In the context of persuasion, narrative is most commonly considered in opposition to argumentation. This separation likely began with Aristotle’s distinction between logos and pathos, which has come to represent the domain of logic and reason on one hand, and emotion, poetry, and stories on the other (Herrick, 1997). Throughout much of the 20th century, persuasion connoted argument—the putting forth of claims and supporting evidence linked by rational or logical coherence (Salvador, 1994; Zarefsky, 1990). Conversely, narrative was thought of as a description of events and characters (Abbott, 2002; Bruner, 1986) presented possibly to enlighten, certainly to entertain. This distinction between persuasion and narrative also is reflected in the view of audiences as processing information in either a paradigmatic or narrative mode (Bruner, 1986). In the paradigmatic mode, audience members are thought to gather information, weigh facts, and evaluate arguments; while in the narrative mode, they are assumed to focus on understanding causally and chronologically related events played out by sentient characters (Padgett & Allen, 1997).

This dichotomy between argument and narrative may be heuristically useful. However, there are risks inherent in a two-mode view of messages or processing (Keren & Schul, 2009): Exclusionary definitions fail to recognize the presence of narrative elements in arguments and rhetorical elements in narratives. Consider that an argument may contain information, such as an example (e.g., Gibson & Zillmann, 1994), which audience members may process the same way they do narrative information. Similarly, a narrative may contain persuasive information that takes the form of an argument (e.g., Hoeken & Hustinx, 2009) or claims and evidence (e.g., Dahlstrom, 2010).

Narrative persuasion may not be a mutually exclusive alternative to other persuasive, rhetorical forms, or an alternative to traditional advertising or health messages. Instead, one can approach narrative persuasion from the perspective that much of human communication and interaction, including many forms of persuasive messages, contain narrative elements or may activate in audiences processes associated with narrative comprehension (Schank & Abelson, 1995; Schank & Berman, 2002). Over the past decade, research in advertising, health communication, and entertainment education has incorporated theoretical and methodological elements of narrative persuasion (e.g., Durkin & Wakefield, 2008; Escalas, 2007; Moyer-Gusé, 2008). Given this, our approach in this chapter is to explore how narrative elements manifest in different types of persuasive content, the degree to which
people are aware of persuasive intent when diffused in narratives, and the mechanisms leading to narrative persuasion.

**Defining Narrative in Light of Persuasion**

Narrative can be thought of, again broadly, as symbolic representation of events (Abbott, 2002; Ryan, 2007, see also Escalas, 1998). Abbott (2002) illustrates how a narrative can be as brief as a single sentence, such as “I fell down.” Explicitly, this communicates the occurrence of an event and suggests states that precede and follow: The narrator was standing and then, as a result of some mishap, found him- or herself on the ground. Similarly, a sketch of a ship wrecked on a rocky shore suggests that the vessel once sailed and that something happened, possibly a storm, which led to its current state. This definition of narrative can easily be applied to a broad range of potentially persuasive content, from a novel like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, often cited as changing attitudes about slavery prior to the United States’ Civil War (Strange, 2002) to a photograph of a wrecked automobile accompanied by a textual reference to alcohol. This broad definition of narrative emphasizes two elements that are not necessarily associated with other persuasive forms: the suggestion of a character or characters and the representation of an event or events. In the shipwreck example, the sketch may not include any humans. Yet, the ship’s passengers—at least a crew—are implied, as is the driver of a wrecked automobile.

Audiences do not receive stories passively. Instead, readers, viewers, or listeners construct the story’s meaning in their own mind; the result is referred to as the “realization” of the story (Oatley, 2002). Story realization is the audience member’s cognitive and emotional understanding of events based on the text and their own pre-existing, relevant knowledge of the topic (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Graesser, Olde, & Klettke, 2002). While the elements of the story exist in a text, the realization of the story exists in the mind of audience members as they experience the narrative. Bordwell (1985) describes a story as “the imaginary construct we create progressively and retroactively . . . the developing result of picking up narrative cues, applying schemata, and framing and testing hypotheses” (p. 49, also see Zwaan, Langston, & Graesser, 1995).

A minimalist definition of narrative as a representation of events will include a range of media formats, such as images, phrases, and advertisements, even though they commonly would not be thought of as narratives. Certainly, the depiction of a parent putting a bandage on a child’s scrape suggests characters and events, as well as several emotions. Such “drama ads” communicate a product’s features “through a story-like format” (Wentzel, Tomczak, & Herrmann, 2010, p. 511). Advertisements or marketing messages containing testimonials and examples also may take a narrative form when a typical person describes an experience with a product or situation (e.g., Martin, Wentzel, & Tomczak, 2008).

An alternative to this plot-focused definition is to consider narrative as a portrayal of the inner world of a character—his or her views, perspectives, emotions, motivations, or goals (Fludernik, 1996). Narrative that is based on this “experiencing-ality” is independent of plot. For example, brief testimonials from cancer patients (e.g., Kreuter et al., 2010) about their current state represent a narrative. This definition emphasizes the notion of empathy (Zillmann, 1994, 2006) or identification with a character (Cohen, 2001; Murphy, Frank, Moran, & Patnoe-Woodley, 2011), which also are processes central to narrative experiences. Here, even a fear appeal message may be considered a narrative if, for example, it includes some type of victim statement (e.g., Slater, 1999). Considering that consumers of stories are often deeply moved by characters, it makes sense to extend the definition of narrative in this way.

Ultimately, narrative persuasion can be defined as any influence on beliefs, attitudes, or actions brought about by a narrative message.
through processes associated with narrative comprehension or engagement. With this broad definition in mind, we turn to the differences between rhetoric and narrative persuasion.

**Narrative Versus Non-narrative Persuasion**

A primary question among persuasion scholars has focused on the relative effectiveness of messages presented in a narrative form compared to those taking a non-narrative form. This is a complex question because non-narrative messages intended to persuade can use different strategies, such as presenting statistical evidence, reasoned arguments, or non-narrative, celebrity endorsements. Similarly, potentially persuasive narratives can vary in many ways, as previously described, as well as with respect to the mere quality of the story (Green & Brock, 2002).

