Locating Self-Modifying Feelings Within Literary Reading

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Self-modifying feelings during literary reading were studied in relation to the personality trait, absorption. Participants read a short story, described their experience of 3 striking or evocative passages in the story, and completed the Tellegen Absorption Scale (Tellegen, 1982). Compared to readers with either low or moderate absorption scores, those high in absorption were more likely to report affective theme variations and self-perceptual shifts, especially during an emotionally complicated portion of the story. Further analyses indicated that, rather than emotional involvement per se, the relationship between absorption and self-perceptual shifts was mediated by the interaction between theme variations and a style of expressive reflection called metaphors of personal identification.

The enduring effects of literary texts on reader attitudes and beliefs have been attributed to both their narrative and stylistic aspects (cf. Hakemulder, 2000, for a review). Narrative features afford the greatest variety of influences: The complex situations, motives, and actions described in literary fiction may nurture the reader's empathic abilities; the presentation of convincingly developed characters may provide models the reader can emulate; the portrayed consequences of character actions may implicitly convey the cultural norms that shape the reader's activities; and the comparison of various characters' demeanor vis-à-vis a common dilemma may enrich the reader's reflection on the ethical principles that guide moral conduct. The stylistic features of literary texts arguably complement—and augment—the preceding effects of narrative: The style in which the narrative is presented may

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defamiliarize and refresh the interpretation of conventionally conceived narrative elements, figurative forms may mark the narrator's evaluations of character actions and their consequences, and rhetorical devices may enhance the persuasive effects of the presented narrative.

Compared to the direct influences of narrative and stylistic features, the forms of reader "involvement" that enable or amplify the effects of literary reading are less well articulated. Beyond the cognitive strategies that constitute comprehension (e.g., concrete simulation of the narrative world), the most commonly proposed forms of reader involvement are transportation (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2002), empathy (Halasz, 1996; Zillman, 1994), and identification (Holland, 1975). Each of these involves the reader's response to narrative features of the text (e.g., empathy with a character's feelings), rather than the reader's engagement with its stylistic features. Consequently, they collectively neglect a pivotal possibility: The stylistic aspects of a literary text may not only have direct effects (e.g., defamiliarization), but they also may initiate a form of reader reflexivity that is itself figurative. Readers may appropriate the text's figurative forms (e.g., by borrowing its metaphors) or transform its narrative elements into figurative forms (e.g., using a fictional battle as a metaphor) in reflective reference to aspects of their own lives.

Substantiation of this possibility would have two important implications. First, it would help to clarify how literary reading complicates and enlivens narrative presentations. Literary reading is that site in which the text and the reader's reflections (also understood as text) provide an intertextual blend of narrative and stylistic forms. Second, it would help to explain why reading-induced changes in attitudes and beliefs often remain compellingly evident to the reader, but resistant (e.g., as resistant as metaphors) to explicit articulation. Indeed, the effects of literary reading often are figuratively grasped as an altered sense of self that is not readily conveyed to others.

The study presented here contributes to the empirical substantiation of these possibilities (see also Kuiken, Miall, & Sikora, 2004). In what follows, we (a) distinguish two figurative forms of reader engagement with literary texts, (b) demonstrate that their recurrent form is characteristic of some readers' involvement in literary reading, and (c) provide evidence that individual differences in such involvement are predictive of the effects of literary reading on the reader's shifting sense of self.

THE FIGURATION OF SELF-MODIFYING FEELINGS

At times, readers of literary texts find themselves participating in an unconventional flow of feelings through which they realize something that they have not previously experienced—or at least that they have not experienced in the form pro-

vided by the text. When this occurs, the imagined world of the text can become unsettling. What is realized (recognized) also may become real-ized (made real) and carried forward as a changed understanding of the reader's own life-world. We propose that this process of real-ization through literary reading involves a form of reflexivity that is itself figurative. We also suggest that the feelings integral to such figurative real-ization be called *self-modifying feelings* to differentiate them from evaluative feelings toward the text as a whole; aesthetic feelings in response to stylistic variations; and narrative feelings in reaction to the setting, characters, and events (Miall & Kuiken, 2002).

Phenomenological studies (Kuiken & Miall, 2001; Sikora, Kuiken, & Miall, 1998) have identified a type of reading experience that is distinctively marked by self-modifying feelings. This type of reading, called *expressive enactment*, involves (a) the emergence of aesthetic feelings, as well as narrative feelings; (b) blurred boundaries between self and other, suggesting some kind of personal identification; and (c) iterative and figurative modification of an emergent affective theme. In the research presented here, we are especially concerned with how readers iteratively and figuratively modify an emergent affective theme. We suggest that such transformation of an emergent affective theme may be the locus not only of readers' changing understanding of the text, but also of their changing sense of themselves.

