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Reality-Based Genre Preferences Do Not Direct Personal Involvement

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Although it seems plausible that people who prefer a particular genre would appreciate characters from that category more than those from other genres, this appears not to be the case. We devised a parsimonious reality-based genre taxonomy that differentiates nonfiction, realism, fantasy, and humor. In Study 1, evidence from film viewers' genre preferences prompted slight adjustments in that taxonomy. In Study 2, however, we found that their reality-based genre preferences did not predict personal involvement with, distance from, or liking for the protagonist in the preferred genre. Instead, the represented and, particularly, the perceived realism of the character did affect personal involvement, but irrespective of genre preferences. We discuss the implications of these results for the rationale behind a genre typology and for engaging with fictional characters to explain personal involvement and character appreciation, especially in motion pictures.

Distinguishing genres in the cultural domain is an example of grouping behavior. People group things together for data reduction, so that they can judge a few categories instead of many instances. Whether valid, the function of such heuristics is that one can infer that "what applies to the group also applies to its members." Extending this heuristic to genres, preferences can be justified, such as "If you like sci-fi, you will like Buck Rogers" (Nowlan, 1928). However, people group things

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together with a goal in mind. If someone collects romantic poetry, Coleridge is included and De Ronsard is excluded. If someone collects books for high status, Einstein (science) stands side by side with Rembrandt (art) and the Bible (religion). Therefore, the history of classifying cultural products has left us with a great diversity of taxonomies, because these were set up with quite different criteria in mind (see Steen, 1999).

Traditional genre classifications often are liable to the “inherent quality fallacy,” claiming that a work belongs to a group because of (text) immanent properties without accounting for the goals of the human classifier. Nowadays, bookshops and other media distributors use an amalgamation of types and classes, which, from a scientific point of view, offer little systematic discrimination among readers’ or viewers’ perceptions (Bordwell, 1989, p. 147). It should be admitted, then, that genre taxonomies shift when people change their objectives in the examination of cultural products (see Chandler, 2000, for nice examples in “The Problem of Definition”). Genre discussions are pointless if the goal of a classification remains implicit. In line with Freedman and Medway (1994, pp. 1–20) and Livingstone (1990, p. 155), classifications are vulnerable to values, norms, worldviews, and ideologies, which may differ from time to time and from culture to culture. Psychological approaches to genre often focus on typicality or similarity as the unifying concept (e.g., Martindale, 1996; Pipers & Stokmans, 2000) or study the affective effects of certain genres (e.g., Gunter & Furham, 1984; Zillmann, 1996). Here, we like to limit the criteria by which similarity is judged, propose a reality-based conception of genre preferences, and study the effects of genre preferences on personal involvement.

If classifications depend on a worldview (Freedman & Medway, 1994), then, despite their diversity, genre taxonomies may in general have two aspects: on the product side, the represented reality and, on the receiver’s side, the perceived realism of that represented reality. These two aspects of genre taxonomies do not necessarily correspond, although it is generally assumed that genre sets the boundaries for how a work should be interpreted. For example, it is unreasonable to disapprove of talking animals in fables, because the very genre depends on this “unrealistic” combination of character attributes. Hence, *represented reality* is the degree to which a product portrays realistic and unrealistic features (a characteristic of the stimulus), and *perceived realism* is the degree to which the receiver judges that reality is reflected in a media product. In this article, we attempt to develop a genre classification founded on the degree of represented reality, as a product feature. This we call the *reality-based genres*: genres that are grouped in a product analysis according to their degrees of presumed represented reality. We empirically validate the reality-based genre taxonomy from a receiver’s perspective by means of what we call the *reality-based genre preferences*: empirically assessed clusters of conventional-genre preferences of receivers that correspond with reality-based genres. In line with Durkin (1985), Livingstone (1989), and Miall and Kuiken

(1998, 1999), we demonstrate that the analyses of product features should be complemented by studies of viewers' perceptions and experiences.

Furthermore, we investigate whether our reality-based genre taxonomy can predict the receiver's experience of personal involvement with the main character of a work. In our view, involvement includes identification and empathy, among other affective states, and is a central concept in studying the reader's/viewer's experiences and liking of a character (Hoorn & Konijn, 2003; Konijn, 1999; Oatley, 1994, 1999; Raney & Bryant, 2002; Tan, 1996; Zillmann, 1996, p. 209). The experience of involvement is important to motivate active participation in discussions of, for example, the morality of a character (e.g., Vorderer, 2000, p. 68); to encourage the formation of opinions about what could be true in real life; and to foster experimentation with sympathy and antipathy toward dissimilar others. We examine whether preference for a genre, as defined by its style of representing reality, positively affects involvement with the protagonist.

REALITY-BASED GENRE TAXONOMY

From the work of Fitch, Huston, and Wright (1993), one can deduce that genre taxonomies provide schemata that structure and guide media experiences. Oatley (1994) even posited that there is a genre for each emotional theme, such as "romances for feeling happy," "thrillers for feeling anxious," and "weepies for sadness" (p. 69). Although our studies focus on film classification and engagement with movie characters, we assume that empirical work in literary studies are also relevant to our aims. Therefore, we consulted studies of visual as well as textual media to arrive at a genre taxonomy that may cover both fields.

At a time in which broadcasted information is contaminated with war propaganda and commercial persuasion, in which teachers become mediated persons on the Internet, and in which surgeons tele-operate real-life patients via their virtual counterparts, it is worthwhile to study whether people perceive mediated information as realistic or unrealistic (cf. Chandler, 2000; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1994). In doing so, it is evident that the level of represented reality and perceived realism in media productions have particular importance (cf. information reality in Shapiro & McDonald, 1992). Hoorn, Konijn, and Van der Veer (2003) argued that cultural products simultaneously have realistic and unrealistic aspects. For example, documentaries, news items, and biopics are primarily focused on information that is checked for its reality status and that is socially accepted as "factual." In contrast, fantasy games, tabloid articles, and hagiologies are primarily fostered by the imagination of their creators, without much concern about an accurate rendering of what is socially accepted as "reality." However, between these extremes, and sometimes even within, there is no strict divide. Highly respected newspapers still have a political color, and tabloids sometimes have a scoop that is picked up and elaborated by the

journalistic establishment. News items broadcasted through multimedia have, apart from using text and image, even more potential to manipulate the representation of reality by editing sound, motion, and sometimes haptic information, usually under the assumption that receivers experience more “presence,” “immersion,” or parasocial interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956/1986) when more sensory channels are activated (Blascovich, Loomis, Beall, Swinth, Hoyt, & Bailenson, 2002; Monk & Gale, 2002). Mallon (2002) stated

At a time when important filmmakers and serious novelists are turning to historical subjects with unusual frequency, their audiences find themselves left to ponder and preserve the distinctions between facts and fabrications.

In general, mixes of realistic and unrealistic features are characteristic of the stories and characters that are conveyed to the receiver, and whether the realistic or unrealistic side dominates often depends on the sender’s objective. In certain cases, genre boundaries may be deliberately made uncertain (e.g., in propaganda), and new mixes of realistic and unrealistic features may be developed (e.g., in infotainment) when this is beneficial to the sender.

