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Back Where I Belong: Rereading as a Risk-Free Pathway to Social Connection

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Although extensive research has explored individuals' engagement with media, the topic of elective reexposure to narratives remains underexplored. The ability of fictional narratives to meet social needs may help explain the appeal of rereading, as well as individual differences in the tendency to reread. We present a measure of the tendency to reread books and examine associations between the tendency to reread and other individual difference factors. Our findings suggest that the tendency to reread is a construct that is unique from the tendency to read in general, and that it is associated with unfulfilled belongingness needs, insecurity about social acceptance, deep engagement with narrative worlds, and other distinct personality characteristics. These findings suggest that the tendency to reread may signal a heightened tendency to engage with narratives to fulfill unmet social goals.

Keywords: belongingness, narrative transportation, personality, reading

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For some of us, books are as important as almost anything else on Earth. What a miracle it is that out of these small, flat, rigid squares of paper unfolds world after world after world, worlds that sing to you, comfort and quiet or excite you.

—Anne Lamott

Reading is a beloved activity, and individuals spend a significant portion of their time reading for enjoyment. Americans spend an average of 30 min per day reading for fun (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).[1] Reading literary fiction, in particular, evokes enjoyment and meaning-making through a variety of avenues. Readers connect with the aesthetics of fiction by recognizing and interpreting unique textual features, engaging with imagery, and enjoying books as art (Miall, 2006; Miall & Kuiken, 1994). And while, by definition, fictional narratives describe imaginary people and events rather than those that can be directly experienced, readers still experience meaningful connections to fictional story worlds. Alongside aesthetic experiences, readers become absorbed into stories and emotionally and socially engage with characters and narrative events (Green & Brock, 2000; Miall & Kuiken, 2002). Previous research indicates that reading involves a set of aesthetic, affective, and social experiences (Miall & Kuiken, 1994), and identifying oneself as someone who tends to read for pleasure is associated with self-reports of understanding the self and others and experiencing relatedness and social benefits (see The Reading Agency, 2015 for a review of this literature).

A small body of existing work explores which personality traits are associated with the tendency to read, suggesting that those who tend to read and become absorbed in books have higher levels of openness to experience (e.g., Kuijpers et al., 2019). However, it is less clear which personality traits are associated with the tendency to reread, as the correlates and effects of the tendency to reread (the tendency to read one or more books or stories multiple times) remains underexplored. Although many individuals never return to the same book once they finish it, others read stories over and over again.

Associations between personality and reading tendencies may provide important clues as to the utility of engaging with narratives, and individuals' motivations for doing so. We propose that, while not all people who tend to read narrative fiction also tend to reread, some people might return to familiar narratives because doing so allows them to meet social needs, and that this may be especially common among those who desire social connection but feel like their social needs are not met in their daily lives. The present work is rooted in social and personality psychology, and investigates the tendency to reread familiar books as a construct that is unique from the tendency to read more generally, and that is unique from seeking predictable experiences. It explores the idea that rereading gains its psychological importance because it is an emotionally safe way to feel socially connected.

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[1] This measure does not differentiate fiction from nonfiction.

The Social Benefits of Fictional Narratives

Humans are inherently social, such that all people are motivated to form and maintain social connection (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). This basic human need for social connection is referred to as *the need to belong* or *belongingness needs* (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). When belongingness needs are satiated or satisfied, individuals have subjective experience of "general belongingness." As most fictional narratives involve relationships between characters and because reading can fulfill various social needs, we suggest that the desire to engage with the fictional social worlds in narratives is driven (at least in part) by this motivation.

Although reading narrative fiction connects people to imaginary characters, experiences, and situations, studies from psychology, communication, and neuroscience suggest that narrative engagement involves many of the same cognitive processes as real-world social interactions. For example, reading triggers cognitive shifts that transition people into a "social processing mode," priming people to understand social information (Mar & Oatley, 2008). Reading narrative fiction has also been conceptualized as running a simulation of complex social worlds in one's mind (Oatley, 1999), which involves inferring how imaginary characters think and feel (Carruthers & Smith, 1996) and understanding the connection between internal experience and social behavior (Mar et al., 2006). Understanding characters' internal states allows readers to predict characters' intentions and behaviors (Hassabis et al., 2014) and to empathize with characters (Mar et al., 2006; Mar & Oatley, 2008) as one would in a successful real-life social interaction. Thus, many of the same skills and processes that are required for day-to-day socialization are used when reading narrative fiction.

Even though reading fiction involves connecting to imaginary social worlds, it may help to fulfill belongingness needs. Although in one sense, reading temporarily removes individuals from real-world interactions, individuals engage with fictional narrative characters in many of the same ways that they engage with real people. These symbolic relationships with characters are referred to as parasocial bonds (Giles, 2002; Horton & Wohl, 1956). Parasocial bonds or connections with characters occur in the minds of the readers. Although a reader cannot directly interact with the character (e.g., a character cannot independently engage in a conversation with the reader), the reader can still feel a strong emotional bond with the character, can imagine how the character might respond in new situations, and can feel a sense of identification or friendship with the character. The connection is created by the reader bringing their own imagination and reactions to the descriptions provided by the author.

