolute "truth" of a narrative, Bruner states, "the best hope of hermeneutic analysis is to provide an intuitively convincing account of the meaning of the text as a whole in the light of the constituent

parts that make it up," (p. 7). When interpreting a story, readers look to specific passages or chapters that seem to suggest the meaning of a narrative. In doing so, however, they must compare one passage to another and then to the whole, as this is the way a narrative is processed. Readers collect these passages and create a mental model that they update with new information as the narrative progresses (Zwaan, Magliano, & Graesser, 1995). Then, upon conclusion, readers have a complete model that only makes sense with all of its parts intact. This represents a complex cognitive process that involves readers filtering a narrative through their own background knowledge and the intent of the author to compose a final product. Moreover, events are not simply chosen and assembled in any suitable order; each piece of the narrative—characters, settings, and events—must function together to both support each other as a whole and achieve reality. In this way, the reader relies on the author to compose a series of interrelated events that constitute a developed narrative while the author relies on the reader's ability to interpret the story and process the information in its narrative form. Hermeneutic composability allows the author to communicate a complex idea through the elements of a narrative with enough elegance that a reader may interpret and extract a meaning.

Narrative Transportation

The next issue involves what happens to a person when he or she reads a story or watches a movie. As researchers we must address the question of how the cognitive process of translating words on paper into scenes in one's mind creates the experience of a "story world." In this section I briefly describe how both narrative theorists and experimental psychologists explain the experience of narrative transportation. My goal is to illustrate how these disparate disciplines have built on each other to help us understand the underlying phenomena associated with transportation into a story world.

Gerrig (1993) initiates his exposition of narrative by likening the experience to two metaphors: "readers are often described as *being transported* into the narrative by virtue of *performing* that narrative," (p. 2). He explains that the use of these metaphors allows us to comment on otherwise elusive details of the phenomenon. The first metaphor suggests that during comprehension of a narrative, readers are transported away to someplace that is not their here and now, and they become "lost in a book" (Nell, 1988). The second metaphor suggests readers are not passively transported, but they take part in the construction and processing of the narrative world, filling the gaps in texts with their own knowledge and experience (Bruner, 1986; Busselle & Bilanzic, 2008; Oatley, 2002). Taken together, Gerrig (1993) claims these

comparisons illustrate what the experience of a narrative worlds feels like, and using them he developed a description of the reader as a literal traveler:

> Someone ("the traveler") is transported, by some means of transportation, as a result of performing certain actions. The traveler goes some distance from his or her world of origin, which makes some aspects of the world of origin inaccessible. The traveler returns to the world of origin, somewhat changed by the journey. (p. 10-11)

Gerrig's theorizing provides researchers with a robust starting point for investigating narrative experience. Here he tells of the reader (as a traveler) leaving behind the world of origin and thus losing access to some aspects of that world. During normal, everyday experience when people travel away from a place they relinquish access to their original physical location and any affordances provided therein. Similarly, Gerrig claims readers transported into narrative worlds opt out of real-world cognizance in lieu of narrative realization. In one respect, this results in the loss of access to real-world facts; in another, it simply means readers lose awareness of their external surroundings. This can be as simple as not noticing the passing of time, which is one consequence of transportation (as will be discussed later). After the journey, the reader returns to the world of origin having been somewhat changed by the experience. While this change can be

as insubstantial as the creation of new memories, profound narratives can impact readers' attitudes and beliefs (Green & Brock, 2000).

Gerrig's (1993) description of the traveler also identifies the key elements of narrative experience. He developed this description from the close analysis of scholarly reports on the interaction of readers and narratives. By cross-referencing reports from various scientific traditions, Gerrig provides an interdisciplinary theoretical base from which investigation can begin. This gives researchers the opportunity to answer the questions: What are the means of transportation? What do readers lose access to during transportation? And, what changes in the reader upon returning to the world of origin?

In some of the seminal work on narrative effects, Green and Brock (2000) set out to study the reader experience. Specifically, they cite the seeming development that public narratives command more attention than public advocacy, or rhetoric, and they focus on the persuasive efficacy of narratives. Green and Brock theorize absorption into narratives, or transportation into narrative worlds, could result in real-world change in people's attitudes and beliefs. They conceptualize narrative transportation to be a distinct mental process based on Gerrig's (1993) metaphor of the reader as a literal traveler. Green and Brock (2000) operationalize the processes

described by the traveler metaphor by identifying the components and consequences of narrative transportation.

To shift from a figurative illustration to a firm definition, Green and Brock (2000, 2002) define narrative transportation as "a convergent mental process, where all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative," (p. 701). This is the action required of readers for transportation. They must forego other mental processes in order to establish complete concentration on the target material. Then, through the coalescence of attention (cognitive engagement), feelings (emotional engagement), and imagery, readers mentally leave the real world behind to completely immerse themselves in the narrative. Throughout Green and Brock's research it is the integration of these three responses that comprise narrative transportation, each of which has consequences, or phenomenological effects, on the reader's experience.

Consequences of narrative transportation. In this section I describe some of the hypothesized consequences of narrative transportation. Despite the historical scarcity of empirical research into the persuasiveness of public narratives (Green & Brock, 2000), scholars have postulated and observed a number of various effects transportation has on people (Gerrig, 1993). The anecdotal evidence for narrative influence provides researchers with a foundation to

investigate these proposed effects. I now elaborate on some of these consequences in that they provide insights into what the nature of narrative transportation is, and what it "feels" like.

Loss of access to the external world. The first consequence of narrative transportation involves the partial loss of access to the world of origin. While the reader cognitively engages in processing the narrative, he or she is less aware of real-world facts and events (Green & Brock, 2000). On a physical level, a transported reader may not notice people moving in the same room, the passing of time or the passing of trees and road signs outside the window of a moving car (Green, 2004). On a psychological level, transported readers have less access to real-world knowledge that may contradict claims made in the narrative. This subjective distancing from reality helps people willingly suspend disbelief so they can accept fantastic story worlds as realities separate from our own, such as a world where certain people are born with the ability to perform real magic, as in the *Harry Potter* series.

Meeting new characters and visualizing new worlds requires some focus from readers. Anyone who has tried to read on a public bus or sit through a movie with a crying baby understands real-world distractions can impede effective transportation. If distractions are minimal, however, the reader needs only to ignore invading thoughts and concentrate on the narrative to enter the story world. As transportation increases, readers process the narrative

almost automatically as if effortless (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). As it was explained before, during transportation a reader's mental systems and capacities are entirely focused on narrative events (Green & Brock, 2000, 2002). This description sounds very similar to another state of consciousness where a person is completely focused on a specific task: *flow*.

Csikszentmihalyi (1997) described flow as an altered state of consciousness a person enters when the challenge of an activity matches the skill level of the participant. A task with difficulty that exceeds a participant's skill level causes anxiety, and a task that does not challenge a participant causes boredom, both of which impede the flow state (Sherry, 2004). Since transportation is regarded as a special type of flow (Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010), narrative skill level can be interpreted as reading level, experience with medium (e.g., frequent reader vs. frequent television watcher), experience with genre (e.g., science fiction, reality TV), or lack of native ability (e.g., dyslexia). Task difficulty, however, is less precisely classified. Generally, as Sherry (2004) explains, media difficulty is typified by how closely it follows convention. Shot composition, uses of sound, and narrative structure are all elements of television shows and movies audiences take no notice of when they conform to expectations and format standards. In a similar vein, the language used in the *Harry Potter* novels is much more easily and commonly

understood than the language in, say, *The Lord of the Rings* series. However, both collections have become bestsellers, thus providing support for the balance of skill and difficulty hypothesis.

Csikszentmihalyi began his research of artists and creativity when he noticed the enjoyment artists and musicians experience while at work, a feeling they described as intense pleasure with no necessity of external rewards (Sherry, 2004). Descriptions such as this led Csikszentmihalyi (1988) to define flow as "optimal experience." Athletes have colloquialized this concept as "being in the zone," (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). When in flow, a person may be completely focused on a task while simultaneously unaware of outside stimuli. Similarly, during reading, the reader is specifically focused on the task of creating and updating the mental model of the narrative. In this way, while they are physically present in their external environment, mentally they have gone somewhere else entirely. It may be literature's much longer period of existence compared to other, relatively young forms of media, its low cost of production, or its ubiquity, but reading may be the most common flow activity in which people engage (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) compared the descriptions of transportation and flow noting that, during both, participants lose awareness that they themselves are separate from the activity being performed. This reflects Gerrig's (1993) second metaphor for narrative experience

where readers become transported by means of performing narratives. Through intense focus on the material, readers gather information and construct a coherent mental model of the narrative world, thus becoming part of the narrative. If the level of challenge the narrative provides matches the reader's skill level, then the reader will remain engaged in the process of realizing the narrative model. Busselle & Bilandzic (2008) propose, then, that narrative transportation can be seen as the level of absorption a person attains during construction of a mental model.

Among the characteristics associated with a flow state are intense and focused concentration, loss of reflective self-consciousness, and distorted perception of time (Sherry, 2004), all of which correspond with narrative transportation. In a study of flow states during both work and leisure activities, Csikszentmihalyi (1989) found that despite whether an activity is done out of responsibility (work) or out of pleasure (leisure) almost any experience is enhanced when a person approaches flow. These enhancements include increases in motivation, concentration, creativity, affect, and satisfaction, which were all higher when in a flow state compared to a non-flow state. As a person approaches flow, their task at hand becomes almost effortless as if done automatically (Sherry, 2004). As transportation increases, Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) state that focus on the narrative should feel easy to maintain, and the cognitive process of constructing a mental model of the narrative world becomes automatic. It is in this

way that narrative transportation differs from other flow-like experiences, because through narratives we gain access to new worlds (Gerrig, 1993).

Creation of a story world. So where must readers go to understand a narrative? Readers abandon their physical "here" and their present "now" and inhabit the time and place of the story world, often taking the perspective of the characters (Gerrig, 1993). Yet this shift occurs with little to no instruction. Perhaps a small introduction to the setting denoting the city and year is all a reader needs to comprehend the disparity between the narrative world and reality, but this designator is quickly assimilated and forgotten. Thereafter, the reader is left with nothing more than descriptions and characters to observe to maintain an accurate perspective. To keep this proper point of view, the reader infers unexpressed information about narrative relationships and assembles a rough mental structure called the *deictic center* (DC) (Rapaport et al., 1989). The DC is the point of "origin" for place (where), time (when), and characters (who); it is the "here" and "now" in which narrative events transpire. Getting to this point has been called the *deictic shift* (Duchan, Bruder & Hewitt, 1995). This shift is the reader's contribution to the narrative that allows him or her to focus attention on the events occurring in the narrative as it progresses. Even if these events occur from the perspective of another character, another time (flashbacks

and flash-forwards) and another place, whatever is currently happening is the DC to which the reader must attend.

Getting to the DC is not a conscious action. It is an involuntary mental adjustment necessary to understand the events of a narrative because the DC is the only time and place these events make any sense. For example, if one character tells another to "come here," the reader must understand that "here" is not the location of the author during writing, nor is it the location of the reader during reading. "Here" is wherever the events of the story are occurring; it is the DC. Likewise, events that are happening "now" are happening in the narrative present. The narrative "who" can be any character that provides a perspective for the reader to adopt.

So when a person reads a narrative the DC is formed in the readers mind. Using the information collected from the narrative, the reader builds a mental representation that is both informed by and used to interpret the events of the narrative. This structure is the reader's theory and working model of the narrative story (Duchan, Bruder, & Hewitt, 1995. Rappaport et al. (1989) suggest the reader builds this temporary model from all the information that has been collected thus far and integrates new information as it is acquired. This process is then repeated until the reader has finished the narrative and completes the model. Rappaport et al. (1989) note, however, that narratives can continue for long passages with no direct reference to the spatial or

temporal location of events with little negative affect on reader understanding. The question, then, is what is it that allows readers to maintain their mental representations with an apparent lack of overt descriptors.