As long as artists, writers, and filmmakers like to mix genres so that the number of hybrids increases, the number of genre labels will increase as well (Nichols, 1991). Considering product features, as most conventional approaches do (cf. Book Nuts Reading Club, 2003), cultural products group together under a miscellany of labels (e.g., *docudrama*, *action-comedy*, and *fake-documentary*). However, because genre boundaries and genre transgressions seem to be associated with the (sometimes blurred) boundaries between fact and fabrication, we hypothesize that grouping products on a criterion of reality representation will lead to a more parsimonious taxonomy that, moreover, makes sense to the receiver’s perception of the work.

In the following, we attempt to group conventional genres according to their style of representing reality. That is, within a given genre, a situation, event, or character can be represented as more realistic (following the laws of nature and the practices of daily life) or more unrealistic (following magical, mythical, or fantastic ideas). The result of our attempt is presented in Table 1 and is elaborated following. In compiling a preliminary taxonomy of genres, we used the extant literature in describing salient features of the conventional genres such that they could be grouped according to their degree of represented reality and analyzed as a feature of the product. The product features that we used to decide whether a conventional genre belonged to one or the other reality-based genre in our taxonomy are the represented degrees of reality in the filmic situation, event, and character. In Table 1, the result of this product analysis is given in columns 3 through 6 and is described next. Furthermore, in Study 1, we provide evidence for the grouping criterion of represented reality by confronting our taxonomy with viewers’ judgments.

TABLE 1
Reality-Based Genre Taxonomy Derived From Literature on Reality Representations

<i>Reality Representation: Realistic Fiction—Unrealistic Fiction</i>	<i>Product Type/Conventional Labels</i>	<i>Situation/Event</i>	<i>Focal Point</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Information Type</i>
Reality registration	Nonfiction (e.g., documentary, news, science)	Direct observation of daily life	Persons	Natural	Information reality
Reality simulation	Realism (e.g., psychological, drama, realism, romance, virtual reality)	As if daily life affairs	Impersonated characters	Performed (staged, acting)	Social and interpersonal reality
Marvels	Fantasy (e.g., thriller, sci-fi, horror, action, myth)	Extraordinary (not daily life) affairs	Detached characters	Faked (invented, fabled)	Possible worlds
Absurdism	Humor (e.g., comedy, cartoons)	Deviation and disruption of daily life	Performers	Illogical	Reflective

Note. This taxonomy is hypothetical. The first and second columns are subjected to the empirical Study 1.

REALITY REGISTRATION

Documentaries and journalism (Table 1, row 1) usually concentrate on a realistic style of representation, depicting daily life as directly and truly as possible (row 1, column 3), focusing on real persons (column 4), and presenting actions as natural and likely to occur (column 5; Bazin, 1962; Nichols, 1991). Here, the director, framing, and camera work can deliberately create a realistic style of representation. For example, reality judgments of TV events are attached to certain (formal) cuing features of the genre, such as when TV newsreaders face the camera (suggesting objective representation), whereas actors-as-characters usually do not (Davies, 1997, pp. 6, 35, 46). Also, in news and documentaries, cuts, focal plane, and topic selection actually mismatch our natural modes of stimulus perception (cf. "TV forms" in Fitch et al., 1993). In other words, this genre registers facts, but these registrations are never without fabrications (cf. Mallon, 2002). Accordingly, documentaries may be conceived as a realistic genre of *fiction* (cf. Hoorn et al., 2003), although the conventional label for such productions is *nonfiction* (column 2). Such media presentations have a high degree of information reality (column 6)—that is, the extent to which a media presentation provides information about reality (Shapiro & McDonald, 1992).

Reality Simulation

Certain documentary makers increase the number of unrealistic features by reconstructing a crime site, allowing actors to replay an emotional scene, and trying to evoke suspense with sinister music and fast montage (e.g., BBC1's *Crimewatch UK*). Together with reality soaps, such docudramas form the border with what usually is called *realism* (Table 1, row 2, column 2; Kracauer, 1960), but what we call *reality simulation* (row 2, column 1). What soap operas, psychodramas, or Zola's social realism have in common with virtual reality (VR) and computer simulations is that they offer an artificial replication, a realistic imitation, or a model of reality rather than a direct registration (Oatley, 1999). Situations and events from daily life are designed and acted out in a lifelike manner, but the make-believe is stronger than in documentaries (column 3). Romantic motion pictures can also be viewed as realistic simulations of interpersonal relationships (Schatz, 1981). The characters are played by actors who, in a sense, impersonate an imagined person (column 4). Prominent examples of this approach are found in method acting, where actors are asked to "become" the character they play and where "truthful emotions" are expected (Konijn, 2000). Actions are performed, not registered, but in a truthful manner; it should be possible to meet such people and encounter such situations in real life (column 5; Horton & Wohl, 1956/1986; Livingstone, 1989). Due to the focus on impersonated characters, what readers/viewers can learn from this kind of realistic pro-

duction is directed toward social and interpersonal authenticity (column 6) or what is called *social reality construction* (Gerbner et al., 1994) and *exemplar accessibility* (Zillmann, 2002).

Marvels

The transition from realistic to unrealistic representation is established when situations and events surpass daily life affairs (Table 1, row 3, column 3; Tan, 1996, p. 51). A label that comes to mind is *fantasy* (row 3, column 2), but we find this term too restricted to sorcery, fairy tales, and the supernatural (see Grodal, 2000, pp. 99–100), such as the *Hobbit* or *Harry Potter*. Although adventures and action are often highly fantastic, they are not necessarily magical as the term *fantasy* connotes. The “marvel” in such genres is in opening up worlds ordinary people are unlikely to enter. Hanging from a cliff as target practice for a gunman in a helicopter, then falling into a tree that pushes its branches through his limbs, after which John Rambo kills everyone who comes in his way, is not the life of an average GI Joe. Sci-fi and horror productions explore galaxies and psychic dimensions one can only dream of. In other words, the actions are faked (cf. special effects) and often performed by a stunt (wo)man, simulated in a studio or by computers (column 5). In evading real-life situations and people, then, marvels present more detached characters (column 4; Tan, 1996, p. 175). Marvel heroes are invincible, untouchable, and do not suffer from human inconveniences, such as going to the toilet or having to bathe the children. Marvels satisfy curiosity about the possibilities of living under unusual conditions (e.g., Rambo), discovering unique worlds (e.g., *Star Trek*), and having higher powers and senses (e.g., Superman, *The Sentinel*; column 6).