Parasocial bonds with imaginary characters in stories may provide many of the same psychological benefits as real relationships (Derrick et al., 2008; Gardner & Knowles, 2008). For example, fictional narratives buffer against self-esteem and mood decrements, as well as feelings of rejection (Derrick et al., 2009; Gardner et al., 2005). Individuals who reread may enjoy spending time with their "fictional friends."

Not only do fictional narratives have the ability to comfort us in a similar way as trusted friends, but they do so with less of the risk of real relationships. For example, although friendships and close relationships confer great benefits, they can be risky such that those closest to us may ultimately let us down (for a review of this "risk regulation model," see Murray et al., 2006; Murray & Holmes, 2011). Real interaction partners may betray our trust, insult us, or abandon us. We experience our own vulnerability in these relationships when we risk rejection in order to experience connection with another person or group. This is not the case with individuals' relationships with fictional characters and collectives in narratives. While vulnerability, and the risk that accompanies it, is necessary to build a successful close relationship with real-life interaction partners (Murray et al., 2006; Murray & Holmes, 2011), readers need not make themselves vulnerable (or risk rejection) in order to experience parasocial connection. A character in a story may act in an insulting or untrustworthy way, but these transgressions are not directed at the reader personally and do not have a direct effect on the reader's real life. For example, a character may betray the trust of another character by revealing a secret, but the reader is not in a vulnerable position to have any of their own personal secrets revealed. Thus, the fictional context allows the reader to be less emotionally and physically vulnerable than in real-life interactions with real others.

Even though reading does not involve the same kinds of risk and vulnerability as real relationships, books do involve another kind of emotional risk. Stories can evoke negative emotions or bad memories. For example, a favorite character might die, a violent or frightening event might occur, or a scene in a book might remind a reader of a painful experience from their own past. Rereading provides an additional buffer against these unpleasant surprises or negative emotional experiences as well; the rereader is safe from unexpected emotional experiences. Furthermore, not all stories are equally compelling to all readers; a reader may or may not form a connection with a particular character. Rereading provides an additional level of certainty about the psychological experience that the reader will have. A rereader can choose to engage again with favorite characters or revisit beloved narrative places. Rereaders can select books that they know will help them feel a sense of belongingness or comfort, rather than taking a chance on a new book that may or may not meet those needs.

Though all narratives eventually come to an end, there is always the opportunity to revisit a narrative or fictional friendship that one finds especially comforting, whenever one feels unhappy or socially depleted. Thus, one reason that people may not only tend to read stories, but reread them is to fulfill the need to belong in a predictable way. We suggest that the tendency to reread confers benefits above and beyond the tendency to read.

Becoming Part of Stories

Many of the social benefits that fictional narratives offer are contingent on the degree to which individuals become psychologically involved in stories and the social groups within them. Two distinct means of becoming psychologically involved in stories are narrative transportation and narrative-collective assimilation. Narrative transportation refers to feeling fully immersed in a narrative world (Green & Brock, 2000). It is characterized by a heightened focus on the events taking place in a story and the characters participating in them, accompanied by strong emotions (Green & Brock, 2000). Narrative-collective assimilation involves feeling as though one is a member of a collective described in a book and often entails taking on the traits of a collective, including their abilities and personality characteristics (Gabriel & Young, 2011).

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For example, those who read *Harry Potter* may feel as if they are part of the wizard community. While not all narratives include social collectives with which one may assimilate, many do. Socially collectives are commonly presented in narratives including fantasy fiction.

Coming to feel as if one is part of a collective within a narrative provides additional social benefits above and beyond those associated with transportation alone. Narrative collective-assimilation predicts increased feelings of life satisfaction, as well as increased positive affect, both of which are outcomes supportive of belongingness (Gabriel & Young, 2011). In other words, narrative collective assimilation leads people to psychologically become part of a social group within a story, even temporarily adopting traits that signal belongingness within a fictional group. People may reread books in order to revisit these collectives that they have psychologically joined.

Who Benefits Most From Reading?

As discussed above, electing to transport oneself into a narrative provides the opportunity to socially engage in a "safe space" where there is minimal vulnerability and risk of rejection (Green, 2005). People seek out narratives when they desire comfort and connection (Greenwood & Long, 2009; Jonason et al., 2008), or when their belongingness needs are otherwise left unmet (Gabriel & Young, 2011; Mar et al., 2006; Oatley, 1999). For this reason, those who exhibit characteristics associated with unfulfilled belongingness needs may benefit most from engaging with narratives. Previous research supports this prediction. For example, one of the primary indicators of low belongingness is low self-esteem (Leary et al., 1995; Tice & Baumeister, 2000). Previous work demonstrates that those with low self-esteem benefit from narrative engagement more than others, as narratives provide benefits that they do not receive from their real-life relationships (Derrick et al., 2008). Narratives similarly benefit other groups who suffer from unmet belongingness needs including those low in trust (Green & Brock, 1998), and victims of trauma (Gabriel et al., 2017).