A number of studies have compared narrative to non-narrative persuasive messages. Kreuter et al. (2010) found that a narrative about the importance of mammography in breast cancer detection and survival told by survivors was more effective than a comparable informational video with respect to recall and behavioral intention, but not actual behavior. However, Kreuter et al. (2010) note that the non-narrative message was relatively ineffective in its persuasive influence, generally, as well as in comparison to the narrative version. Similarly, while de Wit, Das, and Vet (2008) found a narrative message superior to statistical evidence in increasing perceived risk and severity of contracting hepatitis B virus, they note that the statistical evidence message was no different from a control message that contained no evidence. Ricketts, Shanteau, McSpadden, & Fernandez-Medina, (2010) found that participants who read swing-set assembly instructions containing brief stories of playground injuries exhibited more safety behaviors than participants who read instructions without stories. Braverman (2008) found that narrative testimonials about drinking water in order to lose weight (Studies 1 and 3) and about alcohol abuse (Study 2) were more persuasive than statistical evidence about these topics. However, the difference was present only among participants who were less involved in the issue, implicating a heuristic process. Niederdeppe, Shapiro, and Porticella (2011) found a narrative about the causes of obesity to be more effective in prompting external attributions than a non-narrative summary explanation containing similar information. However, the effect was found only among politically liberal participants.

A number of studies also have found narrative messages to be equal or inferior to messages taking a narrative form. Kopfman, Smith, Ah Yun, and Hodges, (1998) found that statistical evidence messages about organ donation were evaluated more positively (e.g., credibility, appropriateness) and lead to more positive attitudes about signing an organ donor card than a similar narrative message. However, the organ donation narrative produced greater anxiety among participants than the non-narrative regarding the need for an organ transplant. Dunlop, Wakefield, and Kashima (2010) recently found no advantage of a narrative over an advocacy format in storyboards for advertisements about smoking cessation or the importance of protecting oneself from sunburn. Similarly, Baesler and Burgoon (1994) found statistical evidence to be no more effective than narratives in influencing beliefs about juvenile delinquency. Greene and Brinn (2003) found statistical evidence to be more effective than narrative message in reducing tanning bed usage, and that difference was greater one month later.

A meta-analysis (Allen & Preiss, 1997) suggested that statistical evidence is more persuasive than narrative evidence, while a more recent meta-analysis did not reveal any significant differences between statistical and narrative messages when all outcome measures were pooled, and a stronger effect of narratives compared to statistical evidence when attitudes as outcome measures were singled out (Reinhart & Feeley, 2007).
At present, results about the effectiveness of narratives versus non-narrative formats are somewhat contradictory. However, as with most communication issues, the most effective message form likely depends on a number of situational factors, such as ideology (Niederdeppe, Shapiro, & Porticella, 2011), involvement in the message or the topic (Braverman, 2008), the nature of the non-narrative evidence to which the narrative is being compared (Greene & Brinn, 2003), whether the message is congruent or incongruent with the individual’s existing attitude (Slater & Rouner, 1996), as well as the temporal distance between exposure and outcome measurement (e.g., Appel & Richter, 2007; Cody & Lee, 1990; Kreuter et al., 2010). Studies that compare narrative to non-narrative messages suggest that progress lies in asking when and under what conditions narrative messages are appropriate and what makes them more and less effective. We now turn to these issues.

The Integration of Narrative and Persuasive Content

We suggested earlier that strictly distinguishing between arguments and narratives does not account for the variety of ways the two formats can be intertwined. A closer look is required to identify typical combinations, which may have different implications for effects.

Probably the purest form is the story that is created with the intention of persuading. For example, in traditionally designed entertainment-education (E-E) narratives, the story is proscriptively designed to include a transitional character who initially exhibits negative behavior and then is rewarded for positive behavior change (Bandura, 2004; Sabido, 2004). It is the entire story that is thought to have persuasive power, rather than any individual fact or facts. Advertisements and public service announcements also may take a narrative form. Such ads have been formally recognized by the advertising industry as “drama” or “narrative” ads (Escalas, 1998; Wentzel, Tomczak, & Herrmann, 2010).

Second, stories may have been created for entertainment purposes, but are recognized as having persuasive potential, even though its intended purpose was to attract and entertain an audience (e.g., Slater, Rouner, & Long, 2006). For example, Moyer-Gusé, Chung, and Jain (2011) recently demonstrated the ability of an episode of Sex and the City to increase discussions about sexually transmitted infections.

Third, instead of the story itself being the persuasive message, information intended to influence the audience may be embedded in a story (Dahlstrom, 2010; Greenberg, Salmon, Patel, Beck, & Cole, 2004; Hoeken & Hustinx, 2009). This sometimes takes the form of a highly integrated, complex storyline focusing on a topic, such as breast cancer (Hether, Huang, Beck, Murphy, & Valente, 2008) or organ donation (e.g., Morgan, King, Smith, & Ivic, 2010; Morgan, Movius, & Cody, 2009) imbedded in an entertainment program. However, the persuasive message also may be less central or even tangential to the overall plot (Valente et al., 2007), or take the form of nothing more than the insertion of a brand name or product image into a story (e.g., de Gregorio & Sung, 2010) or a piece of information related to a social issue or topic, such as the failure rate of condoms (Collins, Elliott, Berry, Kanouse, & Hunter, 2003).

Finally, a narrative example or testimonial may be inserted into a message that is not necessarily narrative in its overall form. Zillmann and colleagues (Gibson & Zillmann, 1994; Zillmann & Brosius, 2000) have demonstrated that the insertion of a narrative example into a news report can increase the report’s influence on perceptions of the report’s topic. Similarly, testimonials in which an individual shares an anecdote or experience often take a narrative form (Braverman, 2008; Brosius & Bathelt, 1994; Slater, 2002).