TWO FIGURATIVE FORMS OF SELF-IMPLICATION

Readers' sense of themselves becomes involved in literary reading through forms of engagement variously called identification or empathy. Despite considerable definitional diversity (Barnes & Thagard, 1997; Oatley & Gholamain, 1997; Zillman, 1994), these forms of self-implication generally involve the self-resonant understanding of another's experiential perspective—regardless of whether the other is a narrator, character, or personified object. The self-resonant understanding of such narrative elements is usually taken literally—as though it could not also be given a figurative form. In contrast, Cohen (1999) suggested that a reader's identification with a narrator, character, or personified object creates a self-implicating tension when the reader metaphorically enacts that figure's perspective. Comparison theories of metaphor, which suggest the transfer or mapping of one pre-established domain onto another, obscure this possibility. Interaction theories of metaphor, in contrast, attempt to explicate that generative tension, and Cohen invoked interaction theories of metaphor in his portrayal of identification in literary reading. When metaphors of personal identification displace the comparative grasp of resemblances between reader and other, there emerges, argued Cohen, a distinctive self-modifying tension.

In think-aloud studies of literary reading, metaphors of personal identification are concretely evident in some readers' comments. To appreciate this possibility, consider first the following example, taken from a study described more fully later in this paper, in which a reader, while reading a short story entitled "The Wrong House" by Katherine Mansfield (1945), engages the text in a manner that resembles simile rather than metaphor. Commenting on the author's description of a setting in which "the houses opposite looked as though they had been cut out with a pair of ugly steel scissors and pasted on to the grey paper sky" (Mansfield, 1945, p. 675), she says

> I could actually see the street and the houses. So there was great imagery there … it reminded me of the street that I lived on when I was young. We lived in a small town in southern Alberta … and the houses looked like that; they looked like they had been cut out with ugly steel scissors.

As this example affirms, the reflections evoked during reading often capture similarities between aspects of a personal memory and aspects of the world of the text. In this case, the comparison is explicit ("the houses looked like that"), which suggests that this reader's expression can be understood on the model of a simile (A is like B; my experience of the street in my home town is like the narrator's experience of the street in the story). As implied by the reader's simile, memory and story are symmetrical partners in an explicit comparison ("A is like B" is equivalent in meaning to "B is like A").

In contrast, consider the following example in which a different reader of "The Wrong House" (Mansfield, 1945) is commenting on the author's description of a moment in which the protagonist, the elderly Mrs. Bean, realizes that men attending a funeral coach are disembarking and approaching her door: "'No!,' she groaned. But yes, the blow fell, and for the moment it struck her down. She gasped, a great cold shiver went through her, and stayed in her hands and knees" (p. 676). This reader comments

> it just makes you realize that … your own mortality is something that can make you unable to think clearly … [W]hile you think you still are alive and well and able to take care of yourself and help others, somebody else has decided that you can't. And then [at times like this] you don't think that it's their problem, [but instead] that you somehow have been mistaken all this time and that it's time for you to give in and end everything, whether you're ready to or not … [A] passage like this makes you realize that some day, perhaps something like that will happen to you and scare the hell out of you because you know how close it could be for you.

This reader uses the pronoun *you* to speak inclusively, but still personally (e.g., "it just makes you realize"). While spelling out what Mrs. Bean is like in this scene (e.g., she was "unable to think clearly"; she realizes that "it's time ... to give in"), this reader is also implicitly referring to herself as a person of the same kind. Although similarity is somehow at stake, this reader is not simply comparing Mrs. Bean and herself. Instead, as indicated by her choice of pronoun form, she identifies Mrs. Bean and herself as members of the same inclusive class. Comparison in this form is asymmetrical; that is, "A is B" is not equivalent in meaning to "B is A." To say, as this reader seems to do, that "I am Mrs. Bean" is not equivalent to saying that "Mrs. Bean is me." Such asymmetry suggests that, rather than comparison through simile, this reader is engaged in a metaphor of personal identification (Cohen, 1999).

The significance of metaphors of personal identification can be articulated according to Glucksberg and Keysar's (1990) interactive theory of metaphor. In that view, the reader's metaphoric identification of herself with Mrs. Bean creates an ad hoc class exemplified by Mrs. Bean, but also including herself. This metaphoric self-reference implicitly endows the reader with attributes of the ad hoc class exemplified by Mrs. Bean (e.g., those who are "unable to think clearly," who realize that "it's time ... to give in," and so on) within constraints imposed by the reader's own self-understanding (e.g., that she is not old like Mrs. Bean). It also generates modifying feelings by prompting her to consider whether she possesses the previously unarticulated attributes of individuals in this class. Examination of the concluding passage in our reader's reflections substantiates this possibility: She is made to "realize" that "something like that will happen to [her] and scare the hell out of [her] because [she will] know how close it could be."