Absurdism

Because of their dazzling effects, high technical performance, and extreme situations, it is hard to suppress a smile while perceiving marvels. To a large extent, the fun is in the exaggeration. What traditionally is labeled *humor* (Table 1, row 4, column 2; Heil, 2002; McGhee & Goldstein, 1983; Zubarev, 1999) exploits this experience even more extensively. Overstatement (e.g., in comedy) and understatement (e.g., in irony) are two styles of representing the world that are much appreciated by humorists. Cartoon and animation figures are stretched to express speed or squeezed together to express a sudden stop. The banana peel joke as well as the subtle satire of Goethe’s *Faust* (part I) have in common that fixed patterns of behavior (e.g., walking, defying the devil) are deautomated (cf. Ruch, 1993). Jokes draw on deviation from convention and disruption of daily life (e.g., falling down, sympathy for the devil) by making reality larger than life or by intending the opposite of what was expressed. Humorous products focus on (exploring the psyche

of) the performer (cf. stand-up comedians, Woody Allen movies; column 4) rather than exploring the deeper feelings of an impersonated character or the epic transactions of an invulnerable hero. Whether understated or overstated, the actions comedians perform are absurd or illogical, given the situations and events with which they have to deal (column 5). They often provide pointed commentaries about social conventions and cultural rules.

Now that we have analyzed the represented reality in specific product features of conventional genres to discern the categories in our presumed taxonomy, we analyze its potential from the receiver's perspective. One of the central issues from a reader's/viewer's perspective is getting involved (Tan, 1996; Vorderer, 2000; Zillmann, 1994). Therefore, what are the implications of a presumed reality-based genre taxonomy for the personal involvement of the receiver?

INVOLVEMENT

To enhance involvement, reality-mimicking genres such as soap operas, (fake) documentaries, docudrama, and reality TV try to trick observers into believing that what they see really has happened. However, TV reality is different from real-world reality (Davies, 1997, p. 33). Movies merely have a degree of realism, reflecting a number of realistic features (p. 45) in contrast to a number of unrealistic features. For each feature, genre or style conventions form the parameters for the right degree of realistic and unrealistic appearances. In the classic conception (from Aristotle to method acting), it is assumed that an increase in the number of realistic features evokes stronger involvement in the receiver.

Smith (1995, p. 94) stated that the strongest provoker of involvement, the "identification figure," is the protagonist of a work (see also Vorderer, 2000, p. 68). Zubarev (1999) saw a direct link between the protagonist and genre attribution. She stated that genre is determined by the protagonists' potential to affect "the future development of their environment." A tragic hero, for instance, has a large potential to change a situation (but makes mistakes), whereas a comedy character has low potential to do so: "any interpreter, including the artist ... gives weight to the protagonist ... , in defining the genre of a literary work." A tragedy is heartbreaking because the vicissitudes and mindstate of the hero are. A comedy is funny because the situations and the character's responses to them are judged scabrous. Livingstone (1989) added that characters are essential to understanding the viewer's involvement with soap operas and that character representation is important to framing the narrative's moral stance.

Genres are sometimes assumed to reflect a worldview (Freedman & Medway, 1994, pp. 1–20; Livingstone, 1990, p. 155), and, by implication, characters may help to establish and reflect those worldviews. Worldviews in media portrayals be-

come visible in how reality is represented or, as Shapiro and McDonald (1992) called it, in the “information reality” of a media product. Characters usually carry the information of a plot, story, or narrative and are important in evoking certain degrees of involvement (e.g., Hoffner & Cantor, 1991; Livingstone, 1989; Smith, 1995, p. 94; Vorderer, 2000, p. 68). Through their characters, then, genres invite involvement in the bearers of certain worldviews.

Furthermore, popular opinion as well as certain studies in mass media effects (e.g., Atkin, 1983; Berkowitz & Alioto, 1973) would have it that more realistic genres evoke more personal involvement with the protagonist and thus more appreciation. The popularity of certain genres, such as reality TV, reality soaps, and stories based on facts, and the status of certain dramatic styles, such as method acting, seem to underscore that position. Therefore, our focus in Study 2 is whether genres that are considered realistic lead to increased personal involvement with the protagonist compared with protagonists of genres that are considered unrealistic. However, first we have to test the empirical validity of our presumed reality-based genre taxonomy.

STUDY 1

The aim of Study 1 was to examine whether the reality-based genre taxonomy presented in Table 1, which stretches from reality registration through reality simulation to marvels and absurdity, fits with readers’/viewers’ perspectives. There are several ways to arrive at such a test. Instead of directly asking the respondents how they classify specific genre labels, we opted for an indirect measure, which may be more reliable in measuring complex constructs (Dillman, 1979; Oosterveld, 1996). This indirect measure consisted of asking the respondents about their individual preferences for particular (conventional) genres, instead of asking them to categorize the genre.

Furthermore, the choice of genre preferences also has a theoretical basis to the extent that indicating preference for a genre may reflect preference for a certain worldview (Freedman & Medway, 1994; Livingstone, 1990). *Genre preferences* may thus be seen as the indirect reflection of grouping behavior on a criterion of reality representation. Therefore, it seems reasonable to expect that genre preferences that reflect more realistic compared to more unrealistic worldviews may group together. If the assumption that genres reflect certain worldviews is correct, preferences for particular genres should be closely related to the degree of represented reality. In other words, we hypothesize that the degree and style of representing reality within a given genre will underlie genre preferences. Thus, it should be possible to reliably group the respondents’ preferences for conventional genres according to the reality-based taxonomy that was proposed in Table 1. A hierarchi-

cal cluster analysis (HCA) of the respondents' preferences for conventional film genres, then, should correspond to the reality-based genre taxonomy in Table 1.

Method

Participants. A diverse sample of undergraduate students participated in this experiment for payment, 312 in total (136 men, 175 women; M age 22.4, $SD = 5.74$). They reported backgrounds in various disciplines. The participants in Study 1 were the same as in Study 2.

Measurements. From the literature on film genres (e.g., Bordwell, 1989; Bordwell, Staiger, & Thompson, 1985; Chandler, 2000; Dirks, 2002) and surveys on film viewing, we compiled a number of common and representative genre labels for the four reality-based genre categories of Table 1. We presented 12 questions concerning genre preferences, in random order, in a paper-pencil questionnaire to the respondents in this study. The first reality-based genre category, *reality registration* (see Table 1), was exemplified by the item "documentary." Items for the second reality-based genre category, *reality simulation*, were "realistic films," "psychological films," "drama," and "romance." The items "action films," "sci-fi," "horror," and "thriller" represented the third reality-based genre category, *marvels*. The fourth, *absurdism*, was reflected by the items "comedy/humor" and "cartoons/animation films." An item called "other" was included so that participants could write down a preferred genre that was not listed. Respondents were asked to indicate their preferences by checking each conventional genre label with yes or no. Furthermore, the questionnaire contained items related to Study 2 (such as involvement, distance, and appreciation—see following) and demographic variables, such as gender and age.

Results and Discussion

Participants by genre. In Table 2, the conventional-genre preferences of men are compared with those of women. Five out of 12 genre items show differences between the sexes of more than 10%. For example, 60% of women preferred drama, as opposed to 29% of men viewers. In general, women preferred drama, romantic, and realistic films more than men, who preferred action and horror (cf. Cohen & Weimann, 2000). However, these differences are not critical in this analysis of clustering preferences to warrant separate analyses of the sexes. Furthermore, as is shown in Study 2, gender as a covariate appeared to be insignificant to predict involvement.