For two reasons, it is important to consider how narrative and persuasive content are combined. First, research has recognized that the extent to which the persuasive information is integrated into the story is important, with greater integration positively related to the magnitude of
influence (e.g., Cowley & Barron, 2008; Dahlstrom, 2010; Fisch, 2000; Russell, 2002). However, the extent of integration is to some extent dependent on the type of persuasion outcome under consideration. For example, from a failed condom storyline in the sitcom *Friends* (Collins et al., 2003), audience members may have learned the simple fact that condoms have a nontrivial failure rate. But they also may have gained insight into the complications of unintended pregnancy on the lives of sexual partners. That is, the fact of the condom failure rate may be integrated superficially (e.g., mentioned in a conversation between two minor characters) or deeply (e.g., motivating the central plot line of several episodes). Regardless, of that particular fact, insight about the complications of unintended pregnancy may be integrated deeply into the plot and available to the audience, independent of specific facts that are or are not stated.

Second, in argumentation, it matters whether audience members are forced to draw their own conclusions or conclusions are drawn for them (Hovland & Mandell, 1952). Similarly, it matters whether the persuasive message associated with a narrative is expressed implicitly or explicitly. *Explicit statements* represent everything that belongs to the story proper, such as, events, characters, settings; all of these can be elaborated or counterargued. The same is true for explicit facts in the story, such as the existence of a rare disease or the causes of lung cancer. They may even be explicitly verbalized positions, such as when a mother warns her son against using alcohol. *Implicit statements*, on the other hand, are expressed by the whole story, its facts, events, and character developments. Here, the story provides grounds for inferences about the story’s overall message (e.g., by simply showing the consequences of an accident in which four friends of the drunk driver have been killed), but does not state the position explicitly. Explicit messages can be argued against—implicit messages need to be inferred before counterarguing can occur. Thus, messages that are implicitly contained in the story may be somewhat insulated from counterarguing, a topic to which we will return in detail in the following. Explicit messages also have greater potential for being perceived as controlling or manipulative by audience members. Awareness of persuasive intent, in turn, is an important determinant of resistance.

**Awareness of Persuasive Intent and Resistance**

Some persuasive narratives come from sources openly committed to changing the audience’s view to match their own. Explicit persuasive intent is present in communicative forms, such as narrative advertisements or public service announcements. Implicit persuasive intent is present in formats such as entertainment-education programs. Narratives with no explicit or implicit persuasive intent, such as *House, MD*, or *CSI*, also may influence audience’s views, as suggested by cultivation research (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010).

When audience members detect persuasive intent, issues of resistance (Knowles & Linn, 2004), reactance (Brehm & Brehm, 1981; Dillard & Shen, 2005), and counterarguing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1979; Petty, Tormala, & Rucker, 2004) become relevant. Resistance is a reaction against change, and more specifically, both the motivation to withstand pressures to change, as well as the actual outcome of not having been changed by a pressure (Knowles & Linn, 2004). Resistance is articulated in several ways (Knowles & Linn, 2004): (1) as heightened scrutiny, where people become more alert when confronted with a persuasive message and carefully consider it in a more critical way than usual; as (2) distrust, where people meet a message with caution when it comes from a source perceived to be persuasive and, apart from negative affect, also generate disbelief in the message; and (3) as reactance, which is negative affect against the perception of persuasive influence and the motivation to counteract that pressure. A slightly different articulation comes from Dillard and Shen (2005;
see also Shen & Dillard, 2005) who describe reactance as an “intermingling” of negative cognition (counterarguing) and emotion (anger).

Among the most convincing arguments for using stories to achieve persuasive goals is their ability to communicate a persuasive message while minimizing reactance, resistance, or counterarguing in audience members. For example, stories may be perceived as lacking a persuasive intent altogether (Moyer-Gusé, 2008), or provide a compelling diversion from the persuasive message (Slater & Rouner, 2002). If an explicit persuasive message is absent, or is not perceived, and the frame that is available is an entertaining one, unfavorable reactions like reactance, distrust, or scrutiny are less likely (Dal Cin, Zanna, & Fong, 2004). Readers or viewers do not expect to be influenced by these stories, and are thought to lower their guard. Dal Cin, Zanna, and Fong (2004) suggest that narrative messages fly “under the radar.”

Which type of resistance occurs and how much it jeopardizes the potential for influence appears to depend on the extent to which persuasive intent is evident within the story (Slater & Rouner, 2002). Moyer-Gusé (2008) and Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) have developed a model that explains how entertainment-education messages overcome resistance. Reactance is lowered (1) by disguising the persuasive intent within the narrative structure, (2) through parasocial interaction with sympathetic characters who make the persuasive message seem less authoritative, less controlling, and more acceptable for the target group, and, for the same reasons, (3) through the audience’s liking or identifying with a central character. In this model, selective avoidance is overridden by transportation into the narrative and identifying with characters. Also, perceived similarity and identification reduce the perception of invulnerability, which is another form of resistance. Similar to Slater and Rouner (2002) and Green and Brock (2000), Moyer-Gusé (2008) sees transportation and identification as phenomena that reduce counterarguing (for a detailed discussion of counterarguing, see the next section).

Mechanisms of Narrative Persuasion

The key to investigating the influence of narratives is to understand the mechanisms that lead to the adoption of narrative assertions. The potential of stories to educate has been supported by the fact that stories are more easily remembered than abstract principles (Schank & Abelson, 2005). Story events and characters are linked with each other through personal, causal, temporal, and spatial associations, which facilitate retrieval of more complex sequences; one need only remember a single story rather than a litany of unrelated facts (Green & Brock, 2005). In a similar vein, narrative can be considered as a basic mode of communication (Bruner, 1986) that best suits the way humans think and remember.

Apart from this general advantage of stories, most models of narrative persuasion assume that some sort of activity on the part of the reader or viewer mediates the persuasive effect of stories: Readers or viewers of narrative counterargue less, elaborate more, make use of imagery, and vicariously experience the characters’ fates. While these four mechanisms of narrative persuasion are plausible, they are generally not discussed in conjunction or within a unified theoretical framework; also, they have received different amounts of scholarly attention, which is reflected in our synthesis that follows.

