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Shane Semmler

*University of South Dakota*, shane.semmler@usd.edu

Megan Swets

test1@gmail.com

Bailey Quanbeck

test2@gmail.com

Blake Warner

test3@nfa.gmail.com

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# An Experiment Testing the Influence of Oral Interpretation on Entertainment and Persuasion

Shane M. Semmler<sup>1</sup>, Megan Swets, Bailey Quanbeck, & Blake Warner  
*The University of South Dakota*

A post-test only experimental design evaluated the empirical influence of three 2016 National Forensic Association final round oral interpretation performances (two Dramatic Interpretations and one Prose Interpretation) on entertainment (parasocial interaction, identification, and narrative transportation); the capacity of entertainment to elicit enjoyment; and the capacity of entertainment to elicit persuasion (i.e., changes to attitude valence and attitude importance) through the mediating process of reduced counterarguing against subjective interpretations of arguments in the oral interpretation performances. The influence of oral interpretation on entertainment, enjoyment, counterarguing, and persuasion was substantially similar to that found in the larger body of empirical scholarship investigating other mediated forms of narrative persuasion.

*Keywords:* oral interpretation, persuasion identification, parasocial interaction, and narrative transportation.

Harris, Kropp, and Rosenthal (1986) observed a divide between the practices of competitive forensics and the theoretically-driven research edifying the larger field of communication studies. They suggested using “the forensic tournament” to study links between rhetorical theory and practice for the purpose of substantially enhancing “the image of forensics both within the field of speech communication and in the larger academic context” (p. 14). Croucher (2006) lamented that “from a communication theory point of view ... forensics research leaves much to be desired” (p. 1). Cronn-Mills and Croucher’s (2013) content analysis of over 400 pieces of communication scholarship substantiated the insularity of forensics research. Three themes dominated what they called the “carousel” of forensic scholarship: general forensic, general debate, and argument theory. Of the 25 themes uncovered by Cronn-Mills and Croucher (2013), none included the empirical effects of narrative performance as a form of narrative persuasion (Green & Brock, 2000) or entertainment education (Brown & Singhal, 1999; Moyer-Gusé, 2008).

The study of narrative persuasion edifies a substantial body of communication studies scholarship dating back to the formation of the National Association of Academic Teachers of Speech in 1914. The Payne Fund Studies of the 1920’s combined content analyses of motion pictures with interviews and observational studies to investigate filmic narratives as “powerful instruments of education, attitude change, [and] emotional impact, [on] health and behaviors” (in Bryant & Zillmann, 2009, p. 12). Cultivation

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1. This manuscript was presented on a competitive paper panel of the NFA Division at the 2017 meeting of the National Communication Association in Dallas, TX.

Correspondence concerning this manuscript should be addressed to first author Shane M. Semmler, Department of Communication Studies, University of South Dakota, Dakota Hall #337, Vermillion, SD 57069. E-mail: [shane.semmler@usd.edu](mailto:shane.semmler@usd.edu).

theory (Gerbner & Gross, 1976) replicated the Payne Fund approach with televised narratives. Cultivation research demonstrates the sociological impact of television by relating quantitative analyses of television content to surveys of television viewers. Although cultivation theory has not convincingly explained the processes of television influence, it reliably shows that television viewing positively predicts television-world values and beliefs. Relying on principles of medium theory, Postman (1985) argued that television is inherently a story-telling medium; and given that the average American spends more than five hours per day watching television (Koblin, 2016), advancing the understanding of how narratives influence audiences is important for understanding how American culture is formed, maintained, and influenced. In that spirit, narrative persuasion studies occur under the rubric of entertainment education (Brown & Singhal, 1999; Moyer-Gusé, 2008).

Moyer-Gusé (2008) defined entertainment education as narratives “promoting healthy and/or prosocial behaviors and/or negatively portraying ‘risky behaviors’” (p. 409). The study of entertainment education was inspired by the powerful and visible influence of *Simplemente María*, a Peruvian telenovela depicting a domestic servant who, after becoming impregnated by the wealthy son of her employer, succeeds in a daring enterprise to raise her daughter alone, learn how to read, become a successful fashion designer, and marry the man of her dreams. In country after country where the program aired, there was greater support for protections of domestic servants, an increase in sales of Singer sewing machines, and an explosion of interest in literacy training (Singhal, Obregon, & Rogers, 1994). Researchers have long acknowledged the potential of entertainment education programs, like *Simplemente María*, to promote various prosocial causes (Brown & Singhal, 1999), but attempts to develop theoretical explanations for the persuasive influence of entertainment education are relatively recent. Moyer-Gusé’s (2008) entertainment overcoming resistance model (EORM) represents one of those attempts. It posits that narratives persuade in a two-step process. First, they elicit one of several forms of entertainment; and second, the experience of that entertainment reduces resistance to persuasion.

Because Prose and Dramatic Interpretation use argumentative introductions to frame unified narratives involving clear dramatic structures, this study examined them as forms of entertainment education. The National Forensics Association (NFA) defines the purpose of Prose Interpretation as the development of a story and the purpose of Dramatic Interpretation as the development of a character in a dramatic context. While the two events differ in their source material and relative emphasis on plot or character, Prose and Dramatic Interpretation are forms of persuasive storytelling (Koeppel & Morman, 1991). Furthermore, Prose and Dramatic Interpretation finals are typically among the most well-attended final rounds at the NFA national championship. While audiences might attend finals for a variety of reasons, most are simply seeking to be entertained, making those rounds ideal laboratories for the study of narrative persuasion as a form of entertainment overcoming resistance to persuasion.