THE TEMPORALITY OF SELF-MODIFYING FEELINGS

The contrast between the preceding pair of commentaries suggests that self-implicating similes are less generative than metaphors of personal identification. The metaphoric form of self-implication creates an affinity between the reader and the text that simultaneously prompts openness to a different understanding not only of the text, but also of the reader herself. For this reason, it might be expected that the reader will say more about the theme that has been metaphorically identified. The originary metaphor of personal identification, in other words, may instigate additional attempts to clarify that self-implicating theme. Through subsequent modifications of this theme, readers may, in the words of Ingarden, attempt to "satiate [themselves] with the quality in question, to consolidate possession of it" (Ingarden, 1985, p. 114). A clear example of such an attempt is evident in the commentaries of the reader last quoted. Commenting on a passage in which Mrs.

Bean's maid pulls down the window blinds, apparently to protect Mrs. Bean from further distressing encounters with the outside world, she says

> Having somebody else pull down the blind in this story makes me feel like when other people make the decisions for you and take away your power over yourself, deciding when it's your time to be in darkness or to die, and when you have outlived your usefulness ... A very uncomfortable feeling with the realization that someday I might get that way and other people are deciding things for me and feeling that I am really no longer really of usefulness and nothing but a silly old woman who has fallen asleep and gets jittery at the smallest things.

As in her response to the earlier passage, this reader uses the pronoun *you* to speak inclusively, but personally (e.g., "other people make the decisions for you and take away your power"). Through this inclusive expression, the reader again implicitly refers to herself as someone whose autonomy is placed in jeopardy as death approaches. In this variation on that theme, however, she emphasizes loss, rather than abdication, of this autonomy.

In this example and others that we have observed (Kuiken et al., 2004), variations on an emergent affective theme are experienced in a pulsing temporal pattern during literary reading. To use a musical analogy, this temporal pattern has the structure of a fugue in which a pivotal theme is progressively augmented or diminished, combined or contrasted, concretized or abstracted, and so on. The temporal dynamics of this fugal structure are seldom considered in discussions of identification, although, we suggest, they may be critical to understanding how literary reading enters the reader's life. One noteworthy exception is Iser (1978), who, although recognizing the reader's momentary identifications, also emphasized their "negation." "Invalidation" of one of the reader's identifications by another "situates the reader halfway between a 'no longer' and a 'not yet.'" Within that "blank," he argued, the possibility of changing the reader's sense of self emerges (Iser, 1978, p. 213). Iser, like Bakhtin (1981), suggested that identification with the perspective of a narrator, character, or personified object is best understood as one moment within a sequence of such dialogical, self-altering moments.

ABSORPTION AND SELF-MODIFYING READING

This theme-varying structure is not evident for all readers and, when evident, not uniformly present throughout the reading experience. The study presented here is an attempt to locate this theme-varying structure in relation to the personality trait absorption. Tellegen and Atkinson (1974; Tellegen, 1982) defined *absorption* as a disposition for having episodes of "total attention" that (a) fully engage one's rep-

resentational resources, (b) heighten the sensed reality of the attentional object, and (c) alter experience of the attentional object and the self. Given its empirical association with openness to experience (McCrae & Costa, 1985; Radtke & Stam, 1991), especially with its aesthetic facets (Glisky, Tataryn, Tobias, Kihlstrom, & McConkey, 1991; Wild, Kuiken, & Schopflocher, 1995), we expected that absorption would predict self-modifying feelings and, hence, the fugal form of literary reading.

Absorption has been linked to several factors that plausibly mediate this form of literary reading. First, people who are high in absorption report visual–auditory synaesthesia (Rader & Tellegen, 1987) and vivid imagery (McConkey & Nogrady, 1986), including in response to visual art (Wild et al., 1995). These findings suggest that people high in absorption will also be responsive to the imaginal sources of figurative language. Second, people high in absorption report self-perceptual shifts during psychotherapy (Lloyd & Gannon, 1999) and intensive self-reflection (Kuiken, Carey, & Nielsen, 1987). These studies suggest that people high in absorption will be open to self-modifying feelings during literary reading. Third, people high in absorption report that the visual, musical, and literary arts influence their feelings in a way that is important in their everyday life (Wild et al., 1995). This finding is consistent with research indicating that people high in absorption describe themselves as motivated to read literary texts for insight (Miall & Kuiken, 1995).