Counterarguing

The most prevalent explanation for a narrative’s persuasive potential is the premise that narrative forms of persuasion inhibit counterarguing. This premise warrants consideration because the relationship between a narrative and a counterargument depends on awareness of persuasive intent, the availability of a target for counterarguing, the nature of involvement in a narrative context, and how counterarguing is measured.

Counterarguing typically is defined as the generation of direct rebuttals toward an overtly
persuasive message or in response to a counterattitudinal statement (e.g., Jacks & Cameron, 2003; Wellins & McGinnies, 1977). Cacioppo (1979, Experiment 2) defined counterarguments as “statements directed against the advocated position that mentioned specific unfavorable consequences . . . alternative methods, challenges to the validity of arguments in the message, and statements of affect opposing the advocated position . . .” (p. 494, fn. 7). Bohner, Ruder, and Erb (2002) defined counterarguing as thoughts relevant to a persuasive message and unfavorable with respect to an issue.

Counterarguing in the context of narratives has been operationalized in two ways. First, one method uses a thought-listing task to directly document audience members’ thoughts—including counterarguments—about a narrative. Kopfman et al. (1998) found that, while narrative messages were no more effective than statistical arguments in garnering behavioral intention about organ donation, participants who read a persuasive narrative listed fewer thoughts of all types (negative, neutral, and positive) about the topic than those who read a statistical argument. However, the prevalence of negative thoughts, indicating counterarguing was not statistically different between participants who read the two different message forms.

Slater, Rouner, and Long (2006) had participants list thoughts about the main themes of television drama programs (gay marriage and capital punishment) after viewing. They found little evidence that participants counterargued with these themes, suggesting either an absence of counterarguments or that counterarguments were focused elsewhere. Green and Brock (2000) asked participants to list thoughts about a narrative in which a young girl is murdered at a shopping mall. They concluded that, “[a]lthough participants were clearly thinking about and reacting to the story, it was impossible to code these thoughts as favorable or unfavorable toward the focal belief items” (2000, p. 707). Niederdeppe, Shapiro, and Porticella (2011) distinguished between cognitive and emotional counterarguments and found that political liberals were both less likely to produce cognitive counterarguments to a narrative about the societal causes of obesity and were more supportive than conservatives of the argument that societal factors influence obesity.

Second, several studies used summary measures of counterarguing, asking audience members to estimate, for example, how much they “wanted to ‘argue back’ with what was going on onscreen” (Moyer-Gusé, Chung, & Jain, 2011, p. 395), or “found myself thinking of ways I disagreed with what was being presented” (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010, p. 36). Using this method, Moyer-Gusé, Chung, and Jain (2011) found counterarguing with the program about sexually transmitted infections negatively related to the intention to discuss and discussions about the topic. Further, counterarguing moderated the relation between identification with characters and intentions to discuss the topic.

There are advantages and disadvantages to both measures, which will become evident as we proceed. For now it is sufficient to point out that summary measures provide an indication of counterarguing, but obfuscate the target of counterarguments. Conversely, thought lists provide a more direct indication of the target of participants’ thoughts allowing researchers to distinguish between thoughts about the persuasive target and other aspects of the narrative. However, selecting thought categories and establishing intercoder reliability can be problematic.

Three factors complicate our understanding of counterarguing in a narrative context. First, engaging with a narrative involves processes and motivations different from those involved in processing overtly persuasive messages. Second, the persuasive elements in a narrative may vary with respect to their availability to an audience member’s awareness and therefore their availability as the target of a counterargument. Third, the nature of involvement in a narrative is not the same as involvement in an overtly persuasive argument. We address each of these issues in turn.
In narrative comprehension, the primary cognitive activity is constructing mental models to represent characters, situations, and ultimately the meaning of the text (Graesser, Olde, & Klettke, 2002; van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983; Zwaan, Langston, & Graesser, 1995). Conversely, engaging with a persuasive argument requires consideration of claims and evaluation of evidence (Bruner, 1986; Zarefsky, 1990). To the extent that these are separate cognitive activities, they put separate demands on cognitive capacity and are more likely to interfere with than complement each other.

Related to this is the idea that humans are Spinozan processors when evaluating the truth status of information (Gilbert, 1991). Evidence suggests that humans initially accept information, and then evaluate the veracity of that information only when and if motivated to do so (Bradley & Shapiro, 2005; Gilbert, 1991; Gilbert, Krull, & Malone, 1990). This suggests that rather than suspending disbelief when engaging with a narrative, audiences must construct disbelief (Prentice, Gerrig, & Bailis, 1997). The implication for narrative persuasion is that for someone engaged in a fictional story, the initial truth status of an event, character, or situation is neither real nor unreal. Instead, events and characters simply are accepted. Their status as fictional products only becomes relevant to the audience member if something prompts evaluation about the truth or realism of story assertions (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). Such a prompt may take the form of awareness of persuasive intent (Nabi, 2002), an observed inconsistency within the text (Oatley, 2002), or an inconsistency between the text and an audience member’s background knowledge or experience (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008).

For example, consider a program in which a police officer says that she and her partner must recover a stolen snake-bite antidote because “millions are bitten by poisonous snakes annually.” An audience member may counterargue the premise that snake bites are so prevalent (“millions”) or become aware that the program is sponsored by, for example, an outdoor safety organization. However, such consideration of veracity or persuasive motive requires cognitive energy beyond that necessary for comprehending the narrative and also requires a shift of cognitive focus toward evaluative processes rather than narrative comprehension. This refocusing should interfere with the story’s progression. Subsequently, the audience’s engagement in the narrative experience should be compromised (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Green & Brock, 2002), along with enjoyment of the narrative experience itself (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004); all of which point toward acceptance rather than critical scrutiny as the default processing mode.