Rereading

In the present work, we sought to investigate our hypothesis that that the tendency to reread books may be associated with many of the same benefits of narrative engagement, but may be additionally beneficial, and therefore more likely, among those who are low in belongingness (e.g., have unfulfilled belongingness needs). We suggest that this may be because rereading involves revisiting familiar characters or story worlds that one enjoys, which may provide a dependable way to fulfill social connection needs. The tendency to reread can be defined as the tendency to read one or more books or stories multiple times. Rereading may confer psychological benefits, because those who tend to reread might reengage with stories in order to revisit or spend quality time with characters whom they have already come to know and with whom they have formed a meaningful connection. Previous work suggests that individuals experience increased feelings of belongingness when they interact with individuals or groups with whom they feel strongly connected (Baumeister & Leary, 2000).

We suggest that the tendency to reconnect with imaginary characters and collectives provides a similar benefit above and beyond initial connections formed when reading a story for the first time. Rereading a fictional narrative may also be especially powerful because the reader knows the outcome and does not have to worry about characters changing in unexpected ways, or leaving. (If a beloved character does leave or die in the course of a narrative, however, rereaders may be more emotionally prepared for this event.) Such prior knowledge should be calming, as research finds that when people are asked how they would feel if a character whom they feel close to is removed from a TV show, they report anticipating intense feelings similar to a real-life break-up (Cohen, 2004). Knowing what to expect from a social world should further reduce any risk of negative feelings or disappointment associated with immersing oneself in a narrative. As such, rereading may be especially comforting and people who have belongingness deficits may be especially likely to feel empowered to reread.

We note that the emotional experience that occurs as a result of the events in the narrative may be separate from the affective benefits that individuals receive from rereading. Individuals may experience specific emotions due to the plot of the story (e.g., happiness when a favorite character succeeds, sadness when the character suffers), and indeed, as mood management theory suggests, individuals may seek out stories in order to feel particular emotions (e.g., Dillman Carpentier, 2020). However, our approach suggests that broader forms of comfort or general positive affect may occur as a result of belongingness needs being satisfied, regardless of the exact emotions evoked by the specific narrative.

Motivations for rereading have previously been explored as one form of volitional reconsumption (Russell & Levy, 2012). Interviews suggest that people may reread in order to experience depth and meaning, to reflect on and reprocess past experiences, and because it is subjectively pleasant to revisit stories. Additionally, the authors speculated that individuals who enjoy unique experiences may not be inclined to reread. However, to our knowledge, previous research has not explored associations between the tendency to reread narrative fiction and personality factors, narrative transportation, and belongingness. The effects of rereading fiction have only been reported in specific contexts such as on children's moral understanding of characters (Whitney et al., 2005), reading comprehension (Margolin & Snyder, 2018), and appreciation of literary features (Kuijpers & Hakemulder, 2018). We believe the current studies to be a unique contribution to existing work on narrative engagement.

We began our exploration of the tendency to reread by examining existing measurements of related topics. While, to our knowledge, there is no existing measure of rereading, previous research includes measures of reading flow (Thissen et al., 2018), habitual reading tendencies (Schmidt & Retelsdorf, 2016), and motivation for reading (Schutte & Malouff, 2007) among adults as well as motivation and engagement (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014), reading efficacy (Kelley et al., 2015) and comprehension (Shapiro et al., 2017) among adolescents. Because none of these existing scales directly measures rereading, our creation of a rereading scale helps to fill a gap in the literature. We did not include these scales in the present work, because the tendency to reread is unique from the constructs included in these measures.

Although the present research focuses on the tendency to reread among adult populations, it is worth noting that this gap in the literature extends to adolescent populations, as evident from our

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literature review; existing research on rereading among younger people has tended to focus more on reading comprehension rather than narrative engagement. The present research investigating the tendency to reread among adults may serve as a starting point for the broader investigation of rereading tendencies and motivations among additional populations.

Additionally, we note that our study was conducted in the cultural context of the United States with participants who were generally well-educated (more than 80% of participants reported having a graduate, professional, or college degree), so our assumption is that most participants had the ability to easily read and understand novels. Different cultural contexts or different ability levels may also influence rereading tendencies or experiences. Furthermore, investigating the particular imaginative or predictive processes that occur when individuals reread can provide valuable insights (e.g., Harrison & Nuttall, 2018; Xue et al., 2020) but these questions are beyond the scope of the current paper.

The Present Research

Overview

We tested whether the tendency to reread narrative fiction is different from the tendency to read narrative fiction in general, as well as tendencies to seek predictable experiences. We then examined the relationships between the tendency to reread, the tendency to read, satisfaction with belonging, and personality constructs related to insecurity about social acceptance, as well as other individual difference measures.

Hypotheses

Need for Predictability. We hypothesized that the tendency to reread would be correlated with the need for predictability, as tending to read books more than once and desiring predictable experiences likely share common variance. However, we hypothesized that this correlation would not be sufficiently strong enough to suggest that these two measures reflect the same underlying construct (as a rule of thumb, we expected this correlation to be small to medium, with a value of $r = .5$ or smaller; Kline, 2013).

