

The Fantasy Self: Relationships between Self-Guides and Experience-Taking in Fictional
Narratives

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Abstract

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In a narrative, individuals construct a relationship between the self and the main character. Through the self-character relationship construction individuals increase experience-taking, adopt attributes of a character, and elicit changes to readers' attitudes and behavior. However, not all characters invoke an easy sense of immersion, with some characters possessing attributes unrealistic in the real world. When a character possesses traits the reader does not, application of the ideal self to the experience-taking process is less appropriate. This study hypothesizes when a character's existence is not discrepant from a reader's reality, the reader uses the ideal self to determine experience-taking. However, in highly fantastical stories instead of mapping ideal self-attributes on to the character, readers map who they would be in a fantasy world, a fantasy self. Two studies were conducted examining these hypotheses. Results from study one support the idea for a differing fantasy self related to experience-taking, where fantasy-self discrepancies were positively related to experience-taking. Study two showed a significant interaction of story realism and fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude on experience-taking. In the realistic story, larger fantasy-self discrepancy magnitudes were negatively related to greater experience-taking. The discussion examines the role of perceived realism in

determining use of the fantasy self and the role of fantasy-self discrepancies in narrative immersion.

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Overview

Storytelling has long been used as a device to communicate messages about culture, ancestry and world knowledge. Every story contains specific elements, such as plot, character development, and environment, meant to produce interest in the consumer (Jin, 2012; Murphy, Frank, Moran, & Patnoe-Woodley, 2011; Shapiro, Barriga & Beren, 2010). To garner interest individuals can become absorbed in the story and interact with the characters. Research suggests the concept of a narrative, or an account of real or fictional events, has the ability to influence people through its immersive capabilities, known as transportation (Green & Brock, 2000). Furthermore, just as close social relationships can influence the individual, interactions with fictional characters can change a person's attitudes and behaviors (Kaufman & Libby, 2012). Individuals can develop strong attachments to the main character, taking on some of that character's personality. This phenomenon, known as experience-taking, can create attitude and behavioral changes that persist past when the reader finishes the narrative (Kaufman & Libby, 2012).

Though research has demonstrated the ability of the character to influence reader behavior, which is of interest to the persuasion literature, narratives also provide a reader with opportunities for self-expansion and identity exploration. Through character involvement individuals can examine identities and perspectives they would not have otherwise encountered (Shedlosky-Shoemaker, Costabile, & Arkin, 2014). They can take on a personality distinct from their own (Kaufman & Libby, 2012) and escape from reality (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). These capabilities allow the reader to explore

identities besides their own and experience what it would be like to have different traits. Any narrative then has the potential for readers to redefine themselves and possess attributes they may desire, but do not currently possess.

Individuals are motivated to become immersed in the story and take on the main character's traits, called experience-taking (Kaufman & Libby, 2012). This motivation may be determined by the individuals' own self-guides. Self-discrepancy theory (Higgins, 1987) suggests individuals have differences between who they are (the actual self) and who they desire to be (the ideal self). When people encounter characters who have the traits they desire for their ideal selves, they may identify with the characters to explore that identity more. The discrepancy between the actual self and the ideal self, as represented by the character, induces engagement because the reader is motivated to experience those attributes.

Since some stories present a fictional world and characters drastically different from reality, however, this poses a problem for individuals attempting to engage with the character in the story. When stories contain a world not based in a reader's typical reality, the characters of that world are ones a person may not be capable of becoming. This does not require the fantasy world to be entirely fictitious, but is a world where the structure and goals of the character are not consistent with the types of goals a person holds in reality. The fantasy world, then, could happen in the real world, but does not. In these situations, the self-ideal discrepancy suggested by Higgins (1987) would not be useful for the self-character relationship. The ideal self-concept isn't as relevant to an unrealistic story since a reader's real life aspirations may not be the same as the aspirations they

would be interested in pursuing in the story. In other words, the reader won't apply a schema fitting their reality to a world that does not fit their reality. Instead, they develop a new schema about the type of person they would want to be given the unique constraints and goals of the fantasy world, since people are able to mental simulate the imaginary and treat it as a reality (Oatley, 1999). This new self, the fantasy self, is the person they want to be within the context of the fictional world. In other words, it is an ideal self confined to a narrative world. Just as ideal-self discrepancies are motivating then, fantasy-self discrepancies will be motivating for identity exploration in more fantastical stories.

Individuals are capable of perceiving differences between the story world and reality, determining a level of perceived realism that impacts the process of character attachment. While some elements of story structure remain consistent across different narratives, there are also aspects that are widely variable. Perceived realism is one such variable structure, representing the degree a story mirrors reality. A highly realistic story would mean creating characters who reflect living beings one could encounter in the real world, who have abilities consistent with what is possible in reality, and live in an environment analogous to real life. This does not mean any part of the story actually exists (i.e. nonfiction), but has the potential to exist based on perceptions of reality. Therefore, any individual approaching a highly realistic story can apply their knowledge of the real world to the story world and have a fairly accurate comprehension of how the story world works. For narratives where the story does not resemble reality, however, applying a schema of reality to the story is not sufficient. Instead, fantastical stories

require the individual to develop a new schema about the narrative. These schemas allow the person to simulate the fantasy world in a way similar to how they think of the real world.

These studies examines whether, in narratives with lower perceived realism, the discrepancy between the fantasy self and actual self are related to narrative immersion. When confronted with a story world outside of a reader's reality, individuals access the fantasy self when attempting to relate to the character. With high levels of perceived realism, the ideal-self discrepancy will be related to experience-taking, as the narrative world is mimicking the real world so a fantasy world schema is not created. Thus, reading a narrative with a story world similar to a reader's real world allows the individual to use the ideal-self in the construction of the character-self relationship.

The Character-Self Relationship

A written narrative represents a progression of events, typically serving to create an enjoyable experience or convey a message. Multiple elements are used to create an immersive experience including the storyline, characters, and the story's setting. The characters, and particularly the main character, play an important role in how the reader interacts with and is affected by the story (De Graaf, Hoeken, Sander and Beentjes, 2012). The way the reader relates to and perceives the character can determine whether the story impacts the person or not. Research has found four emotional dimensions determining how a person connects with a narrative's characters: (a) empathic (shared feelings with the character); (b) cognitive (sharing the character's perspective); (c) motivational (internalizing the character's goals); and (d) absorption (the loss of self-awareness during exposure; Cohen, 2001). By developing these various connections, individuals develop a relationship with the character and become invested in their well-being. People treat story characters as if they are real people and relate to those characters in ways mirroring more traditional social relationships (Giles, 2002; Hoffner & Cantor, 1991). This character-self relationship is what allows for the investment and emotional connection readers feel for fictional characters. By establishing a realistic relationship a person can be influenced by that character in the same way they would be influenced by another person. However, if an individual is uninterested in or otherwise unable to engage with the character, the narrative's impact can be mitigated or eliminated. The potential for change to reader attitudes and behaviors then, is bounded by the connection

created between the reader and the character. Without some sort of relationship between character and reader the impact of the story is drastically reduced.

Parasocial Relationships

Once the reader has an understanding of the story and the character, they may then establish this character-self relationship. The general relationship that develops between character and reader is similar to that of two people in reality (Horton & Wohl, 1956), except the relationship is one-sided, rather than dualistic in nature. The one-sidedness refers to the ability of the character to influence the reader, but the characters' inability to be influenced by the reader. This is known as a parasocial interaction. While most relationships in reality result in all participants in the interaction being impacted by and impacting the others, a parasocial interaction is unidirectional. The character provides a figure who is relatively static in their personality and attributes, that the reader can be free to engage with or not. Research into parasocial interaction also provides support that the character, more so than the general story itself, is intrinsic to reader engagement and influence. Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) report parasocial interaction with a character can prevent reactance to persuasion and persuasive content. This supplements other research on the character-self relationship suggesting that compared to the general story, how the reader relates to the character determines the resulting impact on the reader.

As with relationships in the real world, parasocial interaction is not unconditional. De Graaf (2014) argues this effect of character-reader connection is mediated by the amount of self-referencing. The degree of influence a character exhibits may vary

depending on individual differences in the degree of self-referencing. Readers who are unable to self-reference are less likely to experience parasocial interaction and won't exhibit attitude and behavioral changes to the same degree. By demonstrating the importance of the character-self relationship to attitude change this is acknowledging the character's effects exceeding that of the story's other elements, making the character the feature of the story most relevant to inducing changes in the reader. Furthermore, the research on parasocial interaction suggests that a single character may impact readers in different ways depending on the reader's relationship with that character.

Experience-Taking

As parasocial interaction research indicates, the character-self relationship is unique in its ability to influence the reader. Beyond any other element, the character is capable of creating lasting changes in the reader. This distinction is further exemplified in the differences between transportation and experience-taking.

Research has found two ways one is affected by narratives, via transportation or experience-taking (Green & Brock, 2000; Kaufman & Libby, 2012). While these processes frequently occur together, even simultaneously, they are distinct.

Transportation, while related to the character, refers to the general immersion that can happen in the story world. This absorption is not character specific, but can be attributed to other aspects of the narrative such as environment or writing style (Green & Brock, 2000). Experience-taking, on the other hand, refers specifically to the interaction between the reader and character, where the reader absorbs the character traits into their self-concept (Kaufman & Libby, 2012). Transportation involves forgetting the self, but experience-taking involves forgetting the self and replacing it with the character. Both transportation and experience-taking influence outcomes for the reader. However, experience-taking focuses specifically on the character-self relationship as the central aspect for the establishment of attitude change.

The research into experience-taking has found attitude and behavioral changes can be predicted by the level of self-reported experience-taking while reading. In a series of studies individuals who reported higher levels of experience-taking demonstrated character-consistent behavioral changes, such as exhibiting voting behaviors similar to

the character and a more positive attitude toward the character's stigmatized group (Kaufman & Libby, 2012). Individuals who are experience-taking will adjust their own behaviors and attitudes to become similar to the characters, with these effects remaining even after the story's conclusion. Reading a story from a particular character's perspective leads to more positive evaluations of, and more consistent attitudes with, that character than other characters in the story. For example, individuals developed more favorable attitudes for euthanasia if the main character supported considering euthanasia as an option. The character most central to the storyline then is also the one most important to story absorption (De Graaf et al., 2012). It is through the process of experience-taking that individuals are changed by the main character and the story. Thus, experience-taking is the avenue for the character-self relationship to exert changes to attitude and behavior.

Experience-taking does not happen unconditionally, as Kaufman and Libby (2012) have demonstrated. In situations where a character is perceived as a member of an out-group experience-taking decreased compared to when the character was a member of the reader's in-group or when the reader was unaware of their group membership. This suggests there are instances where the same character will induce different levels of experience-taking depending on the narrative structure and information provided about that character. Therefore, it must be understood how different elements of the character or narrative determine whether the reader proceeds through the experience-taking process.

Wishful Identification

One explanation for how the process of experience-taking develops and exerts change is wishful identification, which provides the opportunity for self-expansion through narrative immersion. Wishful identification is this specific desire to become like a character (Hoffner & Bunchnan, 2005). Additionally, wishful identification provides an understanding of why some characters are more successful at inducing experience-taking than others. The perceived overlap between the self and the character can provide a sense of similarity, or proximity, and through this the relationship between character and reader develops (Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al., 2014). Perceptions of the narrative and character can then create a conflict with the reader's sense of self as the readers compare themselves to the characters. This in turn causes the reader to take on the embodiment of the character (Miall & Kuiken, 2002; Wilshire, 1982).

Identification with a character requires a loss of self-awareness, and presents a possibility for the reader to adopt the character's perspectives, goals and values, thus experiencing what the character would experience in any given situation (Cohen, 2001; Oatley, 1994). This can lead to strong emotional attachments and reactivity to the character's circumstances (Cohen, 2001). Furthermore, for the present study it signifies the importance of identification to the role of attitude change and character embodiment. Without identifying with the character the reader will not be capable of embodying the character's traits. Both the self and the character must contribute to the motivation of the reader to become identified and influenced by the character.

To create higher levels of immersion in the story the character must be one that the reader desires to emulate, or at least likes. Klimmt, Hartmann, and Schramm (2006) suggests wishful identification occurs with characters who serve as role models for media consumers. This is also reflected in a study by Steinke and colleagues (2012) who found that boys demonstrated higher wishful identification with male scientists, while girls showed higher wishful identification with female scientists. Girls also showed significantly greater wishful identification with female scientists who were portrayed as dominant or intelligent than boys exposed to a similar male scientist. This research indicates character attributes play a role in how individuals identify with the character and whether they desire to be like that character. The traits these characters possess determine whether the reader is motivated to desire them or not. Other research has also found gender (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005), race, (Austin, Roberts, & Nass, 1990), and personality or behavioral tendencies (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Turner, 1993) influence the level of wishful identification. Eyal and Rubin (2003) found general attitude measures and similarity of background were related to greater identification. These findings indicate character personality and reader personality both relate to the level of wishful identification the reader demonstrates. Furthermore, wishful identification is not limited simply to attitude but relates to behavior as well, demonstrated by video gamers who played more aggressively when they desired to be like the character of a violent game (Konijn, Bijvank, & Bushman, 2007). Thus, the relationship between character and reader personalities can determine actual behavioral changes in the reader.

Ramasubramanian and Kornfield (2012) suggest the process of wishful identification begins with liking a character, leading to wishful identification, that eventually becomes a parasocial interaction between reader and character. This is supported by their findings that liking a heroine's pro-social traits led to heightened wishful identification and a stronger parasocial relationship. This may be due to certain similarities between the reader and the character. Perceived similarity in one trait can generate a desire to become more like the character in other attributes. This may be due to the similarity signaling the reader about the plausibility of adopting those other characteristics (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). The reader believes that because they already possess one of the same salient characteristics as the character, it is possible for them to possess other characteristics as well. Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) found results supporting this. While there was greater wishful identification with successful and admired characters of the other gender, individuals reported higher level of identification with their own gender. Perhaps more compellingly, participants reported greater wishful identification with characters who appeared to have similar personality characteristics. Therefore, the characters that provided the reader with a sense of interest or a desire for similarity gave the reader incentive to become invested in the character. They strive to identify with a character, which stems from the desire to be like them. Without the motivation to be like the character, experience-taking does not occur. This desire is driven by an absence of the character's traits in the self. When an individual believes they do not have traits they desire, this can lead them to seek out ways to adopt those attributes.