Rappaport et al. (1989) mention multiple theories attempting to explain these processes with global structures, but they all fail to explain how readers collect and maintain information from contextual cues. For smooth narrative construction, the reader must continually construct and modify the DC, which is the window into the ongoing present of the story world through which the audience is aware of the "who" (characters), the "when" (time), and the "where" (spatio-temporal location) of narrative events as well as any implied information from the author. Through this window the reader plucks out minute details linguistically embedded into the grammatical, lexical, and syntactic information. It is in this way that the DC plays an intermediary role between the specific details of narrative events and the overall global world of the story. It is also why the narrative only makes sense from the DC. The multidimensional nature of the DC, and its means of access for updating a mental model from narrative cues, merges seamlessly with another theory about how narratives are processed: the event-indexing model (Zwaan, Langston & Graesser, 1995).

If the DC is the window into the narrative world for updating a reader's mental model, then this model is the situation model proposed by Zwaan, Magliano and Graesser (1995). Whether it is labeled a 'mental' model (Johnson-Laird, 1983) or a 'situation' model (van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983) the idea is the same: during comprehension, readers construct a mental representation of the situations described in the text. The construction of situation models had been sparingly researched by the mid-1990s, but only in regards to one dimension of narrative at a time, such as the temporal order of events, the spatial layout of the story world, or the causal relationships between narrative happenings. At the time, there was no general theory of situation model construction. Zwaan, Magliano and Graesser (1995) claimed that situation models were multidimensional by definition and therefore must be studied as such. They wanted to see if readers were capable of observing multiple situational dimensions simultaneously. The first step was to identify which dimensions were critical to situation model construction, and to then explain how readers monitor the various dimensions for construction of a situation model.

The critical dimensions used to develop the situation model were derived from previous research. Specifically, Gernsbacher (1990) developed a framework of discourse comprehension similar to the situation models construct, which he called the structure building framework. This framework proposes three dimensions that facilitate the maintenance or continuity of a situation:

temporality, spatiality, and causality. During comprehension, readers build mental structures with these dimensions that represent the narrative situation. The structure evolves as new information is mapped onto the previous structure. The continuity of these dimensions between sentences eases information mapping and evolution of the mental structure. In other words, if a new narrative event is occurring in the same spatial location as the last narrative event (spatiality), or if the new event occurs within the same time frame (temporality), the info is mapped onto the structure. Similar to Rappaport et al.'s theory (1989), these are also the "where" and "when" of the DC. Also, if new events are the result of previous actions or events (causality), then continuity is maintained and the structure evolves. When continuity is not maintained, the reader cannot evolve the current mental structure and is forced to build a new structure. The three dimensions used to maintain continuity were the obvious choices, as these three comprise events in the real world. Movement is not possible without the passing of time, and effects cannot precede their causes. One of the hallmarks of narrative, however, is the ability to alter the passing of time, observe simultaneous events, and describe effects before their causes (Bruner, 1991). Therefore, readers need to be cognizant of even subtle changes in these dimensions and must update their situation models accordingly.

Having defined the critical dimensions of situation model construction, Zwaan et al., (1995) conducted two experiments and discovered readers monitor temporal and causal continuity under normal conditions; spatial continuity was also monitored but it did not reach significance. Researchers additionally discovered participants' construction of a situation model was disrupted when they were instructed to read for memory rather than as they would normally. This finding was consistent with Aaronson and Ferres (1986) who found that a memory instruction inhibited deeper comprehension. This could be due to the reading strategies employed under the different instructions. During normal instruction people read for meaning while under the memory instruction people read for phrase structure, which may inhibit comprehension (Aaronson & Ferres, 1986). Although Zwaan et al. (1995) did not designate an official name for their model; this study was a huge step toward creating a general theory of situation model construction.

Soon after this study, Zwaan, Langston and Graesser (1995) came out with the event-indexing Model: a revised model of how readers construct mental representations of narrative events. Unlike the structure building framework, this model didn't require new frameworks whenever information couldn't be mapped onto the existing structure. Instead, a multilayered model composed of the various situational dimensions, also called event indices, would be

updated with new information when a discontinuity occurred. The original three situational dimensions were used for construction with the addition of two new dimensions: intentionality and protagonist. Intentionality is the motivational dimension; it deals with the protagonist's goal structure, and when an action changes the goal structure, the model must be updated. This is similar to what Bruner (1991) said about narrative events impacting the beliefs, desires, and values of the characters. The protagonist is the narrative "who" of the DC, and when a new protagonist is introduced the model must also be updated.

Two experiments provided support for the event-indexing model and correlated with their previous situation model study. Zwaan et al. (1995) also found that each of the five critical situation dimensions made an independent contribution to readers' multidimensional representations. These results support the theory that narrative comprehension influences how information is processed causing the reader to form connections—event-indexing—typically made during real life experiences. During everyday life, people are aware of people present, personal goals and emotions, and the current time and place (Zwaan, 1999), all of which are details monitored and updated in the event-indexing model. This suggests people process narratives in a similar way to everyday experience. During narrative comprehension, readers are transported to the deictic center of the narrative where they vicariously experience the story

world from within with a real-world awareness of time, place, and sequence of events. There, readers process incoming information as if actually present in the situation (Zwaan, 1999).

Emotional engagement. Once the deictic center of the story becomes the reader's reality, emotional connections can form. As readers meet new characters they develop feelings as though these characters were real and may even empathize with them (Zwaan, 1999). Protagonists are not simply imaginary figures in a story; they are people with new information and beliefs to share and people with whom readers get highly involved. Some readers may even associate a narrative character to a real person, leading to greater understand of that character (Green, 2004). Specifically, readers who know someone that shares a significant characteristic with a story character show greater levels of narrative transportation. Green (2004) suggests it might be easier for these readers to create mental images of the characters, thus facilitating transportation. However, another possibility is that having prior knowledge increases links made between narrative elements and the reader's own life called *remindings* (Green, 2004; Schank & Abelson, 1995). Green (2004) states not all prior knowledge increases transportation equally, but knowledge that makes it easier to understand and connect with characters makes transportation more likely, possibly by allowing the reader a means of applying narrative content to their own lives.

Green and Brock (2000) found that the more transported readers were, the more they "liked" the protagonists, which was measured by significantly positive character ratings. Even when the reader knows story events are not real, they may still experience strong emotions and even try to think up alternative outcomes when characters are left with unhappy endings (Allbritton & Gerrig, 1991; Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2000). This is because readers interpret narrative events from the character's perspective within the narrative. Cohen (2001) labeled this phenomenological response as *identification*, stating that readers are not impartially observing these events from a safe distance, but rather the audience is internalizing the character's point of view and experiencing these stories as if they were happening to them. Identification is a direct response to the textual features carefully constructed by writers and directors, and it is a fleeting, intermittent state that varies in intensity (Wilson, 1993).

Cohen (2001) succinctly defined identification as, "an imaginative process through which an audience member assumes the identity, goals, and perspective of a character." This means readers do not simply assume a spectator's view of the action, but rather replace their normal, everyday frame of mind with emotional and cognitive connections to the characters. By surrendering their own self-consciousness and adopting the identity of the character, the reader becomes fully aware of that character's beliefs, motives, and emotions – the character's

intentional states (Bruner, 1991). There, in the DC, the reader occupies the essence of the character to experience the story first-hand, and is thus able to empathize with the character (Oatley, 1999). These experiences and the knowledge the reader has about story events are interpreted through the character's perspective and converted into empathic emotions (Zillman, 1994), sometimes taking on physical manifestations (e.g. crying or cringing) (Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010). Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) note, however, that at times the reader possesses information that a character does not, such as impending danger or the knowledge of a loved one's betrayal. With this omniscience it is not possible for the reader to empathize with a character because the character is still ignorant of his complete situation. This results in what Oatley (1999) described as sympathy, when a reader may feel embarrassed or concerned for a character.

Both empathy and sympathy do not present without being triggered, however. People do not feel empathy for underdeveloped characters who make no tough decisions. Rather, reader empathy is cultivated through witnessing characters' moral judgments and actions (Zillman, 1994). By identifying with characters and adopting their perspectives, readers also experience the moral judgments characters make and understand why they made them. Those moral judgments are then, essentially, judgments about the readers' own personal actions just simulated through

the character. The more developed the characters are the more readers care about them and the consequences of their moral decisions, cheering for the good fortune of protagonists and crying for their misfortunes (Green, Brock & Kaufman, 2004; Zillman, 1994). Eliciting such responses requires the reader to form bonds, whether as friend or enemy, with the characters. Creating such bonds requires significant attention to the story world details, from plot to character development.

These strong cognitive and emotional connections to fictional characters can result in real-world changes (Green, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000). Liebes and Katz (1990), for example, suggest three reactions toward characters are *liking, similarity*, and *modeling*. While Green and Brock (2000) found evidence that transportation increases positive evaluations of characters (i.e. liking), perceived similarity between a reader and a character may not inspire such a reaction. Were a reader to identify with an evil or violent character, he or she might feel dissonance, guilt, or fear (Cohen, 2001). Conversely, emotional involvement with a positive character could provoke reader imitation of that character's language or behavior. Narratives provide alternative emotional and social perspectives through which readers can meet new characters and experience life-altering events, which provide opportunities for new understanding that could result in changes in attitudes and beliefs – another consequence of narrative transportation.

Change in attitudes and/or beliefs. The psychological distance from reality and the strong feelings and emotions experienced during transportation may lead transported readers to change their attitudes and beliefs. This was the focus of Green and Brock's (2000) study. As readers become distanced from real-world facts they also become less likely or able to argue against assertions made in the narrative. This could be because transported readers are immersed in the narrative and therefore less motivated to counterargue.

Alternatively, it could be because by default people believe what they hear and read and only disbelieve after the fact and only through deliberate effort (Gerrig, 1993; Gilbert, 1991; Gilbert, Tafarodi & Malone, 1993). As a result, highly transported readers may be persuaded by narrative arguments and come back to the world of origin with altered attitudes or beliefs. This consequence directly reflects Gerrig's (1993) description of the traveler returning "somewhat changed by the journey," (p. 11).

So what is it about a narrative that makes it so influential? Why do readers become transported and persuaded by these characters and their struggles? According to Bruner (1991), it is because narratives are held to different truth standards than other messages. Unlike rhetorical arguments, narratives must merely reach verisimilitude rather than concrete fact. That is, they must create a sense of believable plausibility or lifelikeness that the audience can accept without

discredit. The author accomplishes this by creating a rich, vivid world free from paradoxes. No matter how fantastic the elements within that world the audience is motivated to accept it, at least temporarily, as long as the narrative avoids conflicting rules and behaviors (Green & Brock, 2000). The reader assists the author by suspending disbelief, which is a consequence of transportation. Unlike narratives, rhetorical arguments must extend beyond verisimilitude and provide supporting factual evidence for claims made.

In combination, a truth standard of verisimilitude combined with the emotional engagement with the characters and a cognitive distance from real-world facts leaves readers open to the persuasiveness of narrative messages, whether deliberate or unintentional (Green & Brock, 2000). In this way, narrative differs from other forms of persuasive rhetoric, such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1982) and Heuristic-Systematic Model of information processing (Chaiken, 1980). Prentice and Gerrig (1999) argue these dual-process models fail to capture the phenomenological experience of reading, hearing, or viewing a work of fiction. By conceptualizing their theory on Gerrig's (1993) description of a traveler, Green and Brock (2000) describe narrative transportation as a distinct mental process and identify the resulting effects of it. As they found in their experiments, however, certain aspects of narrative transportation could not be quantified; a topic to which I now turn.

Transportation scale development. In their research of narrative transportation and its subsequent affects, Green and Brock (2000) attempted to capture the phenomenological experience of reading a narrative. To do so, they developed the Transportation Scale, a 15-item Likert-type measure of the proposed dimensions of narrative transportation. The first 11 questions are general items followed by four narrative-specific imagery items. The final scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.76 in a sample study of 274 participants.