Rereading and Belongingness. We predicted that the tendency to reread would be associated with reporting a greater need to belong and less feelings of general belongingness (that is, less satisfaction with one's level of belongingness). We assessed this via the Need to Belong Scale (Leary et al., 2013) and a one-item measure of general feelings of belongingness. As several researchers note (e.g., Gabriel et al., 2016; Hirsch & Clark, 2019), there is not currently an established scale that measures general belongingness, and this is a gap in the literature that should be addressed. The Need to Belong Scale taps into a mix of desires, anxieties, and motivations about social connection rather than a general sense of felt belonging. Therefore, in order to provide a complete test of our hypotheses and to honor these concerns, we included both the established Need to Belong Scale as well as a one-item measure of general belongingness that we created for this study (agreement or disagreement with the phrase, "In general, I feel like I belong.").

Attachment. To test our prediction that people may reread to fulfill belongingness needs, we investigated the relationship between the tendency to reread and attachment style using the Relationship Questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Adult attachment theory suggests that early experiences with caregivers impact the attachment style that an individual develops, and that these early experiences later impact their experiences in close relationships as adults (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008). Specifically, those who believe that others are trustworthy and are comfortable having close relationships are securely attached, while insecure attachment is characterized by avoidance and anxiety (Brennan et al., 1998). Avoidance involves avoiding relational intimacy, while anxiety involves a fear of rejection. The Relationship Questionnaire identifies attachment security as well as three distinct types of attachment insecurity: anxious-preoccupied, fearful-avoidant, and dismissive-avoidant (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). An anxious-preoccupied attachment style is highest in attachment anxiety. It is characterized by a strong desire for intimacy and approval, emotional dysregulation, impulsiveness, and fear of abandonment. A fearful-avoidant attachment style is characterized by a combination of anxiety and avoidance, resulting in discomfort with intimacy and trust, trouble expressing one's emotions, and feelings of low self-worth. A dismissive-avoidant attachment style is characterized by a strong sense of avoidance resulting in a suppression of one's feelings, and a strong desire to avoid social rejection.

We predicted that rereading may be associated with all varieties of attachment insecurity, but especially with anxious-preoccupied and fearful-avoidance attachment styles. Those who desire intimacy yet feel anxious and unworthy may use their connections with familiar narrative worlds to meet their belongingness needs with minimal risk of rejection. This prediction is in line with previous findings that anxiously attached individuals socially engage more with TV characters than those who are securely or avoidantly attached (Cole & Leets, 1999).

Self-Esteem. The present work also investigated the relationship between the tendency to reread and self-esteem, as a proxy for unfulfilled belongingness needs (Leary et al., 1995; Tice & Baumeister, 2000). We predicted that the tendency to reread may be negatively associated with self-esteem for many of the same reasons that rereading may be associated with anxious-preoccupied and fearful-avoidant attachment styles. That is, reentering a familiar social world is a safe way of connecting, providing an especially attractive option for those who are concerned about rejection or see themselves as unlikeable or unworthy. Furthermore, this prediction is in line with the finding that thinking of symbolic relationships with others reduces the negative impact of low self-esteem on belongingness (Gardner et al., 2005). Those with low self-esteem may be especially likely to reengage with familiar narratives to maintain belongingness needs.

Other Variables

In addition to variables related to our main hypothesis, we also measured some other individual difference measures of interest.

Trait-Level Narrative Transportation (Transportability). We hypothesized that the tendency to reread would be associated with transportability into narratives. Those who are easily transported into narratives, and benefit from the social connections within them, are likely motivated to reread in order to revisit the social worlds with which they have connected. The opposite may also be true. Those who tend to reread books may be higher in transportability due to practice entering into familiar story worlds.

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Big Five Personality Traits. We sought to explore relationships between the tendency to reread, read, and the Big Five personality traits of extraversion, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism (John & Srivastava, 1999). While we did not make specific predictions regarding the relationships between reading variables and these traits, previous research on the personality correlates of media immersion found that neuroticism, extraversion, and openness to experience are positively related to immersive experiences (Weibel et al., 2010).

Empathy. Additionally, we were interested in exploring whether the tendency to reread would be associated with trait levels of empathy, as reading serves as practice mentally simulating oneself in others' shoes (Mar et al., 2006; Oatley & Gholamain, 1997). Those who frequently engage in this practice with fictional characters might also tend toward empathic engagement in their daily lives, and vice versa. (The causal link between reading frequency and empathic ability has shown mixed findings; see Kidd & Castano, 2013; Panero et al., 2016; Mumper & Gerrig, 2017). Individuals who are higher in trait empathy may be more transportable, thus gaining more benefits from reading narratives, and increasing incentives to reread. Again, the opposite may be true. Those who tend to reread may gain practice entering into familiar story worlds and engaging deeply with characters, taking on their perspectives. While we did not have specific predictions regarding each of the empathy subscales, we did expect that rereading and reading would both be associated with fantasy, a subscale similar to narrative transportation.