Self-Discrepancy Theory

The motivation behind seeking these traits is what Higgins' Self-Discrepancy Theory (1987) has called discrepancies of the self, or differences between desired selves and actual selves. Self-Discrepancy Theory (1987) states that individuals have three different forms of self. The three basic domains of the self are the actual self, the ideal self and the ought self. The actual self is the self as you perceive yourself to be currently, your ideal self is who you aspire to be, and your ought self is who you or others want you to become. The ideal and ought selves represent distinct constructs where the ideal self stems from your personal desire and the ought self stems for your roles and obligations (Phillips & Silvia, 2010; Higgins, 1987). While people may differ in what self-guide motivates them, they are motivated by at least one guide to varying degrees. When people are motivated to achieve a self-guide they try to act and think in ways that help their self-concept mirror that desired self, thus decreasing the discrepancy between the self and the self-guide (Higgins, 1987).

Characters Motivating Discrepancy Reduction

The discrepancy itself represents an inability to meet relevant goals, producing a feeling of disappointment. These self-discrepancies then focus attention toward goals and reducing disappointment (Calogero & Watson, 2009). The discrepancy can occur between any two of the three domains. Discrepancies between the actual-ideal selves can be further separated into two distinct categories. These are the ideal self-actualization, where people must identify traits they would ideally like to possess while rating the extent they already possess them, and actual self-regard, where a person gives traits they

already have and rates the extent they desire those traits (Hardin & Larsen, 2014).

Furthermore, the activation of an actual self-focus or an ideal self-focus can determine what types of factors influence behavior changes (Jin, 2012). In terms of a narrative, the character can represent traits of any of the desired selves (i.e. the ideal or the ought) that the reader can reference in comparison to their actual self, like ideal self-actualization.

Thus the character can embody traits the reader desires to possess in any of the selves. As a result, the type of self they reference will change how the reader is affected and play a role in the relational aspects of identification in fictional stories.

Perceived Realism

However, if there are multiple selves that can be used to change the character-self relationship, some element of the story is influencing which self is most accessible. One aspect of the story that could determine the self-guide used is perceived realism. As the narrative world is flexible and does not have to represent reality, perceived realism is the degree a narrative world reflects the real world (Cho, Shen, & Wilson, 2014; Gerbner & Gross, 1976), and relates to many immersive factors such as emotional involvement (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Larkey & Hecht, 2010), identification (Larkey & Hecht, 2010; Livingstone, 1990), and evaluations of messages (Cho & Boster, 2008). Hall (2003) proposes perceived realism may consist of several dimensions. These include plausibility, typicality, factuality, narrative consistency, and perceptual quality. While the dimensions of plausibility, typicality and factuality regard the comparison of the narrative to the real world, the dimensions of narrative consistency and perceptual quality largely revolve around the story's own internal structure. Particularly important is typicality, reflecting the narrative's portrayal of events that may fall within an audience's possible experiences (Hall, 2003). Typicality appears to be the most likely predictor of identification as people are more likely to believe the events are real (Cho et al., 2014). Readers can judge events as possible within the story, but not typical in real life, thus maintaining the application of their reality schema to the fictional world. While low plausibility, typicality, or factuality do not preclude identification, typicality was found to indirectly relate to identification (Cho et al., 2014). Therefore, increasing typicality may increase perceived realism, and in turn may increase identification (Cho et al., 2014;

Larkey & Hecht, 2010; Livingstone, 1990; Potter, 1986; Zillmann, 1980). Cho et al. (2014) suggests this may be due to the ability of typical events to be represented by the reader better than events that match other dimensions. Greater typicality would indicate a more realistic story, though even atypical events can be accounted for so long as they are possible within the individual's realm of understanding.

However, in stories that are highly discrepant from reality the impossible, at least according to a reality-based schema, may happen quite regularly. Therefore, typicality may not be the most useful dimension for determining identification in instances where perceived realism is low. Since individuals are capable of simulating the imaginary as reality (Oatley, 1999), provided they have internal consistency, the driving force may be narrative consistency. With narrative consistency individuals can forego the typicality and plausibility restrictions of the real world when reading and a fantastical story, and begin to use predictions of plausibility and typicality based on their fantasy world schemas. Therefore, the plausibility and typicality of events in the story world are determining if individuals can ascribe their real world schemas to the story world or if they must develop a new fantasy world schema.

Developing schemas for the world and its characters can vary in difficulty depending on the world's level of abstraction. In instances where the story world closely parallels reality, our reality schemas may suffice, but for more abstract, fantasy worlds, a new schema fitting the new reality's rules must be generated. For characters, this would require their models to be limited by the plausibility of actions in the story world rather than our own. This is reflected in the literature, where individuals report higher levels of

realism in stories where the fictional and real worlds are similar. However, realism is not required, as consumers of fictional narratives do not expect strict adherence to reality (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). Instead they are concerned with a coherent internal narrative structure, or narrative realism (Graesser, Olde, Klettke, 2002; Shapiro & Fox, 2002). These schemas are important to the effectiveness of the narrative and the ability to extend knowledge of the world to the consumer (Lindley & Sennersten, 2006). An individual, then, can suspend any disbelief about the fantasy world so long as the fantasy world's structure is internally consistent, since this consistency gives them an ability to create a schema of that world.

Bilandzic and Busselle (2011) further suggest that any threat to immersion occurs on one of two levels based off of the idea of external versus narrative realism. Violations occur either through a violation of external realism, where the narrative and real world are not consistent, or a violation of narrative realism, where the story is not consistent in itself. For stories that are explicitly fantasy, there is less concern with issues of external violation. These stories instead rely on internal consistency. This further demonstrates the individual's capacity to develop an understanding of a fictional world as long as that fictional world has a consistent set of limitations and rules. Since understanding the story world and the character is necessary for establishing a relationship between reader and character it follows that for fiction so long as internal consistency is established it is possible for the reader to engage with a fictional character because they have developed the schemas for understanding that character. For fiction then a mental construction is necessary to the relationship between reader and character (Oatley, 1999). The

relationship between character and reader necessitates the ability to develop schemas about the story world and the characters. Without a conceptualization of the character within the story's context, the impact of the character cannot be sustained as the story will not be consistent. A schema of the world, and the character within it, is necessary to providing the relationship and in turn, the impact of the character.

Thus when events occurring in a story are not typical or plausible in reality, this provides a cue for individuals that they must use a different schema for the fantasy world than the one they use for the real world. It dictates to the reader that the self-guide discrepancy the reader is using to compare to the character may no longer be useful since the character possesses attributes the individual's self-guide would not possess in reality. As a result the self-guide must also be adapted to fit the story world.

The Fantasy Self

To create a connection between reader and character means understanding the character in the context of the story. Without knowing who the character is, and how he/she operates within the story world, one cannot relate to him/her. It is particularly important to understand how the character operates within the limits of the world, even when those limits don't reflect the reader's reality. When the story is fantastical, the reader cannot rely on what they know about reality to apply to the story world. As a result, identification requires readers to consider the events of the story to be realistic despite what cognitive representations they have of how the real world works. The suspension of reality gives the individual the ability to gain knowledge and understanding of the story world that they can then use to create an understanding of the character.

Through repeated interaction with the story, the reader will gain an understanding of the story world's rules (Wynveen, Kyle, Absher, & Theodori, 2011) that can be used to create the fantasy world schema. Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) propose a theoretical framework where "transportation is realized in constructing mental models of the narrative" (p.256). According to this theory, people construct a story from preexisting schemas and impose them onto the narrative. Meaning in the narrative is then created by the understanding of how the story world operates. Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) also propose a definition for transportation where readers are experiencing a gradual shift in perspective from the real world to the story world that results in greater engagement. Readers are slowly transferring themselves from their real world models to models of the story. Therefore, the reader is not using the real world as a reference point and comes to rely on the story to develop its own internal consistencies explaining the story world. Without an understanding of the world, the person would be unable to become immersed as they cannot accurately visualize the story world.

The different levels of realism in stories indicates characters can have varying level of realism as well. As such, the self that the character is relating to may differ in its level of realism as well. With greater perceived realism, the character can have attributes and goals close to what the self-guide contains in reality, as the limitations imposed on the character are similar to what are imposed on the reader's reality. However, with lower realism a real world self-guide will not necessarily fit as the narrative itself does not fit reality. Thus, a new self-guide is applied that fits the story world. Whenever the story departs from what a reader considers to be representative of their world, perceived

realism is decreased and the new self-guide is more likely to be used. The self used to construct the character-self relationship in these scenarios is a fantasy self, a self that fits the universe of the narrative, but not reality. In other words, the fantasy self is a self-guide unique to the narrative world. It represents a type of ideal self, but one that is consistent with the schemas and conceptualization of the fictional reality. The fantasy self applies to situations the ideal self cannot, serving as the self-guide and being applied in the same way as other self-guides. As the narrative extends beyond the bounds of a reader's experience the ideal self is less applicable, and thus less likely to be used. Meanwhile, the fantasy self becomes more applicable and more likely to be used.

In the same way the ideal self motivates an individual toward actualization of that self, the fantasy self motivates individuals to adopt the characteristics of the fantasy self. Due to the suspension of reality-based schemas (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Oatley, 1999) this is possible; because when someone is reading, the fantasy world becomes the real world and the fantasy self becomes the ideal self. As the fantasy self relies on fantasy-based schemas however, it will not be accessible when the narrative is too representative of a reader's reality. The ideal self is a self-guide that is consistently highly accessible (Higgins, 1987), thus the fantasy self will only be accessible when a fantasy self-guide is necessary. When the fictional world is not accessible the fantasy self will not be accessible either, because the ideal self is sufficient. In this way, the fantasy self is only capable of generating attitude change like the ideal self (Higgins, 1987) when the fictional world is conceptualized by the reader.

As the fantasy self applies to the fictional context its activation is limited to when that world is accessible, and research must determine when a fictional context evokes the fantasy self. To have low perceived realism the fantasy world need not be entirely fictional, but simply be outside of the reader's readily available experiences (Hall, 2003). However, one way to change perceived realism is to provide a story world completely outside of what is possible within the real world, as this guarantees the experiences are outside of the reader reality. For the following studies this strategy is employed as a way to ensure individuals have not experienced the fantastical scenarios in everyday life.

Examining the fantasy self further requires understanding of when this self is used for the self-character relationship and when it is not relevant. These studies aim to determine whether the fantasy self is related to experience-taking, and thus attitude change, in situations where the narrative's perceived realism is lower. Since low perceived realism requires the development of new schemas, the generation of a new self-guide would prove more useful to character identification. Therefore, with low perceived realism individuals will apply the fantasy self, and the fantasy-self discrepancy will determine the motivation to adopt character traits. However, stories may also have higher levels of perceived realism. Therefore, when a story has high perceived realism it is expected that the ideal self, and particularly ideal-self discrepancies, will determine experience-taking.

Study 1

The first study examined if individuals, when presented with an alternative reality, distinguish between the ideal self and the fantasy self. To establish the use of the fantasy self at low levels of perceived realism, it is useful to determine whether any differences between the fantasy and ideal selves exist at all. Individuals reporting the magnitude of their fantasy-self and ideal-self discrepancies before reading a fantastical story should exhibit increased experience-taking when the magnitude of the fantasy-self discrepancy is larger. There should be no relationship between the magnitude of the ideal-self discrepancy and experience-taking however. While arguments can be constructed suggesting the strength of the ideal or fantasy self is more important than the self-discrepancy, this study focuses on the magnitude of self-discrepancies as these have been demonstrated to motivate self-guide attainment (Higgins, 1987). The study hypothesizes individuals' level of experience-taking is greater when there is a greater discrepancy between the fantasy self-guide and actual self. Additionally, since the study's stories are fantastical the fantasy-self discrepancy, and not the ideal-self discrepancy, will predict experience-taking.

Participants

A total of 127 participants were collected from the Psych Pool, with 88 females (69.3%) and 39 males (30.7%) completing the study. The sample was predominantly White (84.3%), and had a mean age of 19 years ($SD = 1.397$).

Measures

Ideal self-attributes.

A form of Pelham and Swann's (1989) Self-Attributes Questionnaire was used to assess the ideal self. Individuals were asked to identify, on a 9-point scale, how much more or less of a particular trait they would want their ideal self to have compared to their current selves. All ten questions regarded the individual's desire for adventurous attributes, such as being bold, risk-taking, or cautious (reverse-coded).

Fantasy self-attributes.

A second adapted form of the Self-Attributes Questionnaire (Pelham & Swann, 1989), using a 9-point scale, was also used to assess the fantasy self. Individuals were asked to identify, in comparison to their current selves, who they wanted to be if they were not constrained by the laws of the real world. All ten questions in this questionnaire regarded adventurous attributes such as brave or risk-taking.

Experience-taking.

The experience-taking scale (Kaufman & Libby, 2012) assesses the degree the reader takes on attributes of the character while reading (See Appendix A). The seven item scale uses self-report questions on a 9-point scale. Experience-taking is used as the dependent variable to determine how involved with the character the participant becomes. Examples of statements in this scale are 'I found myself thinking what the character in the story was thinking,' and 'I understood the events of the story as though I were the character in the story.'

Transportation.

As a measure of general engagement in the story, Green and Brock's (2000) transportation scale was used (See Appendix B). This scale assesses a person's general level of absorption in the story, and is not character specific. In other words, it assesses how other elements of the story, aside from the character, such as environment may influence the person's immersion. There are eleven items, each on a 9-point self-report Likert scale. This scale includes statements such as, 'While I was reading the narrative, activity going on in the room around me was on my mind,' (reverse-coded) and 'I was mentally involved in the narrative while reading it.'

PANAS.

The PANAS (Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule) measures separately the levels of positive affect and negative affect (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). It was used to control for positive and negative affect while reading. The scale has 20 items, with the individual rating how much they are currently experiencing each emotion on a scale of 1-5.