A second issue relates to the various possible targets of counterarguing and their availability to the audience. Typically in advertisements and PSAs, the persuasive intent is obvious to the audience and the advocated position is explicitly articulated. This is true even when the message takes a narrative form. This avails to the audience the motivation and opportunity to counterargue, as well as a target for that argument. Conversely, many narratives do not offer explicit advocated positions, but simply show what happens to characters facing certain problems. Essentially, such stories show lived experiences that are difficult to argue against (Oatley, 2002). Here, the story itself makes no assertion about how representative or typical a case may be—it shows specific people in specific situations, at a specific time and location. It is possible to argue that such a portrayal is unlike reality or unlikely to happen in reality. This may occur, for example, when events seem incoherent (Oatley, 2002) or behaviors and characters seem unrealistic (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). But, again, this requires the additional cognitive work of abstraction and generalization. Further, such counterarguing may be focused more on the representation’s authenticity than on a specific advocated persuasive position. In some cases, audiences may infer a story’s point or morale, and use the inference for counterargument. It is

(c) 2013 Sage Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
unlikely, however, that an audience member is more than minimally aware of such thematic points as they process the narrative (Graesser, Olde, & Klettke, 2002). Indeed, a story’s thematic point (e.g., one must take risks to gain rewards) may be unavailable to the audience until the story is near or at its conclusion.

The third point we will take up related to counterarguing is the issue of involvement in a narrative versus involvement in an overtly persuasive message. In attitude change models, such as the Elaboration-Likelihood-Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), high involvement creates a mind set in audience members that fosters attention to the message and scrutiny of argument quality. People who are involved make connections between themselves and the content, compare and judge media content against their prior knowledge and experiences, and are motivated toward thorough evaluation. This, in turn, means higher involvement is positively related to the likelihood that an individual will scrutinize the content for persuasive intent, accuracy, and agreement with their own views.

Conversely, in narrative processing, the dominant processing experience is transportation or narrative engagement—a state of intense cognitive and emotional focus on the story (Green & Brock, 2000; Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). This form of engagement is different from involvement in that it does not necessarily activate the recipient’s self-concept, experiences, and life-world. The character and plot of “Harry Potter” does not in any way refer to or reflect an average adult’s situation; nonetheless, readers may be highly transported into the plot and feel with the young protagonist. On the other hand, involvement and narrative engagement are similar in that they represent intense, active processing. A transported reader vividly relives the story in her mind, extracts meaning from the story without consciously investing effort, elaborates the story text, and understands hints and clues provided by the story by drawing inferences. In this sense, engagement in a narrative parallels involvement in a persuasive message but without the assumption that the audience’s ego is implicated. This suggests that the relationship between engagement in a narrative and involvement in an overtly persuasive message is surprisingly oppositional. While involvement enables counterarguing with overtly persuasive messages, involvement in the form of narrative engagement or transportation is a mechanism that prevents counterarguing: When audiences focus their mental capacity on processing the narrative, they should have neither the ability nor the motivation to counterargue (Green & Brock, 2000; Slater & Rouner, 2002).

To sum up, the suppression of counterarguing, facilitated by a text’s narrative properties and a reader’s narrative engagement, has been discussed as the most important mechanism for narrative persuasion. As we have demonstrated, it is not easy to determine the target of counterarguing in a narrative. It seems to be necessary to separate the story itself from the persuasive message. However, such a separation suggests a more complex conceptualization of counterarguing, one in which counterarguing, when it does occur, may be targeted toward elements of the imbedded or implied persuasive message, or toward elements of the narrative itself, such as plot or character development that may be unrelated to an intended persuasive point.

**Elaboration and Inference**

Elaboration of a persuasive message is considered an important factor in persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). It describes the extent to which someone is engaging in issue-relevant thinking and thorough weighing of argument quality. If the arguments stand up to this critical scrutiny, the persuasive message should change beliefs and attitudes. Issue involvement may increase the likelihood of elaboration by increasing the motivation to attend to and process information (Petty & Wegener, 1999).

However, as we have previously argued, involvement is not sufficient to describe narrative processing. Slater and Rouner (2002) suggested
replacing involvement with the more suitable notion of engagement or transportation in their Extended ELM (E-ELM). In this model, elaboration is an outcome of engagement (not involvement) and that changes attitudes and behavior. Similarly, the Transportation-Imagery-Model (Green & Brock, 2000) assumes that “all mental systems and capacities become focused on events occurring in the narrative” (p. 701). However, Green and Brock (2000) derive different consequences from this intensive focus on the story. It is not elaboration of story content that enhances persuasive effects (as is the case in the E-ELM), because there is no rational evaluation of arguments. Rather, strong immersion into a story reduces counterarguments against story assertions, creates a lifelike experience, and provides strong connections with characters, all of which facilitate narrative persuasion. However, elaboration may still be compatible with the assumptions put forward by the Transportation-Imagery-Model.

Approaches that are concerned with elaboration seem to build on a capacity model of human information processing (e.g., Lang, 2009). Deploying more resources to a task (manifested as involvement, or transportation) improves task performance (elaboration). There is a limited pool of resources, which is divided between the story itself and the persuasive message. The capacity model by Fisch (2000, 2009) is useful here. It explains how children learn educational content embedded in stories. It assumes that both the story itself (events, characters, locations, time, etc.) and the educational content draw on a limited pool of capacity available in working memory. If story and educational content are not related to each other, the two tasks will compete for resources. In general, comprehension of the story will be prioritized in resource allocation. In contrast, when educational content is not tangential, but integral to the story (in other words, important for the development of the plot or the actions of the characters), there will be synergies between processing story and processing the educational content.

The smaller the distance between story and educational content, the better the educational content will be comprehended. Although this model is concerned with children, the same principle should apply to adults. It should be recognized that there is a bit of a paradox here regarding a narrative and the integration of educational and persuasive content into that narrative: A story is likely little affected by information that is not integrated, but that information likely has little persuasive or educational influence. Conversely, when information is highly integrated, the information is likely to have greater influence, but it also has greater impact on the narrative, which may in turn render the narrative less interesting or engaging. For example, an action film with an un-integrated comment about casual sex likely will have little impact on audience attitudes about sexual behavior. But an action film with a strong safe-sex theme likely is not a typical action film, and may border on romance, drama, or tragedy, and may be less engaging to an audience that anticipated an action film.