With Miller’s (2002) definition of persuasion as symbolic transactions capable of modifying beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors, the persuasive intent of successful Prose and Dramatic Interpretation performances is plain. In the three decades since Koeppel and Morman (1991) extended Macksoud’s (1968) observation that Prose and Dramatic Interpretation performances are rhetorical transactions designed to “channel the

listeners' responses toward [a] thesis, with proper subordination of all that is not relevant to that thesis" (p. 71), intercollegiate drama and prose interpreters use a propositional introduction to frame their pieces in terms of a moral, political, social, and/or critical argument. For example, the 2016 National Forensics Association champion in Prose Interpretation, Abigail Onwunali (UT Austin), told a story illustrating her highly personalized request for the audience to reconsider their reverence for whiteness (modification of attitudes). Additionally Onwunali's championship Dramatic Interpretation, from that same year, used an introduction conveying research demonstrating the American medical industry's general indifference to the pain and suffering of people of color (modification of beliefs). The purpose of this study was to demonstrate that, in part, the success of national championship oral interpretation performances is explicable with the processes of narrative persuasion articulated by the EORM (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). To that end, we used digitally recorded final round performances from the 2016 National Forensics Association Championship to investigate the processes by which narrative speeches (i.e., Prose and Dramatic Interpretation) entertain and persuade audiences as specified by the theoretical propositions of the EORM (Moyer-Gusé, 2008).

### Literature Review

Resistance "hounds persuasion the way friction frustrates motion" (Knowles & Linn, 2004, p. 3). That resistance reflects a natural and adaptive drive to maintain the integrity of one's existing subjectivity (Festinger, 1957; Sherif & Hovland, 1961). The EORM (Moyer-Gusé, 2008) provides a predictive framework for explaining how various forms of narrative entertainment overcome the attitudinal inertia presumed by many theories of persuasion. One such form of resistance is counterarguing (Slater & Rouner, 2002).

Because the many processes of narrative persuasion are unique to the particular qualities of specific narratives and/or characteristics of the receiving audience, Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) argued that researchers should limit their investigations to a subset of entertainment forms and modes of resistance. Following that recommendation, this study limited its investigations to the influence of narrative speeches on entertainment defined as parasocial interaction (PSI) (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985), identification (Cohen, 2001), and narrative transportation (Green & Brock, 2000). In addition, this study examined how those forms of entertainment elicit both enjoyment (Tauer & Harackiewicz, 1999) and persuasion through a process of reducing counterarguing against persuasive messages conveyed in narrative speeches (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). Investigating the influence of entertainment (PSI, identification, and narrative transportation) on enjoyment might have practical implications for explaining how prose and dramatic interpreters gain an advantage over their competition; but such an investigation might also have theoretical implications for the construct and ecological validity of the EORM (Moyer-Gusé, 2008).

## PSI and Enjoyment

PSI is the process of applying imaginary friendship considerations to a mediated personality (Rubin et al., 1985). Horton and Wohl (1956) articulated the concept of PSI and Rubin and colleagues (1985) validated its first measure. PSI was originally conceived (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and measured (Rubin, et al., 1985) as a *compensation* for audiences with poor social skills or a lack of opportunities for social interaction. That hypothesis came to be known as the *compensation hypothesis* (Tsao, 1996), but empirical research failed to confirm it. An alternative was the *complementary hypothesis*. It posited that normal affiliative behaviors and aptitudes moderate PSI. Eventually, Tsao (1996) definitively validated the complementary hypothesis when he showed that various social skills and orientations were necessary preconditions for engaging in PSI.

PSI is now one of the most widely studied concepts in media research (Giles, 2002). Conway and Rubin (1991) showed that PSI is a superlatively consistent and strong predictor for consuming a wide variety of media content including soap operas (Rubin & Perse, 1987), television situation comedies (Eyal & Cohen, 2006), and even political talk radio (Rubin & Step, 2000). In other words, PSI is a widely demonstrated source of enjoyment for media consumers. Although PSI has not been demonstrated with public speakers embodying a narrative character, audiences often parasocially interact with characters in narrative formats (Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Rubin & Perse, 1987). Furthermore, Giles (2002) extended Horton and Strauss' (1957) argument that PSI with public speakers is both possible and consistent with the original meaning of the PSI construct. Giles (2002) concluded that, although untested, "a form of PSI exists even in face-to-face social situations where there are large audiences (at a show or a lecture)" (p. 287). Because video-mediated national final round oral interpretation performances contain elements of both audiovisual narrative, which has been empirically linked to PSI (Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Rubin & Perse, 1987), and public communication, which is theoretically linked to PSI (Horton & Strauss, 1957; Giles, 2002), it was reasonable to posit the following hypotheses:

H1a: A narrative speech elicits PSI with the speaker.

H2a: Greater levels of PSI with the speaker of a narrative speech predicts more enjoyment of the speech.

## Identification and Enjoyment

Cohen (2001) articulated a definition of identification, drawing from and narrowing previous definitions, including Freud's introduction of identification as a psychological phenomenon and Wilson's arguments that identification is a form of perspective taking. Consistent with these assumptions, Cohen (2001) defined identification as "a mechanism through which audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text from the inside, as if events were happening to them" (p. 245). Identification consists of four dimensions including emotional empathy, cognitive perspective taking, goal adoption, and absorption. The empathic dimension involves audiences experiencing the character's emotions. The cognitive dimension concerns the

audiences' perspective-taking ability, which allows them to comprehend a character's point of view; and the motivational dimension includes the audiences' internalization of a character's goals. Finally, absorption refers to the degree to which an audience's subjectivity unites with a character's point of view.

Identification has been demonstrated with a variety of narrative characters, including those in film (Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010), reality television (Tsay-Vogel & Oliver, 2010), and situation comedies (Moyer-Gusé, Chung, & Jain, 2011). Cohen (2001) argued and researchers have demonstrated that identification is particularly well suited for understanding the enjoyment of narrative characters (Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010; Tsay-Vogel & Oliver, 2014). Therefore, we posited the following hypotheses.

H1b: A narrative speech elicits identification with the speaker.

H2b: Greater levels of identification with the speaker of a narrative speech predicts more enjoyment of the speech.