Procedure

Individuals were brought in and completes two modified forms of the Self-Attributes Questionnaire (Pelham & Swann, 1989) assessing the magnitude of their fantasy-self discrepancies and ideal-self discrepancies on the same risk-taking dimensions. Participants read one of two stories¹ both adapted from Neil Gaiman's

¹ The two stories were used to test a separate study's hypothesis, one that did not bear out.

fantasy novel ‘Neverwhere,’ a novel that is explicitly fantastical, describing magic and mythical creatures. Once they had finished reading they completed the experience-taking measure (Kaufman & Libby, 2012), transportation scale (Green & Brock, 2000), and the PANAS (Watson et al., 1988). Additionally, at the end of the study there were several control questions about the story and a basic demographics questionnaire that participants filled out.

Results

For all measures, descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1 and zero-order correlations are in Table 2. Using experience-taking and transportation as dependent variables, two separate hierarchical linear regression analyses was run with magnitude of fantasy-self and ideal-self discrepancies as predictor variables. The overall model for experience-taking was significant, $R^2 = .056$, $F(2, 123) = 3.676$, $p = .028$. As the magnitude of fantasy-self discrepancies increased, individuals reported higher levels of experience-taking, $\beta = .295$, $p = .018$ (See Figure 1). On the other hand, the magnitude of the ideal-self discrepancy was not a significant predictor of experience-taking ($p = .769$). The overall model for transportation was not significant ($p = .144$).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Study 1 Variables

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Ideal-Self Discrepancies	6.41	1.16
Fantasy-Self Discrepancies	6.84	1.41
Experience-Taking	5.70	1.84
Transportation	4.83	1.38
Positive Affect	2.55	.73
Negative Affect	1.50	.46

Note: $N = 127$. Ideal-self discrepancies and fantasy-self discrepancies measured on 1-10 scales. Experience-taking and transportation are measured on scales of 1-9. Positive and negative affect measured on a scale of 1-5.

Table 2

Zero-Order Correlations for Study 1 Variables

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Ideal-Self Discrepancies	1.0					
2. Fantasy-Self Discrepancies	.37***	1.0				
3. Experience-Taking	.11	.24**	1.0			
4. Transportation	.01	.17	.78***	1.0		
5. Positive Affect	.08	.12	.46***	.48***	1.0	
6. Negative Affect	.05	-.02	.14	.09	.10	1.0

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

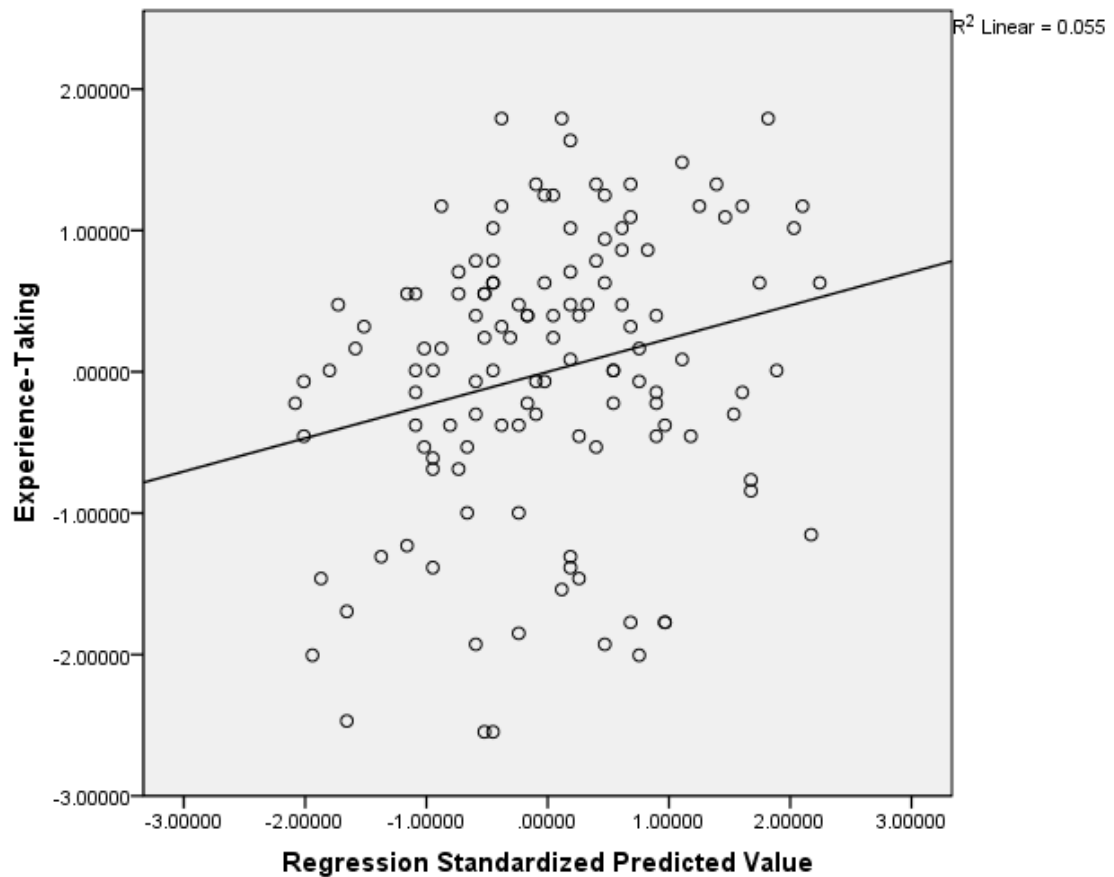


Figure 1. Correlation between Fantasy-Self Discrepancies and Experience-Taking

Discussion

These results demonstrate that when reading a fictional narrative, the fantasy self is related to experience-taking. Moreover, the discrepancies between the fantasy self and the actual self can predict levels of experience-taking. This is consistent with the hypotheses, where the magnitude of self-discrepancies is motivating character engagement because the character's traits are traits the reader desires to obtain for themselves, similar to self-guides in real life (Higgins, 1987). Additionally, the results

show the magnitude of the ideal-self discrepancy is not predicting experience-taking within explicitly fantasy settings. Overall, the findings were consistent with the expectations of the study, indicating that fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude, over ideal-self discrepancy magnitude, was related to experience-taking in a fantastical story.

One major issue with this study was that the ideal self-attributes and fantasy self-attributes questionnaires only measured the discrepancy between the present self and the ideal or fantasy self. The questionnaire did not measure the strength of the ideal or fantasy self. In other words, the scale does not capture the degree the individual endorses those traits for the ideal or fantasy self, only the level of difference between the actual self and the self-guide. This issue is corrected for in Study 2 by including a strength measure.

Pilot Study for Study 2

Before running Study 2 an initial examination of the central story manipulation was conducted. The pilot study examined whether individuals perceived significantly different levels of realism between two story conditions (realistic and fantastical), and if perceived realism differed depending on the number of fantastical elements. If people perceived stories with greater fantastical elements as less realistic or plausible in the real world, it suggests that they were processing these differently. This would be consistent with the argument that when events in a story are highly atypical or implausible they are judged as less realistic. Additionally, for Study 2, this establishes a story with differences in levels of perceived realism, while remaining similar in character development and plot. The study will result in two conditions to the story, a realistic story condition and a fantasy story condition.

Participants

115 Ohio University participants were collected, with 6 participants exempted due to missing data. Additionally, 40 participants did not successfully answer all three story questions exempting them from analysis, thus the total number of people included was 69, with 33 experiencing the fantasy story and 36 experiencing the realistic story.² The sample was predominantly female (75.4%), White, non-Hispanic (76.8%), with a mean age of 19.15 ($SD = 1.25$). Despite the large number exempted, power remained at an appropriate level, around .80. Additionally, analyses did not change when conducted both with and without the exempted individuals.

² The large exemption rate is likely due to the online nature of the study. Individuals may have had more distractions while reading resulting in a difficulty recalling information about the story.

Measures

Perceived realism.

A scale was created assessing individual's level of perceived realism using seven items (Green, 2004; Hall, 2003; See Appendix E). The scale asked participants to report how much they agree or disagree with statements on a 6-point scale. The scale was used as the dependent variable assessing story realism. Statements included assertions such as 'the story world is similar to the real world,' and 'what happened in the story is something that could have happened in reality.'

Procedure

All aspects of the study were completed online. Participants were randomly assigned to read either the story adapted to contain low levels of fantastical elements or the same story containing high levels of fantastical elements. Both stories were developed by the researcher (See Appendix F). After reading, they completed the questionnaire about story realism. Finally participants answered several questions regarding the story, as a manipulation check, and completed a demographics questionnaire.³

Results

Factor analysis.

A factor analysis was conducted using a direct oblimin rotation and an eigenvalue of 1. Loadings greater than .40 were considered relevant to a factor.

³ Additional exploratory measures were included in data collection, but were not analyzed.

A multicollinearity check was done, with no questions demonstrating multicollinearity ($R > .9$), and all questions significantly related to one another (p 's between $<.001$ and $.045$; See Table 3). Thus, all eight questions could be included in the analysis. A single factor was found, explaining 49.96% of the variance. All questions had a factor loading higher than .40 (See Table 4), thus all questions were used to create a single measure of perceived realism.

Table 3

Factor Loadings for Perceived Realism Questionnaire in Pilot Study for Study 2

Questions for Perceived Realism Questionnaire	Component 1 Loadings
1. The story was extremely realistic.	.689
2. The story characters could conceivably exist in reality.	.716
3. The story world is similar to the real world.	.813
4. I felt the story did not closely mirror reality.	.720
5. It is plausible what happened in the story could happen in real life.	.767
6. What happened in the story could be something that happened in reality.	.782
7. The way the story world operated was very different from the way the real world operates.	.716
8. I could draw many parallels between the story world and the real world.	.488
9. The characters in the story could be people I'd meet in reality.	.615

Main analysis.

After a single measure of perceived realism was created, an independent samples t-test was run with condition (Realistic or Fantastical) as the independent variable, and perceived realism as the dependent variable. Those who read the realistic story ($M = 2.89$,

$SD = 1.04$) reported a significantly higher level of realism than those who read the fantasy story ($M = 2.22$, $SD = .73$), $t(63) = -3.021$, $p = .004$ (See Figure 2).

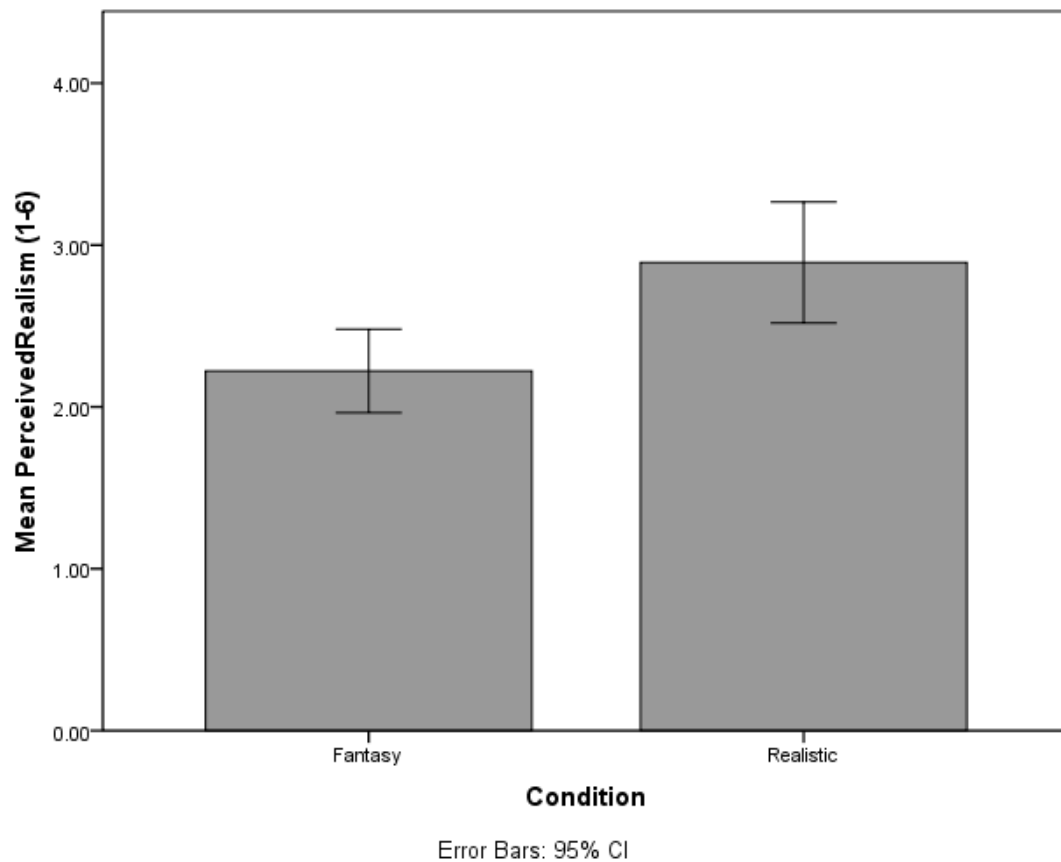


Figure 2. Perceived Realism as a Function of Story Condition

Discussion

The results suggest, consistent with the hypothesis, individuals perceive variable levels of reality depending on story structure and context. In stories with elements that are implausible or atypical in the real world, individuals perceive the story as less realistic than a story where these elements are not present. This provides initial support that

individuals distinguish between levels of perceived realism based on the number of fantastical elements present in the story. Additionally, this also provides Study 2 with two stories similar in plot and character but differing in levels of perceived realism. While both stories had a mean perceived realism below the scale average, this is likely due to how the story was constructed. The plot of both stories was the same, and thus was somewhat atypical, since it relies on the same plot progression. This was done to keep the stories comparable and prevent confounds such as different character actions and side characters. While future studies could use two different stories capable of generating more marked differences in realism, these stories were appropriate here to prevent issues of confounding variables.