When there is no explicit persuasive message to attend to and process, processing should first and foremost be directed at the story elements—changes in characters, time, location, events, causality (Zwaan, Langston, & Graesser, 1995). In order to make the story coherent, readers or viewers make inferences where the story does not provide enough information (e.g., Graesser, Wiemer-Hastings, & Wiemer-Hastings, 2001). The more capacity is used to process the story, the richer the mental model of the story should be. It makes sense to assume that people who are more immersed in a story also make more inferences about the implications of the story events. More immersion also means that readers are more affected by negative outcomes and story endings. In this case, people may engage in “anomalous repotting” (Gerrig, 1993) or counterfactual thinking (Tal-Or, Boninger, Poran, & Gleicher, 2004)—a cognitive activity of imagining a different course of events that may have prevented the negative outcome. However, it is difficult to imagine repotting before a story has concluded. Thus, elaboration, inferences and
re-plotting should be increased when people are engaged, and any of these cognitive activities may lead to more persuasion.

Elaboration is stimulated by personal involvement—when people think that an issue is relevant, or when it relates to their own lives and experiences. Evoking personal memories and experiences is also well-known as resonance in other fields, such psychology of reading (Seilman & Larsen, 1989) or cultivation (Morgan, Shanahan, & Signorielli, 2009). Personal relevance may induce central processing and increase persuasive effects (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), and add autobiographical emotions to the emotions evoked by the narrative (Oatley, 2002).

While transportation and involvement have similar properties regarding the intensity of information processing and also clear differences regarding references to the self, they most often are not considered simultaneously. However, there are some exceptions. For example, Prentice, Gerrig, and Bailis (1997) explored the role of familiarity of story setting for processing fictional texts and found that unfamiliar settings support narrative effects. When readers are familiar with the setting and read unsupported assertions in a story (corresponding to weak arguments), they are more prone to critically assess the content and reject the assertions. Wheeler, Green, and Brock (1999) failed to find the same effect of familiarity in an exact replication, but did find support for closer scrutiny of texts in familiar settings. Green (2004) found that previous experience (i.e., having a homosexual friend or family member and reading story with a homosexual protagonist) increased transportation, but did not alter its effects on beliefs. Strange and Leung (1999) found that being reminded by a narrative (“reminders”) of people one knows in real life facilitates the story’s effect on responsibility attribution.

Bilandzic (2006) argued that the consistency of prior experience with the story is important. The model put forward by Bilandzic predicts that persuasive effects of narratives should be weakened by prior experiences that diverge from the narrative and facilitated by prior experiences that are consistent with the narrative. Specifically, divergent prior experiences produce a critical mode of viewing, which is characterized by the increased occurrence of negative thoughts about the narrative and noticing flaws in the narrative. Critical mode lowers narrative engagement, as well as narrative effects. In contrast, consistent prior experiences reinforce narrative engagement and produce an “enhanced engagement” mode of viewing, in which autobiographical memories and emotions mesh together with emotions elicited by the story and produce even stronger narrative engagement than in a situation where there is no match between the story and one’s experiences. The enhanced engagement mode should reduce counterarguing and strengthen narrative effects.

The concept of self-referencing also deals with personal experiences, but places emphasis on how processing of information changes when the information is considered in conjunction with self-relevant information (Escalas, 2007). One explanation for how self-referencing affects processing is that it induces elaboration and turns the reader’s attention toward argument quality. Effects only occur when strong arguments are present (e.g., Burnkrant & Unnava, 1989). Other research however suggests that self-referencing binds cognitive resources and levels the influence of argument quality (e.g., Sujan, Bettman, & Baumgartner, 1993). To resolve this disparity in research, Escalas (2007) differentiates between analytical and narrative self-referencing. In analytical referencing, information is related to self-structure in memory and leads to more attention to argument quality. Narrative referencing, in contrast, evokes autobiographical memories that are replayed in the mind. These thoughts are similar to stories and can transport the reader into past events, which leaves less capacity for scrutinizing argument quality and should facilitate persuasion. This version of the relation with the self is even more potent than simply being involved, because readers or viewers actively generate or retrieve a complete and self-specific
story in their mind, and are transported into their own specific construction.

Altogether, elaboration and inference represent cognitive activities of the audience associated with deeper reflection of the story and higher persuasive outcomes. While these cognitive activities can be stimulated by any kind of story, they are certainly encouraged by ambiguous plots or characters, and open or negative endings. A crucial question concerns the nature of elaboration. In a narrow sense, elaboration can be understood as thinking about the arguments of a persuasive message. However, as we have pointed out already, narratives do not always contain arguments, for example, if, in Fisch’s (2009) terms, the distance between educational content and story is small. In this case, it is likely that people will elaborate the persuasive message by thinking about the story itself, or the fate of the characters (for example, the alcohol-related death of the protagonist’s husband). In this sense, it is useful to define elaboration in a broader way, as thinking about an issue rather than scrutinizing argument quality.

**Imagery**

In their Transportation-Imagery-Model, Green and Brock (2002) place imagery at the center of narrative persuasion. Narrative texts are considered to be influential if they evoke “measureable images” (Green & Brock, 2002, p. 321). Readers are led by the narrative to generate visual, mental representations of a narrative scene that has qualities similar to a representation elicited by external stimuli. These images are generated during or after exposure and can be “recalled, recognized, and responded to” (p. 321), which explains their potential for effects. Images have to be connected and evoked in a strong transportive experience and be firmly connected to the story plot in order to have effects—otherwise they would be random images that do not contribute to the progress and the experience of the narrative. The belief-changing mechanism, then, is that images take on a specific meaning in the experience of a narrative. Images have specific implications for beliefs, and by leading readers to infer these, images may oppose and change existing beliefs. For example, the image of a violent psychiatric patient stabbing a little girl to death supports the belief that stronger security measures are necessary for those patients to protect society (Green & Brock, 2000).