The Transportation Scale was developed to gauge readers' levels of cognitive and emotional engagement, mentally imagery, feeling of suspense, and loss of external awareness. Green and Brock (2000) chose these dimensions based on Gerrig's (1993) exposition of narrative experience. Gerrig uses a metaphor of the reader as a traveler to describe and elaborate on narrative experience and its effects. He states this metaphor is not a theory of narrative transportation in and of itself, but allows him to organize his thoughts on the phenomenon and presents researchers with issues that necessitate theoretical investigation.

During their study, Green and Brock (2000) found that transportation appeared to "display characteristics consistent with conceptualization from Gerrig," (p. 718). The results of their multiple experiments also show support for the scale as an efficient way to quantify the various dimensions of the phenomenon. As a standardized questionnaire, however, the

Transportation Scale may limit the opportunity for expanding the current theory to include previously unknown dimensions of narrative transportation (Cacioppo, Von Hippel, & Ernst, 1997).

New dimensions of narrative transportation. Perhaps attempting to address this, Green and Brock (2000) employed an ancillary measure for participants to provide their unedited thoughts and ideas about the test narrative. Previously used in studies of social psychology (Brock, 1967), the thought-listing technique provides researchers with a flexible tool to measure participants' cognitive responses to stimuli (Cacioppo & Petty, 1981). This measure is most useful when researchers have little to no predetermined ideas about which cognitive dimensions are relevant (Cacioppo & Petty, 1997).

Depending on what is under investigation, researchers instruct participants to record their thoughts before, during, or after the occurrence of a stimulus. Researchers then score these thought listings using a predetermined set of requirements. The most common method of scoring thought listings is polarity (valence) (Cacioppo et al., 1997). When scoring for polarity, thought listings are interpreted and judged as positive (favorable), negative (unfavorable), and neutral/irrelevant. This traditional method of scoring is used to quantify cognitive responses from participants' thoughts (Cacioppo & Petty, 1981). Cacioppo and Petty (1981) note that although

their research focuses on participants' cognitive responses to persuasive messages, the thought-listing technique is applicable to any significant stimulus.

Because Green and Brock (2000) were interested in the persuasive effects of narrative transportation, they included thought listings after their narrative stimuli. What the researchers found, however, were emotional descriptions and global reactions that could not be quantified. Readers describe sensations and emotions in ways that could not be simply judged as positive or negative, but must be taken in context. Even the one-word response of "Horrifying" offers a much more vivid account of the experience than the Transportation Scale item, "The narrative affected me emotionally," (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 704). It is possible these though listings were omitted because they could not be objectively coded and quantified. However, because they did not work in the context of this study does not mean they should be completely eliminated from the research on narrative transportation. In support of continued research, Green and Brock (2000) suggest that a fuller range of transportation would be worth exploring.

Summary

The aforementioned sections described some of the theoretical underpinnings of narrative transportation. Additionally, the core cognitive processes thought to be involved in narrative transportation were discussed. Because objective description implies describing events separate

from their contextual setting, however, these descriptions of narrative transportation may not correspond with individual experience (Pollio, 1982). Green and Brock (2000) developed a scale to measure theoretical dimensions of a phenomenon described by Gerrig; Gerrig (1993) compared the experience of narrative worlds to that of a literal traveler, basing his metaphor on the reports of other researchers. Their work provides a solid foundation for a more in-depth investigation of what it feels like to be transported into a narrative world. Using thought listings as an ancillary measure was an initial step toward collecting first-person accounts of narrative experience. By allowing the participants a forum to describe their unedited thoughts and emotions, Green & Brock (2000) were collecting raw qualitative data that could provide an important complement to understanding the phenomenon. Unfortunately, attempting to code this data using a method of quantification was unsuccessful, leading the researchers to abandon the use of thought-listings.

Phenomenology

In this final section I describe a core construct that may help move beyond the traditional methods of understanding narrative transportation. This is the notion of "phenomenology", an idea with roots in philosophy and which means, more generally, a method for studying human consciousness and phenomena as they are experienced (Valle & Halling, 1989). I now review

how phenomenology, as a method of inquiry, can be used to more fully examine the experience of narrative transportation.

In various lines of study, the use of oral, open-ended interviews has proven beneficial. For example, researchers in sports psychology (Dale, 1996; Scanlan, Stein, & Ravizza, 1989), consumer research (Thompson, Locander & Pollio, 1989), and nursing (Knaack, 1984) have taken participants' subjective descriptions as practical sources of information. They did not, however, attempt to quantify these data using traditional coding methods (e.g. Brock, 1967). Instead, interviews were conducted that allowed the participants to steer the conversation and produce contextual and personally meaningful descriptions of their lived experiences. These phenomenological interviews are a form of investigation influenced by existentialism and phenomenology – the first a philosophical perspective and the second a method of inquiry (Thompson et al., 1989). Existentialism holds the view that understanding concrete human existence is not fully explainable through either moral or scientific explanation, both of which only capture some aspects of everyday life (Crowell, 2010). Phenomenology is the study of phenomena as experienced from the subjective point of view (Smith, 2008). Taken together, these two philosophies aim to provide thorough descriptions of everyday human life through first-person accounts of lived experience (Dale, 1996).

One key tenet of existential-phenomenology is it does not require an individual to be separated from his or her environment like the traditional scientific method. In fact, because phenomenology accepts a contextualist worldview, it requires a person to be observed as a human-being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962). This interpretation suggests people cannot ever be separated from their environment, and they are always either acting upon the world or being acted upon (Dale, 1996). Experiences, then, are contextual and depend on a variety of factors such as time, place, the individual's background knowledge, skill sets, emotions, etc. Because of this contextuality, lived experience is not always explicable via objective description. Existential-phenomenology provides a method for describing human experience in context, and the phenomenological interview provides researchers with an effective tool to investigate the subjective perspectives of people during their experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Phenomenological interview. The phenomenological interview differs in format form a standard interview in that the researcher is not directing the interview with a long list of mandatory questions. Instead, the researcher begins this semi-structured interview with a single guiding question about the participant's experience in an attempt to: (a) elicit a contextual and personally meaningful description of a phenomenon, and (b) initiate a dialogue between the two individuals that leads to natural conversation (Dale, 1996). This discovery-oriented approach

allows the participant to get comfortable and speak naturally while the researcher listens. The researcher then asks open-ended questions not aimed at opinions or theories (Gallagher, 2010), but aimed at eliciting further description of the participants' experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

In order to reduce difficulties that could arise during the interview, researchers can create an interview schedule of possible follow-up questions (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This list is meant to be suggestive in nature and should not be used to restrict the flexibility of the dialogue. Having thought of potential difficulties beforehand allows researchers the confidence to concentrate more thoroughly on what the participant is saying (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Typically, though, follow-up questions should flow from the dialogue (Smith, 2004). For example, the researcher may ask the participant to describe a previous experience that relates to the topic of discussion. By focusing on specific events, the participant can describe experiences in greater detail, clarify the meaning of things, and even realize sensations and perceptions he or she may have been previously unaware of (Dale, 1996). Thompson et al. (1989), for example, reported about a consumer who discovered during her phenomenological interview that she was happier with products she bought on impulse rather than those she had bought after sensible deliberation. This revelation came about through the participant's own account of a skirt

purchased during a sale. During their dialogue, the only question the researcher asked was for the participant to describe a time where she made such a purchase.

This method of vague questioning helps draw out details from the participant—who is the subject matter expert on the experience (Dale, 1996)—not to confirm theoretical hypotheses (Smith, 2004; Thompson et al., 1989). By doing so, the researcher allows the participant to steer the conversation and control the interview; the researcher's role during questioning is to provide a comfortable setting for participants to describe their experiences in detail. In this way, researchers must help participants avoid theorizing while attending to their experiences (Gallagher & Sørensen, 2006). That is, they must avoid asking participants, "Why?" Asking participants to provide rationalizations for their decisions can make them feel judged and self-conscious, which may lead to defensive responses (Thompson et al., 1989). In addition, "why" questions may elicit responses not indicative of lived experience. These questions force participants into the position of having to explain their behavior and reactions rather than describe them. Asking participants "why" they responded the way they did could result in, at best, naïve theories about their own behavior, and at worst, defensive responses that could contaminate or limit the collection of useful data. Therefore, efforts should be focused on specific situations and reactions that illustrate the participants' lived experience.

Analyzing the data. The discoveries made via phenomenological interviews are made useful by comparison to other interviews. Researchers investigate what a single individual is thinking and feeling during an event in order to contrast the findings with other individuals' accounts of the same phenomenon in the hopes of finding recurring themes. That is, one person's report of an experience is valuable if it is representative of common experiences (Gallagher & Sørensen, 2006). The first-person data collected from all participants' interviews are analyzed for themes, or patterns of response, that indicate invariant structures of experience.

To begin such an analysis, first the interview must be recorded for audio and then transcribed (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Recording the interview relieves the researcher of the burden of writing down everything the participant says, and allows him or her to concentrate more fully on the participants' responses. This way the researcher can ask pertinent follow-up questions based on the participant's own language that get at the deeper levels of meaning and experience described by the participant. Once the interviews are conducted, the verbatim audio for each interview, including the researcher's questions, is transcribed for thematic analysis. Smith and Osborn (2003) suggest transcription to the semantic level, which includes false starts, significant pauses, and laughter. On the semantic level, the researcher looks only at what was explicitly stated by the participants to provide a rich description of the entire data set. Using

verbatim transcripts maintains interpretive validity by using the participants' exact words (Johnson, 1997). This differs from the latent level of analysis in which the researcher identifies underlying ideas and assumptions that shape the semantic content of the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). Regardless of which level one chooses to transcribe the audio, the transcription process is a key phase for familiarization with the data (Bird, 2005), which informs further analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006).

Once the recorded interviews are transcribed, a thematic analysis can be conducted. "The analysis facilitates the transfer of naïve descriptions of experience into a description of the essential textural features of that individual experience," (Conklin, 2007, p. 277). There are two primary processes of data analysis – inductive and deductive. Deductive is top-down and theory driven. Researchers begin with a theory or framework and seek out data that fit within that predetermined model (Braun & Clark, 2006). This process is typically used when there is a specific research question to be answered. Because the current study was discovery oriented, however, an inductive process is used for data analysis. An inductive analysis is a bottom-up, or data driven, analysis, where themes arise naturally from the content and not from some predetermined theories (Patton, 1990). This allows researchers to get a better understanding of a phenomenon as experienced from a particular person's point of view. Braun and Clark (2006)

note, however, although researchers try to code without bias, they "cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum," (p. 12).

The first step of any analysis is familiarization with the data, which is accomplished by reading through the transcript several times (Braun & Clark, 2006; Dale, 1996; Scanlan et al., 1989; Smith & Osborn, 2003). For some, this step began during the transcription process. This familiarization allows one to gain a sense of the data as a whole, including early identification of patterns. Once a level of familiarity is attained, it is necessary to define the unit of analysis. These may be labeled as *tags* (Côté, Salmela, Baria, & Russell, 1993), *meaning units* (Tesch, 1990), or *basic units* (Scanlan et al., 1989). Once defined, the transcripts can be coded for these units of analysis. After the data has been completely coded, the codes are clustered and organized into categories, or themes. This requires the researcher to compare and contrast codes with one another to identify underlying uniformities in the data that share a common thread (Scanlan et al., 1989). The common thread is the theme for that cluster. Some codes may not suitably fit into another cluster and become themes of their own. Throughout this process, themes must be examined to make sure codes within them are similar enough to be clustered yet

remain distinct from other themes (Côté et al., 1993). Patton (1990) referred to this characteristic as internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity.