### **Narrative Transportation and Enjoyment**

Gerrig (1993) conceptualized narrative transportation as a journey in which audiences feel as though they are traveling to narrative worlds. It involves losing one's awareness of reality by feeling absorbed within a story. Gerrig further analogized the feeling of narrative transportation to going "some distance from the world of origin, which makes some aspects of the world of origin inaccessible" (p. 10). As Batat and Wohlfeil (2009) argued, consuming narratives involves a purposeful escape from a present reality. Green and Brock (2000) expanded the definition of transportation by dividing the mental experience of transportation into three categories: "attention, imagery, and feelings" (p. 701). People thoroughly engrossed in a narrative are cognitively and emotionally engaged in their perceived interaction with the environments and characters of that narrative. Green and Brock (2001) likened narrative transportation to the pleasurable experience of flow (see Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) and found it to be an inherent component of narrative enjoyment. Therefore, we posited the following.

H1c: A narrative speech elicits narrative transportation.

H2c: A greater level of narrative transportation into a narrative speech predicts more enjoyment of the speech.

### **Persuasion**

Effective persuasion shapes responses to an object (Miller, 2002). Those responses could be beliefs, attitudes, values, or behaviors, but attitudes are a particularly useful outcome of persuasion research as they represent a psychological tendency to evaluate "a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p. 1), predict behavior (Ajzen, 1991), and guide information processing in terms of attention, perception, and retrieval (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Attitudes are complex entities including considerations of both valence and strength (Krosnick & Petty, 1995).

The positivity or negativity of an attitude is its valence, but valence is only one dimension of an attitude (Miller, 2002). To understand an attitude's persistence, resistance, information processing guidance, and consistency with behavior, researchers must consider both its valence and strength. Consistent with extant entertainment overcoming resistance to persuasion research, this study operationalized persuasion in terms of attitude valence (Green & Brock, 2000; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004) and attitude strength (Moyer-Gusé et al., 2011; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010). As attitudes represent important components of the self, their holders often resist modifying them in response to explicitly perceived persuasive efforts (Knowles & Linn, 2004).

Counterarguments are an important form of resistance to persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Slater and Rouner (2002) defined counterarguments as "thoughts that dispute or are inconsistent with a persuasive argument" (p. 180). Their Extended-Elaboration Likelihood Model (E-ELM) describes counterarguing as a "key obstacle to persuasive efforts" (p. 180). Like the EORM (Moyer-Gusé, 2008), the E-ELM (Slater & Rouner, 2002) posits that the absorbing nature of entertainment processes occupy or preempt the cognitive resources needed to counterargue against the persuasive features of a narrative.

### **PSI and Persuasion**

Moyer-Gusé's (2008) EORM argues that PSI increases narrative persuasion through the mediating mechanism of less counterarguing. She reasoned that one is less likely to argue with perceived friends than mere acquaintances; however, the relationship between PSI and counterarguing is untested. Nevertheless, there is extant research showing the persuasiveness of PSI (Rubin & Step, 2000; Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes). Given the logic of the EORM (Moyer-Gusé, 2008), reduced counterarguing might explain that persuasive influence. Therefore, we posited the following hypothesis.

H3a: The relationship between PSI with a narrative speaker and more persuasion is mediated by less counterarguing.

### **Identification and Persuasion**

Character identification is the degree to which "audience members experience reception and interpretation of the text from inside, as if the events were happening to them" (Cohen, 2001, p. 245). The loss of self-awareness imposed by identification is incompatible with the subjective distance needed to argue against a narrative. For audience members engaged in identification, the narrative script is not open to debate. It is encountered as if it were a direct experience, no more debatable than touching a hot stove is painful. In other words, audiences vicariously experience narrative lessons as though they were the character for whom they are consequential. Under such conditions, counter argumentation is nearly inconceivable.

Consistent with the conceptualization of identification as preempting counterarguing through absorption, existing empirical research shows identification's negative relationship with counterarguing against narrative persuasion. As Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) revealed, more identification with characters in both narrative and non-

narrative programs predicted lower levels of counterarguing; however, reduced counterarguing did not result in greater levels of persuasion for either program. In other research, however, narrative persuasion has followed the path predicted by the EORM (Moyer-Gusé, 2008), with identification eliciting less counterarguing and less counterarguing predicting more persuasion (Moyer-Gusé et al., 2011; Semmler & Loof, 2019). Thus, there is some mixed empirical evidence to support the theoretical expectation that identification reduces counterarguing and reduced counterarguing increases persuasion; however, the preponderance of theorizing and evidence suggests the following hypothesis.

H3b: The relationship between more identification with the speaker of a narrative speech and more persuasion is mediated by less counterarguing.

### **Narrative Transportation and Persuasion**

The absorbing nature of narrative transportation reduces awareness to the bounded confines of a narrative, elicits enjoyment, and prevents audiences from counterarguing against a narrative (Green & Brock, 2000; Moyer-Gusé, 2008). Despite several studies showing a positive relationship between transportation and narrative persuasion (Cohen, Tal-Or, & Mazor-Tregerman, 2015; Deighton et al., 1989; Green & Brock, 2000), evidence for the relationship between transportation and reduced counterarguing has been elusive (Green & Brock, 2000; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010). Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) explained that the reliable detection of reduced counterarguing against entertainment education might require a more specific measure of counterarguing, including an open-ended component allowing respondents to report their own thoughts on the narrative. Referencing that argument, Semmler and Loof (2019) published a narrative counterarguing measure asking respondents to define the narrative message against which they might counterargue. That measure proved reliable in an EORM study relating entertainment processes to reduced counterarguing and persuasion. The present study employs the Semmler and Loof (2019) counterarguing measure. Given its reliable capacity to detect counterarguing and empirical findings supporting the relationship between narrative transportation and persuasion (Cohen, Tal-Or, & Mazor-Tregerman, 2015; Deighton et al., 1989; Green & Brock, 2000), this study offered the following hypothesis.