Consequently, imagery production is an integral part of the transportation scale. However, the imagery subscale has proven less predictive of effects than the overall transportation scale (Green & Brock, 2000). This may mean that imagery is only effective if it occurs in the context of transportive experiences (this is the interpretation of the authors: Green & Brock, 2005, p. 129). Alternatively, the same results may be explained by considering imagery production as one possible mechanism of narrative impact; other aspects (that react to imagery as a content feature) override the actual amount of imagery production (for example, strong emotional narrative experience). In a different study reported by Green and Brock (2005) the rated quality of imagery did have a mediating effect on beliefs (Livingston, 2003).

Another explanation for why imagery may be influential is that it is difficult to counterargue against images (Mazzocco & Brock, 2006). This is similar to the way a narrative may be to some extent immune from counterarguing in a narrow sense. In contrast to rhetorical argumentation, the criterion of an image is not whether it is logically correct or not. A strong emotional image persists in the reader’s mind regardless of reality status—it is the idea that a little girl may be stabbed to death that changes attitudes rather than the fact that it did or did not happen.

Mazzocco and Brock (2006) argue that imagery may be effective due to three processes: First, images can be encoded dually (analogically and symbolically) and thus be better remembered; second, they may award reality status to fictional or unbelievable events; third, they provide experiences that are close to sensations. The authors
also offer explanations that show how images may impact or alter the processing mode following the ELM. Images may be used as peripheral cues for attitude formation. We do not need an argument when we have an image. Mazzocco and Brock (2006) also suggest that images are highly accessible and may act as peripheral cues that create enduring effects even in peripheral processing. But central processing may also be strengthened with images when they are heavily related to the theme of the message, they may entail a more thorough processing of the message and increase central persuasive effects. Both paths are equally plausible and probably depend on the specific characteristics of the image and the message.

Rather than relying on peripheral processing, one may also argue that imagery is an argument in and of itself, which may be used to form a judgment and save the reader or viewer from having to consider the full range of rhetoric arguments (Mazzocco & Brock, 2006). This is plausible in the example of Murder in the Mall (Green & Brock, 2000), where the image of the mental patient stabbing the girl is closely connected to or even stands for the more restrictive attitudes about criminal mental patients.

Further, audiovisual material should support imagery construction in a way that is different from textual content. Mazzocco and Brock (2006) distinguish between image representations that automatically result in mental images, which is the case in pictorial stimuli (television, photos, etc.). The other case entails a more effortful construction of mental images from nonpictorial stimuli that require “imaginial elaboration.” Image elaboration competes for resources with the process of elaborating of a text’s arguments. Only if sufficient cognitive resources are available are images processed properly and influence on persuasive outcomes possible. This would support Green and Brock’s (2002) assertion that imagery can only have influence when related to the plot and combined with a transportive experience: If the plot is closely related to the images used, we can expect synergies in processing the plot and in processing the images. This is in parallel to Fisch’s (2009) contention that the distance between story and educational content matters. Then, we may regard transportation as greater investment in processing the story, which should result in increased resource availability.

Summing up, imagery is an important characteristic of all audiovisual stories and, to varying degrees, of written or audio stories. There are good theoretical arguments suggesting images influence persuasion outcomes. It stands to reason that not all imagery has this potential. For example, descriptions of a landscape or a room will create images, but are likely to be irrelevant to persuasion. On the other hand, strong transportive experiences are possible without any imagery, for example, a detailed portrayal of a character’s feeling and thoughts; their inner world. It seems that imagery is neither a necessary nor a sufficient direct condition for narrative engagement; in many cases, however, it may provide the basis for readers and viewers to react emotionally, to engage with the narrative and care for the characters, and subsequently for narrative effects.

Vicarious Experience

Media narratives provide rich depictions of social experience, containing behaviors, motivations, emotions, situational, and social contexts to which audiences usually do not have access. By understanding narratives, following the fates, successes, and failures of characters, by emoting for and identifying with the characters—essentially, by reliving the story in their minds—audiences may experience social life vicariously. Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) provides a good theoretical background for this. By observing models in the media, audience members learn how successful a particular behavior is for achieving one’s goals, and whether it is easy or hard to perform (Bandura, 2004, 2009). Processes of identification support vicarious learning: First, similarity to the model is important for viewers.
to accept a behavior as manageable within one's own capabilities. If the model's capabilities are perceived to be different from one's own, vicarious experience is less influential (Pajares, Prestin, Chen, & Nabi, 2009). Second, if people process narratives in a transportive mode, they typically are able to take on the perspective of a character and see the narrative through this character's eyes (identification as perspective taking, Cohen, 2001).

A consequence of this perspective taking is that people are able to deeply understand the emotions and the motivations of a character, and understand the joys of succeeding or the sadness of failing as if it was happening to themselves (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008). Thus, perspective taking should increase a message's effectiveness as people care for the characters and internalize outcome expectancies. Also, perspective taking should help with acquiring self-efficacy: The story is perceived with reduced distance as the narrative experience resembles direct personal experience and the audience perceives the events as if they were part of the action themselves (Green & Brock, 2000). In Entertainment-Education approaches, positive and negative models are strategically constructed for this purpose; transitional characters offer an opportunity for the audience to experience the change from an undesirable behavior to a desirable one, as well as the motivations and intricacies of that change (Singhal & Rogers, 1999). Indeed, narrative engagement has been integrated in Entertainment-Education approaches to capture the specific potential for persuasion (e.g., Moyer-Gusé, 2008).

Mar and Oatley (2008) decrease the distance between the model and the audience by stating that stories (they focus literary on stories) are “simulations of selves in the social world” (p. 173). While reading a story, people experience thoughts and emotions implied by the story, and in doing so, simulate the story in their minds. The stories themselves, Mar and Oatley argue, offer complex models of the human social world and allow readers to understand other people's motivations, thoughts, and feelings. In contrast to Social Cognitive Theory, the focus is not on behaviors, but on sympathetic and empathetic growth (i.e., learning to understand and anticipate other people's states of mind and feel compassion with their fates) and on the acquisition of social knowledge (i.e., norms and values in a given society).