Study 2

Study 2 assessed when the two self-guides are used to develop the character-self relationship, with perceived realism serving as a moderating variable. Perceived realism is represented by the different story conditions developed in Pilot Study for Study 2, where one condition represents a more realistic story and the other condition represents a more fantastical story. When perceived realism is high, individuals use ideal-self discrepancies to connect to the character since the story is more similar to reality, and individuals desire to obtain the traits of the ideal self that are presented in the character. However, when the real world and the story world are more disparate the individual constructs a fantasy self to establish relationship with the character. In this instance, the magnitude of the fantasy-self discrepancy will be related to greater experience-taking as the character possesses traits the reader wants to embody in the fantasy self. The desire to embody those traits is what will motivate experience-taking. Therefore, the higher the discrepancy the more engaged with the character the individual will become.

Additionally, previous research has indicated a relationship between attitude change and experience-taking (Kaufman & Libby, 2012), where increased experience-taking was related to greater character-consistent attitude change. As a result, individuals who are experience-taking more should exhibit greater endorsement of characteristics similar to character. In Study 2's story the character is a courageous individual venturing into an unknown forest. As a result, individuals who are experience-taking more with this story should have a higher level of self-reported bravery after reading compared to those experience-taking to a lesser degree. This leads to the following two hypotheses:

- There will be a three-way interaction between story condition, fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude and ideal-self discrepancy magnitude. In the realistic condition, the greater the disparity between the ideal self and the actual self the greater experience-taking the individual will report. However, in the fantasy condition, the greater the discrepancy between the fantasy self and the actual self the more experience-taking will be reported.
- Level of experience-taking will correlate positively with great risk-taking endorsement, consistent with the traits of the character.

Participants

Sample size was determined using G*Power, for the calculated effect size of .10, consistent with previous research (Kaufman & Libby, 2012) and our previous study, a total of 200 participants were required. 201 participants were collected, where 14 individuals were exempted from analysis, 4 for stating they did not read or skimmed the story, and 10 for incorrectly completing measures or story check questions. Thus, a total of 187 Ohio University participants were included in the final analysis. Exclusionary criteria included English as a first language to ensure similar levels of reading ability across participants. There were 157 females (84%) and 30 males (16%) in the study. The sample was predominantly White (84%), and had a mean age of 19 years ($SD = 1.11$).

Measures

Ideal self-attributes.

A scale assessing the ideal self in comparison to the actual self was developed using the Self-Attributes Questionnaire (Pelham & Swann, 1989) as a foundation (See

Appendix C). The scale contains two subparts, ten questions each. One assessed the level an individual's actual self possesses a series of traits. The second asked participants to compare their ideal self to their actual self. This was created to have a measure of both the strength of the ideal self (how extreme are the traits the ideal self possesses) and the level discrepancy between the ideal self and the actual self. All the traits are adventurous-oriented, such as heroic, brave, and cautious (reverse-coded). The first subscale uses a 10-point scale and the second uses an 11-point scale.

Fantasy self-attributes.

The scale assessed the fantasy self, defined as the self a person could be if they were not bounded by the limits of reality, using the same scales as explained for the ideal self-attributes (See Appendix D). As with the ideal self-attributes scale the first subscale used a 10-point scale, and the second scale used an 11-point scale, asking participants to determine how much their actual self differs from their fantasy self. By separating this measure into two subscales a measure of strength for the fantasy self and a discrepancy measure between the fantasy self and the actual self was created.

Experience-taking.

The experience-taking scale (Kaufman & Libby, 2012) used in Study 1 was used to measure character-specific engagement within the narrative.

Transportation.

The transportation scale (Green & Brock, 2000) used in Study 1 was used as a measure of general narrative absorption.

Attitude endorsement.

To examine whether experience-taking was related to participants' attitudes, an adapted form of the ten-item Big Five personality inventory was used (Gosling, Rentfrow & Swann, 2003) that examines the extent an individual believes specific traits apply to themselves. The adapted form of this questionnaire adds several additional items referring specifically to adventurousness, such as being brave, bold or daring (See Appendix G). The total number of items for the adapted form of the questionnaire was fifteen, using a 7-point scale to determine levels of agreement or disagreement. Examples of traits from the original questionnaire include anxious, easily upset, disorganized, and careless. While individuals responded to all items of the questionnaire, the attitude change measure only used traits referring specifically to adventurous characteristics. Examples of traits included in these questions were daring, bold, timid (reverse-coded) and courageous.

Reading experience.

A short five-item questionnaire was used to determine the level of experience individuals had with reading general fiction and fantasy narratives (See Appendix H). It also asked individuals to report the average amount of time in a week they spent free reading (reading for enjoyment) and the level of enjoyment they experienced while free reading. Additionally participants reported their favorite genre of story for a specified list (i.e. fantasy, science fiction, nonfiction, etc.).

Demographics, language check and story questions.

Demographics were collected using a basic questionnaire regarding age, sex and ethnicity. Individuals were also asked to report whether or not their first language was English to ensure they were qualified for the study. Finally, they completed three questions asking about the story to ensure that all participants read the story (See Appendix I). If individuals did not correctly answer all three questions their data were to be eliminated from examination.

Procedure

All measures and manipulations were presented in the lab using paper and pencil. Participants first completed the ideal self-attributes questionnaire and the fantasy self questionnaire, counterbalanced for carry-over and order effects. After completing these measures individuals read a short story (See Appendix F). The story focused on a main character who must enter dangerous woods to find two lost children from the character's village. The story's main character was kept gender-consistent to the participant. Participants were exposed to one of the two stories developed in the pilot study for Study 2. One contained repeated elements of fantasy, specifically magic (fantastical story condition), while the other story had elements that are similar to what is realistically plausible (realistic story condition). After reading one of the stories they completed the experience-taking scale and transportation scale, again counterbalanced, followed by the attitude change measure. Finally, participants completed the reading experience questionnaire, as well as the demographics, language check and story check questionnaire.

Results

For all measures, descriptive statistics are presented in Table 5 and zero-order correlations are in Table 6. Additionally, zero-order correlations for the separate conditions are presented in Table 7 (Realistic Condition) and Table 8 (Fantasy Condition).

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Study 2 Variables

Variables	Realistic Condition	Fantasy Condition
Ideal-Self Discrepancies	1.86 (1.33)	1.81 (1.00)
Fantasy-Self Discrepancies	2.50 (1.39)	2.16 (1.23)
Ideal Self Strength	7.59 (1.67)	7.45 (1.46)
Fantasy Self Strength	9.10 (2.21)	8.90 (2.07)
Experience-Taking	6.10 (1.61)	5.95 (1.63)
Transportation	3.65 (.68)	3.63 (.60)
Attitude Endorsements	4.33 (1.03)	4.34 (1.07)

Note: $N = 174$. Realistic Condition $n = 87$, Fantasy Condition $n = 87$. Ideal-self discrepancies and fantasy-self discrepancies measured on -5 to +5 scales. Ideal self and fantasy self strength measured on a 0-10 scales. Experience-taking and transportation are measured on scales of 1-9. Attitude endorsements were measured on a 1-7 scale.

Table 5

Zero-Order Correlations for Study 2 Variables

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Ideal-Self Discrepancies	1.0						
2. Fantasy-Self Discrepancies	.462***	1.0					
3. Ideal Self Strength	.510***	.189*	1.0				
4. Fantasy Self Strength	.217**	.533***	.396***	1.0			
5. Experience-Taking	.125	.003	.244**	.086	1.0		
6. Transportation	-.011	.008	.154*	.084	.631***	1.0	
7. Attitude Endorsements	-.096	-.151*	.488***	.261***	.225**	.191**	1.0

* p < .05

** p < .01

*** p < .001

Table 6

Zero-Order Correlations for Study 2 Variables in the Realistic Condition

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Ideal-Self Discrepancies	1.0						
2. Fantasy-Self Discrepancies	.450***	1.0					
3. Ideal Self Strength	.654***	.375***	1.0				
4. Fantasy Self Strength	.244*	.656***	.507***	1.0			
5. Experience-Taking	.179	-.062	.364***	.135	1.0		
6. Transportation	.045	-.015	.217*	.118	.621***	1.0	
7. Attitude Endorsements	-.082	.029	.369***	.383***	.368***	.319**	1.0

* p < .05

** p < .01

*** p < .001

Table 7

Zero-Order Correlations for Study 2 Variables in the Fantasy Condition

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Ideal-Self Discrepancies	1.0						
2. Fantasy-Self Discrepancies	.486***	1.0					
3. Ideal Self Strength	.303**	-.058	1.0				
4. Fantasy Self Strength	.181	.387***	.256*	1.0			
5. Experience-Taking	.056	.058	.106	.030	1.0		
6. Transportation	-.098	.030	.069	.038	.645***	1.0	
7. Attitude Endorsements	-.117	-.346**	.627***	.136	.087	.048	1.0

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Two hierarchical linear regressions were conducted examining experience-taking and risk-taking attitude endorsements respectively. The first regression contained a three-way interaction using a condition by fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude by ideal-self discrepancy magnitude interaction. In the first block, ideal-self discrepancy magnitude, fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude, condition, ideal-self strength, and fantasy-self strength were included. The fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude by condition interaction, fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude by ideal-self discrepancy magnitude interaction, and ideal-self discrepancy magnitude by condition interaction were entered in the second block. The condition by fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude by ideal-self discrepancy

magnitude was entered in the third block. The overall model for the third block was statistically significant, $p = .054$, however the three-way interaction was not statistically significant, $p = .529$. The second block overall model was also significant $F(8, 147) = 2.114$, $p = .038$, $R^2 = .103$. As predicted there was a significant interaction between condition and fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude, $\beta = .585$, $p = .047$ (See Figure 3). In the realistic condition as fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude increased experience-taking decreased, $\beta = -.468$, $p = .022$. However in the fantasy condition there was no significant relationship between fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude and experience-taking, $p = .528$. Contrary to the hypothesis, the ideal-self discrepancy magnitude by condition interaction was not significant ($p = .162$; See Figure 4). The fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude by ideal-self discrepancy magnitude was not statistically significant, $p = .965$. Ideal self strength scores were significantly related to experience-taking, $\beta = .339$, $p = .007$. As individuals reported higher levels of desired risk-taking in their ideal selves, experience-taking increased.