Once all the codes have been clustered into themes the process is repeated to identify higher level (or superordinate) themes (Scanlan et al., 1989; Smith & Osborn, 2003). The themes identified in the first clustering are compared, contrasted, and examined for underlying uniformities. Similar themes are then grouped together to create higher-level themes. Some themes may be dropped if they appear undistinguishable or lack rich evidence. Each higher level is more interpretive and analytical than the previous as the researcher identifies meaningful connections among themes (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Scanlan et al. (1989) identified three criteria for delimiting meaningful themes. The first states themes at any level must accurately capture the lower order themes that comprise it. The second states all themes on the same level must be mutually exclusive, which is similar to Patton's (1990) external heterogeneity. The third states higher-level themes must capture as many of the lower level themes as possible in order to limit unclustered themes. This process continues until all the data fits into existing theme hierarchy without the creation of new, meaningful themes, at which point the structure reaches theoretical saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). During this lengthy process it is important to

repeatedly reference the actual words of the participant (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This way the interpretations of the researcher do not stray from the actual context of the data.

Using the results of this analysis, researchers can confidently develop a comprehensive description of a phenomenon that is not wholly objective, but *intersubjective* – an essential feature meaning the experience can be independently observed by all (Rasmussen, 1996). This specialized study may then stand on its own as a detailed description of a specific issue (or group of issues), or it could be correlated with supplementary objective measures to ascertain previously unknown associations or interactions (Gallagher & Sørensen, 2006). In short, the phenomenological investigation of narrative transportation can complement and extend our current understanding of this phenomenon.

Study design. Rather than seeking to discover "why" something happens, as is the traditional scientific view, existential phenomenology attempts to answer "what" a phenomenon is like (Valle & Halling, 1989). The phenomenological interview provides researchers with an effective tool to investigate the nature of the phenomenon in question (Dale, 1996). By focusing on specific individuals as unique and viable sources of information rather than collecting a wide range of observable and measurable data, however, the phenomenological interview demands much more of the researchers' time and focus per subject.

This type of approach, whereby each case is rigorously investigated and analyzed, is idiographic rather than nomothetic, the latter of which has typically dominated studies of human behavior (Runyan, 1983; Smith & Osborn, 2003). "In a nomothetic study, analysis is at the level of groups and populations, and one can make only probabilistic claims about individuals; for example, there is a 70 percent chance that person x will respond in this way," (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 56). Rather than attempting to make broad generalizations by focusing on the group, the idiographic approach reveals individual traits or variables (Runyan, 1983), which allows us to form specific and substantive statements about individual cases (Smith, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Runyan (1983) suggests greater attention on the individual via the idiographic approach could supplement the well-established method of nomothetic research and provide a balanced perspective.

In a similar argument, Côté et al. (1993) discuss moving away from "orthodox" science toward a more *heuristic* paradigm, which stresses the importance of subjective experience. They too suggest idiographic approaches, such as in-depth interviews and the subsequent comprehensive content analyses, are needed to gain a more thorough understanding of human experience. For this reason, these studies are often conducted on small sample sizes (Smith &

Osborn, 2003). The goal of these very discrete studies is to identify the subtleties and nuances of individual experience discovered during inductive analysis (Côté et al., 1993).

Because the aim of a phenomenological study is to provide an in-depth description of a specific phenomenon, and because the case-by-case interview and analysis is extremely time consuming, it has been suggested that these studies can only be accomplished with a very limited sample size (Smith, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2003). Smith (2004) even proposed a study could be done on a single case, provided the case is particularly rich or compelling. While there is no explicit or exact limit for a sample size, a group of five to 10 is recommended for a student project (Smith, 2004; Smith & Osborn, 2003). With a small sample size, the researcher is sacrificing breadth for depth. For this reason, it is also necessary to recruit a purposive, homogenous sample (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The rationale for this is by studying such a limited sample it is not helpful to attempt a representative sampling, but rather one should recruit participants with similar demographics or culture for whom the research topic is of importance. In the next section I detail how I use an integrated set of methods, both quantitative and qualitative, to identify the common qualitative features of narrative transportation. In doing so, I attempt to explain what transportation into a story world feels like and how people make sense of this experience.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

Introduction to Study

To get a more complete understanding of narrative transportation as a phenomenon, I propose a study that holds participants as the subject matter experts. Prior research has led to the creation of consistent measures that determine the extent to which participants were transported. Building upon that foundation, in the present study I additionally examine what it means to be transported on an experiential level. A questionnaire completed by a participant may show a high level of narrative transportation, but this may mean something different to various individuals. Just as with any other phenomenon, we must not assume the experience is the same for everyone. As such, I argue that by taking a multidisciplinary approach to the understanding of narrative transportation, it will be possible to gain a deeper understanding of the qualities and the phenomenological characteristics of the experience. I now describe the stimulus and methods to be used in this study.

Participants

Eight U.S. college students, six female and two male, in communications courses participated for extra credit in their courses. Participants' ages ranged from 21 to 46 years of age.

Quantitative Measures. Because an idiographic approach was used in this study, it was important to use a small, homogenous sample for whom the research topic was of importance (Smith & Osborn, 2003). To ensure participants in this sample were comparable in multiple contexts, they completed the following measures: Transportation Scale, two factors from the Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire, personal experience survey, and a demographics survey.

Transportation scale. The Transportation Scale is a 15-item scale developed to measure a reader's immersion in another setting with simultaneous distancing from the reader's external world. The seven-point Likert-type scale is anchored by *not at all* to *very much* and has shown good internal consistency, as well as discriminant and convergent validity (Green, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000). Multiple studies have shown the scale's effectiveness at measuring emotional involvement, cognitive attention, mental imagery, feelings of suspense, and loss of external awareness (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$). The first 11 items are general purpose. Items 12-15 on the scale are imagery questions modified to specifically correspond with the test narrative.

Table 1: Transportation Scale Items

Item
Panel 1: General Items
1. While I was reading the narrative, I could easily picture the events in it taking place.
2. While I was reading the narrative, activity going on in the room around me was on my mind. (R)
3. I could picture myself in the scene of the events described in the narrative.
4. I was mentally involved in the narrative while reading it.
5. After finishing the narrative, I found it easy to put it out of my mind. (R)
6. I wanted to learn how the narrative ended.
7. The narrative affected me emotionally.
8. I found myself thinking of ways the narrative could have turned out differently.
9. I found my mind wandering while reading the narrative. (R)
10. The events in the narrative are relevant to my everyday life.
11. The events in the narrative have changed my life.
Panel 2: Items specific to "The Shed Skin"
12. While reading the narrative I had a vivid image of the Narrator.
13. While reading the narrative I had a vivid image of the Surgeon.
14. While reading the narrative I had a vivid image of the snake.
15. While reading the narrative I had a vivid image of the Lorie.
Note. R = reverse-scored.

***Transportation scale results*.** Results show participants were all moderately transported (mean = 73.5) with very little range between transportation scores (range = 69 – 77). Results are shown in Table 2. Because this was a small, purposive sampling of similar participants, these results could indicate the sampling was a success. A much wider range of scores might imply participants were too different to make specific and substantive claims from this analysis.

Table 2: Transportation Scale Results

PARTICIPANT	TRANSPORTATION SCORE
1	69
2	72
3	75
4	76
5	71
6	74
7	73
8	77
MEAN	72.8
MEDIAN	73.5
MODE	n/a
RANGE	69 – 77

Multidimensional personality questionnaire. Transportation significantly correlated with the dissociative oblivion factor of the Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire (Green & Brock, 2000). The six true/false item portion of the MPQ measures the ease of which participants

become absorbed in experiences. Also, the three-item vivid reminiscence factor measures participants' ability to relive experiences in their mind, which may influence the results of the phenomenological interview. For example, if during the interview a participant is unable to recollect or fully describe their experience, this may be the result of a low vivid reminiscence score and not indicative of low transportation. Permission for use did not allow reproduction of this unpublished scale (Multidimensional, 2003).

MPQ results. As Table 3 indicates, all participants scored high on the dissociative oblivion factor of the MPQ. Three of eight participants scored low on the vivid reminiscence factor. While it was theorized this factor might affect the results of the phenomenological interview, these scores did not have an observable effect during the phenomenological interview. However, participant 1 self-identified as a type-A personality that focuses on getting the details when reading. It is possible that this participant's focus on the details disrupted construction of a situation model, similar to the memory instruction of Zwaan, Magliano, and Graesser's (1995) experiment. This disruption could then explain the participant's inability to mentally relive the experience mind, as indicated by the low score.

Table 3: Multidimensional Personality Questionnaire Results

	DISSOCIATIVE OBLIVION			VIVID REMINISCENCE		
PARTICIPANT	**TRUE**	**FALSE**	**HIGH/LOW**	**TRUE**	**FALSE**	**HIGH/LOW**
1	5	1	HIGH	1	3	LOW
2	5	1	HIGH	3	0	HIGH
3	4	2	HIGH	1	2	LOW
4	5	1	HIGH	3	0	HIGH
5	5	1	HIGH	1	2	LOW
6	6	0	HIGH	2	1	HIGH
7	4	2	HIGH	2	1	HIGH
8	5	1	HIGH	3	0	HIGH
			Dissociative Oblivion	Vivid Reminiscence		
		High	8	5		
		Low	0	3		

Personal experience. It has been shown that personal experience with themes similar to those in the narrative increases transportation; specifically, if the participant knew a close friend or family member that shared significant characteristics with the main characters, transportation was higher (Green, 2004). Also, to a lesser degree, familiarity with societies and organizations

present in the narrative may increase transportation to a lesser degree. Therefore, for this study, participants were asked whether they had any familiarity with people, events or experiences similar to those that occurred in the narrative.

For "The Shed Skin," participants were specifically asked if they had close friends or family members who had been diagnosed with cancer (yes/no). Participants were asked how they would rate their physical health. Participants were asked if they ever had severe medical issues that required surgery or a long stay in a hospital. Also, participants were asked about their familiarity and knowledge of cancer treatment and their effects on a scale ranging from 1 (not familiar) to 5 (very familiar).

Because transportation is regarded as a special type of flow (Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010), reader skill level and experience with the genre may also increase levels of transportation. To assess these factors, readers were asked how many hours per week they spend reading fiction (i.e., fantasy, science-fiction, thriller stories), and nonfiction (i.e., news stories, biographies, etc.) either in books, magazines, or online?

Table 4: Personal Experience Items

Item
Panel 1: "The Shed Skin"
1. Do you have close friends or family who have had cancer? (yes/no)
2. How would you rate your physical health? (great, average, poor, prefer not to say)
3. Have you had any major medical problems that required surgery or long stays in a hospital? (yes/no)
4. How familiar are you with breast cancer treatments and their effects? (1-5, not familiar – very familiar)
Panel 2: Reading
1. How many hours per week do you spend reading **fiction** (i.e., fantasy, science-fiction, thriller stories, etc.), in **books**? _____ hours per week
2. How many hours per week do you spend reading **fiction** (i.e., fantasy, science-fiction, thriller stories, etc.), in **magazines**? _____ hours per week
3. How many hours per week do you spend reading **fiction** (i.e., fantasy, science-fiction, thriller stories, etc.), **online**? _____ hours per week
4. How many hours per week do you spend reading **non-fiction** (i.e., news stories, biographies, etc.), in **books**? _____ hours per week
5. How many hours per week do you spend reading **non-fiction** (i.e., news stories, biographies, etc.), in **magazines**? _____ hours per week
6. How many hours per week do you spend reading **non-fiction** (i.e., news stories, biographies, etc.), **online**? _____ hours per week

***Personal experience survey results*.** Results for the narrative themes portion of the personal experience survey can be seen in Table 5. Perhaps the most important finding here is the answer to the question, "Do you have close friends or family who have had cancer?" Seven out of eight participants answered yes to this, and the one who answered no reported having an

acquaintance with breast cancer. Therefore, 100% of participants knew someone who had cancer. This single negative response may be the result of how the question was worded.