H3c: The relationship between more narrative transportation into a narrative speech and more persuasion is mediated by less counterarguing.

## **Method**

### **Participants & Recruitment**

Students at a mid-sized Midwestern university (~10,000 students) earned course credit in exchange for participation in an online-administered study entitled “Perceptions of Public Speaking.” Interested students emailed the first author who responded with a link to a randomized post-test only experimental design administered by the online



platform surveymonkey.com. Consenting respondents were randomly assigned to one of three digitally recorded oral interpretation performances hosted on the first author's private *YouTube* account. After viewing the videos, respondents were presented with several questions: open-ended interpretation of the speech's perceived message, counterarguing against the speech's perceived message, evaluation of the speech's perceived message, importance of attitude toward the speech's perceived message, identification with the speaker, PSI with the speaker, narrative transportation into the speech, biological sex and political ideology. A total of 87 respondents participated in the study, but 14 were removed for providing response sets or failing to complete the entire survey instrument. The final sample consisted of 73 respondents assigned to one of three final round oral interpretation performances from the 2015 National Forensic Association Championship (speech one = 22, speech two = 28, and speech three = 23).

## Measures

### *Individual Differences*

Political ideology and biological sex were measured as control variables. Given the influence of political ideology on various attitudes (Bishop, 2008), respondents were asked to rate their political ideology with a single Likert-type item (1 = *liberal* / 7 = *conservative*,  $M = 3.89$ ,  $SD = 1.69$ ). Those failing to report ideology were assigned the scale's mid-point ( $n = 8$ , 11%). The measurement of biological sex (*female* = 43, 59%) was justified by its potential to influence narrative persuasion (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010).

### *Enjoyment*

Enjoyment (Tauer & Harackiewicz, 1999) was measured by asking respondents to rate how much five adjectives gauged their level of enjoyment: interesting, boring (*reverse coded*), enjoyable, a waste of time (*reverse coded*), and fun ( $M = 4.81$ ,  $SD = 1.32$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ).

### *Identification*

Identification with the speaker was assessed with Cohen's (2001) 10-item Likert scale. It included items like "when the speaker suffered, I felt sad;" "while viewing this speech, I wanted the speaker to succeed in achieving their goals" and "while viewing this speaker, I forgot myself and felt fully absorbed" (1 = strongly disagree / 7 = strongly agree;  $M = 4.97$ ,  $SD = 1.14$ ,  $\alpha = .88$ ).

### *PSI*

PSI with the speaker was measured with eight items (Rubin & Perse, 1987) adapted for PSI with a public speaker. Illustrative items were "I would like to meet this speaker in person;" "if I saw a story about this speaker in a newspaper or magazine, I

would read it;” and “the speaker made me feel comfortable as if I was with an old friend” (1 = strongly disagree / 7 = strongly agree;  $M = 4.31$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ,  $\alpha = .90$ ).

### ***Narrative Transportation***

Green and Brock’s (2000) 11-item transportation scale was adapted for transportation into a speech. Illustrative items were “while watching this speech, I could easily picture the events in it taking place;” “after finishing watching this speech, I could easily put it out of my mind (*reverse coded*);” and “this speech affected me emotionally” (1 = strongly disagree / 7 = strongly agree;  $M = 4.38$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ,  $\alpha = .83$ ).

### ***Subjective Interpretation of the Speech’s Message***

Because audiences read texts through the lens of their subjective experience (Fiske & Hartley, 2003), respondents were given the opportunity to report their own interpretation of their speech’s message with an open-ended item.

### ***Counterarguing***

Counterarguing against the speech’s message was measured with a four-item Likert scale used in previous investigations of narrative persuasion (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010) but adapted for respondents’ particular interpretation of the narrative message (see Semmler & Loof, 2019). Respondents were asked to rate their agreement (1 = strongly disagree / 7 = strongly agree) with statements like “I found myself actively agreeing with this speech” (*reverse coded*), and “I was often looking for flaws in this speech” ( $M = 2.89$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ,  $\alpha = .64$ ).

### ***Persuasion Outcomes***

Consistent with other investigations of the EORM (Semmler & Loof, 2019), persuasion was measured in terms of both attitude valence (i.e., changes in the favorability toward a speech’s message) and attitude strength (i.e., importance of attitude toward a speech’s message).

**Attitude Valence.** Attitude valence was measured with a global attitude scale (Burgoon, Cohen, Miller, & Montgomery, 1978) asking respondents to rate how much a series of adjectives described their subjective interpretation of the speech’s message (1 = not at all / 7 = completely): foolish (*reverse coded*), wise, immoral (*reverse coded*), moral, bad (*reverse coded*), good, unacceptable (*reverse coded*), acceptable, wrong (*reverse coded*), right ( $M = 5.44$ ,  $SD = .99$ ,  $\alpha = .89$ ).

**Attitude Strength.** Attitude strength was measured with an attitude importance adjective rating scale (Zaichkowsky, 1985). As a unique dimension of attitude strength, attitude importance is significantly associated with other consequential dimensions of attitude strength, like persistence resistance (Fine, 1957) and attitude-behavior consistency (Jaccard & Becker, 1985). Respondents rated the importance of their subjective interpretation of the speech’s message with a series of adjectives (1 = not at all / 7 = completely): unimportant (*reverse coded*), important, irrelevant (*reverse coded*),

relevant, insignificant (*reverse coded*), significant, means nothing (*reverse coded*), and means a lot ( $M = 5.42$ ,  $SD = 1.10$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ ).