Method

Participants

Previous unpublished work from our lab suggests that the average correlation between similar measures of rereading and individual difference values is approximately $r = .17$, with the smallest significant correlations being as low as $r = .1$.[2] We aimed to power this study to detect an effect of $r = .1$ or smaller. G*Power software suggested a sample of 779 to detect a correlation of $r = .1$ with an alpha value of .05 and 80% power. We aimed for approximately this number, but discontinued data collection due to the national COVID-19 crisis that we felt may have altered individuals' social habits and responses.[3] Our final sample included a total of 671 participants, allowing us to detect correlations of $r = .11$ or smaller. Six hundred 71 participants (76.2% female and 23.8% male; 3 who did not report gender) participated on a volunteer basis through Research Match, an online platform created to connect academic researchers with volunteers located in the United States. Individuals completing this study were not compensated and may have been motivated to participate due to an intrinsic interest in research or the desire to help researchers acquire new knowledge and understanding. Of these participants, 89.7% were White or European American, 3.7% were Black or African American, 1.6% were Asian or Asian American, 1.9% were Hispanic or Latin American, and 3% selected "other." Three participants chose not to answer this question. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 88 years old ($M = 51.36$, $SD = 17.37$), and were generally highly educated (40% of participants indicated that they have a graduate school or professional degree, 43.4% indicated that they have a college degree, 12.4% indicated that they have completed some college, 3.6% indicated that they have completed high school, and .6% indicated that they did not complete high school).

All materials and study procedures were approved by both the institutional review board at a North American research university and a Research Match Liaison. Participants were free to skip any questions that they did not wish to answer. As such, some data points were missing. We have no reason to believe that participants who skipped questions differed in any meaningful way from those that did not.

Measures

The Tendency to Reread

The tendency to reread scale was created for the present study. While the scale, as calculated for analyses, included three items (presented in Table 1), participants were also asked to respond to the item "I often revisit books from my childhood." However, this scale item reduced the cohesiveness of the scale with an item-total correlation of $r = .57$. whereas the other items had an item-total correlation of $r = .80$ or above. With this item deleted, the Cronbach's alpha increased from $\alpha = .88$ to $\alpha = .92$. Thus, we chose to remove the item "I often revisit books from my childhood" resulting in a three-item tendency to reread scale.

The Tendency to Read

As the tendency to read scale was created to parallel the tendency to reread scale, we also assessed the item "In my childhood, I read a lot of books" along with three other items. Similar to the parallel item in the tendency to reread scale, this item also had a low item-total correlation relative to the rest of the items that make up the scale ($r = .37$ relative to other items ranging from $r = .60–.75$). The scale Cronbach's alpha increased from $\alpha = .77$ to $\alpha = .84$ after dropping this item from analyses. Based on these considerations, and as a means of creating a measurement of the tendency to read that is parallel to the tendency to reread scale, we removed the item "In my childhood, I read a lot of books," resulting in a three-item tendency to read scale (presented in Table 1).

Need for Predictability

We wanted to ensure that the tendency to reread was not merely a manifestation of a broader desire for predictability in all aspects of life. To examine this, need for predictability was measured using the eight-item predictability subscale of the Need for Cognitive Closure scale ($\alpha = .80$, measured on a 1–6 scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*; Kruglanski et al., 2013).

[2] Though the patterns of results were similar, this preliminary data is not included in this article due to reviewer's suggestions to revise the tendency to reread and tendency to read scales to be more parallel measures. Previous items generated were not ideal to test the unique effects of the tendencies to reread and read without confounds. Nonetheless, this preliminary work provides insight for the current power analysis.

[3] Data collection was discontinued on March 26, 2020 due to the COVID-19 outbreak. While this study only includes the assessment of trait-level variables that should not be as sensitive to situational effects as state-level variables, we feel that this is an important limitation to note, and discontinued data collection to prioritize validity.

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Table 1
The Tendency to Reread and the Tendency to Read

Tendency to Reread
1. How frequently do you tend to reread books (that is, read books again for your own pleasure once you have already read them before)?
2. How much do you like to reread books for your own pleasure?
3. I am someone who tends to reread books
Tendency to Read
4. How frequently do you tend to read books?
5. How much do you like to read books for your own pleasure?
6. I am someone who tends to read books

Note. Questions were answered on a scale of 1 to 7, Items 1 and 4 ranging from *never* to *always*, Items 2 and 5 ranging *not at all* to *very much*, and agreement/disagreement with Items 3 and 6 ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*.

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Example items include "I prefer to socialize with familiar friends because I know what to expect from them" and "I dislike unpredictable situations."

Current Satisfaction With Belonging

There is no scale that measures the degree to which people are currently satisfied (or not satisfied) with their general belongingness levels, so we used two different measures to assess this tendency. The 10-item Need to Belong Scale ($\alpha = .86$; Leary et al., 2013) includes items such as "I try hard not to do things that will make other people avoid or reject me" and "I need to feel that there are people I can turn to in times of need." Items are assessed using a 5-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. High scores on this scale suggest that belongingness needs are not currently being fully met. We also included a one-item general belongingness measure that we created for this study, which was measured on the same scale ("In general, I feel like I belong"). Low scores on this scale suggest that belongingness needs are not currently being met.