Clustering of genre preferences. An HCA was performed over the questionnaire answers that related to genre preferences. Note that the HCA was used to

TABLE 2
Conventional-Genre Preferences × Sex

Conventional-Genre Preference: Yes	Men		Women	
	Count	%	Count	%
Thriller	86	63.2	109	62.3
Documentary	61	44.9	75	42.9
Comedy	90	66.2	107	61.1
Drama	40	29.4	106	60.6
Action	67	49.3	45	25.7
Sci-fi	43	31.6	24	13.7
Realism	60	44.1	91	52.0
Psychological	58	42.6	112	64.0
Cartoons	34	25.0	35	20.0
Romance	26	19.1	111	63.4
Horror	20	14.7	16	9.1
Other	9	6.6	15	8.6

Note. $N = 312$. Differences between the sexes for their genre preferences that are greater than 10% are in bold.

categorize the conventional genre labels rather than to categorize individuals. Because of the nature of the dichotomous data (yes–no), an average linkage (between groups) algorithm utilized the binary option and Jaccard's (1908) similarity ratio (Milligan & Schilling, 1985). Often, but not always, respondents left check boxes empty to give a *no-answer*. Therefore, Jaccard's method was preferred because it focuses the analysis on the *yes-answers* of the respondents.¹ Due to the binary analyses, the agglomeration schedule was hardly interpretable. We focus, then, on the dendrogram as shown in Figure 1.

The HCA provided reasonable empirical support for discerning four genre groups. However, their contents only partly match the taxonomy of Table 1. The first cluster grouped horror, cartoons, and sci-fi (bottom up in Figure 1), followed by a cluster that included action, comedy, and thriller. Finally, documentary could be distinguished as a separate cluster from romance, realistic films, psychological films, and drama. The latter two clusters coincided with realistic registration and realistic simulation, respectively (Table 1). However, the absurdism category (containing comedy and cartoons as exemplars) was spread over the first and second clusters in the analysis and thus did not seem to be a genre category of its own. Comedy, thriller, and action were grouped in the second cluster (bottom up), whereas cartoons was at best clustered with sci-fi and horror.

¹The Jaccard coefficient indicates a proximation of similarity between categories and is calculated from binary data (present vs. absent). Jaccard discounts the shared absences because these are ecologically indefinite.

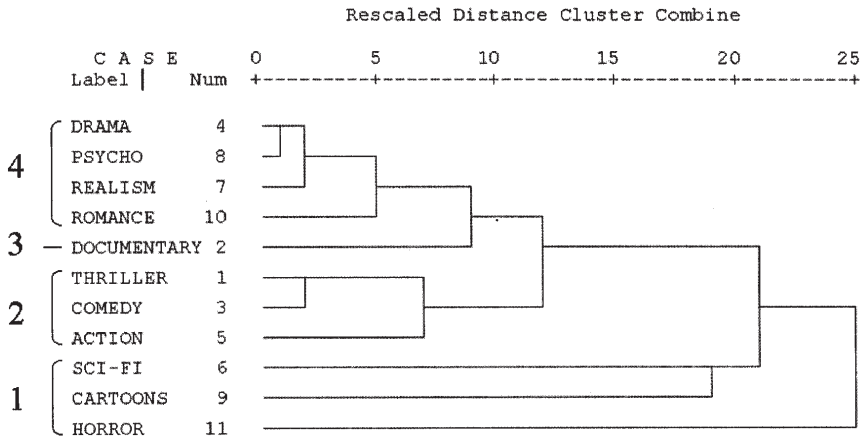


FIGURE 1 Hierarchical binary cluster analysis for respondents' genre preferences.

Results from the cluster analysis indicate that marvels as a reality-based genre in the presumed taxonomy may be divided into two groups: a weaker form, which we characterize as *believable fantasy* (comedy, action, and thrillers), and a stronger form, which we characterize as *unbelievable fantasy* (cartoons, sci-fi, and horror). Unbelievable fantasy would also probably include what traditionally is labeled *fantasy*—that is, fairy tales and supernatural stories. Some clusters appeared to be more tight (e.g., thriller, comedy, action) than other clusters (e.g., sci-fi, cartoons, horror). That horror joined the cluster relatively late is probably due to the relatively small number of respondents who checked this option as their preferred genre. In all, this suggests the necessity of replication, particularly regarding the cluster of unbelievable fantasy.

Based on the literature (e.g., Bordwell et al., 1985; Dirks, 2002) and our product analysis, we had originally distinguished humorous genres from realistic genres because humor exaggerates or understates real-world situations. However, the results presented here suggest that absurdism is distributed over believable and unbelievable fantasy, with comedy representing the more realistic and cartoons the more unrealistic variants.

Given these results, the genre taxonomy presented in Table 1 should be adjusted. We interpreted the four resulting clusters as reality-based genre preferences for reality registration, reality simulation, believable fantasy, and unbelievable fantasy. Accordingly, we adjusted the respective descriptions in Table 3. The main difference from Table 1 is in the genres of unrealistic fiction. Marvels should be divided into fantasy that is still believable, situated in worlds that possibly exist (e.g., Rambo surviving in a forest), and fantasy that is unbelievable, set in a world that is impossible (e.g., Superman on Krypton). Accordingly, characters in believable

TABLE 3
Reality-Based Genre Taxonomy Based on Clustered Genre Preferences of Respondents

<i>Reality Representation: Realistic Fiction–Unrealistic Fiction</i>	<i>Product Type/Conventional Label</i>	<i>Situation/Event</i>	<i>Focal Point</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Information Type</i>
Reality registration	Nonfiction: documentary	Direct observation of daily life	Persons	Natural	Information reality
Reality simulation	Realism: psychological, drama, realism, romance	As if daily life affairs	Impersonated characters	Performed (staged, acting)	Social and interpersonal reality
Believable fantasy	Adventure: action, thriller, comedy	Extraordinary events in daily life	Detached characters	Faked (invented, fabled)	Possible worlds
Unbelievable fantasy	Fantasy: horror, sci-fi, cartoons	Extraordinary events, not in daily life	Caricatures	Absurd	Impossible worlds

Note. This taxonomy is based on the cluster analysis. The first column is combined into the factor reality-based genre preference (Study 2). *Marvels* (Table 1) turned out to have two subdivisions: *believable fantasy* and *unbelievable fantasy*, which is adjusted in agreement with the data of Study 1.

fantasy (e.g., comedy) may be detached persons; in unbelievable fantasy (e.g., cartoons and horror), they become caricatures. Nevertheless, a replication is wanted, and the remaining columns in Table 3 have to be empirically validated.

STUDY 2

Generating taxonomies in itself is uninteresting if the taxonomy does not clarify processes or effects in the reader/viewer (cf. Durkin, 1985; Livingstone, 1989; Miall & Kuiken, 1998). In the previous sections, we hypothesized that the presumed reality-based genres (Table 1) would affect the personal involvement with and appreciation of the protagonist in the corresponding genre. We now extend that logic to our empirically substantiated genre preferences (Table 3).