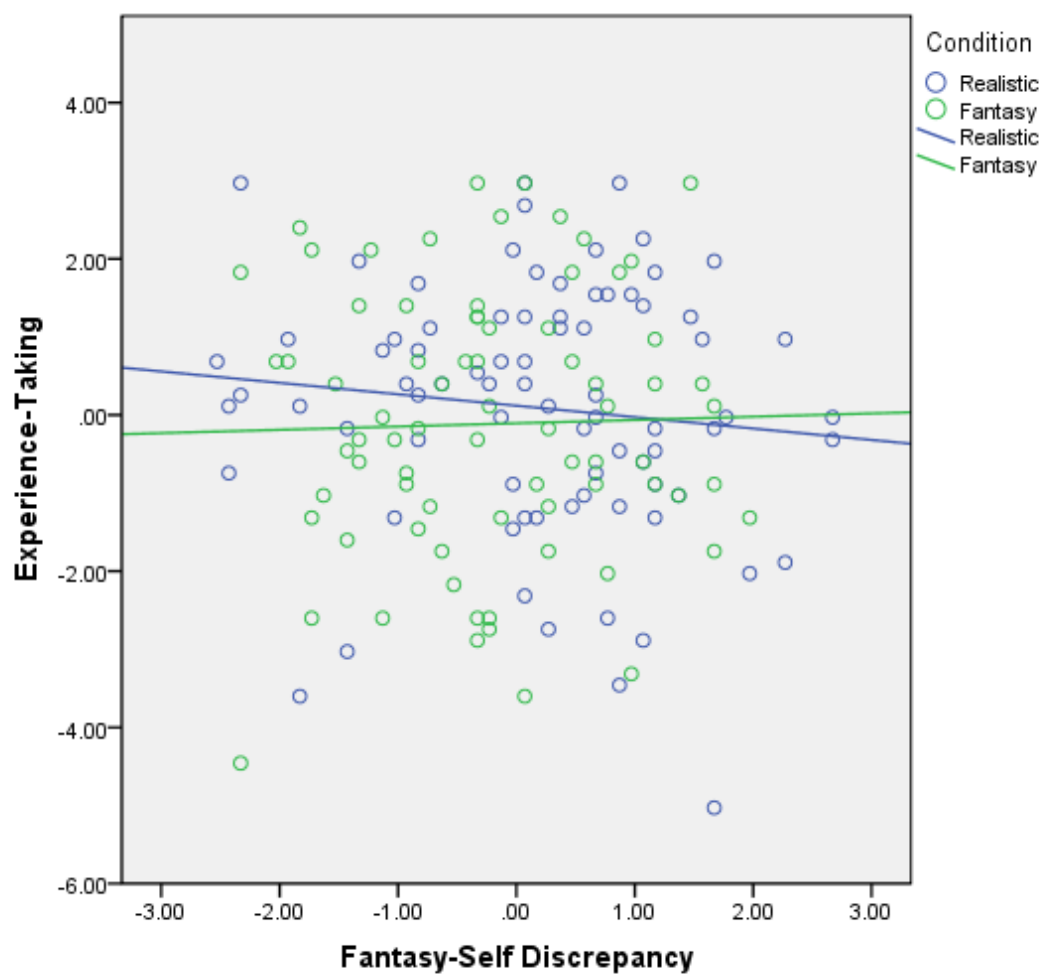


Figure 3. Condition X Fantasy-Self Discrepancies Predicting Experience-Taking

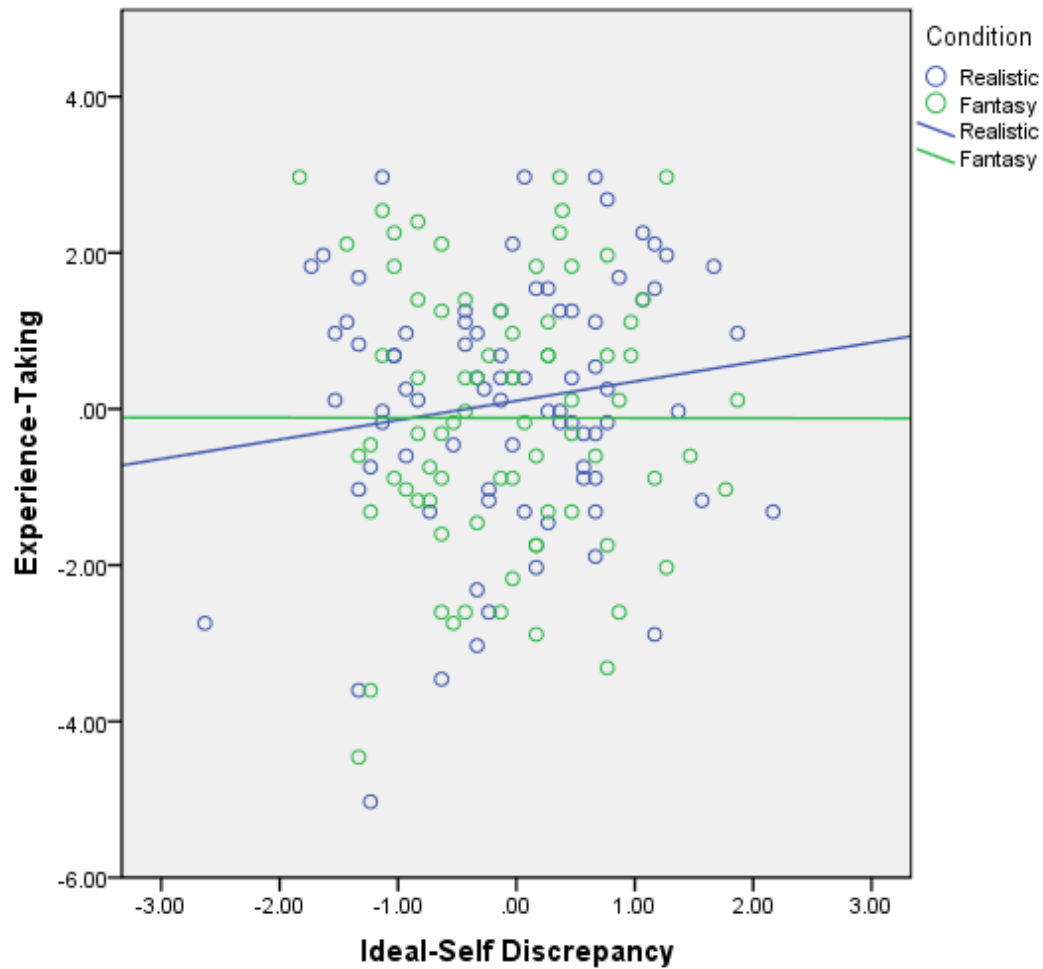


Figure 4. Condition X Ideal-Self Discrepancies Predicting Experience-Taking

A second hierarchical linear regression examined attitude endorsements as the dependent variable, with condition, experience-taking and transportation as independent variables in the first block and an experience-taking by condition interaction in the second block. The overall model was significant, $F(4, 174) = 3.626, p = .007, R^2 = .077$. There was a significant interaction between condition and experience-taking, $\beta = -.209, p = .038$ (See Figure 5). In the realistic condition as experience-taking increased, greater

risk-taking was endorsed, $\beta = .177, p = .027$. In the fantasy condition, experience-taking was not significantly related to risk-taking endorsements, $p = .492$.

Experience-taking as a conditional effect was also significantly related to attitude endorsements, $\beta = .209, p = .020$, such that, after accounting for the interaction, as experience-taking increased individuals' reported higher levels of risk-taking behaviors in their own self-attributes. Transportation was not significantly related to attitude endorsements ($p = .332$).

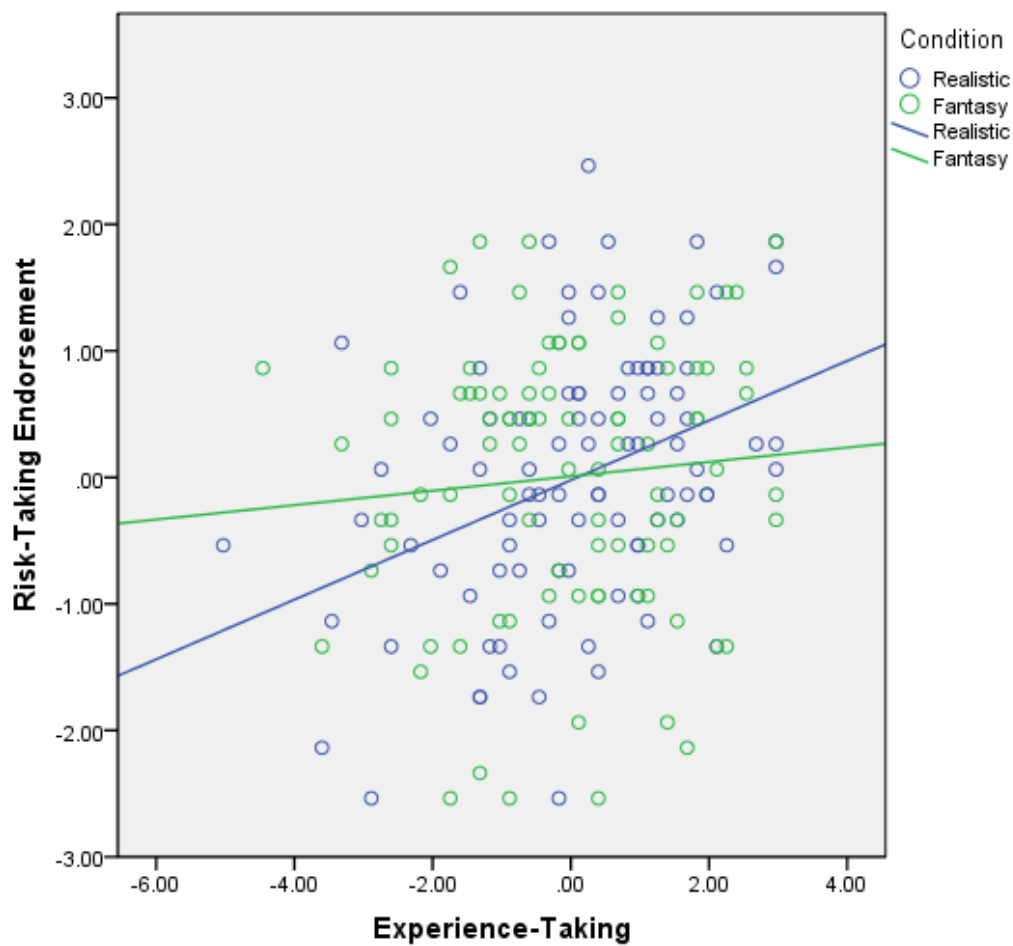


Figure 5. Condition X Experience-Taking Predicting Attitude Endorsements

Discussion

The results found partial support for the hypotheses presented. While the predicted three-way interaction was not statistically significant, there was a significant interaction between story condition and fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude. However, contrary to the hypothesis, there was no relationship found between fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude and experience-taking in the fantasy condition. Increased fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude was instead related to decreased experience-taking in the realistic condition. Additionally, inconsistent with the hypotheses, there was not a significant interaction between condition and ideal-self discrepancy magnitude, which would be expected if experience-taking is related to ideal-self discrepancies in the realistic condition. The lack of a relationship between the fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude and experience-taking may be due to the structure of the stories. As the pilot study determined, both stories had a mean below average on the perceived realism scale, meaning neither condition was viewed as particularly realistic, but even the fantasy condition was viewed as extremely unrealistic. This may have resulted in both the ideal self and fantasy self being somewhat accessible in both stories conditions, instead of having just the fantasy self in the exceptionally fantastical condition, and just the ideal self in the realistic condition. The ideal self and fantasy self are both self-guides, and so as the story drifts further away from reality the more the fantasy self is evoked and the less the ideal self is evoked. As a result, the accessibility is more of a continuum than a strict difference. Thus, the stories here may have fallen closer to the middle of the continuum than the extremes, as was intended.

The lack of a significant relationship between ideal-self discrepancy magnitude and experience-taking could similarly be explained by story structure. However, the results could also be due to the strong relationship between ideal self strength and experience-taking. Although the strength of the ideal self appears to predict experience-taking, in contrast to the hypotheses, this does not seem to be contingent on the type of scenario presented while reading. This could suggest the ideal self plays a role in most genres of reading, while the fantasy self makes contributions to the character-self relationship only when stories are fantastical.

Consistent with previous research (Kaufman & Libby, 2012) individuals endorsed higher levels of character-consistent behaviors if they also reported a higher level of experience-taking. Thus, those who have greater levels of experience-taking will exhibit behavior changes more consistent with the actions of the character even after the story's conclusion. Unexpectedly, there was a significant interaction between condition and experience-taking on attitude endorsements after reading. The realistic story, compared to the fantasy story, demonstrated a stronger relationship between experience-taking and reported risk-taking behaviors. This suggests individuals are capable of acknowledging different levels of perceived realism and they are less likely to transfer character-consistent attitude changes from the story to the real world when a story is extremely fantastical.

General Discussion

While Study 1 provided initial evidence for the use of fantasy-self discrepancies in predicting experience-taking, Study 2 did not fully support this hypothesis. Study 2 attempted to verify a three-way interaction between perceived realism, ideal-self discrepancy magnitude and fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude. Though a significant interaction of fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude and condition was found, neither the three-way interaction nor the ideal-self discrepancy by condition interaction was not significant. Although Study 2 failed to support the three-way interaction, Study 1 found fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude were related to experience-taking in highly fantastic stories, and in Study 2 fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude was negatively related to experience-taking in the realistic story condition. This indicates the value of the fantasy self, and fantasy-self discrepancies, to the experience-taking process. The moderating effect of perceived realism also suggests the applicability of the fantasy self is not appropriate for all stories, although the current relationship between perceived realism and the fantasy is unclear. The inconsistency in the relationship between fantasy-self discrepancy magnitude and experience-taking suggests further study is required to determine when the fantasy-self is relevant to experience-taking.

Further support was found for the predictive capabilities of experience-taking on self-reported risk-taking traits, consistent with previous research (Kaufman & Libby, 2012). Individuals reported higher levels of risk-taking behaviors if they were experience-taking more with the main character. The results also indicated the strength of the relationship between experience-taking and character-consistent attitude adoption was

moderated by perceived realism. The realistic stories demonstrated a relationship between experience-taking and attitude change while reading the fantastical story. This provides a new avenue for future research as the relationship between experience-taking and attitude change in fantastical stories is not well developed. The results suggest the process of attitude-adoption is not solely contingent on experience-taking, but may be taking into account the discrepancy between the story world and the real world. Thus readers won't exhibit attitude changes in the real world that were developed in a fantastical one. Therefore, the process of persuasion and attitude adoption through immersion may be more complicated than is currently articulated in the literature.

Finally, the results suggest the ideal self does play an important role in the immersion experience, though the fantasy self may be related to experience-taking as well. The significant finding for the ideal self strength could be, as Rotter (1942) noted, because the ideal self is a particularly motivating self-guide so individuals may apply the ideal self in some degree to all stories while only applying the fantasy self to highly fantastical stories. Additionally, it could also indicate individuals have a clearer mental representation of their ideal self compared to the fantasy self. The greater accessibility of this self-guide would mean a higher likelihood of its activation compared to the fantasy self when developing the character-self relationship (Higgins, 1987; Shedlosky-Shoemaker et al., 2014).

Results from Study 1 demonstrate individuals are capable of distinguishing between the fantasy and ideal selves. Though this distinction was less pronounced in Study 2, there was still a significant interaction of fantasy self and condition on

experience-taking. In Study 2, the lack of a three-way interaction may have been due to a difficulty measuring the ideal-self and fantasy-self discrepancies. The measures used may not have possessed high enough sensitivity and specificity to distinguish between the two types of selves. There may have been too much overlap between the fantasy and ideal selves to identify a consistent difference between them in Study 2, thus preventing a significant interaction between the different conditions. Future research needs to form more reliable measures of these self-guides, capable of consistently distinguishing between the two selves. More indirect measures of the fantasy self, such as using a character creation task, or an adapted form of the go no-go association task (Nosek & Banaji, 2001) could prove more successful than the direct measures employed in these studies.

An additional issue with the studies presented may have been the focus of the perceived realism. Most attempts to differ the levels of perceived realism were focused on the story environment and capabilities, but not on the character, who appeared relatively human. This may have meant that the character itself wasn't perceived as fantastical and thus the reader didn't have to use the fantasy self. This could account for the use of the ideal self relating to experience-taking across both conditions in Study 2. Further research should explore whether fantasy elements within the character specifically determine the use of the fantasy self as opposed to a general level of fantasy across all story elements.

Conclusion

Initial evidence suggests the fantasy-self discrepancy may be a useful predictor of experience-taking depending on the level of fantasy in a story. The findings did support the relationship between experience-taking and character-relevant attitudes, and the possibility of a fantasy self. While the possibility remains for a relationship between fantasy selves and experience-taking with certain fantasy stories, further developments must be made to adequately distinguish the fantasy and ideals selves. Additionally, proper measures of the fantasy self must be developed that can accurately examine the distinction between the fantasy and ideal selves. If measured properly the fantasy self has the potential to provide an explanation for why individuals are motivated to read, and why they may choose to read about characters so distinct from themselves. These characters possess traits they desire, or would desire if they were in the narrative's world, allowing them to explore these identities without the consequences of reality.

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Appendix A: Experience-Taking Scale

Experience-Taking Scale

Rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements about how you felt while reading the story. Circle the number that corresponds to your response for each item.

1. I felt like I could put myself in the shoes of the character in the story.

(strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 (strongly agree)

2. I found myself thinking what the character in the story was thinking.

(strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 (strongly agree)

3. I found myself feeling what the character in the story was feeling.

(strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 (strongly agree)

4. I could empathize with the situation of the character in the story.

(strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 (strongly agree)

5. I understood the events of the story as though I were the character in the story.

(strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 (strongly agree)

6. I was not able to get inside the character's head.

(strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 (strongly agree)

7. At key moments in the story, I felt I knew what the character was going through.

(strongly disagree) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 (strongly agree)

Appendix B: Transportation Scale

Transportation Scale

Rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements. Use the following 1 to 6 scale:

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = moderately disagree
- 3 = slightly disagree
- 4 = slightly agree
- 5 = moderately agree
- 6 = strongly agree

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.
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.
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.
10. The events in the narrative are relevant to my everyday life.
11. The events in the narrative have changed my life.