Attachment Style. Attachment style was assessed across all three samples using the four-item Relationship Questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Each item represents how much an individual aligns with one of four attachment styles on a 7-point scale ranging from *not at all like me* to *very much like me*. The four attachment prototypes presented include: secure, anxious-preoccupied, fearful-avoidant, and dismissive-avoidant. Specifically, this scale conveys one variety of attachment anxiety (anxious-preoccupied) and two varieties of attachment avoidance (dismissive-avoidant and fearful-avoidant), allowing for specificity in understanding individuals' relational experiences.

Self-Esteem. Self-esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale measured on a 1–7 scale with response options ranging from *not at all like me* to *very much like me* ($\alpha = .93$; Rosenberg, 1965).

Personality. Personality dimensions were assessed using either the Big Five Inventory (BFI: John & Srivastava, 1999) The BFI includes 44 items and five dimensions including extraversion versus introversion ($\alpha = .69$), agreeableness versus antagonism ($\alpha = .83$), conscientiousness versus lack of direction ($\alpha = .85$), neuroticism versus emotional stability ($\alpha = .88$), and openness versus closedness to experience ($\alpha = .84$). Items were assessed on a 1–7 scale ranging from *disagree strongly* to *agree strongly*.

Trait Narrative Transportation (Transportability). The amount that individuals tend to feel transported into narratives was measured on a 1–7 scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* ($\alpha = .84$; Mazzocco & Green, 2011). This scale measures typical immersion experiences when reading stories and includes items such as "I am mentally involved in stories while reading them."

Empathy. An individual difference measure of empathy containing several relevant subscales was also included (Interpersonal Reactivity Index; IRI: Davis, 1980). The subscales include perspective taking ($\alpha = .83$), empathic concern ($\alpha = .86$), fantasy ($\alpha = .82$), and personal distress ($\alpha = .83$). Perspective taking refers to spontaneously taking others' perspectives, empathic concern refers to feeling sympathy and concern for others, fantasy refers to imaginatively transporting oneself into fiction, and personal distress refers to feeling self-focused anxiety in social situations. It is important to note that there is some disagreement as to how empathy should be conceptualized. Some researchers do not consider fantasy and personal distress to be components of empathy (Baron-Cohen & Wheelwright, 2004; Cliffordson, 2001). However, we believe that they are relevant to studying the tendency to reread as it relates to narrative immersion and belongingness. All items were measured on a 1–5 scale ranging from *does not describe me well* to *describes me very well*.

Results

The tendencies to read and to reread were correlated, but not highly enough to suggest that they are the same construct correlated, $r(670) = .31$, $p < .001$. Contrary to our predictions, rereading was not correlated with need for predictability, $r(669) = .009$, $p = .81$. The tendency to read was negatively correlated with need for predictability, $r(669) = -.08$, $p = .04$. While we expected that the tendency to reread and need for predictability would be positively correlated, this finding demonstrates that that these constructs are not confounded and the role of need for predictability is not of concern in determining the effects of the tendency to reread.

All descriptive statistics and correlations are presented in Tables 2 through 5. For our primary analysis, we examined regression models investigating main and interactive effects of the tendency to reread and the tendency to read on these various outcome measures. We structured our analyses in this way in order to examine the effects of each variable controlling for one another, and to determine the effects of the tendency to reread narrative fiction on various outcome measures above and beyond the tendency to read narrative fiction more generally. Finally, in models where both the tendency to read and the tendency to reread significantly predict the outcome variable, note that both variables contribute unique variance. All predictor variables were standardized by creating *z* scores prior to analysis.

We did not predict interactions between reading and rereading on our dependent variables, and results generally revealed no significant interactions. Therefore, in the results reported below, interactions between the tendency to reread and the tendency to read predicting each outcome variable are not significant unless

Table 2
Correlations: Reading, Rereading, Need for Predictability, and Belonging

Variables	*N*	*M* (*SD*)	Reread	Read	Need for predictability	Need to belong	General belonging
Reread	671	2.57 (1.11)	1.0	.31**	.009	.04	−.09*
Read	671	4.26 (.85)	.31**	1.0	−.08	−.07	.12**
Need for predictability	670	4.35 (.83)	.009	−.08	1.0	.22**	−.19**
Need to belong	670	4.20 (1.09)	.04	−.07	.22***	1.0	−.13**
General belonging	666	4.85 (1.49)	.03	.12**	−.19**	−.13**	1.0

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

otherwise noted. Further information about all interactions is presented in the online supplemental material.