Given the results from Study 1, we were able to create four groups of respondents on the basis of their genre preferences that we interpreted as reality-based; hence, we call them *reality-based genre preferences*. In so doing, the receiver's perspective (the empirically assessed preferences) is integrated with a product feature (the presumed degree of represented reality; cf. Miall & Kuiken, 1999). A salient aspect of a genre supposedly is the protagonist (Livingstone, 1989; Zubarev, 1999). Therefore, we claim that genre preference will be reflected in preference for its protagonists. Liking a character is strongly based on involvement with the protagonist (Raney & Bryant, 2002; Zillmann, 1994; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977). We hypothesize, then, that liking a particular genre (i.e., a preference for "reality registration") evokes increased involvement with a protagonist from a corresponding genre (e.g., Gandhi) compared to protagonists of other genres (e.g., Vlad Dracul).

Thus, the effects of the reality-based genre preferences should become apparent in higher levels of appreciation for leading roles in the preferred genre than in other genres. In addition, personal involvement with the character from a preferred genre should be higher and distance should be lower compared to characters from the less preferred genres.² Thus, respondents who belong to the empirically grouped genre-preferences believable and unbelievable fantasy (i.e., the low-realistic genres containing the highest numbers of unrealistic features) should entail lower levels of involvement with protagonists from realistic genres. By contrast, preferences for reality registration and reality simulation should elicit higher levels of involvement with and appreciation of the protagonists from these genres than protagonists from the low-realistic genres.

Furthermore, from the popularity of "reality TV" and claims such as "story based on facts" (cf. Atkin, 1983; Berkowitz & Alioto, 1973), it may be derived that

²We envision involvement and distance as parallel processes that complement each other, not as opposing tendencies (Hoorn & Konijn, 2003; Konijn & Hoorn, in press). Therefore, we include distance as a separate variable in the analyses.

the realistic genres in general will entail a positive bias toward their protagonists. Taking the protagonist as the main carrier of the story and the genre, we hypothesize that realistic protagonists will evoke increases in the levels of involvement and appreciation compared to the unrealistic ones, even if someone prefers unbelievable fantasy. Therefore, in addition to the reality-based genre preferences, we distinguished the degree of represented reality of the character as a second experimental factor. This factor, *character-reality* (as represented), pertains to the degree to which a product portrays realistic and unrealistic features of the protagonist in a media product (thus a characteristic of the stimulus).

Method

Participants. The participants in this study were the same 136 men and 175 women volunteers that participated in Study 1.

Stimuli. We identified four movies as exemplars of the realistic genres (e.g., *Gandhi*) and four movies as exemplars of the unrealistic or fantasy genres (e.g., *Superman*; see Appendix). The selection of movies was based on film catalogs, encyclopedias, the CD Cinemania, Internet searches, and watching movies ourselves. The assignment to one or the other category was based on the person portrayals, the contents, and the descriptions of the feature films, in addition to the label given to them (by the producers). We focused primarily on the way in which the protagonist's features were depicted (within his or her environments) to serve the goal of our study, which guided the editing and cutting we performed (see following). To improve comparability, we restricted our choices to contemporary, original Hollywood productions in color. Each was cut back to a 20-min trailer, concentrating primarily on the main character so that each character had about equal exposure time. The trailers were captured and edited on video with the software package *Studio DC10 plus* (see details in Konijn & Hoorn, in press). The video clips did not summarize the movie as such, but rather depicted the main character in key situations.

Procedure. Participants were asked to view a 20-min trailer of a contemporary motion picture and subsequently to answer questions about the film on a paper-pencil questionnaire (duration about 15 min). There were eight different video clips (see Appendix), in varying degrees of represented reality, which were presented to eight different groups of participants. Participants were randomly distributed over the experimental conditions of a between-subjects design. That is, each respondent only saw one of the eight clips. They watched the clips in groups of 10–20 persons, seated in a dimly lit room that mimicked a small theater. Immediately after watching the video clip, the respondents were asked to fill out the questionnaire (which was part of a larger study).

Measurements. Measurements were developed to indicate the levels of personal involvement with, distance toward, and appreciation of the main character (10, 10, and 12 items, respectively). Each item was followed by a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*do not agree at all*) to 5 (*fully agree*). *Involvement* and *distance* were defined as the felt tendencies to (psychologically) approach and avoid the character (see Konijn & Hoorn, in press), respectively. Items reflected general positive–negative affect and approach–avoidance tendencies toward the character, such as “I want to be friends with ...,” “I feel close to ...,” “I prefer to stay away from ...,” and “... leaves me with cold feelings.” The involvement scale (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .90$, $M = 1.79$, $SD = .97$) also included items that could be labeled as *identification* or *empathy*. Cronbach’s alpha for the distance scale was .94 ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 1.22$). *Appreciation* was operationalized in simple evaluative statements about the character, such as “... is great” and “... is boring” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .92$, $M = 2.95$, $SD = 1.03$). The three main dependent variables were interrelated. Involvement significantly correlated with appreciation, but not very strong ($r = .58$, $p < .01$, $n = 309$). Distance correlated slightly less with appreciation, but in a negative direction ($r = -.51$, $p < .01$, $n = 309$). Involvement correlated significantly and negatively with distance ($r = -.71$, $p < .01$, $n = 312$). However, one should be cautious when correlations are based on large samples because they become easily significant (Guilford, 1956).

Furthermore, to check whether the characters that we chose for their level of represented reality in the video clips were indeed perceived as such by the participants, we devised a Likert scale to measure the perceived realism of the character (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .93$, $M = 2.30$, $SD = 1.08$). This factor, character-realism (as perceived), relates to the degree to which the receiver judges that reality is reflected in the protagonist of a media product. Other measurements were included, but not reported in this study (see Konijn & Hoorn, in press), as well as some control variables such as sex, age, and comprehensibility of the story.

Analyses. To perform the statistical analyses to test the hypotheses, the respondents were grouped into four subgroups based on the variables that indicated their conventional genre preferences. These were grouped into a new variable with four values (by means of the SPSS-procedure IF), each value reflecting one of the grouped reality-based genre preferences described in Table 3. Reality-based genre preference, then, was the first independent factor to be included in a 4×2 multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The second factor, character-reality—the degree of represented reality of the character—had two levels (realistic vs. unrealistic). The level of character-reality was based on the motion picture to which this character belonged (see Stimuli previous). Involvement, distance, and appreciation were entered as the dependent variables.

However, as can be expected, respondents marked more than one genre preference, so that certain respondents entered more than one group, whereas others did

TABLE 4
Conventional-Genre Preferences ×
Documentary Preference

Conventional-Genre Preference: Yes	Documentary Preference			
	No		Yes	
	Count	%	Count	%
Thriller	122	69.7	74	54.0
Comedy	114	65.1	84	61.3
Drama	68	38.9	79	57.7
Action	60	34.3	52	38.0
Sci-fi	41	23.4	27	19.7
Realism	71	40.6	81	59.1
Psychological	92	52.6	78	56.9
Cartoons	39	17.7	31	28.5
Romance	71	40.6	66	48.2
Horror	20	11.4	17	12.4
Other	10	5.7	14	10.2

Note. $N = 312$. Differences between preferences to conventional genres and a preference for documentaries greater than 10% are in bold. For instance, for those who prefer thriller (69.7%), 54% also prefer documentaries (considerable overlap).

not. Therefore, we used an exclusion procedure to create independent groups. For example, to be included in the reality simulation genre, a respondent should have answered *yes* to the drama, romance, or psychological genres, but also *no* to horror, thriller, cartoons, and so on (i.e., all the remaining genres).