This final mechanism of narrative persuasion may be the one that moves away most from rhetoric persuasion and comes closest to narrative persuasion as an independent field. Only narratives can provide grounds to simulate a self in a possible world; and only narratives carry a dense array of social information. At the same time, these subtle experiences and effects are somewhat difficult to capture in empirical research. Especially since social knowledge is omnipresent, it may be difficult to trace the effects of single exposures or, in the long term, to single out the specific influence of media.

Conclusions and Suggestions for the Future

People have probably always used narratives when attempting to persuade, and narratives have always had the potential to be persuasive. Thus, it is somewhat surprising that over the past century, with the exception of propaganda, narrative persuasion has received relatively little research attention. On the other hand, the separation of narratives from overt argumentation is understandable, because, as we have articulated in this chapter, narratives are fundamentally different from their non-narrative counterparts. When comprehending a narrative, audience members must focus on characters and events, rather than arguments and evidence, in order to construct a coherent story. This process is different from that involved in comprehending arguments and evidence, requiring its own cognitive resources and involving separate psychological mechanisms. Fortunately, over the past decade this trend has reversed and scholarship
focused on narrative persuasion has progressed quickly. In that time the focus has shifted from comparing the effectiveness of narrative and non-narrative formats to exploring mechanisms that allow narratives to persuade, processes that mediate effects, and individual differences that may render audience members more or less susceptible.

We can conclude that the form a persuasive narrative may take varies in three important ways. First is the level of integration between the story and the persuasive message. High integration is evident when the story itself is the persuasive message, for example, when a story conveys a lesson or morale or when PSAs or advertisements take a narrative form. Low integration is evident when a piece of information or a product appears in a narrative but is only tangentially linked to the narrative’s main plot or theme. Second is the extent to which awareness of persuasive intent is available to the audience. At one end of this continuum may be cases in which neither the content nor the setting suggest persuasive intent, such as when one sits down to watch a medical drama program for entertainment purposes (as opposed to in a research setting). On the other hand, the persuasive purpose of a 30-second commercial or PSA likely is obvious to most audiences, excepting children. A third way that a potentially persuasive narrative may vary is in the extent to which the persuasive point is made explicitly in the story or is left to the audience to infer. Of course these three variations in form are interrelated and related to both engagement in the narrative and involvement with the narrative’s persuasive message. Research is needed to better understand how integration, explicitness and awareness of persuasive intent interact with each other and with other phenomena such as involvement, reactance, and counterarguing.

As we have argued, engagement in a narrative should serve a function that is oppositional to involvement in a persuasive argument. Individuals who are highly involved in a persuasive argument likely focus on critical evaluation of claims and evidence. Conversely, individuals highly engaged in a narrative should be unmotivated and, to some extent, incapable of critical scrutiny, especially scrutiny targeted toward a persuasive argument that is implied and peripheral to the narrative’s main storyline. Research is needed to further investigate how all of these factors interact with each other and intervene in a narrative’s persuasive influence. For example, extant theorizing suggests that reactance and counterarguing are incompatible with persuasive messages presented in a narrative form. While some empirical evidence of this exists, it is not clear exactly how to conceive of the relationship between narrative form and counterarguing. We might think of narratives as inhibiting resistance in the sense that counterarguing may be initiated but narrative comprehension interferes with development and elaboration of counterarguments. Alternatively, narratives may prevent counterarguing in the sense that the presence of a narrative interferes with the initiation of critical evaluation.

Finally, one may not even suspect persuasive intent because of narrative form, but may find aspects of the narrative that are unrelated to the persuasive point objectionable in some way and counterargue with those targets (for example, an unrealistic plot or an inconsistent character). At this point it is not safe to assume that all forms of counterarguing necessarily decrease persuasive effects. It is possible that, for example, counterarguments focused away from a narrative's persuasive purpose may inhibit resistance to the intended persuasive message or increase the likelihood that the persuasive message will be processed heuristically, in turn facilitating persuasive effects. This is consistent with the basic assumption of the Transportation-Imagery-Model (Green & Brock, 2000) that intense engagement in a narrative reduces capacity and ability for critical scrutiny, which essentially means that the persuasive message is processed heuristically when audiences are primarily engaged with the narrative. Indeed, to the extent that becoming highly engaged in a narrative is
similar to a real-life experience, it is possible that that real-life experience includes heuristically processed information about people, behaviors, and products, again facilitating persuasive influence. Further research into both the processes and the conditions under which the processes occur is warranted.

Narrative engagement appears to be an important mediator in persuasive effects. More research is needed to better understand the precise nature of transportation, such as whether it originates from identification or imagery, and whether it is the same phenomenon when engaging with a 30-second advertisement or PSA, situation comedy, or a longer dramatic television program or motion picture. Similarly, research is needed to better understand the role of imagery in stories with strong visual descriptions versus those focused on the inner world of characters, as well as in different media, such as written short stories versus 3-D movies.

Thus far, the effects of narrative persuasive are discussed in terms of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. However, the insight gained through identification with characters and experienced events may be a fundamentally different kind of effect, one specific to narratives. Research investigating insight as an outcome of narrative experience is warranted.

Ultimately, research in the merged domains of persuasion and narrative have important implications for theoretical understanding and practical application in health communication, entertainment-education, and marketing, as well as areas in which narrative effects traditionally have not been conceived as a form of persuasion.

References


Green, M. C. (2004). Transportation into narrative worlds: The role of prior knowledge and perceived realism. *Discourse Processes*, 38, 247–266.


Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2002). In the mind’s eye: Transportation-imagery model of narrative persuasion. In M. C. Green, J. J. Strange, & T. C. Brock (Eds.), *Narrative impact: Social and cognitive foundations* (pp. 315–341). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Green, M. C., Brock, T. C. (2004). Transportation into narrative worlds: The role of prior knowledge and perceived realism. *Discourse Processes, 38*, 247–266.


Morgan, S. E., Movius, L., & Cody, M. J. (2009). The power of narratives: The effect of entertainment...


Knowledge and memory: The real story (pp. 1–85). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.


(c) 2013 Sage Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.