In the study presented here, we examined the possibility that people high in absorption will report that, during literary reading, they re-express a theme and experience related shifts in self-perception.

METHOD

Participants

Fifty-eight introductory psychology students at the University of Alberta participated in this study for partial course credit. Forty-six were women (*M* age 21.08, range = 17–47), and 13 were men (*M* age 19.91, range = 17–30). A prerequisite to participation was that the participant's first language be English.

Procedures

Arriving at the laboratory in groups of three or four, participants first were given an overview of the study. They were told that (a) the study was concerned with how people respond to literature; (b) after reading a short story, they would be asked to identify and mark passages that they found striking or evocative; (c) they would then be asked to describe their thoughts and feelings about each marked passage;

(d) these comments on their thoughts and feelings would be tape-recorded; and (e) they would be asked to complete a personality questionnaire. They were also told that the information they provided would remain anonymous and confidential. On providing consent to participate, participants were guided to separate research rooms to ensure their privacy while they completed the research tasks.

To acquaint them with the procedures, participants were asked to read an excerpt from a short story entitled "The Trout" by Seán O'Faoláin (1980). After reading it at their own pace and as they normally would, they read it again to identify and mark any passages they found striking or evocative. In an adaptation of the self-probed retrospection technique (Larsen & Seilman, 1988), they then chose the one marked passage that they found most striking or evocative and, using a voice-activated tape recorder, described any "thoughts, feelings, images, or memories" that were part of their experience of that passage. Finally, they completed a nine-item Reading Experience Questionnaire (REQ) that assessed several aspects of their feelings and self-perceptions while reading that passage.

After the practice session, participants were asked to read a complete short story, "The Wrong House" by Katherine Mansfield (1945). They followed the same steps as for the practice story, except that they were asked to choose the three passages that they found most striking or evocative. Participants provided tape-recorded commentaries on their experience of each selected passage before completing the REQ for each of them. Finally, participants completed the Tellegen Absorption Scale (TAS; Tellegen, 1982) and were provided a complete debriefing.

Questionnaires

REQ.   The REQ included 9 items assessing changes in feeling and self-perception while reading the marked passage. Each item was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 5 (*extremely true*). One 3-item subscale, designed to assess feeling involvement, included items that asked about "feelings in reaction to situations or events in the story (e.g., feeling compassion for a character's frustration)," "resonance of my own feelings with those in the story (e.g., feeling in myself the mood of a setting)," and "an impression of the feelings that were expressed/embodied in the story" (Cronbach's α = .76). Another 4-item scale, designed to reflect self-perceptual shifts, included items that asked about awareness of "feelings that I typically ignore," "feelings about myself (e.g., feelings of inferiority)," remembering "an event external to the story (e.g., an event that occurred in my personal life)," and anticipating "something that would happen in the future (e.g., something that might happen to me tomorrow)" (Cronbach's α = .53).

TAS.   The TAS (Tellegen, 1982) is a 34-item (true–false) measure consisting of items such as "The sound of a voice can be so fascinating to me that I can just go on listening to it"; "If I wish, I can imagine (or daydream) some things so vividly

that they hold my attention as a good movie or story does"; and "Sometimes I experience things as if they were doubly real." Psychometric evaluation suggests that the scale is essentially unidimensional, with high inter-item consistency (Kuder-Richardson 20 = .86 in Wild et al., 1995; .81 in this sample) and high test–retest reliability (e.g., .92 in Tellegen, 1982). Roche and McConkey (1990) reviewed evidence that the TAS possesses construct validity as a measure of imaginative involvement. For the study presented here, we created a masked version of the TAS by administering it in a form that mixed its items with the 33 (true–false) items of the Crowne-Marlowe Social Desirability Scale (Crowne & Marlowe, 1964). The resulting 67-item questionnaire was presented to participants as a "series of statements a person might use to describe her or his attitudes, opinions, interests, and other characteristics."

Content Analyses

Three categories of response (affective theme variations, metaphors of personal identification, and similes of personal identification) were identified in participant commentaries on the passages they selected as especially striking or evocative. Two judges, blind to TAS scores and REQ ratings, scored each category of response, and disagreements were resolved in discussions involving both judges and the first author. Because these categories were created during close examination of commentaries from the study presented here, because their subtlety motivated frequent rereading and rescoring, and because precision in their use requires considerable experience, we did not calculate interjudge reliability estimates.