Table 4 shows that only 3 respondents preferred documentaries alone. In other words, a genre preference for reality registration overlapped substantially with other genre preferences. To overcome the problem of not testing the documentary preferences (due to the exclusion procedure), we performed a 3 (reality-based genre preference: reality simulation vs. believable fantasy vs. unbelievable fantasy) × 2 (character-reality: realistic vs. unrealistic) MANOVA. Separately, we performed a 2 (yes vs. no preference for reality registration, i.e., documentary) × 2 (character-reality) MANOVA. All multivariate F values were calculated according to Pillai.

Results and Discussion

Control questions revealed that, despite editing, the plot and narrative were still comprehensible. As such, the character may be seen as the carrier of the story. The mean comprehensibility for films with realistic protagonists did not significantly differ from the mean comprehensibility of films with unrealistic protagonists in a

one-way analysis ($M_{\text{real}} = 3.63$, $M_{\text{unreal}} = 3.75$), $F(1, 310) < 1$, scale max = 5. Furthermore, the selection and manipulation of the feature films reached the intended goal: Character-realism (as perceived) showed that the characters from the clips with realistic representations were indeed considered more realistic ($M = 2.43$) than the unrealistically represented characters ($M = 1.38$), and vice versa—unrealistic characters ($M_{\text{unreal}} = 2.70$, $M_{\text{real}} = 1.99$), $F(6, 299) = 21.19$, $p < .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .30$). Finally, sex and age only induced null effects, and sex as a covariate with reality-based genre preference by character-reality (as represented) on the three dependent variables also yielded insignificant effects ($F < 1$, $p = .79$).

The results of the 3 (reality-based genre preference: reality simulation vs. believable fantasy vs. unbelievable fantasy) \times 2 (character-reality: realistic vs. unrealistic) MANOVA showed that, contrary to expectations, neither a significant main effect for reality-based genre preference, multivariate $F(6, 598) = 1.24$, $p = .29$, nor a significant interaction of reality-based genre preference with character-reality, multivariate $F(6, 598) = 1.01$, $p = .41$, was observed. However, an overall main effect was obtained for character-reality, multivariate $F(3, 298) = 6.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$, as expected, and subsequent analyses indicated that more realistically represented characters significantly increased the levels of involvement and decreased distance toward the protagonist as compared to unrealistically represented characters. The between-subjects analyses showed, however, that the significant effects of character-reality did not hold for appreciation ($p = .148$). It appears from the means in Table 5 that the degree of represented reality of the protagonist (in its environments) induced relatively small effects (see also partial eta squared) in the predicted directions regardless of the respondent's grouped reality-based genre preferences.

Yet, the possibility still exists that, compared to other genres, documentaries have so many realistic features that they do increase the level of involvement with the pro-

TABLE 5
Mean Involvement, Distance, and Appreciation for
3 (Reality-Based Genres) \times 2 (Character Reality as Represented)

Reality-Based Genres	Involvement ^a				Distance ^a				Appreciation ^b			
	Realistic		Unrealistic		Realistic		Unrealistic		Realistic		Unrealistic	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Reality simulation ^b	2.08	0.92	1.43	0.76	2.20	1.13	3.03	1.15	3.10	1.14	2.91	0.80
Believable fantasy ^b	1.88	0.87	1.70	1.00	2.56	1.21	2.77	1.16	2.98	0.98	3.00	0.97
Unbelievable fantasy ^b	2.01	1.08	1.56	1.02	2.12	1.27	2.86	1.23	2.98	1.05	2.63	1.09

Note. For realistic, $n = 43, 65, 51$ (vertically), for unrealistic, $n = 30, 71, 46$ (vertically).

^aIndicates that differences were significant for character reality (see text). ^bIndicates no significant effects.

tagonist significantly in documentary lovers. Therefore, we contrasted the respondents who indicated preference for documentaries with those who did not. The means are presented in Table 6. A 2 (yes vs. no preference for reality registration) \times 2 (character-reality) MANOVA showed overall significance for a small main effect of preference for reality registration, multivariate $F(3, 303) = 3.90, p = .009, \eta_p^2 = .04$, and for a small main effect of character-reality, multivariate $F(3, 303) = 5.25, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .05$. However, the tests of between-subjects effects showed a significant but small main effect for preference for reality registration on distance alone, $F(1, 305) = 6.64, p = .01, \eta_p^2 = .02$. This indicates that those who like documentaries experienced a slightly lower level of distance toward the protagonists compared to those who do not prefer documentaries. No interaction effect between preference for reality registration and character-reality was found ($F < 1$). Apparently, preference for documentaries did not significantly affect personal involvement or appreciation, not even when characters were realistically depicted. Note that a decrease in distance is not the same as an increase in involvement.

In addition, we performed a separate MANOVA with the single (not grouped) conventional-genre preferences as fixed factors (11). The multivariate tests obtained no significant effects on the three dependent variables, except for the overall significance for cartoons, multivariate $F(3, 299) < 2.98, p = .032, \eta_p^2 < .030$. However, the test of between-subjects effects showed that no significant effects of cartoons was evident for the three dependent variables taken separately—that is, for involvement ($p = .473$), distance ($p = .181$), or appreciation ($p = .125$) alone.

A multiple regression analysis with the reality-based genre preferences entered in the first step as a categorical independent variable and character-reality (as represented) entered in the second step enabled further assessment of the primary genre hypothesis and clarified that the character-reality factor slightly affected the prediction of involvement and distance above and beyond genre ($R^2 = .04, \beta = -.193, p = .001; R^2 = .05, \beta = .216, p < .001$, respectively). However, no significant effects oc-

TABLE 6
Mean Involvement, Distance, and Appreciation for Preference for
2 (Reality Registration) \times 2 (Character Reality as Represented)

Preference for Reality Registration ^{b,c}	Involvement ^a				Distance ^a				Appreciation ^b			
	Realistic		Unrealistic		Realistic		Unrealistic		Realistic		Unrealistic	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Yes	2.01	1.07	1.57	0.97	2.10	1.21	2.68	1.34	3.05	1.15	2.88	1.10
No	1.92	0.84	1.62	0.95	2.55	1.19	2.94	1.06	2.95	0.94	2.90	0.95

Note. For realistic, preference yes, $n = 80$, preference no, $n = 80$. Likewise, for unrealistic, preference yes, $n = 55$, preference no, $n = 94$.