### Stimulus Materials

The oral interpretation performances used in this study were intentionally selected from digital recordings of the 2016 National Forensics Association Prose and Dramatic Interpretation final rounds. In an effort to minimize differences between the experimental conditions, we chose these performances for their important similarities. All three performers were women of color with performances highlighting various forms of injustice culminating in emotions of sadness or anger. Tiffany McLarty (Western Kentucky University, 3<sup>rd</sup> place in Dramatic Interpretation) performed speech one; Abigail Onwunali (UT Austin, 1<sup>st</sup> place in Dramatic Interpretation) performed speech two; and Alexa Thomas (UT Austin, 6<sup>th</sup> place Prose Interpretation) performed speech three. Finally, each introduced their speeches with arguments relating to particular concerns of women: Onwunali highlighted the medical industry's mistreatment of women of color; McLarty argued that women in America's prisons lack adequate mental health; and Thomas drew attention to Western European standards of female beauty in American art. We randomly assigned respondents to view one of the three performances. Given their similarities, we expected the performances to operate similarly in terms of their capacity to entertain and overcome resistance to persuasion. That expectation was tested with a combination of one-way ANOVAs, correlations, and  $r$  to  $z$  tests of significant differences between correlations.

The one-way ANOVA results showed that the three speeches did not differ on ratings of attitude valence,  $F(2, 69) = 1.77$ ,  $p = .178$ , attitude importance,  $F(2, 69) = .250$ ,  $p = .780$ , counterarguing,  $F(2, 69) = .142$ ,  $p = .868$ , PSI,  $F(2, 69) = 1.02$ ,  $p = .367$ , identification,  $F(2, 69) = .271$ ,  $p = .764$ , or narrative transportation,  $F(2, 70) = .389$ ,  $p = .679$ ; however, there was a significant effect for enjoyment,  $F(2, 70) = 3.36$ ,  $p = .040$ . Adjusting for Type I error with Tukey's HSD, it was revealed that there was a significant difference for Onwunali ( $M = 4.24$ ,  $SD = 1.47$ ) versus Thomas ( $M = 5.18$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ) on enjoyment,  $p = .040$ . The potential for that difference to produce interactions on the relationship between entertainment and enjoyment was probed with Fisher's  $r$  to  $z$  comparisons of partial correlations of PSI and enjoyment for Onwunali,  $r(18) = .65$ ,  $p = .001$ , and Thomas,  $r(19) = .76$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $z = .24$ ,  $p = .810$ ; identification and enjoyment for Onwunali,  $r(18) = .70$ ,  $p < .001$ , and Thomas,  $r(19) = .67$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $z = .94$ ,  $p = .347$ ; and transportation and enjoyment for Onwunali,  $r(18) = .84$ ,  $p < .001$ , and Thomas,  $r(19) = .66$ ,  $p = .001$ ,  $z = .68$ ,  $p = .497$ . The lack of significant differences between correlations for Onwunali and Thomas on enjoyment and entertainment demonstrates that enjoyment was not conflated with the process of entertainment and persuasion posited in this study. Therefore, the greater elicitation of enjoyment for Thomas must have been due to another factor unrelated to this study.

### Results

Three regression analyses evaluated H1's prediction that narrative speeches are associated with significant levels of PSI (H1a), identification (H1b), and narrative

transportation (H1c). Using one-sample *t*-tests, levels of PSI, identification, and transportation were compared to their scales' midpoint (i.e., 4). PSI was above the midpoint, but the relationship was only marginally significant,  $t(71) = 1.81, p = .074$ . On the other hand, respondents reported significant levels of identification,  $t(71) = 7.19, p < .001$  and narrative transportation,  $t(72) = 2.93, p = .004$ . H1 was confirmed for identification and narrative transportation but only marginally for PSI. Nevertheless, the narrative speeches elicited acceptable levels of all three forms of entertainment to consider them a potential influence on enjoyment and persuasion.

H2 posited that engagement with a narrative speech elicits enjoyment. A single regression analysis revealed that, controlling for biological sex and political ideology, H2 was confirmed for narrative transportation,  $b(SE) = .45(.17), p = .008$  and PSI,  $b(SE) = .32(.13), p = .017$ , but not for identification,  $b(SE) = .04 (.15), p = .810$ . Nevertheless, the final model accounted for a significant and large amount of the variance in enjoyment,  $R^2\Delta = .46, F\Delta(3, 65) = 22.25, p < .001$ ,

Ultimately, PSI (H2a) and narrative transportation (H2c) predicted significantly more enjoyment, but identification (H2b) was not a significant factor in the enjoyment of narrative speeches. Therefore, H2 was confirmed for narrative transportation and PSI but not identification.

H3 posited that entertainment by narrative speeches initiates a process of overcoming resistance to persuasion through reduced counterarguing against subjective interpretations of the speeches. Two sets of regression-based Model 4 PROCESS (Hayes, 2013) analyses were calculated to examine the posited paths of persuasion. One set of analyses operationalized persuasion as attitude valence (unfavorable versus favorable evaluation of the speech's message), and the other operationalized persuasion as attitude strength (importance of the evaluation of the speech's message).

Controlling for sex, political ideology, and the other two forms of entertainment, the final regression models for attitude valence were significant for PSI,  $R^2\Delta = .06, F\Delta(2, 64) = 3.59, p = .033$ , identification,  $R^2\Delta = .05, F\Delta(2, 64) = 3.19, p = .048$ , and narrative transportation,  $R^2\Delta = .09, F\Delta(2, 64) = 5.66, p = .005$ . Furthermore, the expected path of influence was significant for identification, 95% CI [.0130, .2351] and PSI, 95% CI [.0073, .2149] but not for narrative transportation, 95% CI [-.0292, .1940]. Rather than influencing attitude valence through the mediating factor of reduced counterarguing, narrative transportation directly increased persuasion. Figure 1a through Figure 1c display the regression coefficients and significance levels for the analysis of H3 with respect to persuasion defined as a more favorable attitude toward the narrative message (H3a).