The Relationship of Rereading to Satisfaction With Belonging

We had two measures of satisfaction with belonging, the Need to Belong Scale and the one-item general belongingness measure. High levels of satisfaction with belonging would be evidenced by low scores on the need to belong measure and high scores on the one-item general belongingness measure. The first regression examined the Need to Belong Scale and found that, although the tendency to reread did not significantly predict the Need to Belong Scale, this effect was nearing significance, and in the expected direction ($B = .07$, 95% CI [−0.007, 0.17], $p = .07$, $f^2 = .004$). The tendency to read significantly predicted the need to belong in the opposite direction, such that the tendency to read was associated with reduced belongingness needs ($B = -.12$, 95% CI [−0.23, −0.04], $p = .008$, $f^2 = .01$). The second regression examined the general belongingness measure and found that the tendency to reread predicted reduced feelings of general belongingness ($B = -.13$, 95% CI [−0.32, −0.08], $p = .001$, $f^2 = .02$). The tendency to read was significant in the opposite direction, predicting higher levels of general belongingness ($B = .16$, 95% CI [0.10, 0.36], $p = .001$, $f^2 = .02$). Thus, in examining the relationships between satisfaction with belonging and reading and rereading, three out of the four analyses were significant (and the fourth was marginally significant) suggesting that reading is associated with high levels of satisfaction with belonging whereas rereading is associated with low levels of satisfaction with belonging.

The Relationship of Rereading to Insecurity About Relationships

Attachment

All correlations and descriptive statistics are presented in Table 3.

Secure Attachment. The tendency to reread did not significantly predict endorsement of a secure attachment style ($B = -.03$, 95% CI [−0.20, 0.10], $p = .53$) but the tendency to read did ($B = .23$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.40], $p = .007$, $f^2 = .01$). These findings support our hypotheses that the tendency to reread is not related to a secure attachment style.

Anxious-Preoccupied Attachment. As hypothesized, the tendency to reread significantly predicted endorsement of an anxious-preoccupied attachment style ($B = .11$, 95% CI [0.05, 0.33], $p = .007$, $f^2 = .01$) and the tendency to read predicted reduced endorsement ($B = -.10$, 95% CI [0.33, 0.02], $p = .03$, $f^2 = .008$).

Fearful-Avoidant Attachment. As hypothesized, the tendency to reread predicted endorsement of a fearful-avoidant attachment style ($B = .09$, 95% CI [0.2, 0.35], $p = .03$) and a significant effect of the tendency to read predicting reduced endorsement of a fearful-avoidant attachment style ($B = -.09$, 95% CI [−0.37, −0.005], $p = .04$).

Dismissive-Avoidant Attachment. Neither the tendency to reread nor or the tendency to read predicted endorsement of a dismissive-avoidant attachment style (reread: $B = -.03$, 95% CI [−0.21, 0.89], $p = .42$; $B = .06$, 95% CI [−0.05, 0.28], $p = .17$). We did not predict an association between rereading and dismissive-avoidance.

Table 3
Correlations: Rereading, Reading, and Insecurity About Relationships

Variables	*N*	*M* (*SD*)	Reread	Read	Self-esteem	Secure	Anx-preocc	Fear-avoid	Dismiss-avoid
Reread	671	2.71(1.21)	1.0	.31**	−.12**	.01	.08*	.07	−.02
Read	671	4.36 (.76)	.31**	1.0	.12**	−.02	−.08	−.03	.41
Self-esteem	671	5.18 (1.11)	−.12**	.12**	1.0	.45**	−.32**	−.48**	−.03
Secure	669	4.19(.93)	.01	.10*	.45**	1.0	−.14**	−.52**	−.24**
Anx-preocc	668	2.82 (1.75)	.08*	−.08	−.32**	−.14**	1.0	.29**	−.11**
Fear-avoid	667	3.40 (2.07)	.07	−.03	−.48**	−.52**	.29**	1.0	.23**
Dismiss-avoid	669	4.16 (1.84)	−.02	.41	−.03	−.24**	−.11**	.23**	1.0

Note. Anx-preocc = anxious-preoccupied attachment; Fear-avoid = fearful-avoidant attachment; Dismiss-avoid = dismissive-avoidant attachment.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

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Table 4
Correlations: Rereading, Reading, and the Big 5 Personality Traits

Variables	*N*	*M* (*SD*)	Reread	Read	Extra.	Agree.	Neurot.	Consc.	Open.
Reread	671	2.57(1.11)	1.0	.31**	−.004	−.05	.11**	−.11**	.19**
Read	671	4.27 (.85)	.31**	1.0	.08*	.05	−.06	.11**	.27***
Extra.	670	4.16 (.97)	−.004	.08*	1.0	.27**	−.31**	.25**	.30**
Agree.	670	5.23 (.93)	−.05	.05	.27**	1.0	−.40**	.32**	.17**
Neurot.	670	3.65 (1.25)	.11**	−.06	−.31**	−.40**	1.0	−.44**	−.16**
Consc.	670	5.26 (.97)	−.11**	.11**	.25**	.32**	−.44**	1.0	.15**
Open.	670	5.05 (.94)	.19**	.23**	.30**	.17**	−.16**	.15**	1.0

Note. Extra. = extraversion; Agree. = agreeableness; Neurot. = neuroticism; Consc. = conscientiousness; Open. = openness to experience.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

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Self-Esteem

As hypothesized, the tendency to reread ($B = -.17$, 95% CI [−0.31, −0.11], $p < .001$, $f^2 = .03$) predicted lower self-esteem while and the tendency to read predicted higher self-esteem scores ($B = .18$, 95% CI [0.12, 0.33], $p < .001$, $f^2 = .02$).