^aIndicates that differences were significant for character reality. ^bIndicates no significant effects. ^cIndicates a significant effect on distance only (see text).

curred for appreciation ($p = .22$). Genre as a grouped variable (reality-based genre preferences) did not significantly contribute to the prediction of any of the three dependent variables. To complete the analyses, the same procedure was executed for the assessment of the effects of the separate conventional genre preferences. None of the conventional genre preferences provided a significant explanation of the variance in involvement, distance, or appreciation, except for the preference for documentaries, which provided a minor additional explanation of the variance in distance (R^2 change = .019, $p = .013$) in combination with character-reality. Again, the represented character-reality factor affected the prediction of involvement above and beyond the conventional genre preferences, and yet it only provided a small contribution ($R^2 = .04$, $\beta = -.186$, $p = .001$). Thus, reality representation in the character, character-reality, is the only variable in this study that significantly explained some of the variance in personal involvement of the observer with the character in a feature film. Nonetheless, this contribution is rather small.

However, the explained variance of involvement increased considerably when the perceived level of realism of a character (perceived character-realism) was entered as the second independent variable (with reality-based genre preferences as the first independent variable): for involvement, $R^2 = .20$, $\beta = .45$, $p < .001$; similarly for distance: $R^2 = .16$, $\beta = -.40$, $p < .001$. Again, the reality-based genre preferences did not show significant effects. In contrast to the represented reality in the character, the perceived level of character-realism did directly affect appreciation ($R^2 = .35$, $\beta = .59$, $p < .001$).

Contrary to expectations, then, the results of Study 2 suggest that reality-based genre preferences have no significant effect on personal involvement with, distance toward, or appreciation of protagonists from a variety of feature films. Only respondents who indicated preference for documentaries experienced somewhat less distance (but not more involvement or appreciation) toward the protagonists than respondents with other preferences. By contrast, the degree to which a character was represented as more realistic or unrealistic did evoke the expected effects, although they were small. Realistically depicted characters elicited slightly increased levels of personal involvement with the protagonist, whereas the level of distance slightly decreased, but appreciation remained unaffected. This effect was independent of genre preferences. However, the best explanation of personal involvement, distance, and appreciation, as suggested by the results of this study, was provided by the perceived level of realism of the characters above and beyond genre preference.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In Study 1, we assessed the viability of the proposed reality-based genre taxonomy. The results showed that conventional genres could be grouped according to their representation of reality in (visual) media products. We arrived at a more par-

simonious genre taxonomy of reality registration (e.g., documentary), reality simulation (e.g., romance), believable fantasy (e.g., thriller), and unbelievable fantasy (e.g., sci-fi), which we then used to predict receivers' experiences of the film trailers. However, Study 2 showed that the reality-based genre preferences did not direct personal involvement with or appreciation of the protagonist. That is, when the respondent viewed a protagonist from his or her preferred genre, there was no significant increase in involvement or liking of this protagonist compared to protagonists taken from the other, not-preferred genres. Only a slight decrease in the level of distance was observed for those viewers who preferred documentaries to other genres.

Instead, a realistic representation of the protagonist evoked increases in the level of involvement and decreases in distance, but did not significantly affect appreciation. Unrealistic characters evoked increases in the level of distance, whereas involvement decreased, and appreciation remained unaffected. More important, the perceived level of character-realism made a substantial contribution to involvement, distance, and, above all, appreciation of the protagonist. Thus, engaging with and (dis)liking fictional characters is not so much an effect of the representation of reality in the product features, but rather of the perception of realism of those features from the perspective of the observer. This supports the arguments presented by Durkin (1985), Livingstone (1989), and Miall and Kuiken (1999) for integrating product features with the observer's response to those features.

As a form of grouping behavior and data reduction, genre taxonomies rely on the assumption that what can be attributed to the group is also valid for its members ("Sci-fi? Sure I'll like Buck Rogers"). The results presented here show that such heuristics have their limitations. We showed that a preference for a particular reality-based genre does not necessarily imply appreciation for the characters of that particular reality-based genre. Rather, appreciation and personal involvement are affected by the perceived level of realism of the character in its filmic situations, whereas the represented level of reality in the character only slightly affected involvement. In other words, although people may prefer sci-fi, they may still like Gandhi better than Buck Rogers if Gandhi evokes the right level of perceived reality.

Other studies have found effects of genre on experience. For instance, Heil (2002) obtained evidence for increases in state aggression, anxiety, and sadness for nonhumorous violence as compared to violent action comedy. Meade (2000) found that the motivation to watch horror was related to arousal and vicarious thrill seeking. However, these studies were either limited to one or two (sub)genres (Heil, 2002; Meade, 2000; also Buck, 1998 [silent movie]; Ordman, 1996 [tragedy]) or concentrated on some negative emotions (aggression, anxiety, sadness in Heil, 2002; anger and crying in Ordman, 1996; arousal and thrill seeking in Meade, 2000). In our Study 2, we also found that only one genre, documentary, slightly affected negative experiences (distance), although in a positive direction (a decrease in distance). Together, the evidence seems to converge and perhaps suggests that "negative" genres, such as horror and violent action, have effects on

“negative” experiences, whereas the positive aspects (e.g., humor) only mitigate negativity. This is in line with Buck’s report that the effects of a silent film classic on psychological involvement and aesthetic preference were insignificant. With Cohen and Weimann (2000), then, we emphasize that “some genres have some effects on some viewers,” primarily in the “negative” genre segment and with respect to “negative” emotions.

Reality TV, VR, and docusoaps capitalize on the assumption that adding more reality to their products will boost involvement and appreciation in the receiver. Our sense of “being-there” (cf. presence), however, can be induced by reading a book just as easily as by using new technology. We think this is the case because the perceived (psychological) realism of the character’s actions, feelings, thoughts, and so on, is more important than the “reality” of the technical representation of the character. For instance, a VR environment that displays a character who is not “real” is not something with which a user can emotionally connect (cf. Bailenson, Blascovich, Beall, & Loomis, 2003; Blascovich et al., 2002; Monk & Gale, 2002). However, a book character that acts in a way readers can grasp will be observed, judged, liked, or resented. Likewise, our studies suggest that increasing the number and quality of realistic representations (as product features) may not increase preference for such genres, nor do they enhance the degree of involvement with and appreciation of the characters that much (cf. Hoorn et al., 2003). In contrast, the perception of the level of realism partly determines involvement and appreciation and points at the active role of the viewer. To trigger the desired experience in their audiences, then, creators of reality-based genres should have a firm understanding of how different audiences experience mediated reality. In this sense, the Aristotelian proposal that an increase in the number of realistic features engenders increased involvement in the receiver may only hold if those features are perceived as realistic. An interesting question for future studies is how strictly genre or style conventions set the parameters for the “right” degree of realism in the eyes of the observer.

Although genre preferences apparently do not increase involvement with the protagonist (e.g., experiencing friendship, sympathy, and intimacy), it might well be that they evoke personal emotions that are not captured by involvement with the character. Happiness, sadness, and suspense, for example, can be evoked by personal reminiscences, certain cinematic and narrative techniques, or the plot (e.g., Vorderer, 2000). Thus, certain genres may boost certain emotions, but experiencing emotions does not necessarily mean that they involve the viewer with the character. Perhaps genre may affect appreciation for narrative structure and plot (although Buck, 1998, found no evidence), but engagement with and appreciation of the character in its situations may be independent from that. Although the perceived realism of the protagonist apparently is predictive of involvement, the question remains whether the protagonist is a determinant of genre attribution, as Zubarev (1999) suggested. In our results, we find a suggestion that the main character has a central posi-

tion for understanding the plot, because the respondents reported that they could easily follow the story despite the serious editing that we did. However, although the character may be seen as the carrier of the story, a question for future research is to what degree characters are fundamental to establishing genres.

