
Harry Potter: Becoming a Vampire Without Being Bitten - The Narrative Collective-Assimilation Hypothesis

Summary:

Gabriel and Young (2011) designed a study to test three hypotheses. The first hypothesis they were testing if reading a passage from either Harry Potter will make participants “become” wizards or if reading Twilight will make participants “become” vampires. More specifically they examined and proposed the narrative collective-assimilation hypothesis. This hypothesis states that reading a chapter or passage from a book can lead to psychological adaptation of the collections described in the story. The second hypothesis was narrative collective assimilation; they predicted that the more participants achieved their social needs by classifying themselves in groups, the more they would display narrative collective assimilation. Lastly, they tested that narrative collective assimilation would have the same affects as satiated belongingness and positive mood. The example in this study involved 140 undergraduates from the University at Buffalo, State University of New York.

This study used an experimental research method because manipulating the independent variable, which was the type of passage they read from either Twilight or Harry Potter. Although never stated in the text, I assumed they used random assignment on which participants read which passage. The dependent variable for the study were the scores from the identity Implicit Association Test. The participants read a specific chapter in each of the books, for Twilight they specifically read chapter 13 “Confessions,” when Edward (vampire) describes what it is like to be a vampire to Bella. Harry Potter participants read chapters 7 “The Sorting Hat” and 8 “The Potions Master”, chapter 7 was when Harry and his friends (wizards) get sorted into assigned houses from a hat they place on their head and chapter 8, is when Harry first encounters Severus Snape. They gathered the data in person.

The procedures were as followed: participants were told the purpose of the study was to observe people’s responses to book and movies. To do this participant were assigned either a passage from Twilight or Harry Potter and were asking to read as they would normally read for pleasure. Once all participants finished, which took about 30 minutes they then completed an identity Implicit Association Test (identity IAT). The response time it took participants assessed their indirect identification with vampires relative to wizards. The IAT test consisted of multiple tasks, they completed two critical blocks of 40 trials and in each block they were instructed to categorize “me” words and “wizard” words, in the second block they categorized “not me” words with “vampire” words. They next administered an explicit measure of collective assimilation, which consisted of three items designed to measure collective assimilation to vampires or wizards. Finally, they completed the Transportation Scale, a measure of level of absorption in a story.

The results confirmed the hypothesis for all three of the hypothesis. Participants who read Harry Potter associated themselves with wizards, meanwhile those who read Twilight associated themselves with vampires. The findings supported their argument that narratives (stories) is related to the need to belong to groups. It was also supportive of the link between narrative collective assimilation and belongingness which predicted increased life satisfaction and

positive affect.

Critique:

Overall the study was well designed to test all three of the hypothesis. The method of having participants read a narrative and then having them “become” the character (wizard or vampire) supports the researcher’s theory. I found the study to be very valid. Validity is having a well-founded and justifiable experiment. The researchers gathered their result by the amount of time it took participants to pair “me” words with “wizard” words and “not me” words with “vampire” words and vice versa. They excluded five participants from the examination because over 10% of their answer times were too fast. Although, they never stated the responses had to be within a certain time limit. Maybe these participants found this examination a lot easier and that’s why they had faster times.

All three of the researcher’s hypothesis were confirmed based on the analysis they performed. I did find the results to be very confusing, they should’ve provided less numbers in the text or a better explanation on what the number meant. If the chart was not provided at the end, I would not have understood the results. They also, should’ve mentioned how they decided to give each of the participants a designated passage to read (random assignment). The researchers should’ve provided a third passage and had the participants read all three, counterbalancing the order each participant received, then they could see which character the participants “became.” Also, after reading the first page and reading the title, it threw me off because I expected that more participants “became” vampires but that wasn’t the case.

A follow-up study, along the same lines as the previous findings can more carefully look at the participants who read on a regular basis for pleasure and see if they still had that desire to belong (increased life satisfaction and better mood) compared to the participants who don’t read at all. They could then see if reading passages and “becoming” the character they’re reading about puts the participants in a better mood than those who do not read and increase life satisfaction.

Brief Summary:

Gabriel and Young (2011) conducted a study to test three hypotheses, mainly that reading a passage causes one to psychologically become part of the collective (group) within the story. The experiment they conducted to test their hypothesis is having the participants read passages from either Twilight (vampires) or Harry Potter (wizards). After the participants finished reading their designated passages, those who read Twilight “became” vampires and those whom read Harry Potter “became” wizards, which supported the researcher’s hypothesis. They also tested the narrative collective assimilation hypothesis, which is humans basic need for connection. Lastly, they tested if narrative collective assimilation was correlated with positive mood and life satisfaction. All three of the researcher’s results supported all the hypothesis.

References

1. Gabriel, S., & Young, A. F. (2011). Becoming a Vampire Without Being Bitten. *Psychological Science*, 22(8), 990–994. doi: 10.1177/0956797611415541