Appendix C: Ideal Self-Attributes Questionnaire

Ideal Self-Attributes Questionnaire

This questionnaire has to do with the type of person you desire to become, **your ideal-self**, as well as the person you currently are. Your ideal-self is the person you could ideally be in this world. Now please rate how much you feel you currently possess each of the following traits on a scale of 1 (not at all) -10 (a lot).

1. risk-taking _____
2. adventurous _____
3. cautious _____
4. daring _____
5. bold _____
6. timid _____
7. heroic _____
8. brave _____
9. thrill-seeking _____
10. carefree _____

Now, rate how much more or less of each trait you desire to have in your ideal-self. This means, how much of the trait you would want your **ideal-self** to have, compared to the person you currently are. Remember your ideal-self is the person you desire to become. Please use the following scale from -5 to 5:

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
A Lot		Somewhat		A Little		A Little		Somewhat		A Lot
Less		Less		Less		More		More		More

Here is an example for clarification, if you rated a 6 on brave for the previous questionnaire, but wish to become somewhat more brave you would rate a 3 for this questionnaire.

1. risk-taking _____
2. adventurous _____
3. cautious _____
4. daring _____
5. bold _____
6. timid _____
7. heroic _____
8. brave _____
9. thrill-seeking _____
10. carefree _____

Appendix D: Fantasy Self-Attributes Questionnaire

Fantasy Self-Attributes Questionnaire

This questionnaire has to do with the type of person you would want to become in an alternative world, **your fantasy-self**, as well as the person you currently are. Your fantasy-self is the person you want to become if you were not limited by the bounds of reality, in other words, the person you could be if you had no limitations. Please rate how much you feel you possess each of the following traits on a scale of 1 (not at all) -10 (a lot).

1. risk-taking _____
2. adventurous _____
3. cautious _____
4. daring _____
5. bold _____
6. timid _____
7. heroic _____
8. brave _____
9. thrill-seeking _____
10. carefree _____

Now, rate how much more or less of each trait you would desire to have in your fantasy-self. This means, how much of the trait you would want your **fantasy-self** to have compared to the person you currently are. Remember your fantasy-self is the person you would want to become if you didn't have any limitations. Please use the following scale from -5 to 5:

-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4	5
A Lot		Somewhat		A Little		A Little		Somewhat		A Lot
Less		Less		Less		More		More		More

Here is an example for clarification, if you rated a 6 on brave for the previous questionnaire, but wish, in an alternative reality, to become somewhat more brave you would rate a 3 for this questionnaire.

1. risk-taking _____
2. adventurous _____
3. cautious _____
4. daring _____
5. bold _____
6. timid _____
7. heroic _____
8. brave _____
9. thrill-seeking _____
10. carefree _____

Appendix E: Perceived Realism Scale

Perceived Realism Scale

Rate the extent to which you agree with the following statements. Use the following 1 to 6 scale:

- 1 = strongly disagree
- 2 = moderately disagree
- 3 = slightly disagree
- 4 = slightly agree
- 5 = moderately agree
- 6 = strongly agree

- 10. The story was extremely realistic.
- 11. The story characters could conceivably exist in reality.
- 12. The story world is similar to the real world.
- 13. I felt the story did not closely mirror reality.
- 14. It is plausible what happened in the story could happen in real life.
- 15. What happened in the story could be something that happened in reality.
- 16. The way the story world operated was very different from the way the real world operates.
- 17. I could draw many parallels between the story world and the real world.
- 18. The characters in the story could be people I'd meet in reality.

Appendix F: Story Manipulation

Story Manipulation

For the story there is both a male and female version. Included here is the female version. The male version is identical with the exception of replacing all main character-oriented feminine pronouns with masculine pronouns.

Though the two stories are presented separately based on condition, they are presented here as a single condensed story for comparison purposes. Anything presented in **bold** is exclusive to the Realistic Story condition, and anything in *underlined italic* is only in the Fantasy Story condition.

Dorian stood in front of an old, stone house, looking stoically over her small village. Vines ran up one side of the building, burying their roots in the cracked stone. From here she could even see her own house, its small wooden structure bordering the woods which encompassed the tiny town. Turning back toward the door, she drew in a deep breath, wondering why she had been called here. A cool wind blew as Dorian approached the door, ruffling her short, cropped hair. She knocked softly, before standing back to wait anxiously. It was rare that anyone was called directly up to the house. While the village Elder was a deeply respected man, he would usually go into the village below when he wanted to meet with someone. It must be something truly serious to have her called up to the house.

The door opened slowly to reveal an older woman, whom Dorian recognized as the Elder's wife, Mianna. She stood slightly stooped, but with a gentle smile beckoned Dorian inside.

"The Elder asked for me," Dorian said simply.

Mianna nodded. "We're glad you came. He is out back." Her voice was calm and endearing. Without saying anything else, Mianna turned and began walking. Dorian followed her down a hallway toward the back of the house. As they walked passed a small table, Mianna stopped momentarily to pick up a small stone lying in a shallow bowl, and handed it to Dorian. It was roughly the size of her palm, smooth and dark, with several unusual inscriptions carved into its surface. For their village these stones were a luck charm, said to bring good fortune to those who must embark on a hard journey. Dorian looked up at the Elder's wife questioningly. "Why, would I need this?" Mianna smiled knowingly. "It may just come in useful." Her tone had a mysteriously, unearthly quality, but Dorian did not question it further. Instead she simply placed the stone in her pants pocket.

Mianna then led Dorian to a wooden door, opening it slowly and pointing through. "He should be just outside," Mianna said, before turning to walk over to the kitchen. Dorian nodded.

"And please close the door behind you," Mianna requested.

Doing as she asked, Dorian walked outside, glancing around the large area. She found herself in a garden, with beautiful flowers who petals, Dorian knew, gave off an luminescent glow at night, shrubs, and large pine trees who blue leaves looked like waves in an ocean. **(Realistic Story: beautiful, blooming flowers, shrubs, and large, branching pine trees)**. The scents of sweet flowers and gritty earth intermingled as Dorian stepped off the small stone patio, and onto a grassy open area. Despite the beautiful garden, she did not see the Elder anywhere. There was a stone path Dorian started to follow, hoping perhaps he was beyond some of the shrubs, just out of sight. As she walked, Dorian felt a sudden sense of being watched. Like a dark looming force, staring down at her. The hair on the back of her neck bristled, and she quickly looked around.

In a dark corner nearby, underneath the pines, a shape shifted and moved. Slowly, it stood up, and stalked toward her. As it stepped into the light, a low growl could be heard emerging from its mouth. Rippling muscles flexed as the body moved forward, hidden if only slightly by a coat of fur so deeply red, it appeared almost black. Several sharp spikes ran along its back, ending at the base of its two tails. Sharp, black talons clicked like metal as it walked. A pair of calculating eyes bore down on her, the gaze of the ero-panther never leaving her. **(Realistic Story: Rippling muscles flexed as the body moved forward, hidden if only slightly by a thick coat of silky, black fur. Dorian could see the gleam of its claws as it walked. A pair of calculating eyes bore down on her, the gaze of the panther never leaving her.)**

Almost automatically, Dorian raised a hand toward the panther, aware now of where the sensation of being watched had been coming from. She knew it was more than likely the ero-panther had been observing her ever since she had entered the garden. Was this the reason she could not find the village Elder? She didn't want to dwell on it. Despite the imposing presence of a full-grown ero-panther, Dorian was not afraid. This was something she had prepared for. Her whole village knew of the dangerous animals which lived in the surrounding forests. They were trained since they were young to protect the village, to use any tools available to defend the village against animal and person alike. This meant learning to fight, hunt, and perform the mystical charms **(Realistic Story: the tamer's training)** passed down through the generations. For Dorian this was especially true, as she had inherited a very special gift which allowed her to say a special charm to tame and relax the wild animals which would occasionally wander into the village. **(Realistic Story: Since before Dorian could remember, she was made, along with the rest of the children, to practice a special melodic chant to tame and relax the wild animals which would occasionally wander into the village.** She had successfully dealt with foxes, deer, bobcats and even a wolf; but never a panther. They were rarely seen at all, mostly keeping to themselves, and they were notoriously difficult to deal with when encountered. Of the beasts she knew of, there were only a few which were harder to control and tame. She knew it would take incredible focus to be

able to calm such a beast. As it approached however, Dorian did not have much of a choice but to try.

Slowly, Dorian began to chant a slow, low melody. Called the Pacification Charm, it was a series of words in a lost language, a language rumored to have existed before man himself. It was meant to quell the wildness within any animal, returning it to a relaxed, docile state. Her eyes locked with the panther as she chanted the words. Then it became a battle of wills. Dorian could feel the panther mentally push back against her attempts to calm it. It was trying to break away from her spell, but it was losing. Then like a wave, she felt the force of the panther surrender and the effect of the chant washed over it. As if in a trance, the panther slowly stopped its progression toward her. It stood still, its eyes still staring into hers. Dorian felt as if she could feel the heart of the beast. Holding her other hand out as well, she made a motion for the beast to lay down. It did as she asked. As it lay on the grass, Dorian could feel the tension leave the air. She stopped chanting the charm, and dropped her hands to her sides. (Realistic Story: Slowly, Dorian began to chant a slow, low melody. Called the Pacification Ability, it was a series of words in a specific melody created in their village through years of practice taming animals. It was meant to quell the wildness within any animal, returning it to a relaxed, docile state. Her eyes locked with the panthers, as she chanted the words. Then it just became a matter of time. Dorian could feel the panther try to resist her attempts to calm it. It was trying to break away from her gaze, but it was losing. Then, like a wave, she felt the panther surrender and the effect of the chant washed over it. The panther slowly stopped its progression toward her as it relaxed to the sound of the melody. It stood still, its eyes still staring into hers. Dorian felt the both of them relax. Holding her other hand out as well, she made a motion for the beast to lay down. It did as she asked. As it lay on the grass, Dorian could feel the tension leave the air. She stopped chanting the melody, and dropped her hands to her sides).

For a moment longer she watched the panther laying there, now seemingly at ease. It looked completely relaxed. Then the rustling of branches behind her caused Dorian to turn her head. From the bushes beside her, the Elder walked out with a contemplative smile on his face.

“That was quite excellent,” he stated, looking over at the panther who was now grooming itself. Dorian bowed, making the Elder chuckle.

“Please,” he said, “no need for formality at this time.” Gesturing for her to follow him, she began to walk back up the path toward the house. The panther watched her leave quietly and without fuss.

Taking a seat on a bench, the Elder gave a low sigh. “First off, I apologize if I caused you any concern,” he continued, “but I had to know if you were ready.” Dorian was thoroughly confused.

“I don’t understand,” she replied, “apologize for what?”

All of a sudden, the panther wandered up the stone path toward them and hopped up on the bench beside the Elder. It lay down, its head resting comfortably by his side. Softly, he stroked it behind the ears.

“I have a request for you,” the Elder started, “and I needed to be sure that you were able to handle yourself in a dangerous situation. I had to be sure that you could use what we have taught you successfully.”

“I see.” The panther then, was simply a test to make sure that Dorian had trained adequately. She had proven herself capable of using the unique charm she had been born with (**Realistic Story: the training her village had taught her**). She stared at the panther, for a moment. It appeared content.

“What do you want me to do?” she asked, looking back at the Elder.

“I don’t know if you’re aware,” he replied, his tone becoming serious, “but yesterday two of the children wandered into the forest of the Mountain.” Dorian’s eyes widened. She had not known this.

Their village was surrounded by a dense forest, filled with many creatures. Among them, Dorian knew that ero-panthers, drakes and dire wolves (**Realistic Story: panthers, eagles and wolves**) made the Mountain their home. While most of the area was well explored, the area by the Mountain was not. It was the dark part of the forest which lay just beyond the field next to her village. There were many frightening myths and superstitions about that part of the forest, and those who explored too deep inside the Mountain’s woodland usually did not return. As a result, people avoided that part of the forest entirely, never attempting to even approach it.

“We sent a search party out for them, but it was unsuccessful. They combed the forest for hours, but due to a lack of knowledge about the area, they almost got lost several times. Ultimately, they had to turn back.”

Dorian nodded solemnly. This didn’t surprise her. While the villagers had expertise in all of the surrounding forest, since they avoided the Mountain, they would not know the area well. It would be easy to get lost out there.

“So now we must find someone who has at least some knowledge of the Mountain.” He looked at Dorian intently, “Someone who can hopefully negotiate the terrain and find these children before it is too late.”

Dorian’s brow furrowed. “But why me?”

The Elder smiled. “I think you already know why.”

Dorian agreed. She knew she was by no means physically stronger, hardier or even remarkably faster than her peers, but what she did have was her special abilities and an understanding of the Mountain (**Realistic Story: was an understanding of the tamer’s training and of Mountain**). Unlike most of the other villagers, because of her family’s abilities, (**Realistic Story: because her family excelled at the tamer’s training**), they lived very close to the woods of the Mountain, and would venture inside on rare occasions to hunt or gather supplies. Rare occasions though, were still more frequent than none. So while the other people living in the village avoided the mountain, Dorian’s family knew some of its trails, slopes, and dangers first hand.

“You are of the age where you should begin to participate in the protection of the village,” the Elder continued to explain, “so this will be first your task. We need you to go inside the forbidden forest of the Mountain, find the two lost children and bring them home.”

Dorian took a long breath in. There were dangers in the Mountain, many she probably wasn't even aware of, but the cause was just. She couldn't refuse.

"I'll do my best," she agreed. The Elder smiled once more and stood up.

"I have no doubts about that."

Dorian stood at the edge of the village, her backpack and sword slung behind her, and a tenseness in the bottom of her stomach. She took a deep, unsteady breath in, and then back out. Though there was no way to know what she was going to encounter in the forest, Dorian had to be prepared. Her one hope was that of the many myths surrounding the Mountain, in particular one was not true. Known as the Spirit of the Mountain, this myth talked of a beast who protected the Mountain from humans. Unlike the other creatures it was completely untamable, a totally wild, animal spirit. Though the stories were always vague, every one described it as having a large, muscular body, sharp tusks, and a menacing glare. Dorian did not want to encounter anything like that.