Table 5**:** Previous Experience Results

	FRIEND/FAMILY WITH CANCER	**RATING OF PERSONAL HEATLH**	**LONG STAYS IN HOSPITAL**	**FAMILIAR WITH BREAST CANCER**
PARTICIPANT	**Yes/No**	**Great/Avg/Poor/ Prefer Not to Say**	**Yes/No**	**Not Familiar – Very Familiar (1 – 5)**
1	YES	AVERAGE	NO	2
2	YES	AVERAGE	YES	5
3	YES	GREAT	NO	4
4	YES	AVERAGE	NO	4
5	NO	AVERAGE	NO	3
6	YES	GREAT	NO	4
7	YES	AVERAGE	YES	3
8	YES	GREAT	YES	4
			MEAN	3.625
			MEDIAN	4
			MODE	4
			RANGE	2 – 5

Also, as indicated in Table 6, participants self-reported low to medium levels of reading frequency, whether in books, magazines, or online. Although ranges vary, only one participant reported reading more fiction than nonfiction each week. This could suggest experience with fiction may not have influenced levels of transportation in this study.

Table 6**:** Reading Frequency Results

		HOURS PER WEEK SPENT READING			
PARTICIPANT	**FICTION**	**NONFICTION**	**TOTAL**	**READING FREQUENCY**	
1	1 – 5	3 – 15	4 – 20	LOW	
2	3 – 15	3 – 15	6 – 30	LOW	
3	8 – 20	42 – 50+	50 – 70+	LOW/MED – MEDIUM	
4	23 – 35	28 – 40	51 – 75	LOW/MED – MEDIUM	
5	3 – 15	8 – 20	11 – 35	LOW – LOW/MED	
6	23 – 35	18 – 30	41 – 65	LOW/MED – MEDIUM	
7	8 – 20	13 – 25	21 – 45	LOW – LOW/MED	
8	8 – 20	8 – 20	16 – 40	LOW – LOW/MED	
Reading Frequency:	Low	Low-mid	Medium	Mid-High	High
#Hours Per Week Spent Reading:	6 -- 30	31 -- 60	61 -- 90	91 -- 120	121+

Demographics survey. Although most personally identifiable information was not collected for this study, some basic demographic information was used to get a sense of the group, including age, race, and gender.

Table 7: Demographic Items

Item
Demographics
1. What is your current age?
2. What is your race/ethnicity?
3. What is your gender?

Demographics survey results. The results of the demographics survey indicate the group was demographically similar, as can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8**:** Demographics

PARTICIPANT	CURRENT AGE	RACE/ETHNICITY	GENDER		
1	28	WHITE	FEMALE		
2	24	HISPANIC	MALE		
3	46	WHITE/OTHER	FEMALE		
4	24	BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN	FEMALE		
5	22	WHITE	FEMALE		
6	27	MIDDLE EASTERN	FEMALE		
7	22	WHITE/CAUCASIAN	FEMALE		
8	21	HISPANIC (MEXICAN/ COLUMBIAN)	MALE		
	WHITE	**BLACK**	**HISPANIC**	**MIDDLE EASTERN**	**TOTAL**
MALE ~			2		2
FEMALE ~	4	1		1	6
	MEAN	**MEDIAN**	**MODE**	**RANGE**	
AGES:	26.75	24	24	21 – 46	

This demographic information, combined with the results from all other surveys, demonstrates the homogeneity of the sample. Having met the criteria of a small, homogenous

sample, a more in-depth phenomenological investigation of each participant's first-person experience can be conducted.

Materials

Test narrative. Two essays were selected from *The Sun*, an independent American magazine comprised of essays, stories, poems, and photography. Published submissions contain common themes of relationships, drugs, crime, and death, as well as the resulting human conditions of remorse, redemption, and forgiveness. "Writing from *The Sun* has won the Pushcart Prize, been published in *Best American Short Stories* and *Best American Essays*, and been broadcast on National Public Radio," ("About the sun," 2012).

In previous studies, researchers adapted short stories from larger narratives (Green & Brock, 2000), which may have altered participants' experienced transportation and responses to Transportation Scale items. In order to eliminate this potential confound, I chose complete narratives with a definitive beginning, middle, and end. Selected narratives were comparable in word count and complexity based on results from the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count program (LIWC). Therefore, I performed a pilot study to identify which of the two narratives produced higher levels of transportation. Results showed both narratives were equal in

transportation, therefore one was chosen based on its relatable themes of friendship, cancer and death.

"The Shed Skin" was written by Kim I. Young and published in the February 2005 issue of *The Sun*. At approximately 3,900 words long, this narrative tells the story of one woman's diagnosis of breast cancer and how it affects her outlook on life and her relationships with others. Told from the first-person point of view, the story centers on how the narrator feels, both physically and emotionally, throughout her diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer. One example is the narrator's description of her sliding out of her chair and wondering why no one seems concerned only to realize she hasn't actually fallen from her chair but merely feels this way as a result of the devastating diagnosis she has just been given. The story ends with the narrator realizing how lucky she is to survive her cancer and treatment despite her imperfect, damaged body. This article was selected because it is well written, delves into fear and realistic reactions to death, and is emotionally powerful.

Phenomenological interview. The phenomenological interview is a functional dialogue between the researcher and the participant where both are equals and the participant is the subject matter expert. It is not a rigid, a priori list of questions posed to each participant and set by the researcher. The interview begins with a single pre-planned, open-ended question and

continues with an undetermined amount of follow-up questions designed to elicit precise descriptions of experience from the participant and clarify the meaning of the experience. Whenever possible, follow-up questions were asked using the participant's own language.

In order to reduce possible difficulties that could arise during the interview, and interview schedule was created to remind the researcher of topic probes (Smith & Osborn, 2003). This list is merely suggestive in nature and was used when a particular path of dialogue seemed to end. Not all questions were asked of every participant and not all questions were worded the same way. The only exceptions were the opening question and the closing question, which were asked to every participant to maintain consistency and avoid omitting any experiences not covered during the dialogue. Interviews continued long enough to explore the topic in depth.

Table 9**:** Phenomenological Interview Items

Item
Panel 1: Opening Question
1. Can you describe how you felt while reading the narrative?
Panel 2: Possible Follow-up Questions
2. Can you tell me about another time where you felt a similar experience, either in real life or when reading a narrative?
3. What was the experience like?
4. When you experienced _____, did that change the way you felt?
5. While reading the narrative, what were you focused on?
6. What was it about _____ that stole your focus?
7. What were you most aware of during reading?
8. Can you describe what your favorite scene was like?
9. How were you imagining the scene?
10. What was your impression of the main character?
11. What was it about the character that made you feel this way?
12. What were you thinking about when you finished reading the story?
13. Was there one scene that sticks out in your mind?
14. How did you feel about that scene?
15. Was there a particular character you could relate to?
16. Can you describe in detail any mental images that stick out to you?
17. Could you describe any sensations you got during reading?
18. Can you describe what that _____ (sensation) felt like?
19. What thoughts did you have about the narrator's decision?
20. When you had these thoughts, how did they make you feel?
Panel 3: Closing Question
21. Were there any other sensations or perceptions you experienced while reading the narrative that we have not covered?

Procedure

Communication majors were chosen as a small, homogenous sample. This purposive sampling was aimed at people who may read, whether fiction or nonfiction, more often than

other demographics. For example, people enrolled in higher education courses may read more often than people not enrolled in higher education. Also, communications majors, specifically, may read more literary narratives than engineering majors who may focus primarily on scientific and nonfiction reading materials. However, communications majors may read at a less intensive level than English majors, who may reflexively scrutinize narratives for structure and meaning.

Participants were recruited through the university email system. A program coordinator in the Nicholson School of Communication at the University of Central Florida emailed both graduate and undergraduate students a description of the study along with the researcher's contact information. Students then volunteered for participation via email. As an incentive, a communications professor offered students extra credit for participation in the study. Volunteers were given available dates and times, and they chose their own appointment times based on their availability.

The study was held in a room at the Nicholson School of Communication. Participants entered the study room, were greeted, and were asked to sit on the opposite side of the table from the researcher. The researcher provided an informed consent document, which the participant was asked to read before continuing with the study. Next, the researcher provided participants with the test narrative, an envelope containing the four questionnaires, and two #2 pencils.

Participants were instructed to read the test narrative as if they were reading in their own spare time for leisure. Participants were instructed to remove the questionnaires from the envelope when finished reading, completed the questionnaires, and place them back inside the envelope. After the questionnaires were completed, the researcher collected the narrative and envelope from the participants. Then, the researcher described the phenomenological interview and asked participants if they had any questions before the interview began. Participants were also informed the interview would be audio recorded. Interview recordings were used for transcription and data analysis, and also increase the descriptive validity of the study (Johnson, 1997).

Interview sequence. To maintain consistency between interviews, each interview began with the same open-ended question. Follow-up questions were asked based on the participants' language and response. Some follow-up questions asked the participant to elaborate or clarify a previously used term or phrase. These questions were often posed as, "What do you mean by _____?" or "What do you mean when you say _____?" The interview continued while the participant and researcher discussed the thoughts, feelings and sensations experienced during reading. An interview schedule was used to direct the researcher when one discussion path seemed to end. To maintain consistency between interviews, a final open-ended probe was asked

of each participant to ensure no thoughts, feelings or sensations the participant experienced were not covered.

Data analysis. Two researchers, myself and another graduate student unfamiliar with the literature, analyzed verbatim transcripts typed from digital audio recordings of the phenomenological interviews. First, the researchers began with the same transcript. Following the guidelines proposed in other such research (Braun & Clark, 2006; Dale, 1996; Scanlan et al., 1989; Smith & Osborn, 2003), both read through the transcript multiple times to familiarize themselves and get a sense of the whole. Then, using methods suggested in earlier work (Côté et al., 1993; Scanlan et al., 1989; Tesch, 1990), the two defined the unit of analysis. The unit of analysis for this study was any statement containing a description of experience reported by the participant as occurring during the time of reading the test narrative. Statements varied in length from a single sentence to multiple paragraphs that expressed "a single, recognizable aspect of the subject's experience," (Cloonan, 1971, p. 117). The researchers then each coded the entire transcript independently. Once coding was complete, the coded transcripts were compared for similarity. Disagreements were settled by discussion until both researchers agreed the code fit the unit of analysis, or until the code was dropped. During this process, one researcher would state the page number and location of the statement and read it aloud as the other researcher followed

along. Then, the research would verbally defend why this statement fit the unit of analysis. Disagreements arose based on: (a) if a statement described an experience or not, (b) if the described experience occurred while reading the test narrative or some other time in the participant's life, (c) and if all parts of the statement represented a single, recognizable aspect of experience. This consensual validation helped reduce potential biases of either researcher (Côté et al., 1993; Scanlan et al., 1989).

Once codes were agreed upon, the remaining transcripts were divided equally between the two researchers. They then independently read through and coded each transcript separately. When all transcripts had been coded, the two once again compared codes for similarity. Disagreements were settled by discussion as previously described for the first transcript. Once all transcripts were coded and all codes agreed upon, the researchers reviewed the codes to determine whether described experiences resulted directly from narrative elements or from links readers created between their own memories and narrative elements (Green, 2004; Schank & Abelson, 1995). Disagreements were settled by discussion.

After reviewing the codes, the two researchers began an inductive content analysis to organize the raw data into meaningful themes (Scanlan et al., 1989). First, the researchers clustered statements by identifying underlying uniformities in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The underlying uniformity became the theme for each cluster. Statements were compared and contrasted to ascertain internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Patton, 1990). During this process, researchers discussed the rationale behind theme names and definitions, as well as whether a statement fit cleanly into an existing category or required a new category. Disagreements were settled by discussion, ending when one researcher provided a more convincing argument. Each theme was consensually validated. This inductive process was repeated for each level of themes. Themes with common threads were clustered into higher order themes that were more analytic and interpretive (Scanlan et al., 1989). This continued until it was not possible to cluster themes into a higher level. After all of the highest-level themes had been identified they were once again compared to the participants' original words to ensure themes didn't stray from the raw data.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The inductive content analysis of the verbatim transcripts resulted in the identification of four main themes representing the common qualitative features of narrative transportation, which are shown in Figure 1. The specific quotes and resulting higher-level themes indicate sensations, perceptions, thoughts, and emotions experienced by participants while reading the test narrative. The terms *themes* and *categories* are used interchangeably to describe these features at all levels of analysis, only varying in their level of abstraction.