Figure 2a through Figure 2c shows an identical pattern of results for persuasion defined as attitude strength. Controlling for sex, political ideology, and the other two forms of entertainment, the final regression models for attitude strength were significant for identification,  $R^2\Delta = .09, F\Delta(2, 64) = 8.61, p = .002$ , PSI,  $R^2\Delta = .079, F\Delta(2, 64) = 6.13, p = .004$  and narrative transportation,  $R^2\Delta = .22, F\Delta(2, 64) = 17.33, p < .001$ . Similarly, the hypothesized paths were significant for PSI, 95% CI [.0294, .2806] and identification, 95% CI [.0114, .2882] but not for narrative transportation, 95% CI [-.0491, .1983]. Again, transportation directly increased persuasion defined as rating one's attitude toward the narrative message as important.

H3 was confirmed for PSI and identification but not for narrative transportation. Nevertheless, transportation predicted greater levels of persuasion for both attitude valence and attitude strength. Whereas PSI and identification's persuasive effect was indirect, transportation's influence was direct.

Figure 1

*Influence of Being Entertained by Narrative Speeches on Counterarguing and Attitude Valence<sup>1</sup>*

Figure 1a

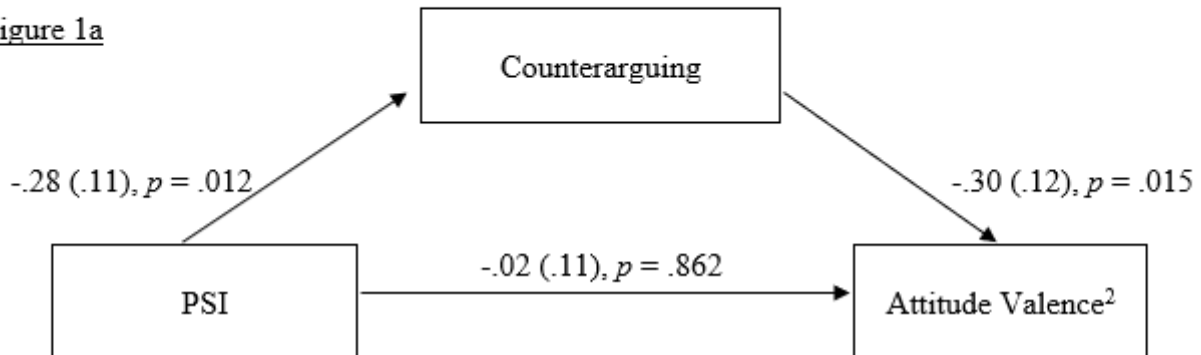


Figure 1b

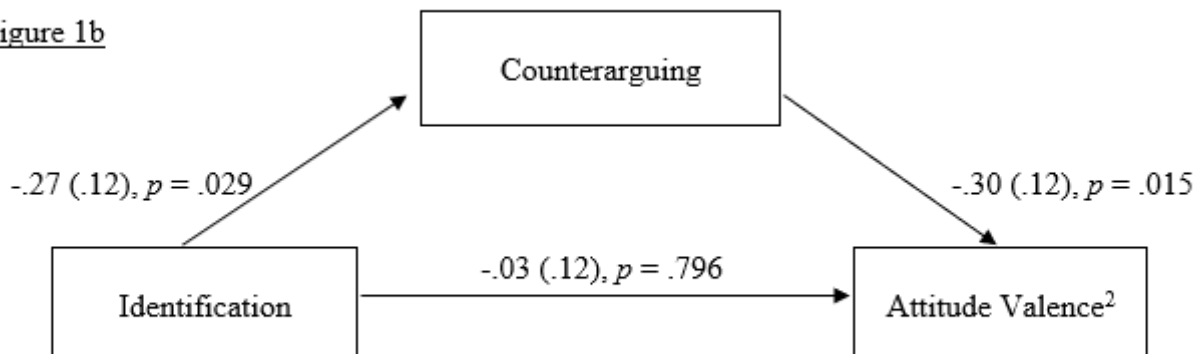
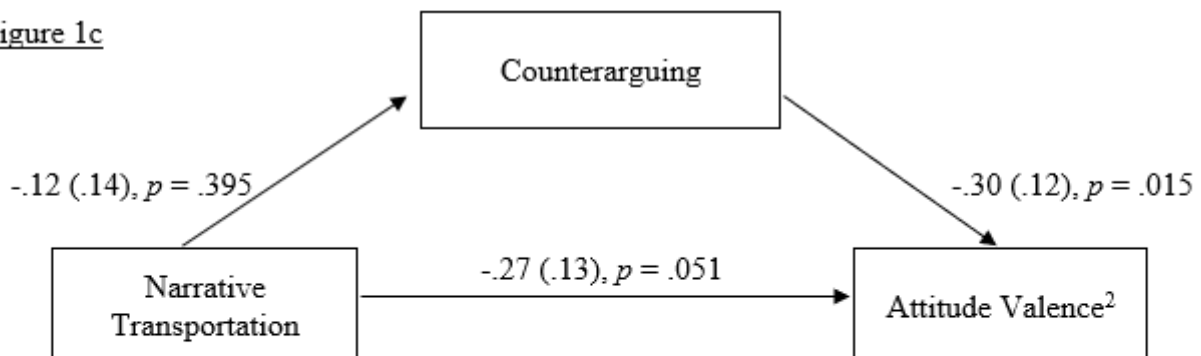


Figure 1c



*Notes.* <sup>1</sup> All analyses controlled for the influence of biological sex, political ideology, and the other forms of entertainment not included in the analysis. <sup>2</sup> Higher levels of attitude valence mean more persuasion.