The Elder had said that during their previous search they had found one of the children's toys along a trail further into the woods. This seemed the best place to start.

Looking up at the sky, the sun shined brightly, *giving off a cherry red glow* (**Realistic**

Story: giving off a soft yellow glow). There would be at least a few hours before nightfall. Still, if Dorian wanted to begin the search, she would need to move quickly.

Before the Mountain actually began, there was a long, hilly field and a large river Dorian will need to cross. Taking off, she moved at a quick pace down the solitary trail toward the Mountain. Its presence loomed over her, towering and massive. Jagged peaks and stone outcrops marred its face, warning the world what lay ahead should they attempt the climb.

Within a few minutes she had reached the field. Just beyond was the river, and once she had crossed its running waters, Dorian would be in the forest of the Mountain.

When younger, Dorian was trained to travel quickly through the landscape without

sound. It was a necessity when hunting. So as she moved across the field, it was as if she had never been there at all. She moved silently, her feet appearing not even touching to

the ground. (**Realistic Story: When younger, Dorian was trained to travel quickly through the landscape without disturbing the area. It was a necessity when hunting.**

So as she moved across the field, it was as if she had never been there at all. She moved quietly, her feet barely leaving a mark on the ground).

As she reached the other side of the field she slowed slightly to take a look around. While Dorian had been here a few times before, she did not want to get lost. She was nervous after all, about entering the forest.

The trail faded away as it reached the bank of the river. On the other side was the untamed wilderness. This time of year the river ran shallower than usual, and there were a number of rocks that one could use to cross. Dorian imagined that was probably how the children managed to get to the other side. Even if someone had fallen in to the river,

the current right now was not terribly strong and it wouldn't take much to swim to the other side. *Stepping to the first rock, Dorian could feel it shift slightly beneath her feet. The water splashed up the sides, touching the bottoms of her feet. Expertly she moved to the next rock, then the next, as if dancing. To an observer it looked as if she was running on top of the water.* **(Realistic Story: Stepping to the first rock, Dorian could feel it shift slightly beneath her feet. The water splashed up the sides, touching the bottoms of her feet. Expertly she moved to the next rock, then the next, jumping. To an observer it looked as if she was playing hopscotch).** As she reached the last rock, it slipped from underneath her and she got thrown off balance. Barely in time, Dorian managed to right herself and jump steadily to the other side of the stream, avoiding a plunge into the cold water. Straightening up, she again stopped to look around.

It may have just been a trick of the sun, but the forest looked darker now, like something refused to let the light penetrate its layers. From where she was the ground began to meander slowly upwards, before finally breaching upwards toward the sky with jagged cliffs and haunting slopes. The very top of the Mountain was currently covered in hazy *midnight blue* **(Realistic Story: stormy grey)** clouds. Dorian hoped she wouldn't have to go that high.

After readjusting her pack and the single sword slung across her back, she slowly approached the woods. Entering inside, the smell of *the blue trees, like smoke and coffee* **(Realistic Story: the trees, a deep pine)** lingered on the breeze. There was an old, unkempt animal trail she had to follow. It was along this trail the search party had found one of the children's toys.

Dorian kept alert as she walked. She did not want to drop her guard for even a second. The animals in this forest were *not like normal animals* **(Realistic Story: not like the animals closer to the village)**. Since they never encountered humans, they had no immediate fear of people. This would pose a problem if she ran across any predators. As she walked, Dorian noticed an area close to the trail with a lot of footprints and broken branches. It seemed likely this was where they had found the toy. There was also a small jug of water. Dorian looked down at it.

'They must have left this here in case the children came back this way,' she thought. Examining the rest of the area, Dorian hoped she would turn up another clue that could tell her what direction the children had headed in. A couple of yards away she saw what looked like the tiny tracks of little feet. They were fresh, and the distance between them told her they had been running. Dorian guessed that was the children.

As she stood stooped over examining the tracks there was the sudden sound of rustling behind her. Dorian's head jerked up. Down the path some, a large mass was moving through the trees. Dorian froze in place, afraid to make any movement that might attract whatever creature was there.

As it moved, it sent a nervous chill up Dorian's spine. *The beast's feet struck the ground like thunder, leaving imprints in the soft dirt. Standing over fifteen feet, it's back brushed up against many of the tree's upper branches. As it came further into view Dorian could*

see it was a monstrous boar-like creature. It had coarse hairs that ran along its back, jutting out like spikes. Its heavy breath blew from lips which curled around large, ivory tusks. Each tusk was at least three feet long and as thick as a log. Hunched low, it gave an immediate impression of immense power, and sheer menace. **(Realistic Story: The**

beast's feet struck the ground like a drum, leaving imprints in the soft dirt. Standing over seven feet, it's back brushed up against many of the tree's upper branches. As it came further into view Dorian could see it was a large boar. It had coarse hairs that ran along its back, jutting out like spikes. Its heavy breath blew from lips which curled around large, ivory tusks. Each tusk was at least a foot long and as thick as a stick. Hunched low, it gave an immediate impression of immense power, and sheer menace.)

Instinctually, Dorian knew this was the beast in her village's myth. This creature was what the villagers called the Spirit of the Mountain. The creature which completely embodied the wild animal spirit.

Unconsciously, Dorian drew in a breath. This was a mistake. Almost immediately the beast's large head turned toward her. Its bloodshot eyes seemed to strain to focus, but once it saw her standing there it let out a deafening roar. The trees around it shook and billowed as if they were about to break. In seconds the beast changed from calm, to utterly feral and furious. Its wild eyes bore down on Dorian, as if livid to see any human at all, and without waiting another moment it stormed toward her. Despite its crushing size, the Spirit of the Mountain moved through the trees with skill and remarkable speed. Dorian barely had time to move out of the way as it rushed by, smashing directly through a nearby *tree* **(Realistic Story: bush)**. Shaking itself free of the plant's mangled remains, the creature turned to face her once more.

On her back, Dorian was carrying a sword, and while she had hoped not to use it, it now appeared she would have to. Drawing the glistening metal sword from its sheath, she held it steadily out in front of her. For a moment everything was still. Dorian waited. She knew another attack was imminent, and she had to be prepared.

Ducking its head low, the boar hurled toward her again. It looked as if it was driven purely by an insane anger. Moving slightly to the side, Dorian prepared herself for a counter attack. As the beast reached her she swung the sword upwards, attempting to catch it in the neck. She miscalculated though and as she drew the sword up, it collided with the boar's tusk. Caught in the hard tusk, the sword was wrenched from her grip and flung far behind her. Dorian gasped and quickly rolled to avoid getting caught underneath the boar's large hooves. She rolled several times before finally coming to a stop, only to see that the boar had already turned to run at her once more.

Looking quickly around, she noticed a long splintered stick lying behind her, one of the branches knocked from a tree in all the fighting. Picking it up, she quickly hurled the sharpened stick like spear, as hard as she could toward the beast. It buried itself in the boar's left flank, but it did not seem to have any effect. The boar did not even slow its

charge. Scrambling now, Dorian struggled to pull her feet underneath her. She could see the glint of the sword buried in brush some twenty yards away.

Getting up she bolted for the sword, the boar in hot pursuit. Vaulting over a log, the space between her and the sword was quickly disappearing. Dorian knew that as her only weapon, the sword was also her only hope of survival in the forest, so she had to recover it. Even as she grabbed the sword and pulled it from the bush however, she could hear the pounding of hooves behind her. She could feel it as well, the ground shaking slightly with each stride.

As she began to prepare for another counterattack, Dorian noticed a cliff face not far from her that looked just barely climbable. If she was able to get to the cliff she could climb up and away from the boar. On such steep terrain it would not be able to follow her.

Dorian took off toward the cliff at a full sprint, dodging tree limbs and boulders as she went. The boar, its hulking muscles flexed tight, charged after her, crushing trees and rocks beneath its feet. Reaching the cliff with only seconds to spare, Dorian grabbed for a handhold and launched herself upward. Climbing the rock face, she managed to get above the boar's reach just as it smashed into the cliff side. The whole rock face shook, but Dorian was able to hold on tightly, if only because of the fear of what would happen if she fell. Below her the boar bellowed again, scrapping its tusks against the rock in frustration. Staring down at it for a moment more, Dorian breathed a sigh of relief before finishing the rest of the climb up.

As she climbed to the top of the cliff, she glanced one last time downward to see the Spirit of the Mountain stalking back into the thick forest. The branches bent around it as it vanished from view beneath the leafy cover. Dorian didn't dwell however, she reminded herself to remain focused.

As she looked at her new surrounding she found herself in a forest similar to before, except now from the cliff's edge she could see out across the lower portion of the forest below. Looking further into the distance, she noticed the sky was darkening and the sun was preparing to set. Dorian decided that after the most recent events, it would be best if she started to prepare a shelter for the night. There was no point in looking around in the dark. She would only get herself lost. Climbing partway up a tree, she strung out a hammock. She also collected some wood to prepare a fire. Stacking the wood in a pyramid, she placed some dry brush underneath. Muttering a short, magical incantation under her breath, Dorian watched as the brush smoldered briefly before bursting into flames. **(Realistic Story: Humming under her breath, Dorian lit the brush with some matches. She watched as the brush smoldered briefly before bursting into flames).** Standing there for a moment, she watched the fire catch on the logs and spread, emitting a soft glow. By the time Dorian had tended to the fire and eaten a quick meal the sun had fully set and the moon shone bright in the night sky. She crawled up into her hammock and looked up at the stars. They blazed brilliantly against the inky blackness of the night. Before long Dorian had drifted off to sleep.

She awoke a few hours later to the very distinct sound of a sharp growl. Her body tensed as she recognized the sound. Peering over the edge of hammock she looked through the darkness to the ground below. Beneath her a lone animal strolled, examining the almost extinguished fire carefully. Looking closer, she could see it was a *dire* wolf. The dire wolf was bulky, with mud brown fur. Despite its short legs the dire wolf could move surprisingly quickly, frequently overpowering its prey with its large needle-like teeth (Realistic Story: The wolf was thin, but tall with thick, grey, spindly fur. Its large head held a jaw of long, menacing teeth). Glad she had hung her hammock high enough in the tree to avoid any attacks from the ground, Dorian wondered what to do next. She could just let the wolf wander off, that seemed the best course of action. However, as she shifted her weight around, the hammock groaned slightly and the wolf looked up.

It stared for a moment, as if deciding what to do. Black eyes, empty of any color looking up at her (Realistic Story: Light grey eyes looking up at her). Sitting, it was almost four feet tall, but its fangs suggested that size was not the factor you should be concerned about.

Finally, after a few seconds ticked, the wolf seemed to have decided what to do. Slowly, it tilted its head back and howled. Dorian groaned under her breath. The sound of the howl could very well bring other creatures toward her. Maybe even the Spirit of the Mountain. It may not have been able to make it up the cliff face, but there were other ways it could get up the Mountain if it wanted to.

Unfolding herself from the hammock, Dorian prepared to drop herself to the ground about ten feet from the wolf. She couldn't risk it attracting any more predators. She would simply have to tame it using her special incantation ability (Realistic Story: tamer's training).

Raising a hand to the wolf, she locked eyes with it. The melody, like with the ero-panther, was low and slow as she started to chant. Before she could begin the charm (Realistic Story: the chant) however, a pair of eyes appeared, glinting in the darkness of the underbrush. Then another appeared. Then another. Dorian's concentration slipped and she stopped the chant. From the woods approached another four wolves, one from each direction. She was now completely surrounded by them. Dorian realized it was pointless trying to use the chant again. While it could tame most animals, it would never be effective on an entire pack of five hungry *dire* wolves.

Instead, Dorian slowly reached into her pack, thankful she had grabbed it, and the sword, before jumping down from the hammock. She pulled out a small cloth bag, better known in her village as a spell bag. They were tiny bags enchanted with magical spells. In particular, this spell bag was used for quick escapes against multiple foes. Pulling the string of the bag would ignite a small piece of paper with the incantation and spell materials inside. Without waiting for the pack's attack, Dorian pulled the string of the bag and dropped it to the ground, activating the spell. Instantly the area around her was enveloped in smoke. Dorian took the opportunity to disappear before the smoke cleared.

(Realistic Story: She pulled out a small cloth bag, better known in her village as a smoke bag. They were tiny bags with a specific concoction inside. In particular, this smoke bag was used for quick escapes against multiple foes. Pulling the string of the bag would ignite the materials inside creating a large plume of smoke. Without waiting for the pack's attack, Dorian pulled the string of the bag and dropped it to the ground, activating the bag. Instantly the area around her was enveloped in smoke. Dorian took the opportunity to disappear before the smoke cleared.)

Escaping, she landed several yards away by the cliff's edge, and quietly left the wolves standing there in confusion. She was doing her best not to harm any of the animals in the forest, but it was difficult when she was being regularly attacked.

Once she was far enough from the wolves to be content they would not follow her, Dorian stopped for a moment to catch her breath. She had followed the cliff's edge just to be safe she could find her way back when the sun rose. Until then, she would simply have to wait. She didn't feel comfortable falling asleep again either. Instead, Dorian sat down on the edge of the cliff and gazed off across the forest below.

Looking over the forest everything seemed still. There was the slightest chirping of insects, but otherwise it was silent. As Dorian gazed out over across the dark landscape, one small area stood out. Not far from her, in the lower portion of the forest, and almost directly ahead there was a single light shining out from beneath the trees. Dorian stared at it.

"A fire?" she said aloud, "but why would there..." Her voice trailed away as she came to the realization. It must be the lost kids! Who else would have come into the forbidden woods and stay there all night? No one. No one that wasn't lost inside its depths that is. A bright smile broke out across Dorian's face. She was overwhelmed with joy. 'They must be there,' she thought happily. Taking note of the direction she would need to travel, Dorian quickly started the climb down the cliff. The rocks were cold and slippery in the darkness, but she didn't stop. There was no way to know how long the glow of their fire was going to last. This may be her only chance of finding the two children. She just hoped they would both be there, and that they were both alright.