The resulting themes are presented in descending order from the four highest-level themes down through the respective lower level themes. Verbatim quotes are used to exemplify themes as expressed by participants. They provide a richer account of the primary source material for all emerging themes. Occasionally quotes attained from elaboration probes are used without the preceding dialogue, as this would prove lengthy and superfluous.

The four highest-level themes resulting from the inductive content analysis, as shown in Figure 1, include *complex personal connection*, *cognitive engagement*, *immersion in the story world*, and *made an impression*.

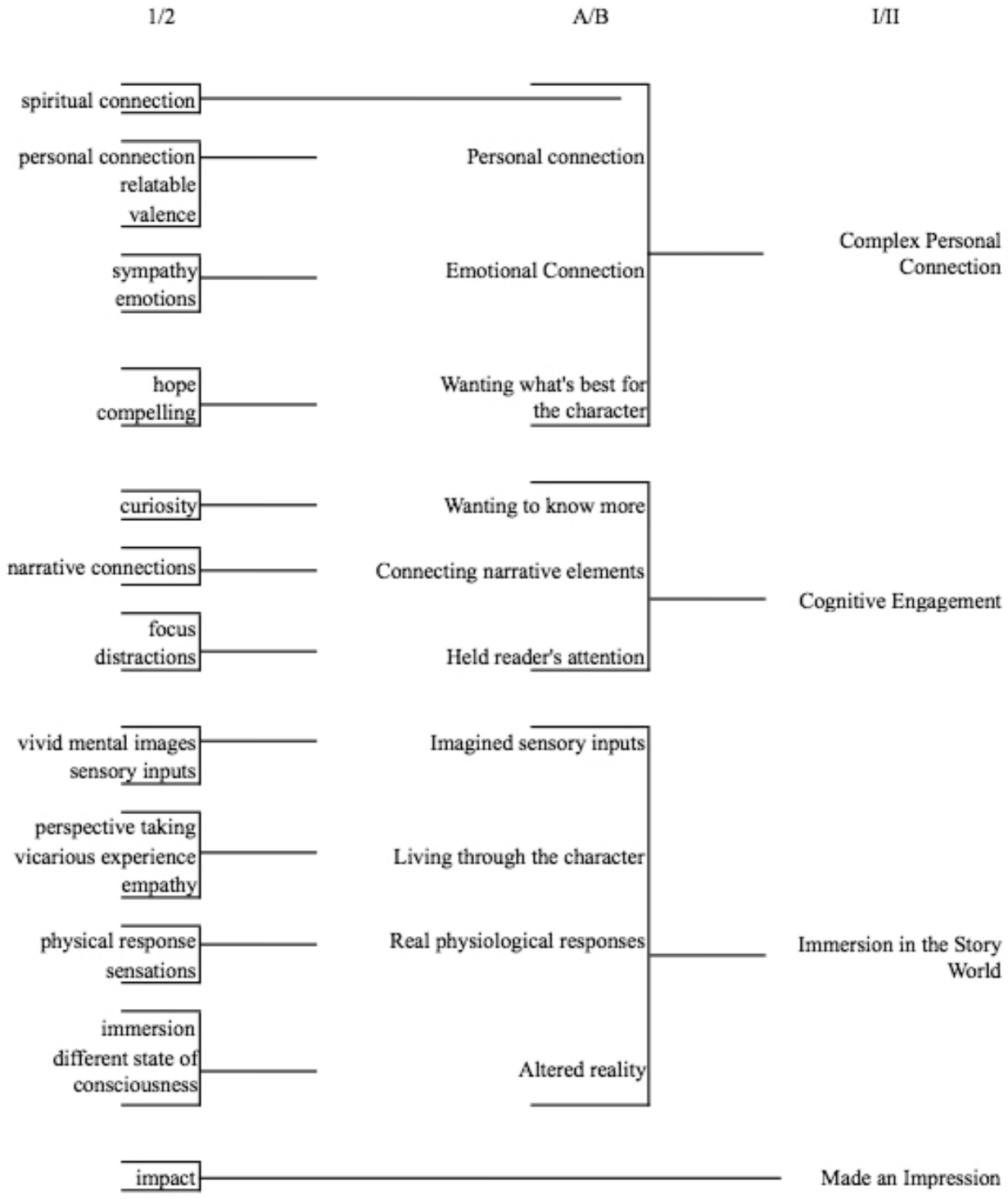

Figure 1: Emerging Themes

Complex personal connection. Complex personal connection is defined as a combination of personal, emotional, and/or spiritual connection with story elements leading to a desire for a positive outcome for the protagonist. This theme emerged from the following four lower level themes: *personal connection*, *emotional connection*, *spiritual connection*, and *wanting what's best for the character*.

Personal connection. Personal connection is defined as intimacy with a character based on similar experiences and/or perspectives that could evoke a positive feeling. This theme is composed of the three lower level themes (a) *personal connections*, as expressed in quotes such as, "I felt sort of, like, emotional about it, just because I've just had a lot of past history with these types of things…with cancer and whatnot," and, "So, like, growing up and, like, seeing my dad go through, like, the pain of radiation and stuff kind of, like, made me think of, like…I thought about that in the story," (b) *relatable*, as expressed in quotes such as, "We could relate, being women, um…we all could relate to maybe the type of shoes, uh, the doctor had one, or maybe the…maybe her hairdo. You get what I'm saying? We all have certain things in common while in, like, the same room. So I can relate to that story," and "She felt it this way. I feel it's natural…I…just part of being human, um, and therefore it was understandable," and (c) *valence*, as expressed in quotes such as, "So to tie back to this story, it's positive because you feel

feelings, and the author obviously wants to evoke some sort of emotion in you, otherwise she, the author, wouldn't have written the story. But, um…I think it's good to have an emotion no matter what that emotion is. So even if it's a negative feeling, or, um…you know, it's not happy and joyous, it's still a good thing," and, "When you're reading a good story, it feels…I mean, obviously this is a sad story, but it feels good, because you feel that connection, and you do want to know the end."

Emotional connection. Emotional connection is defined as and affective response to the events, subject matter, and/or interactions expressed in the narrative. This category is composed of the two lower level themes (a) *sympathy* and (b) *emotions*. Sympathy was expressed in quotes such as, "I felt sad for her inability to express herself, and feel like she had support," and "I felt so sorry for her." Participants expressed a variety of emotions during interviews, some of which may be considered basic while others more complex. These emotions were expressed in quotes such as, "I guess I was a little aggravated that she didn't want to take the pills, cuz, I mean, they found out it was stage four," and, "It's scary. It was very scary," and, "I was disgusted. Um…it, like, brought negative thoughts into my head, I guess," and "In a way it was…it was emotional. I don't…I don't…it was emotional and shocking at the same time."

Spiritual connection. Spiritual connection is defined as a relation of story elements to religious or spiritual symbols of personal significance. This theme was expressed through quotes such as, "I kind of took it hand in hand when it was just, like, the lady experiencing cancer. And then the result of the snake in the garden, um, I kind of looked at it in the sense of, like, a spiritual, uh, standpoint…to where it's just, like…snakes are consid…considered, like, evil," and, "And then evil, um, it kind of coincides with, like, cancer…you feeling, like it's something that…evil that's come upon you."

Wanting what's best for the character. The wanting what's best for the character category is defined as a desire for a positive outcome for the protagonist as experienced as hopeful thoughts or a feeling of compulsion to help. This theme was composed of the two lower level themes (a) *hope*, as expressed in the quote, "It was really poignant for her to beat the cancer. That was, I mean, that's what I was really rooting for," and (b) *compelling*, as expressed in the quote, "Um, to understand her and to understand her emotions and to, um, I guess that feeling of wanting to do something about it, of wanting to help."

Cognitive engagement. Cognitive engagement is defined as holding reader focus by maintaining a balance between information given and information desired. This theme emerged

from the following three themes: *wanting to know more*, *mentally connective narrative elements*, and *held reader's attention*.

Wanting to know more. The wanting to know more category is defined as a desire to learn what happens to the characters after the most recent events have been processed. This *curiosity* was expressed in the quotes such as, "It was just, like, 'Wow, where is this going?'" and, "I was just kind of curious in general, because, uh, you know, when someone goes through that kind of problem in their life, you just wanna…you just wanna see the way they react to it, emotionally and psychologically," and "I think this story kept me engaged because I did want to know what happened. There was enough, um, detail about the character that I cared about that main character to want to know what happened. What was the ending gonna be like?"

Mentally connecting narrative elements. The mentally connecting the story elements category is defined as the interpretations, inferences, and assumptions not explicitly stated in the narrative text but contributed by the reader. These *narrative connections* were expressed in quotes such as, "She was experiencing some cognitive dissonance in the way she perceived her illness, um, coming to terms with losing her hair, um, coming to terms with the severity of her cancer and if she was going to die, um, feeling sort of angry at the hospital staff that, um, she was, uh…as they were explaining to her, you know, the symptoms of the treatments and, uh,

how she was gonna…how she was gonna go about her life afterwards," and, "She made a lot of connections between, um, the snake in the garden and…well, in my mind, the snake in the garden and her experiences. And, um, how she felt that the snake shed its skin, and so it sort of got a second chance. You know, it didn't get caught by the bird. It just skinned it. Um, and unlike Lorie, she didn't get caught by the illness. She survived," and, "You can, like…you can just tell, like, there's just so much joy in her life, because, like, she did experience cancer, and so, like, she moved on from it," and "Um, when she…when she described, like, the hospital, and the color, and…her view about life that has changed, and she started to notice things that she didn't notice before."

Held reader's attention. The held reader's attention category is defined as a continuum between complete focus on the narrative and complete lack of focus as the result of various distractions. This category is composed of the two lower level themes (a) *focus*, as expressed in the quote, "But, um, I kept…I didn't really notice anything else. I was just more…it seemed like the pages were going quicker as I kept on getting more interested into it," and (b) *distractions*, as expressed in the quotes, "I mean, I could definitely hear the air conditioning. I could hear slight shifts in the chair and the table and, uh, occasionally my own, uh, physiology. So, um, that kind

of thing would be, uh, at…sometimes it would come to the forefront of my mind," and "The fact that I haven't eaten lunch, I was focusing on that a little bit."

Immersion in the story world. Immersion in the story world is defined as the reader's perception of his or her self as part of the story world, resulting in imagined and/or real physiological effects that overcome the external reality. This theme emerged from the following four themes: *imagined sensory inputs, living through the character, real physiological response,* and *altered reality*.

Imagined sensory inputs. The imagined sensory inputs category is defined as inputs perceived as coming from the traditional five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch). These sensory inputs were most often described as (a) *vivid mental images* of scenes or specific story elements described in enough detail that the reader could "see" them, as was expressed in the quotes, "Um, a small bird flying to, like, a low hanging branch with the skin…the shed skin of the snake hanging out of its mouth, sort of, you know, um… Birds have a way of, like…they have a certain way of flying when they're protecting whatever it is that they're bringing back so that nothing takes it from them. And you, I could just, you know, see that," and, "Well, when she was, like, talking about, um, the snake…and how the snake was, like, going through the old, like, wood and, like, licking the tools and, like, living on the farm, um…it, like, just, like, brought

back really happy memories of, like, my grandparents' farm," but were also reported as (b) other *sensory inputs* from traditional five senses, as expressed in the quotes, "And so you think about it that way and then, also you think about, like, the calm, professional demeanor of the doctor, and how she speaks things, like, very polite, very casual…dressing in her professional blazers, trousers, um…the pristine white lab coat, um…and then you…you, you know…it's very easy to…uh…if it's…if it's a woman, um, you know, to…to imagine a very calm and soothing voice," and "I'll describe it in this…in this amount of detail, and, um…anyone who's resonated with that type of fiction, or with that type of literature is definitely going to be able to relate, either exactly or very close to it, because they're familiar with the…what…what she's talking about…sensory experiences…touching, smelling, seeing, tasting even…hearing."