Affective theme variations.   Affective theme variations were identified across the three commentaries. Theme variations occurred when, in response to either the second or third passages, the reader returned to an affective theme that had been described in comments on an earlier passage. We created a scale that reflected the following distinctions:

1. No repetition of a theme.
2. (Nonaffective) theme repetition without elaboration.
3. (Nonaffective) theme repetition with concrete situational elaboration.
4. Theme repetition with affective variation.
5. Theme repetition with affective variation and concrete situational elaboration.
6. Theme repetition with affective variation and feeling elaboration.

We then created a *composite measure of (peak) theme variations*, which was defined as the larger of the theme variation ratings for each reader's second and third commentaries.

In the following example (scored 6 on the preceding scale), the reader initially commented on Mrs. Bean's self-absorbed knitting, recalling her own turn toward that craft after accidental injury had severely restricted her activities:

> The first passage that struck me was of Mrs. Bean knitting. I began to knit shortly after, well not shortly after, about six months after being in a serious car accident. It was a change of lifestyle for me completely. I had gone from being extremely physical, training for body building competitions, to being completely sedentary. And a friend decided the best distraction for me was to learn to knit and crochet. Knitting, for me, began to be a time of productivity, where I was able to do nothing before a time of construction, a time that was warm because whatever I was knitting, as it increased in size, would be growing and becoming warm in my hands.

In her next commentary, in response to a narrative account of Mrs. Bean's shadowy sitting room, this reader reflected again on restricted activities. As before, she considered her inability to undertake or complete constructive projects (theme repetition), although the source of this frustrating inability was now the autumnal onset of long, dark nights (affective theme variation). Also, her feelings of frustration became more elaborately described (feeling elaboration): Through her account of the seasonal changes, she seemed metaphorically to revisit the time when, due to her accident, "life itself" was "closing in." In her words

> The second passage that really struck me was, "It seemed dusk already; dusk came floating into the room, heavy dark [sic], powdery dusk." That has been my experience as well late in the fall. It is not my favourite season of the year. Darkness comes way too early. It is a frustrating time because of commitments that have to be done … It just feels like life, not only the day time closing, but life itself is closing in on a person, that there isn't space to complete stuff that one had wanted to do, that things are becoming dark and cold, they're closing in on one. But more than that, that the opportunity to get things completed and finished is closing down on one before they are ready for it. And I think that's what was trying to be said in the story for poor Mrs. Bean as well.

Metaphors of personal identification. *Metaphors of personal identification* were defined as commentaries in which the reader (a) made first-person reference to self and third-person reference to a story character; (b) occasionally used the pronoun *you* to indicate that some aspect of experience was shared by the reader, a story character, and others; and (c) used this pronoun form in conjunction with present tense verbs, suggesting that the shared experience was considered broad and enduring.

Example: It says that she had fallen into a cave whose walls were darkness. I guess it's the personal experience I've had … After especially an event that shocks you, you don't always start thinking about it right away. Your mind just goes completely blank and you kind of don't believe it actually happened.

Similes of personal identification. *Similes of personal identification* were defined as commentaries in which the reader (a) made first-person reference to self and third-person reference to a story character; (b) used explicitly comparative terms (e.g., "that was like …"; "that reminded me of …") to indicate recognition of personal experiences that were similar to the character's; and (c) portrayed these similarities as involving character traits, actions, motives, thoughts, attitudes, or feelings.

Example: … when she talked about "two purl, two plain, woolinfront-oftheneedle," [that] reminded me of all the attempts that I've made to try and knit something … So I very much kind of had images of myself at my grandmother's, of her teaching me how to knit at my own home in front of the TV set, knitting a red wool scarf for my brother.

A subset of these commentaries, which we have labeled *similes of empathic identification*, were similes of personal identification that explicitly portrayed similarities between the reader's and a character's attitudes or feelings. Other similarities might be acknowledged as well, but similarities in attitudes or feelings were at least mentioned.

Example: I feel like she feels. I have more goose bumps now. I can almost hear the footsteps of the horses fading away in the background. Scary: "the cave whose walls were darkness." I know that feeling well, not wanting to think of what happened 'cause it's scary.

RESULTS

Because individuals with high absorption scores sometimes differ systematically from those having either low or moderate scores (i.e., relations are not always linear), TAS scores (overall $M = 21.32$) were used to create groups with low (range = 8–19, $n = 17$), moderate (range = 20–23, $n = 24$), and high (range = 24–33, $n = 17$) absorption scores.

Primary Analyses

Theme variations.   A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) assessing the relation between absorption and (peak) theme variations was statistically significant, $F(2, 56) = 3.781$, $MSE = 2.913$, $p < .029$. Planned contrasts indicated that the average theme variation rating for high-absorption participants was greater than the average theme variation rating for those with low ($p < .032$) or moderate ($p < .017$) absorption scores (see Table 1). Thus, as expected, in response to the second and third marked passages, readers with high absorption scores were more likely to report modification of previously expressed affective themes.