Dorian jumped the last few feet to the soft dirt below, landing silently. She did not want to attract any unwanted attention. She would simply have to locate the fire herself. If she shouted for the children it would likely only bring in the wolves, or worse, the Spirit of the Mountain. Dorian crept quietly into the brush, listening for the sounds of any nearby animals. Despite the lower elevation the air felt colder here, and she shivered.

Keeping an eye on the skies she continued to walk, moving slowly forward inch by inch. While there were many creatures which could see in the dark, Dorian felt almost blind. What little light the moon gave her was broken up and scattered by the trees above her head. Walking through the forest at night was like walking into a black hole.

After what felt like ages, she could make out what appeared to be the soft glow of a fire in the distance. She edged closer, remaining vigilant. There was now only a few bushes

and trees between her and the source of the light. As she pushed them aside, she look in on a tiny clearing, only a few feet wide. Dorian smiled.

Inside the clearing a fire burned and cackled quietly to itself. Beside it lay two sleeping children, curled next to one another. Both looked dirty, with muddied clothes and matted hair. Each bore a few scratches and bruises, but otherwise appeared fine. Their expressions were content.

Dorian approached the closest one first, a small boy, maybe six years old. She knelt down and gently shook his arm. For a moment he didn't move, but eventually his eyes opened and he pulled himself dazedly to an upright position. Dorian was surprised they could both sleep so soundly in a forest like this. She chalked it up to pure exhaustion. The boy's stirring caused the girl beside him to wake as well. Sitting up she yawned, her brown locks falling sloppily in front of her face.

As they both awoke, their eyes focused in on Dorian. Almost simultaneously the boy gasped and the girl squealed. Dorian quickly put a finger to her lips to quiet them. The less sound the better.

"I've come to bring you back to the village," she said in a hushed tone. The children nodded fervently, as they broke out into happy smiles, glad to have been discovered. Dorian could tell they were relieved to see another human face.

For a moment Dorian thought about what to do next.

As she thought, the boy interrupted. "Can we go home now?" he asked, his voice squeaking slightly as he tried to remain quiet. Dorian glanced out into the forest. It was getting brighter as the sun was starting to rise. She knew the kids probably wanted desperately to get home, and the trail back to the village wasn't that far off. They could risk it.

"Alright," Dorian nodded, "let's go." She started to lead them in the direction of the path, but then stopped and turned. "But let's be quiet. Okay?"

The kids nodded again.

They walked for some time and the children tried their best to be quiet. She was surprised, but pleased they were holding together so well. Eventually, they reached the old trail she had used to enter the forest. All they would have to do now is follow the trail out to the river and then they were home free. Dorian breathed the smallest sigh of relief.

"What's that?" the boy asked suddenly. Dorian stopped and turned in the direction he was pointing. Almost immediately the color drained from her face, once she realized what the boy was staring at.

"We need to move," Dorian stated, pushing the children in front of her and quickening their pace. In the trees, the Spirit of the Mountain was standing hunched over, it's eyes toward the ground. It had not noticed them.

"But what is it!" the boy asked again slightly louder. The boar's head shot up, hearing the sound of the boy's voice. What little color that remained in Dorian's face left. She had a hard enough time dealing with the boar before. She didn't know if she could protect two children on top of defending herself against such a large creature.

“Run,” Dorian said slightly louder, and with significantly more concern. The boar bellowed. “Run!” Dorian and the children took off down the trail as fast as they could. Behind them the thunderous rumble of hooves barreled down the trail.

“Aahhh!” the girl shouted as she suddenly tripped and rolled off the path and down a small embankment. Dorian skidded to a stop. The boar was quickly closing in as she and the young boy ran down the slope. Reaching the fallen girl, Dorian could see her frantically pulling at some vines covering her feet.

“I’m tangled,” the girl mumbled anxiously as she struggled. It was clear she would need some time to disentangle herself from the rope-like plants.

“Help her,” Dorian commanded to the boy before heading back up the slope. Dorian knew she would need to buy some time for them. She drew her sword as she reached the path and raised it toward the oncoming creature. Narrowing her eyes, Dorian took in a slow breath and tried to calm her nerves. The boar reached her a moment later, swinging its large tusk toward her chest. She ducked underneath, swinging the sword low along the creature’s side. She felt the pressure of the sword coming into contact with beast. It roared as she pulled the sword away, a deep wound appearing along its left side. It wasn’t fatal, but it clearly caused the beast some pain. The boar turned wildly toward Dorian, its yellow eyes glowing with fury like the embers of a fire. It pawed its hoof aggressively against the ground as it prepared to charge again.

Once more Dorian raised the sword as it moved toward her, trees snapping and cracking in its wake. She aimed the sword at its chest, dodging the boar’s attack. At the last second however, the boar swiveled its massive head, smashing its hard skull into Dorian. She flew backwards a dozen or so feet, her breath taken from her. The sword fell from her grip, landing on the ground uselessly between her and the creature. Her head spinning Dorian tried to right herself, but it took her a precious few moments to recover. As she did, the boar approached her threateningly. It walked slowly forward, huffing deep breaths of air in and out. Its breath stank, smelling of rot and decayed plants. As it stepped closer, one of its large hooves landed on the flat metal blade of Dorian’s sword. She cringed as she heard the sound of metal snapping.

Struggling to her feet, Dorian realized the boar was too close now for her to successfully run away. Desperately she reached into the pockets of her pack for something to help. All her spell bags were gone though. Dorian concluded they must have fallen out when she was thrown back by the boar. Suddenly, she felt a weight shift in her pant pocket. Reaching into it, she pulled out the small luck charm the Elder’s wife had given her before she entered the forest. Flipping it over in her hand, Dorian got a sudden idea. *Mumbling a magical spell, the stone’s inscriptions suddenly started to glow. She threw it to the side of the boar, a few feet from its lumbering frame. Its inscriptions glowed, and then faded before a sudden burst of bright light flew out from the stone. The boar groaned, and took a step away, temporarily blinded by the sharp light of the spell.* **(Realistic Story: She flipped the stone over once more, before throwing it to the side of the boar, a few feet from its lumbering frame. It collided severely with another**

rock and cracked loudly before shattering. The boar groaned, and took a step away, surprised by the sudden, sharp sound of the stone hitting the rock). This gave Dorian just enough time to put distance between herself and the boar once more.

“She’s free!” came a sudden shout as the boy came running up the slope. Shortly after the girl followed, now freed from the vines. Apparently unaware of what was going on they had appeared on the path between Dorian and the boar. Her eyes widened. Quickly she ran forward and pulled the children out of the way just as the boar spun around at them, swinging its large tusks ferociously. She pushed them behind a large tree and out of sight. Knowing she would now have to find some way to incapacitate the beast to be able to get away, she also knew she wouldn’t be able to protect the children at the same time. The only problem left was she did not know how to stop the boar.

So Dorian stood there weaponless, defenseless, staring into the feral eyes of the Spirit of the Mountain. There were no more spell bags, and her sword was gone. She had nothing left but her bare hands, and a desperate hope. As she stared at the boar, wondering what to do, she realized there was only one option left. She had learned as a child about an ability that allowed a person to paralyze any opponent. By hitting them in just the right spot, and imbued with the right mystical force, it would cause instant paralysis for a short time. While the paralysis was only temporary it would be enough time for Dorian and the children to escape. It was her only hope. **(Realistic Story: She had learned as a child about an ability that allowed a person to incapacitate any opponent. By hitting them in just the right spot, and imbued with the right physical force, it would cause them to instantly collapse for a short time. While it was only temporary it would be enough time for Dorian and the children to escape. It was her only hope.)**. The only problem was, she had never tried using it before. While she knew how to do it, she had never practiced. It didn’t matter though, she was out of options. The boar bellowed once more, its low sound rumbling through the ground and reverberating off the trees.

Dorian stared down the Spirit of the Mountain, steeling herself for what would be the beast’s last charge. Whatever way things turned out, this would be the final moment of their battle. The Spirit of the Mountain took in a deep breath, before snorting the air out through its gargantuan nostrils. It’s stormed toward her, charging at full speed. The ground rumbled and Dorian steadied herself as it shook. The hair’s on the boar’s back bristled as it tensed, expecting the impending clash. Dorian knew she would have to place her punch perfectly, just below the collar. Unfortunately, that meant she would be directly under the beast when she hit it.

She ducked low as it plowed toward her, and barely managed to avoid being skewered by the large tusks. Closing her hand into a fist, Dorian readied herself before launching her punch upward. She felt the beast’s thick, prickly hair on her closed hand and the heat from its body hit her skin. Dorian pushed with all her might against the creature’s hard frame. She felt a sudden snap, and it grunted, one of its front legs slipping out from underneath it. As it did, it kicked Dorian in the stomach, pushing her down into the dirt.

The weight of the boar crashed unexpectedly down upon her. After stumbling the rest of the way over her, the beast made it a few more feet before promptly collapsing. A single, long breath escaped its lips. Its head lay to one side, two legs tucked underneath it and the other two sprawled out in front. While its chest heaved in and out, it no longer appeared to be moving.

Meanwhile, Dorian lay on the ground, still and pale. There was the distinct impression of a hoof on her left shoulder. Her eyes were closed. The children, hearing silence, peered out from behind the tree. For a moment, nothing in the forest moved.

Then Dorian coughed. Gasping for breath, she pulled herself off the ground. "Ow," she mumbled, her eyes struggling to open. She felt like a boulder had been dropped on top of her.

"Are you okay?" the girl asking, gradually and cautiously walking up. Dorian looked over herself before slowly nodding. Her shoulder was aching terribly, but she was able to move it. In honesty she was surprised at just how lucky she was. It seemed impossible that she had not been killed. Turning behind her, she saw the boar lying on the ground. She stood up, sharp pains screaming from every part of her body.

The beast lay on top of several broken branches, and Dorian carefully stepped over them to get a better look at the boar. As she came around to its front, she could see its eyes following her. Its breathing was deep and solid, but its body did not flinch. It clearly was no longer able to move even if the effect was only temporary.

Dorian was staring down at the boar in complete shock. It had actually worked. She had hit it in the right spot, she had known that almost immediately, but she was still surprised. Staring for a moment longer, Dorian collected herself before turning away. She moved back to the path and gestured for the children to follow her. Though her body ached, she pushed through it and together the three walked quickly down the trail.

A short time later they reached the river. It looked exactly the same as yesterday when she had crossed it. The only difference was now it was the only obstacle between her and the safety of her village. She had never been more relieved to see a river in her entire life. Moving as quickly as possible she guided the children on to the rocks so they could cross. Helping the children as best she could, they made it to the other side with relative ease.

The children cheered as they reached the other side, jumping excitedly up and down. Despite being exhausted and sore, Dorian gave a satisfied smile. She stepped off the rock and joined them on the far side of the river. Relief washed over her.

Barely waiting a moment, they took off down the path. "Come on!" they shouted, already heading toward the village. Their eyes beamed as bright as the sun. Dorian walked after them, content to move slowly with minimal pain. The warm sun beamed down on her. There was the thick and sweet aroma of flowers in the air. It soothed her.

As Dorian reached the top of the hill, she felt the abrupt sense of being watched. She stopped and glanced around. The field was empty except for the two excited children bouncing hurriedly toward home. Turning around, Dorian looked across the river.

In the trees a pair of large yellow eyes stared back at her. The shape took a step forward, its hooves sinking into the muddy bank of the river. Dorian's eyes locked with the Spirit of the Mountain, the wind picking up from across the river. It blew the scent of the forest toward her. Pine mixed with a sense of danger, but Dorian was not afraid. The Spirit of the Mountain would not cross the river, she knew that.

Dorian watched on as the goliath turned slowly away from her, moving back into the forest. Its monstrous form disappearing into the trees. When it was finally out of sight, Dorian too turned away. She walked leisurely into the field, her mind tired, but at peace.

Appendix G: Attitude Change Scale

Attitude Change Scale

Here are a number of personality traits that may or may not apply to you. Please write a number next to each statement to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement. You should rate the extent to which the pair of traits applies to you, even if one characteristic applies more strongly than the other.

Disagree Strongly	Disagree moderately	Disagree a little	Neither nor disagree	Agree a little	Agree moderately	Agree strongly
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

I see myself as:

1. _____ Extraverted, enthusiastic.
2. _____ Critical, quarrelsome.
3. _____ Dependable, self-disciplined.
4. _____ Cautious, timid.
5. _____ Thrill-seeking, gutsy.
6. _____ Anxious, easily upset.
7. _____ Adventurous, heroic.
8. _____ Open to new experiences, complex.
9. _____ Reserved, quiet.
10. _____ Sympathetic, warm.
11. _____ Daring, courageous.
12. _____ Disorganized, careless.
13. _____ Bold, brave.
14. _____ Calm, emotionally stable.
15. _____ Conventional, uncreative.

Appendix H: Reading Experience Questionnaire

Reading Experience Questionnaire

1. How many hours a week do you spend free reading (i.e. reading just for enjoyment)? _____
 - a. How many hours a week are spent reading the fiction genre? _____
 - b. How many hours a week are spent reading the fantasy genre? _____
2. How much do you enjoy reading in your spare time?

Not at all A little Moderately Very much Extremely
3. Please circle your favorite genre to read:
 - a. Mystery
 - b. Fantasy
 - c. Science Fiction
 - d. Romance
 - e. Thriller
 - f. Nonfiction
 - g. Other: _____

Appendix I: Demographics, Language Check and Story Questions

Demographics, Language Check and Story Questions

1. Gender (circle one):
Female
Male
2. Age _____
3. Please circle one of the following to indicate your primary ethnic identity:

A. African American
B. Asian American
C. White, non-Hispanic
D. White, Hispanic
E. Middle Eastern
F. Other: _____
4. Is your first language English? Yes No

For the remaining questions, please answer based on the story you have just read.

5. What is the name of the main character?
 - a. Dorian
 - b. Emile
 - c. Alex
 - d. Ryan
6. What was the main character attempting to find throughout the story?
 - a. A spirit
 - b. Two children
 - c. Three small stones
 - d. Four scrolls
7. Where was the main character for the majority of the story?
 - a. In a desert
 - b. By a large lake
 - c. In a small city
 - d. In a forest



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