Living through the character. The living through the character category is defined as attempting to directly understand the character's mental and emotional states from within his or her point of view. This category is composed of the three lower level themes (a) *perspective taking*, as expressed in quotes such as, "I kind of, like, put myself, not in the narrator's, like, perspective, but in her friend, like, Lorie's perspective," and "I was trying to think as if she might have thought, in a way that, you know…she was trying to appreciate these things, you know, because her own life is sort of out of control, and she was rather upset about it," (b)

vicarious experience, as expressed in quotes such as, "You might vicariously experience, you know, an amputation through a character, you know, whether it be, like, their breast or their arm or their finger," and (c) *empathy*, as expressed in quotes such as, "I've been in that position, and I can understand," and, "You know, as a woman, I can, you know…this is an…scary, scary thing, and so I can relate to, you know, the fear of cancer, generally speaking, but also that fear of breast cancer…um…um…or anything that can come after that, right?"

Real physiological response. Real physiological response is defined as any bodily reaction the reader perceived apart from the traditional five senses. This category is composed of two lower level themes, including (a) direct *physical response* such as shifting body language and smiling, as expressed in the quotes, "I actually noticed my body language when I was…while reading. Um…at first I started off kind of, like, slumped, and like…but then as the story got very intense I kind of, like, raised my body and, like…different scenes in the story to where I was just, like, you know, shocked, and then I was, like, 'Aw,'" and, "It made me smile," and (b) *sensations* of temperature change, as expressed in the quotes, "Um, she talked about, at one point, the snake, um, sunbathing, um, and the feel of the sun, and at that moment I didn't think about it. But then later on, when she talked about, you know, taking the medication and getting the hot flashes and constantly having to change her sheets, it sort of brought back the

memory of, you know, sunburn…feeling…the feeling of being in the sun and being, you know, overly warm," and "On that walk she had with the fox that was real cold, and when the horse, you know, exhaled…it looked like fog, and I felt the sense of, you know, cold."

Altered reality. Altered reality is defined as an awareness of the story world that is more immediate than the reader's external reality. This category is composed of the lower level themes (a) *immersion*, as expressed in quotes such as, "So, to me, I like to feel as if, you know, I'm experiencing this. I'm there. Um, obviously not, you know sitting right next to her, but there, as in present, in the story," and "But it's, like, the way you look at it, and the attention to detail, and the way you react to it that, all of a sudden, it takes on a new form. It takes on a, like…you don't have to necessarily have, uh, big technologies, or, crazy universes in order to have this immersion. Um, even more so, it becomes a little bit easier to immerse, because you're so familiar with these settings that…it's just, you've never thought about it this way," and (b) *different state of consciousness*, as expressed in quotes such as, "It's kind of, like…we're talking about it…you know, being immersed in different states of consciousness…uh, different states of…of thought patterns and stuff," and "For a second, you know, it's hard to relate to certain characters when you haven't had these experiences, but at the same time it puts you into a different state of, you know, consciousness the way…they didn't have an option the way you do

when you read a book." The different state of consciousness differs from immersion because it specifically describes altered thought patterns as opposed to feeling present in the story world.

Made an impression. The made an impression category is defined as a story element made memorable by personal connection and/or intensity of narrative subject matter. It differed from the other themes in that it did not share an underlying uniformity with any other clusters. While personal connection does comprise one aspect of this theme, it does not completely define the term. This is made evident by the quote, "They might see somebody else whose anatomy is complete, and they go…they're either sad or they're jealous, you know. Maybe it's at the beach. Maybe, um, it's just what they're talking about at a party with other members who are quote unquote "normal"…more normal than she is. And so you have, like, uh…you have a sort of sympathy for that sort of scene, cuz it's just highly memorable." Here, the participant describes the intense feelings and emotions one might experience after amputation, which was described as *impact*. Another story element made memorable by personal connection is expressed in the quote, "I've never had anything amputated. I'm in great physical condition, fortunately. I have gone to the hospital for surgery and endoscopy, but, um, nothing that took part of me away with it. And so I just thought about the character. And I thought about people I knew who had similar experiences, and, um, tried my best to understand what it might feel like to lose something that's

important to you, especially a part of your own body. So, that was something that I, uh…that had some significant impact on me while I was reading that part of the story." Here, the participant uses a personal connection by thinking of people who had similar experiences while discussing the intense subject matter of losing a part of one's body.

Frequency Analysis. Along with identifying the emergent themes from the transcripts, these themes were analyzed for the total number of occurrences, percentage of the total, and whether these themes occurred in direct response to narrative features or as a result of links created between narrative elements and the participant's previous experience, identified here as a *reminiscent response* (Green, 2004; Schank & Abelson, 1995). Results are shown in Table 10. The table provides evidence that more than half of all themes identified occurred as a reminiscent response to narrative features. This suggests during narrative processing, participants are accessing previous experience to inform and interpret narrative events, which may suggest prior experience has a much greater influence on narrative transportation than previously theorized (Green, 2004). This aligns with research in the cognitive sciences on the relation between episodic and autobiographical memory and narrative (e.g., Nelson, 2003; Nelson et al. 2008) as well as the role of episodic memory in story processing (e.g., Maguire, Frith, & Morris, 1999; Speer et al. 2007).

Table 10: Personal Experience Items

BASE-LEVEL THEME	# OF OCCURRENCES	PERCENTAGE OF THEMES	DIRECT RESPONSE	REMINISCENT RESPONSE
Curiosity	23	6.59%	19	4
Vivid Mental Images	43	12.32%	19	24
Perspective Taking	11	3.15%	3	8
Narrative Connections	67	19.20%	46	21
Personal Connections	60	17.19%	3	57
Vicarious Experience	3	0.86%	1	2
Different State of Consciousness	1	0.29%	0	1
Impact	4	1.15%	1	3
Focus	8	2.29%	6	2
Distractions	13	3.72%	4	9
Immersed	10	2.87%	7	3
Sensory Inputs	4	1.15%	1	3
Sympathy	9	2.58%	6	3
Empathy	18	5.16%	7	11
Emotions	36	10.32%	12	24
Spiritual Connections	3	0.86%	0	3
Valence	17	4.87%	7	10
Physical Response	6	1.72%	2	4
Compelling	5	1.43%	2	3
Hope	1	0.29%	0	1
Relatable	5	1.43%	2	3
Sensations	2	0.57%	0	2
TOTAL	**349**		**148**	**201**

Transcript totals. Table 11 shows the totals and averages for transcript analysis.

Table 11**:** Transcript Totals and Averages

TOTAL INTERVIEW TIME	TOTAL NUMBER OF TRANSCRIPT PAGES	MEAN AVERAGE OF INTERVIEW TIME	MEAN AVERAGE OF TRANSCRIPT PAGES
4:18:22	148	0:32:18	18.5

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The phenomenological interview and inductive content analysis used in this study were essential in identifying the common qualitative features of narrative transportation. While not every participant expressed the entire gamut of themes, each theme represents a specific experience felt while reading the test narrative. Overall, the diversity of these findings demonstrate: (a) narrative transportation is a complex phenomenon that affects people on multiple levels; (b) transportation triggers physical, mental, and emotions responses, whether real and/or imagined; and (c) transportation affects people differently. The results of this study suggest narrative transportation is a much more complicated and individual experience than previously theorized. Participants mostly reported thoughts, sensations, and perceptions that corroborated previous research. However, participants also reported some subtle and distinct experiences that provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the experience as it is lived. In this chapter, I first identify some limitations of the current study. Next, I describe how the current findings help corroborate previous theory and research on narrative transportation. I then recognize and explain the additions this study contributes to the existing literature. I conclude by suggesting some implications of the present findings.

Limitations

This study had certain limitations. First, the small sample size may limit the generalizability of the results. Smith and Osborn (2003) suggest phenomenological analyses, such as this one, are more useful in terms of theoretical generalizability rather than empirical. This means readers can compare the findings presented here with other literature and personal experience to find possible parallels and relationships. Second, the homogeneity of the sample may limit the diversity of responses in two ways: demographically, and by means of transportation. Participants who are demographically similar may share similar upbringings and cultures, and, therefore, they may also process narratives in similar ways. Perhaps more demographically diverse participants would have a greater diversity of experiences. Future researchers may seek a larger, more heterogeneous sample to determine if additional themes may be identified. Similarly, perhaps the comparable levels of transportation, as identified via the Transportation Scale, resulted in similar experiences. It would be worthwhile to identify any variability of experience between high levels of transportation and low levels of transportation whether between or within participants. Third, in this study, participants were asked to describe experiences felt while reading the test narrative. They were not, however, asked how intense these feelings and experiences were, thus each experience carried equal weight. For example, a

statement such as, “I was, like, feeling more of her pain, you know? I was, like…after going through such a long, painful road and coming to death, and, you know, her leaving, you know, three kids and her husband, just…it goes back to, like, just the scenario of my aunt. So, I mean, it just opens some wounds I guess,” is treated as equal to the statement, “The clothes that the doctor was wearing. I don’t know. It got me thinking about, like, shopping.” Future researchers may want to explore the intensity of described experiences by asking participants follow-up questions such as, “How intense was this feeling you just described?” A fourth limitation could be the use of the phenomenological interview as a method of qualitative inquiry. Because there is no uniform set of questions asked to all participants, depth of responses and range of discussion topics can vary widely. Likewise, having no set time limit means the interview could end after a few short minutes or last an incredibly long time depending on the participants’ cooperation and ability to articulate their responses.

Despite these limitations, however, the phenomenological interview and inductive content analysis may have provided insights that would have been unattainable with different methods (Dale, 1996). The flexibility of the interview format and the casual atmosphere created by the researcher may inspire participants to share more than if questioned in a rigid, directive way. Also, the inductive nature of the thematic analysis provided an opportunity for significant

findings to emerge from the extensive data. Therefore, this thesis was able to corroborate as well as contribute to the existing narrative transportation literature. I turn now to the corroborations.

Corroboration with Narrative Transportation Theory

The descriptions of experience participants provided in this study corroborate Green and Brock's (2000) theory of narrative transportation. Consistent with previous research, participants reported cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and vivid mental imagery, which are the integral components of narrative transportation (Green & Brock, 2000). These three elements were present in three of the four highest-level themes found during the inductive analysis.

Cognitive engagement. Within the cognitive engagement category, participants reported several interpretations, inferences, and assumptions about story elements not explicitly stated in the narrative text. These *narrative connections* often took the form of assessments about the relationship between the snake and the protagonist, and to the protagonist's ultimate fate after her cancer treatments. These assessments are a product of the reader mentally shifting to the deictic center (DC) of the story (Rapaport et al., 1989). Using the DC as a window into the narrative world, readers acquire explicit textual information with a real-world awareness of time, place and events (Zwaan, 1999), while they simultaneously process unexpressed properties and relationships linguistically embedded in the grammatical, lexical, and syntactic information

(Rapaport et al., 1989). By putting this information together, the reader builds a mental model that is both informed by and used to interpret the narrative. When assembling this mental model, readers may reference previous experience to bridge the gap from the real world into the narrative world (Bruner, 1991). Green (2004) found that familiarity with narrative elements, especially with a person who shares a characteristic with a main character, increases narrative transportation. This familiarity may have helped participants accept the protagonist as more than a character in a story, but as an avatar for the person they knew. Likewise, Bruner's (1991) *referentiality* may have helped participants build their mental models from experience with birds, snakes, outdoor environments, and hospital settings. When taken all together, this filtering of narrative elements through the reader's background knowledge to create a mental model that achieves reality embodies Bruner's (1991) *hermeneutic composability*. Base-level themes that lend support to these theories of cognitive engagement are *narrative connections, spiritual connections, personal connections, different state of consciousness,* and *immersed*.