Self-perceptual shifts.   One-way ANOVAs assessing the relation between absorption and the REQ self-perceptual shifts scale indicated that, on the second (but neither the first nor third) marked passage, the relation between absorption and self-perceptual shift ratings was statistically significant, $F(2, 55) = 3.806$, $MSE = 0.621$, $p < .028$. Planned contrasts indicated that the average self-perceptual shift rating for high-absorption participants was greater than the average self-perceptual shift rating for those with low ($p < .010$) or moderate ($p < .035$) absorption scores (see Table 1). Thus, while reading the middle portion of the story, which depicted the encounter between Mrs. Bean and the men from the funeral coach, high-absorption readers were more likely to report a shifting sense of self.

Together, these findings are consistent with the expectation that absorption would be associated with affective theme variations and with a shifting sense of self during reading—even though the latter relationship was specific to the middle portion of the story. However, we unexpectedly found that (peak) theme variation ratings were uncorrelated with reported shifts in self-perception in response to either the second passage or the other two passages (all p values > .14). So, we could not confidently conclude that theme variations mediated that self-perceptual outcome.

TABLE 1
Mean (Peak) Theme Variation and Self-Perceptual Shift Scores
as a Function of Absorption

Dependent Measures	Absorption Score		
	Low	Moderate	High
(Peak) theme variation ratings	2.33	2.38	3.71*
Self-perceptual shifts for Passage 1	2.24	2.45	2.26
Self-perceptual shifts for Passage 2	2.02	2.18	2.72*
Self-perceptual shifts for Passage 3	2.23	2.46	2.32

*Means differ significantly from low and moderate absorption groups at $p < .05$.

Supplemental Analyses

Theme variations and metaphors of personal identification. Our origi-
nal expectation was that metaphors of personal identification would generate af-
fective theme variations and that such exploratory reflection within a series of
theme variations would lead to self-perceptual shifts. However, that model is in-
consistent with the finding that theme variations did not predict self-perceptual
shifts. As an alternate model, we considered whether theme variations might lead
to such shifts only when the generative force of metaphors of personal identifica-
tion persists as part of their structure. So, we examined the possibility that the rela-
tionship between absorption and self-perceptual shifts is mediated by the interac-
tion between metaphors of personal identification and theme variations. First, we
conducted a two-way ANOVA with (a) the presence or absence of metaphors of
personal identification as a categorical between-subjects variable, (b) (peak)
theme variation ratings as a continuous between-subjects variable, and (c) TAS ab-
sorption scores as the dependent variable. Only the interaction between metaphors
of personal identification and theme variations was significant, $F(1, 53) = 5.157$,
$MSE = 30.06$, $p < .027$. Among readers who engaged the text using metaphors of
personal identification, theme variations were associated with higher absorption
scores ($r = .647$, $p < .007$); for those who did not use metaphors of personal identi-
fication, the relationship between theme variations and absorption was negligible
($r = .085$, ns).

Second, we conducted an analogous two-way ANOVA with self-perceptual
shifts in response to the second passage as the dependent variable. Again, there
was a significant interaction between metaphors of personal identification and
theme variations, $F(1, 52) = 4.094$, $MSE = 0.619$, $p < .048$. When readers engaged
the text using metaphors of personal identification, theme variations tended to be
positively correlated with reported self-perceptual shifts in response to the second
passage ($r = .465$, $p < .070$); when readers did not use metaphors of personal identi-
fication, theme variations were, if anything, negatively correlated with these
self-perceptual shifts ($r = -.158$, ns).

Furthermore, when absorption was added to the preceding ANOVA as a
covariate, the effect of the interaction between metaphors of personal identifica-
tion and theme variations became negligible: Partial eta squared declined from
.073 to .002. This decline is consistent with a model in which the relationship
between absorption and self-perceptual shifts, particularly in response to the sec-
ond marked passage, is mediated by the interaction between metaphors of per-
sonal identification and theme variations (Baron & Kenny, 1986). In other
words, among readers who are high in absorption, engaging the text by extend-
ing their metaphors of personal identification across theme variations initiates
self-perceptual shifts.