Hence, the question remains whether it is fruitful to produce a taxonomy based on a receiver's perspective. On the one hand, the reality-based genre taxonomy designed for the study presented here is supported by empirical data—that is, by grouping individual genre preferences. Thus, it seems to make sense to group cultural products in a more parsimonious way on a criterion that is relevant to the receivers. Somehow, viewers' implicit grouping behavior for feature films seems to be reflected in statistically grouping their preferences for single, conventional genres. Furthermore, confronting the theoretically devised reality-based genre taxonomy based on product features with the empirical data from a receiver's perspective prompted a regrouping of some aspects of the taxonomy. The results are in line with a recent study of Nabi, Biely, Morgan, and Stitt (2003), who found a reality–fiction dimension as the only stable dimension in respondents' grouping of television programs.

On the other hand, it does not seem useful to establish a reality-based genre taxonomy because it has no effects on a principal element of viewers' personal involvement with and appreciation of the protagonists. In this respect, therefore, it seems as if designing a taxonomy from a reader's/viewer's perspective is not very useful in predicting the viewer's responses. However, the degree of (un)realistic representation of the protagonist (including its situational features) will have a small but significant effect on personal involvement, such that a more realistic character increases involvement, but not appreciation. Yet, the explanatory power of the represented reality criterion at the product side appeared to be limited, so that we have to look for other factors as well. Studies in affective disposition theory have repeatedly shown that the moral judgment of a character, whether he or she is a good hero or a bad villain, is important to engaging with characters (e.g., Raney & Bryant, 2002; Zillmann, 1994; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977) both in fiction and nonfiction (Zillmann, Taylor, & Lewis, 1998; see also Bryant, Roskos-Ewoldsen, & Cantor, 2003). Furthermore, studies in art perception (e.g., Cupchik, 1997; Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972) and interpersonal attraction (e.g., Baker & Churchill, 1977; Iannucci, 1992) emphasize that aesthetic appeal is an important contributing factor to (art) appreciation. In her correlational studies, Buck (1998) found that, among others, the subscales of aesthetic preference and psychological involvement were strongly correlated and that they contributed to one another. The effects of the triad morality (ethics), beauty (aesthetics), and realism (epistemics) on personal involvement with fictional characters are examined in Konijn and Hoorn (in press).

All in all, the results of our studies show that it is worthwhile to take the active role of the reader/viewer into consideration in studying media effects and to arrive

at integrative theories and empirical validation of interaction processes between product features and receiver's interpretations of a cultural product. Our results are in line with what Miall and Kuiken (1999) proposed in their search for "literariness"—the interaction between objective features of the text and the reader's response to those features. Creating genre taxonomies or new genre labels based on product or content features may have its usefulness from a producer's perspective. However, from a receiver's perspective, other, more experiential or psychological dimensions seem to contribute to their personal involvement and liking of specific characters appearing in such genres. Clearly, readers/viewers do not simply take over the genre convention per se, but they make up their own minds. For instance, absurd action in *Monty Python's Life of Brian* (Jones, 1979) may provoke involvement with the protagonist not because the level of represented reality is low, but rather because the level of its perceived realism is high. In this respect, character attributes might well fulfill key roles in determining the perceived realism of a program, movie, or text, even when they appear in completely fictitious settings. It may be interesting in future research to study how perceived realism of a character in various fictitious settings may determine the perceived realism of the media presentation as a whole and how involvement with a protagonist relates to discrete emotional responses.

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APPENDIX

<i>Fictional Character</i>	<i>Performer</i>	<i>Film</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Director</i>	<i>Represented Reality of the Character</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>n</i>
Mahatma Gandhi	Ben Kingsley	<i>Gandhi</i>	1982	Richard Attenborough	Realistic	20:36	39
Bridget Gregory	Linda Fiorentino	<i>The Last Seduction</i>	1994	John Dahl	Realistic	22:02	40
Rocky Dennis	Eric Stoltz	<i>Mask</i>	1985	Peter Bogdanovich	Realistic	21:15	42
John Sedley	Mickey Rourke	<i>Johnny Handsome</i>	1989	Walter Hill	Realistic	18:38	39
Superman	Christopher Reeve	<i>Superman</i>	1978	Richard Donner	Unrealistic	22:53	36
Cruella de Vil	Glenn Close	<i>101 Dalmatians</i>	1996	Stephen Herek	Unrealistic	21:10	37
Edward Scissorhands	Johnny Depp	<i>Edward Scissorhands</i>	1990	Tim Burton	Unrealistic	21:47	38
Count Vlad Dracul	Gary Oldman	<i>Bram Stoker's Dracula</i>	1992	Francis Ford Coppola	Unrealistic	18:12	41

Note. Mohandas K. Gandhi: At first a lawyer in South Africa, then becomes India's leader of nonviolent resistance against British oppression. Nowadays, a worldwide symbol of peace and understanding. Bridget Gregory: Extremely attractive woman deceives her husband, runs off with the money from a drug deal they set up, lands at a small town where she seduces a boyish lover to kill her revenge-seeking husband, faking a rape to turn the boy in to the police. Rocky Dennis: Adolescent boy suffers from craniodiaphyseal dysplasia, a disease that causes the disfigurement of his face. He succeeds at doing the right thing in a world of Hell's Angels, drug abuse, and misdemeanors. Finds love in the arms of a blind girl who sees his inner beauty. John Sedley: Small-time criminal with a skull forced out of shape (nickname Johnny Handsome) is imprisoned after his fellow lowlifes have deserted him. A plastic surgeon proposes to help him prove the theory that normal looks will normalize behavior. The doctor is proven wrong. Superman: Supernatural mister righteous stays modest and polite while flying around arresting criminals, fixing cracks in the earth, and avoiding the flooding of a town. His love for Lois Lane brings him to breaking his vow not to interfere with earth's history but this is all for the best. He says he is for "truth, justice, and the American Way." Cruella de Vil: Runs a fashion house with extravagance and wickedness. Her latest craze is to have a coat of dalmatian puppy fur. All dalmatian doggies of London are kidnapped but the spectacular fashion witch bites the dust after all, due to the willful scheming of animated animals. Edward Scissorhands: Feeble and unadapted to normal life, the Frankenstein-like boy with scissors for hands is adopted by a kindhearted Avon Lady, who wants him to look beautiful again. American suburbia thinks differently and scams him into a burglary but he survives social abandonment and keeps straight. Count Vlad Dracul: Old Romanian warlord rises from the dead to defy Christ and avenge the death of his wife. Finds her mirror image in Victorian London, a lovely young woman who cannot resist his seductive shrewdness. The gruesome vampire wants her living blood to take her with him into eternal doom.