Emotional engagement. Within the complex personal connection category, participants cited memories of friends, family and acquaintances who had experience with cancer. These memories influenced readers' experience with the narrative by direct comparison, leading to emotional connections with the story characters (Green, 2004; Schank & Abelson, 1995). In

addition, these emotions could have been the result of living through the character (Cohen, 2001) or by reacting to characters' values and decisions. Because readers react to characters as if they were real people (Green & Brock, 2000), they may disagree with characters' beliefs, desires, and values—their intentional states—leading to a more emotional experience (Bruner, 1991; Cohen, 2001). For example, in this study participants reported feeling aggravated at the protagonist's decision to not take her prescription medication, and fear for the protagonist's diagnosis. More commonly, however, participants reported feeling *sympathy* and *empathy* for the protagonist. These *emotions* were also associated with wanting the best for the characters, which was expressed as either *hope* for the character's well-being, or a *compelling* feeling to help.

Vivid mental imagery. Within the immersion in the story world category, participants reported perceiving vivid mental images of entire scenes and specific story elements such as the snakeskin, the doctor's attire, and the appearance of the cancer patients. Green and Brock (2000) claimed vivid, concrete descriptions make stories images seem more realistic. Lending support to this claim, participants stated they could see these images, despite no actual images being present in the test narrative.

Other dimensions. In addition to the three integral components of narrative transportation, the Transportation Scale measures for two other major dimensions: suspense and

lack of external awareness (Green & Brock, 2000). In this study, participants frequently reported feeling curious and wanting to know more about the protagonist and what happened after the events of the story. This curiosity may be similar in form to suspense (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2000). Participants also described themselves as both focused and distracted at times. This was understood as a continuum between complete focus and complete lack of focus. Although it is beyond the scope of this study to identify specific causes of focus, distractions were identified as external sounds, invading thoughts, and physiological demands such as hunger.

Flow. Narrative transportation has been regarded as a special type of *flow* (Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010), and possibly the most common flow activity people engage in (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Colloquially referred to as "being in the zone" (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009), flow describes a state of optimal experience where the participant performs an activity almost automatically, as if effortless (Sherry, 2004). Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) used this same illustration to describe reading as transportation increases. In support of narrative transportation as a flow activity, participants in this study reported themes of positive *valence*, as well as intense *focus*. For example, one participant stated, "I don't know if it's just because of my connection to it. I just…I felt…I…I hate reading. I mean, not much of a reader. But, um, I

kept…I didn't really notice anything else. I was just more…it seemed like the pages were going quicker as I kept on getting more interested into it."

Thought listings. By and large, participants reported a variety of thoughts, sensations, and perceptions that corroborate and exemplify previous findings. Green and Brock (2000) similarly collected unfiltered qualitative data during their initial experiment by using *thought listings*. Thought listings were traditionally used quantify participants' cognitive responses to persuasive messages into positive (favorable), negative (unfavorable), and neutral/irrelevant categories (Cacioppo & Petty, 1981). In Green and Brock's initial experiment, participants read the experimental narrative and then reported their unedited thoughts. Participants' reports included emotional descriptions and global reactions that could not be quantified via this traditional method, however, and the though listings were omitted. The study reported here has provided participants the opportunity to describe their unedited thoughts and experiences in a way that can be analyzed to discover a fuller range of narrative transportation. I now describe the additions made to narrative literature.

Additions to Narrative Transportation Theory

By using an idiographic approach, the present findings go beyond existing theories to include subtleties and nuances of narrative transportation. These include multiple sensory inputs,

physiological sensations, observable bodily reactions, complex emotions, and spiritual connection. Additionally, a relationship was discovered between episodic memory and construction of a narrative world, labeled here as *reminiscent scaffolding*.

Multiple sensory inputs. Green and Brock (2000) identified imagery as one of the three key components of narrative transportation. They suggested a story containing rich, concrete descriptions create vivid mental images in the reader's head making the story seem more real. Given that humans are visual creatures (Gazzaniga, 2004), this seems like a perfectly plausible connection to make. Perhaps as this realness escalates, and readers become increasingly more transported into the narrative world, other senses come into play as well. One participant described imagining the calm, soothing voice of the doctor casually explaining the side effects of the protagonist's cancer treatments. Just as the images readers "see" are imagined, so too can readers imagine other sensory inputs described in narratives.

Physiological sensations. Another step further than sensory inputs are the sensations participants reported feeling while reading the narrative. Specifically, the protagonist describes the snake baking its skin in the warm sun, and later describes the uncomfortable hot flashes she gets from her medication. One participant stated, "…it sort of brought back the memory of, you know, sunburn…feeling…the feeling of being in the sun and being, you know, overly warm."

Similarly, another participant described a scene where the protagonist goes for a walk when it's cold outside, stating, "On that walk she had with the fox that was real cold, and when the horse, you know, exhaled…it looked like fog, and I felt the sense of, you know, cold." These reports suggest if a scene is vivid enough, and the reader is sufficiently transported, perceptions of temperature change can result in the reader experiencing a feeling of warmth and/or cold.

Observable bodily reactions. Observable bodily reactions are responses to narrative content that are externally apparent, such as shifts in body language and smiling. One participant described starting the narrative with a slumped posture, which became increasingly more upright as the intensity of the story increased. The expression "on the edge of one's seat" could be an apt description of this physical manifestation of interest. Similarly, another participant reported being amused at the protagonist's sense of humor, which resulted in a smile. These physical responses are observable consequences of narrative transportation that may be similar to the crying and cringing described by Tal-Or and Cohen (2010).

Complex emotions. Emotional engagement is another of the three key components of narrative transportation. Green and Brock (2000) explained readers might feel strong emotions despite being aware that story events are not real. However, they were not specific on what emotions readers might experience, and what further consequences these emotions might have.

In the previous example, for instance, a participant reported feeling amused, which resulted in a smile. On the other end of the spectrum, another participant reported feeling grossed out by the snake and its skin. When asked what that felt like, the participant said, "I was disgusted. Um…it, like, brought negative thoughts into my head, I guess. I don't really know how grossed out feels…like, I just kind of wanted to throw up in my mouth a little, I guess." Likewise, although possibly to a lesser extent, another participant reported being shocked a number of times by the events in the narrative. In this case, the described "shock" may express a feeling of surprise. These examples communicate a complexity of emotion that can further stimulate mental and physical responses.

Spiritual connection. Lastly, a single participant reported a spiritual connection to the story, stating snakes are a symbol of evil. This participant described a personal upbringing in a religious household that lead to the conclusion that the snake could symbolize death or harm, and it might represent the protagonist's cancer. While a discussion of literary symbolism is beyond the scope of this study, the spiritual connection described by this participant indicates another level of personal connection to the narrative elements. This is another example of the nuanced descriptions of experience reported during this study.

Reminiscent scaffolding. Researchers have discussed participants' referencing previous experience during construction of a narrative world (Bruner, 1991; Green, 2004; Schank & Abelson, 1995). Prior experience with story-relevant information is thought to increase comprehension and recall of narratives (Bransford & Johnson, 1972; Maguire et al., 1999), as well as increase levels of transportation (Green, 2004). Accessing this experience, however, is not as simple as retrieving memories of people and events as if they were items in a warehouse (Schank & Abelson, 1995). Unlike semantic memories such as state capitals or word definitions, which have no accompanying self-experience (Nelson, 2003), previous experience is stored as episodic memory, which allows people to relive events in their minds (Tulving, 2002). The findings from this study suggest episodic memory may play a more significant role in narrative processing than simply accessing recalling facts and scripts. To help interpret this result, I now briefly discuss some conceptual aspects of episodic memory.

Tulving (2002) described memory not as a specific type of retained and retrieved information, but as an organized system that involves multiple processes. A key part of his theorizing, though, was episodic memory, defined as long-term memories relating to personal events and experiences in one's life. However, as Conway (2009) observed, episodic memories as *memories* have many distinct properties that identify them as long-term mental representations

of lived experience. That is to say, they are not literal records of experience, but they contain fragments of vivid recollection, such as perceived emotional, cognitive and sensory inputs, especially visual imagery, from a specific slice of time (Conway, 2009). Because, as humans, we have self-awareness and autonoetic consciousness, we can choose to access these mental representations and re-experience the past (Tulving, 2002). These memories may also be activated by cues that trigger a recollective experience (Conway, 2009). In the present study, for example, the protagonist of the test narrative describes a snake. This same cue triggered a variety of responses derived from previous experience including: a positive memory of a pet snake, a negative memory of a childhood trauma involving a snake, and a spiritual memory of a snake representing evil. This suggests that while prior knowledge and previous experience may increase comprehension and recall of a narrative, the context of that experience may alter the resulting narrative experience.

This hypothesis directly bears on narrative transportation. That is, during transportation the reader leaves behind the world of origin to become immersed in the narrative world. Critically, though, readers combine narrative information with previous experience to construct a mental model that is both informed by and used to interpret events in the narrative. Narrative cues may then trigger episodic memories that, by definition, activate recollective experience

generating simultaneous transportation into the narrative world and the reader's autobiographical past. This could result in a dynamic flow whereby readers move between the narrative world and their own episodic memory. What this study illustrates is that the outcome of this dynamic flow could be a different experience for every different episodic memory used to construct the mental model. This use of episodic memory to inform and construct narrative mental models is referred to here as *reminiscent scaffolding*. This finding suggests that research in narrative transportation needs to more fully explore reminiscent scaffolding in order to better understand the relationship between episodic memories and transportation.

Implications for Narrative Transportation Theory and Research

The many thoughts, feelings, sensations, and emotions shared by participants in this study illustrate how diverse and idiosyncratic narrative transportation can be. The extant literature provides some essential elements that lead to this experience, but may have lacked the qualitative rigor necessary to identify the discrete components and consequences that constitute the experience as it is lived. The implications of these findings are discussed here.

First, researchers can use the findings presented here to further investigate the mental constructs that allow words on paper to inspire feelings of disgust, sensations of temperature change, and observable bodily reactions. Although much of the literature discussion vicarious

experience and emotional identification with narrative characters, what are the mental processes that convert the descriptions themselves into felt experiences? One possibility is the use of episodic memory during narrative mental model construction previously discussed. By triggering recollective experience, for example, a reader might experience the feeling of warmth while also reading about a snake baking its skin in the sun.

Second, researchers can explore the influence of episodic memory on the idiosyncrasy of narrative transportation. In this study, three participants reported three different responses to the same cue: the snake. All other things being equal, simply their episodic memory impacted their interpretations of this narrative element and thus their experience. In terms of marketing, this could be used to draw certain demographics while avoiding others, such as the use of a snake as a product mascot; or it could be used to associate a product with a typically happy memory, such as a trip to a theme park as a child.

Lastly, authors and playwrights can use these findings to shape and form stories to the particular feelings and sensations they want to inspire in their audiences. Even those in advertising and public relations could better determine what are the more compelling and connecting types of text. For example, if a writer was describing somewhere with a tropical climate, he or she might include vivid descriptions of how hot the weather was to inspire the

feeling of warmth in the audience. In advertising, this could be used to write ad copy that triggers cold sensations to sell mint gum. Or, for a film taking a position against something, one might research what phrases or language inspires discomfort in audiences to convey the target in an unpleasant way. By cultivating responses on multiple levels, writers can create a richer, more vivid experience for audiences.

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1**
FWA00000351, IRB00001138

To: **William J. Buchanan**

Date: **February 13, 2013**

Dear Researcher:

On 2/13/2013, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Exempt Determination
Project Title:	The Phenomenological Experience of Narrative Transportation
Investigator:	William J. Buchanan
IRB Number:	SBE-13-09062
Funding Agency:	
Grant Title:	
Research ID:	N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 02/13/2013 02:47:36 PM EST

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX B: MPQ PERMISSION LETTER

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

University of Minnesota Press

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Tami Brown
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October 25, 2012
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