Other potential mediators of self-perceptual shifts.   The preceding pattern of relationships is specific to metaphors of personal identification. Although metaphors of personal identification are plausibly associated with feeling involvement, participants reporting metaphors of personal identification actually did not report greater feeling involvement on the REQ ($r = -.079$, *ns*). Moreover, two-way ANOVAs indicated that neither feeling involvement, nor theme variations, nor their interaction predicted absorption scores or self-perceptual shifts. Similarly, metaphors of personal identification plausibly occur within the context of similes of personal identification (perhaps especially within the context of similes of empathic identification). That expectation is warranted: Readers providing metaphors of personal identification were more likely to provide similes of personal identification ($r = .297$, $p < .024$), especially similes of empathic identification ($r = .390$, $p < .002$). However, two-way ANOVAs indicated that neither similes of personal identification, nor theme variations, nor their interaction predicted absorption scores or self-perceptual shifts. And, two-way ANOVAs indicted that neither similes of empathic identification, nor theme variations, nor their interaction predicted absorption scores or self-perceptual shifts. In none of the preceding analyses, then, was the pattern for feeling involvement, similes of personal identification, or similes of empathic identification comparable to the pattern observed for metaphors of personal identification. Metaphors of personal identification, but neither feeling involvement, nor similes of personal identification, nor similes of empathic identification, interacted with theme variations to mediate the effects of absorption on self-perceptual shifts during reading.

Absorption and feeling involvement.   In general, there was no relation between absorption and feeling involvement. One-way ANOVAs with absorption as the independent variable and REQ feeling involvement scores for the three marked passages as dependent variables indicated no reliable differences. However, responses to an REQ item asking whether readers' experience of the marked passage involved feelings about themselves (rather than about the story) did vary as a function of absorption, $F(2, 55) = 6.888$, $MSE = 1.351$, $p < .002$. Specifically in response to the second marked passage, the average rating for self-directed feelings among high-absorption participants (3.06) was greater than the average rating for self-directed feelings among those with low (1.71, $p < .001$) or moderate (1.92, $p < .003$) absorption scores. The middle section of the story, during which high-absorption readers also were more likely to report self-perceptual shifts, also evoked self-directed feelings in those readers.

Selected passages.   We examined the passages that participants marked as striking or evocative to determine whether there was any consistency in their selections. There was some consistency in the first two selections, but not the third. The modal first choice (selected by 18 of the 58 participants) was a highly

foregrounded passage describing the opening scene in which we find Mrs. Bean rhythmically and routinely knitting clothing for charity:

> She sat at the dining-room window facing the street. It was a bitter autumn day; the wind ran in the street like a thin dog; the houses opposite looked as though they had been cut out with a pair of ugly steel scissors and pasted on to the grey paper sky. (Mansfield, 1945, p. 675)

The modal second choice (selected by 15 participants) was a passage in which Mrs. Bean is shocked to see a funeral coach attendant approaching her door:

> What was this? What was happening? What could it mean? Help, God! Her old heart leaped like a fish and then fell as the glass coach drew up outside her door, as the outside men scrambled down from the front, swung off the back, and the tallest of them, with a glance of surprise at the windows, came quickly, stealthily, up the garden path. (Mansfield, 1945, p. 676)

Twelve other passages selected for the second commentary immediately followed this one. Collectively, these passages describe Mrs. Bean's dismay as the funeral attendant approaches her door, her flustered distress as he realizes that he has gone to the "wrong 'ouse," and her ensuing and secretly unsettled disorientation "as if she had fallen into a cave whose walls were darkness" (Mansfield, 1945, p. 677). There was no evidence that absorption affected the likelihood that any particular passage would be selected as striking or evocative.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study help to locate self-modifying feelings within literary reading. Readers who engaged a literary text through variations in an affective theme were more likely to be high in absorption. Also, readers who reported shifts in self-perception, especially in response to emotionally complicated passages in a text, were more likely to be high in absorption. However, our findings are not compatible with a model according to which the effect of absorption on self-perceptual shifts is mediated simply by reader theme variations. Instead, they indicate that the interaction between theme variations and metaphors of personal identification mediate these effects. Affective theme variations only lead to self-perceptual shifts when metaphors of personal identification persist as part of their structure. High-absorption readers, who showed such persistence more regularly than did low-absorption readers, also more regularly reported shifts in self-perception. In sum, high-absorption readers report self-modifying feelings during reading be-

cause they re-express affective themes within that form of self-implicating reflection called metaphors of personal identification.

This model specifically implicates metaphors of personal identification. Theme variations within the context of similes of personal identification were not associated with the same self-perceptual outcome—even when they involved empathic reference to similarities between the reader's and the story character's attitudes or feelings. The specificity of these relationships affirms the self-modifying force attributed to metaphors of personal identification in Cohen's (1999) and our account. Theme variations within the context of metaphors of personal identification prompt readers to consider iteratively whether they possess the attributes of individuals in the ad hoc class exemplified by a selected story character. Such freshly articulated self-perceptual possibilities depend on the generativity that is posited by interaction theories of metaphor; they do not arise through the simile-like structure of many readers' experience of literary texts.