Figure 2

*Influence of Being Entertained by Narrative Speeches on Counterarguing and Attitude Strength<sup>1</sup>*

Figure 2a

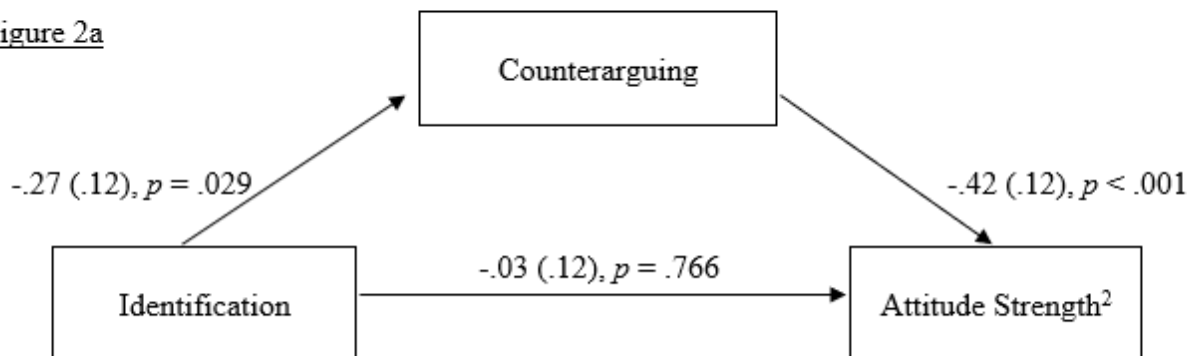


Figure 2b

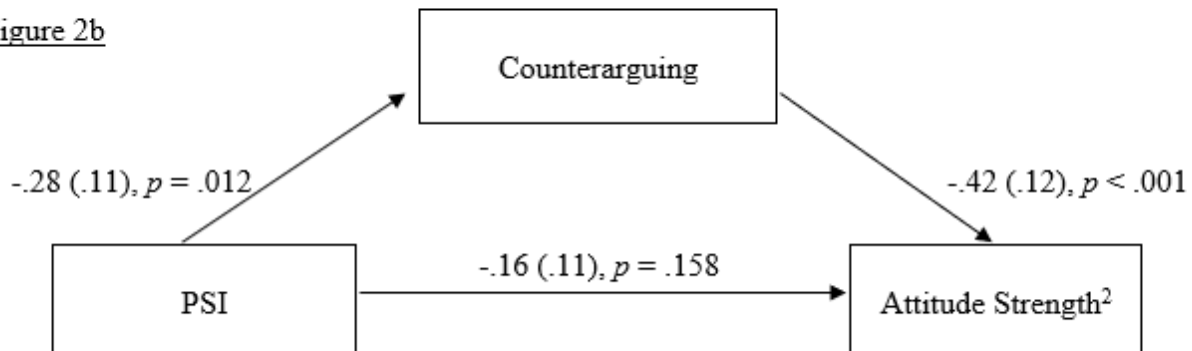
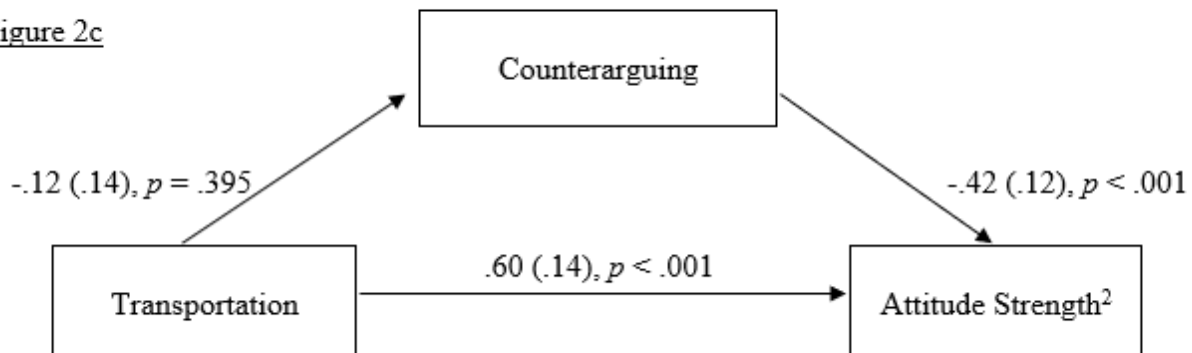


Figure 2c



*Notes.* <sup>1</sup> All analyses controlled for the influence of biological sex, political ideology, and the other forms of entertainment not included in the analysis. <sup>2</sup> Higher levels of attitude importance mean more persuasion.

## Discussion

This study demonstrated that audiences respond to Prose and Dramatic Interpretation performances in ways consistent with the EORM (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). The

expectation of H1 that audiences respond to a narrative speech with traditional forms of entertainment was confirmed for identification with the speaker (Cohen, 2001) and transportation (Green & Brock, 2000) into the narrative. Results for PSI (Rubin et al, 1985) were in the predicted direction but not significant. The expectation of H2 that being entertained (PSI, identification, and narrative transportation) by a narrative speech predicts more enjoyment of the speech was also partially confirmed. PSI and narrative transportation predicted more enjoyment, but contrary to research by Tal-Or and Cohen (2010), findings were not significant for the impact of identification on enjoyment. Finally, the findings for H3 mostly confirmed the EORM (Moyer-Gusé, 2008); and when they did not, they were informative. On two measures of persuasion (attitude valence and attitude strength), the influence of PSI and identification on persuasion was mediated by less counterarguing. These findings support the construct validity of the EORM (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). They both extend the model to another media form (i.e., oral interpretation) and demonstrate the capacity of PSI to reduce counterarguing. Additionally, these findings provide further support for extant research showing that transportation directly influences persuasion (Green & Brock, 2000); but contrary to the expectation of the EORM (Moyer-Gusé, 2008), that influence was not mediated by less counterarguing.

