ON HOW FICTION IMPACTS THE SELF-CONCEPT

Contemporary Reading Practices and Storyworld Possible Selves

Reading fiction expands and shapes our sense of self (Sestir & Green, 2010; Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2016). This doctoral project contributes to this line of research by mapping specifically which temporal dimensions of our self-concept are activated and transformed by reading fiction.

This research is articulated in four studies, and it is grounded in a panorama of contemporary reading practices.

1. Comparing Contemporary Reading Practices:
   Which combinations of reading motivations and genre preferences predict the occurrence of transformative reading experiences?

   Predictors of transformative reading experiences across reading practices
   - Books
     - Literary Fiction
     - Dramatic Fiction
     - Wattpad
     - Romantic Fiction
   - Digital Fiction
     - Poetry, Short Fiction, Classics
     - Romance, Drama, Horror, Psychological Thriller
     - Activist Fiction
     - Non Fiction, Comedy/Satire
   
   Transformation of the self-concept
   - Measured with a Mixed Methods Content Analysis on the readers’ reading experiences.

   Transformation of the self-concept
   - Measured with Storyworld Possible Selves
     - Desired Self
     - Past Self
     - Feared Self

   Activation of the self-concept
   - Measured with Storyworld Possible Selves
     - Desired Self
     - Past Self
     - Feared Self

   Transportation and Emotional Engagement are associated with higher scores on all SPS.

   Which temporal dimensions of the self-concept are activated and transformed by reading fiction?
   A general trend across 543 reading experiences

   On how fiction impacts the self-concept: transformative reading experiences and storyworld possible selves
   - Loi, Hakonenlör, Kegens & Luken. (under review)

2. Individual Differences in Reading Motivations
   Is fiction a remedy for our wish to live many lives?
   Testing a popular assumption among contemporary readers

   Individuals with an active sense of possibility (as measured by Regret and Maximization traits) are significantly more likely to report that they regularly experience feelings of longing towards their alternative lives.

   Within this subset of readers, 34.5% spontaneously mentioned that they read fiction in order to satisfy this longing because it allows them to assume alternative identities.

3. Predictors in common across groups: Drama (focus on characters’ inner lives, emphasis on psychological insight)

4. Measuring Storyworld Possible Selves: Linguistic Features, Personal Relevance, and the Narrative Experience
   Between-subjects design with 4 conditions

   The presence of SPS linguistic markers (e.g., doubly deictic you) does not facilitate the activation of Storyworld Possible Selves

   Personal relevance (measured with personality traits similar to the story character + the familiarity with the story topic) leads to activating SPSs. The activation of SPSs leads to higher Transportation, Emotional Engagement, and Affective Empathy.

   Measuring Storyworld Possible Selves:
   Linguistic Features, Personal Relevance, and the Narrative Experience
   Loi, C., Scapin, G., Alber, J., Martínez, M. (in preparation)

   Story A
   - SPS linguistic markers
   - Original
   - No SPS linguistic markers
   - Manipulated

   Story B
   - SPS linguistic markers
   - Original
   - No SPS linguistic markers
   - Manipulated

   + measures of individual differences in personal relevance and in the narrative experience
   (Absorption, Identification)