Procedures used in the study presented here indicate that metaphors of personal identification can be effectively discerned in readers' comments on their reading experience. The structured combination of self-reference (*I*), inclusive pronominal reference to self and others (*you*), and present-tense verbs identifies a mode of engagement that can be meaningfully differentiated from other forms of self-implication in reader commentaries. Similarly, we have found that variations on an affective theme can be systematically differentiated from repetitions of situationally contextualized attributions. Nonetheless, despite productive use of these content analytic categories in the study presented here, more should be done to articulate concretely these discriminations.

Also, the moderate level of internal consistency in the measure of self-perceptual shifts used in this study suggests the need for psychometric refinement. Despite evidence of its factorial and construct validity in situations that involve intensive self-reflection (Kuiken et al., 1987; Kuiken & Nielsen, 1996), more precise measures of the shifts in self-perception that occur during reading are required. In particular, we need to develop additional items to reflect emerging awareness of feelings that are typically ignored, uncommon reminiscences evoked by passages in the text, and the anticipation of novel forms of future conduct.

Despite these limitations, the study presented here provides useful information about when and for whom literary reading adds intricacy to reflection on the forms of life in which the reader participates. The theme variations articulated here are somewhat reminiscent of the alternating identifications through which, according to Carroll (2002), readers refine concepts of virtue and the conditions of their application. However, it is important to contrast our characterization of theme variations with the perspectival transitions that occur when a reader identifies first with one character's perspective and then another's. It is also important to contrast our characterization with the perspectival transitions that occur as a reader becomes acquainted with a character through a sequence of contrasting narrative events.

The theme variations that readers reported in our study include these, but also perspectival transitions afforded by shifts in figurative style. We have begun to examine how these perspectival transitions are marked by the reader's own fluctuations in expressive style (e.g., through metaphorical or allegorical interpretive reflection; Sikora et al., 1998). Examination of theme variations in this way begins to touch closely on the criteria by which we identify metaphors of personal identification. Is the movement from explicitly comparative, simile-like expressions to metaphors of personal identification already a type of theme variation? Considerations such as these may help us understand the statistical interaction, observed in the study presented here, between metaphors of personal identification and theme variations in the prediction of self-perceptual shifts during reading.

They may also help us understand why readers who are high in absorption are predisposed to re-express affective themes through metaphors of personal identification. The self-altering aspect of Tellegen and Atkinson's (1974) conception of absorption is not very well understood. There is evidence, including results from the study presented here, that the imaginative involvement associated with absorption is more than simple emotional involvement. We found that absorption did not predict REQ ratings of feeling involvement, and similar findings are common in the literature (cf. Foster, Webster, & Smith, 1997). But neither is the imaginative involvement associated with absorption simply reducible to imagery vividness—even though that aspect of the life of imagination is more consistently predicted by the TAS (cf. Roche & McConkey, 1990). Instead, we suggest, under certain conditions, such as are afforded by literary reading, absorption predisposes people to experience self-modifying feelings within imaginal activity. This self-altering aspect of absorption, which helps to locate it within the "openness to experience" domain in personality research, may be especially important to clarify.

Because the results of absorption research have been most fruitful when person–situation interactions are considered, absorption per se is not a satisfactory—and certainly not a complete—explanation for the self-perceptual shifts prompted by literary reading. The study of absorption within systematically varied reading conditions may usefully supplement this attempt to locate self-modifying feelings in literary reading. For example, Tellegen (1981) suggested that high-absorption people adopt an experiential orientation toward imaginal activity, whereas low-absorption people tend to adopt an instrumental orientation. If so, manipulations that undermine instrumentality during literary reading, as proposed by aesthetic attitude theory (Fenner, 1994), may prompt low- or moderate-absorption readers to engage the text not only affectively (Wild & Kuiken, 1992), but also through theme-varying metaphors of personal identification. Under these circumstances, readers more generally may enter the world of the text and emerge with a changed sense of themselves.

It will be important to locate this subtly changed sense of self among the array of attitudes and beliefs usually examined in research on the effects of literary read-

ing. Reading-induced change in one's sense of self may accompany, or even mediate, the other purported effects of literary reading, such as the enhancement of empathic abilities, the enrichment of reflection on moral issues, and so on. It will also be important to determine whether reading-induced changes in one's sense of self are more likely to occur in response to literary than to nonliterary narratives. Whether there are not only distinctively literary reading experiences, but also distinctive effects of literary reading, is a question that can be freshly considered in light of these findings.

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