Further, our findings link the substantial body of empirical entertainment education research to the forensic tournament. With the EORM (Moyer-Gusé, 2008) as a predictive framework for articulating an explanatory process for the influence of Prose and Dramatic Interpretation, coaches and students could use existing entertainment literature to guide some of their performance choices. The relationship can move the other direction as well. The sheer number and variety of narrative speeches produced annually by the forensic community offers a wealth of opportunities for examining how story structure, emotional stakes, non-verbal communication, blocking, and introduction strategies might influence the processes of entertainment education (i.e., PSI, identification, and narrative transportation) with applications far beyond the forensic tournament or forensic community. The theoretical nature of such research offers opportunities to publish scholarship in venues rarely available to forensic scholars, for example *Communication Monographs*, *Media Psychology*, and *Human Communication Research*. Furthermore, the impact factors of the aforementioned journals offer forensic scholars opportunities to make strong cases for tenure and to gain wider visibility within the field. In particular, this study's findings are broadly relevant to the larger community of entertainment scholarship.

Although our results for the effect of oral interpretation on PSI were non-significant, this study is the first to test the claim that a semi-parasocial relationship can occur with personalities encountered in a lecture (i.e., public speaking) format (Horton & Strauss, 1957; Giles, 2002). Although not confirmatory of the hypothesized relationship between oral interpretation and PSI, results trended toward confirmation. Thus, a more powerful replication of this research with an onsite public speaker might provide a critical test of the relationship between public speaking and PSI with the speaker. The more encouraging and precedent-setting finding for PSI in the process of narrative persuasion was its initiation of a significant path of influence through less counterarguing and to more persuasion. Although studies of the EORM have investigated the role of PSI in the process of entertainment education, this is the first to examine and demonstrate the

posited path from PSI, through reduced counterarguing, and ultimately to greater levels of persuasion (see Moyer-Gusé, 2008).

This study also expands the study of identification (Cohen, 2001) and narrative transportation (Green & Brock, 2000) into the media form of oral storytelling. Although narrative transportation has been demonstrated with written materials (Green & Brock, 2000), both are typically examined with commercial media products. The capacity of oral interpretation to elicit the same forms of entertainment typically elicited by expensive and highly produced audiovisual media speaks to its raw power and elegance.

Simultaneously, it is important to note that this study investigated *audio-visually* mediated performances. *Live* performances might have provided a far more powerful test of the entertainment education potential of oral interpretation. Compared to an audio-visually mediated story, the reduced social, emotional, and physical distance between a live storyteller and the audience might have resulted in greater levels of identification with the character and transportation into the narrative.

Although narrative transportation did not offer a path to persuasion through counterarguing, identification operated as predicted by the EORM (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). Oral interpretation elicited identification, identification reduced counterarguing, and less counterarguing predicted more persuasion in terms of valence and attitude strength. In other words, this research is consistent with Moyer-Gusé and colleagues' (2011) finding that identification plays an important role in the process of entertainment overcoming resistance to persuasion. Furthermore, our lack of persuasion findings for the influence of narrative transportation through the mechanism of less counterarguing is consistent with Moyer-Gusé and Nabi's (2010) lack of findings for that same relationship. Even more interesting is that, just as it did for Green and Brock (2000), transportation directly influenced persuasion. In fact, this study adds to a growing body of research showing that the the influence of transportation on persuasion is direct, or at least takes a different path than identification or PSI. More broadly, the consistency of our findings with the larger body of research investigating entertainment, narrative persuasion, and the EORM demonstrates the usefulness of studying oral interpretation as a form of narrative persuasion and entertainment education.

This demonstration that oral interpretation elicits powerful forms of entertainment, enjoyment, and persuasion is also relevant to forensic scholarship and practice. We provided evidence for Koeppe and Morman's (1991) argument that oral interpretation is persuasive. Therefore, these results reinforce the importance of competitors and coaches acknowledging their responsibility as ethical persuaders. Oral interpretation is not merely a tool for winning prestige and trophies. It is a tool for profoundly affecting an audiences' subjectivity, and it is precisely that persuasive power that could further justify the existence of the introduction as a means of clarifying the persuasive intent of any particular oral interpretation performance (Koeppe & Morman, 1991).

On the other hand, the presence of an introduction raises interesting theoretical and practical questions concerning its effect on the processes of entertainment overcoming resistance to persuasion (see Moyer-Gusé, 2008). Future research might investigate how the absence/presence of an introduction, influence the effect of the performance on entertainment, enjoyment, and persuasion. In this study, the introduction did not prevent audiences from significantly identifying with the performers. Moreover,



the introduction did not seem to prevent identification from having its posited influence on reduced counterarguing. Interestingly, omitting the introduction might result in a significantly stronger effect for identification, enjoyment, and ultimately persuasion through reduced counterarguing. Such a finding might provide support for performers omitting introductions as a way of enhancing the influence of their performance, even if that decision might mean being less explicit about their persuasive intent.

State of the art communication studies research developing and testing theory for how narratives persuade audiences offers a myriad of ways to inform the performance choices of oral interpreters. Semmler and Loof (2019) recently revealed that soliloquy in a typical situation comedy increased the potential of that comedy to elicit identification with the speaking character and ultimately, the persuasiveness of its narrative message. Similarly, Onwunali's 2018 championship Prose Interpretation incorporated soliloquy (i.e., interior monologue aside) by presenting it with her book closed. In other words, When Onwunali opened the book, her character's dialogue was audible to the other characters in the world of the narrative, but when Onwunali closed the book, her character's dialogue was presented as audible to only the audience. This particular adaptation of soliloquy to oral interpretation deserves to be empirically tested for its influence on identification (Cohen, 2001) and ultimately, persuasion. Indeed, as communication theory and performance tactics continue to evolve, there will be myriad opportunities for the two spheres of the communication discipline to benefit one another in both practice and in publishing studies like this one.

Of course, all studies are limited in many ways. This study is no exception. Initially, the sample size is relatively small, resulting in low power for statistical tests and a relatively low reliability value for the counterarguing measure. Finally, this study lacked a clear control condition with which to compare the narrative speeches. Future research employing such a sample would provide a powerful test of these hypotheses.

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