The Relationship of Rereading to Other Individual Difference Variables

Personality

All descriptive statistics and simple correlations are presented in Table 4.

Extraversion. The tendency to reread did not significantly predict extraversion, but the tendency to read did (reread: $B = -.04$, 95% CI [−0.12, 0.04], $p = .35$, read: $B = .12$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.21], $p = .007$, $f^2 = .01$).

Neuroticism. The tendency to reread predicted higher neuroticism scores ($B = .15$, 95% CI [0.08, 0.28], $p < .001$, $f^2 = .02$), while the tendency to read predicted lower neuroticism scores ($B = -.04$, 95% CI [−0.26, 0.04], $p = .007$, $f^2 = .01$).

Agreeableness. The tendency to reread trended toward predicting lower agreeableness scores ($B = -.08$, 95% CI [−0.15, 0.001], $p = .05$, $f^2 = .005$), while the tendency to read predicted higher agreeableness scores ($B = .1$, 95% CI [0.007, 0.17], $p = .03$, $f^2 = .007$).

Openness to Experience. Both the tendency to reread and the tendency to read predicted openness to experience, and predicted unique variance as both were significant predictors when simultaneously entered in the regression model (reread: $B = .11$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.18], $p = .03$, $f^2 = .01$; read: $B = .27$, 95% CI [0.17, 0.33], $p < .001$, $f^2 = .05$).

Conscientiousness. The tendency to reread predicted lower levels of conscientiousness ($B = -.16$, 95% CI [−0.24, −0.08], $p < .001$, $f^2 = .02$), while the tendency to read predicted higher levels of conscientiousness ($B = .18$, 95% CI [0.09, 0.26], $p < .001$, $f^2 = .02$).

Transportability

As hypothesized, the tendency to reread ($B = .22$, 95% CI [0.16, 0.32], $p < .001$, $f^2 = .04$) and the tendency to read ($B = .31$, 95% CI [0.26, 0.43], $p < .001$, $f^2 = .07$) both significantly predicted transportability. This finding suggests that both the tendency to read and the tendency to reread independently relate to immersion while reading, and predict unique variance as both were significant predictors when simultaneously entered in the regression model

Empathy

All descriptive statistics and simple correlations are presented in Table 5.

Empathic Concern. The tendency to reread did not significantly predict empathic concern ($B = .04$, 95% CI [−0.03, 0.09], $p = .29$) but the tendency to read did ($B = .12$, 95% CI [.02, 0.15], $p = .008$, $f^2 = .01$). This provides some evidence that the tendency to read, but not the tendency to reread, is associated with experiencing other-oriented feelings of sympathy and concern.

Perspective Taking. Relatedly, the tendency to reread did not significantly predict perspective taking ($B = .04$, 95% CI [−0.03, 0.08], $p = .39$), but the tendency to read did ($B = .13$, 95% CI

Table 5
Correlations: Rereading, Reading, the IRI and Transportation

Variables	*N*	*M* (*SD*)	Rereading	Reading	Empathic concern	Distress	Perspective taking	Fantasy	Transportation
Reread	671	2.57 (1.11)	1.0	.31**	.08*	.05	.07	.29**	.32**
Read	671	4.27 (.85)	.31**	1.0	.12**	−.09*	.12**	.17**	.39**
Empathic concern	671	3.97 (.69)	.08*	.12**	1.0	.09	.47**	.44**	.32**
Distress	671	2.35 (.73)	.05	−.09*	.09*	1.0	−.08	.27**	.11**
Perspective taking	671	3.52 (.69)	.07	.12**	.47**	−.08	1.0	.33**	.24**
Fantasy	671	3.25 (.81)	.29**	.17**	.44**	.27**	.33**	1.0	.68**
Transportation	670	5.67 (1.10)	.32**	.39**	.32**	.11**	.24**	.68**	1.0

Note. IRI = Interpersonal Reactivity Index.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

[0.03, 0.15], $p = .004$ $f^2 = .01$). This finding indicated that only the tendency to read is associated with spontaneously taking others' perspectives. These two subscales—empathic concern and perspective taking—are the components of empathy that are most characteristic and representative across conceptualizations of empathy. These findings are counter to our exploratory hypothesis that rereading would predict empathy.

Personal Distress. Rereading predicted higher levels of personal distress whereas reading predicted lower levels of distress (reread: $B = .09$, 95% CI [0.008, 0.12], $p = .03$, $f^2 = .006$, read: $B = -.14$, 95% CI [−0.18, −0.05], $p = .002$, $f^2 = .01$). While this was not hypothesized, it is unsurprising that personal distress is related the tendency to reread, as we hypothesized that this tendency should be related to negative emotionality.

Fantasy. As hypothesized, both the tendency to reread and the tendency to read predicted the fantasy subscale of the trait empathy measure (reread: $B = .26$, 95% CI [0.15, 0.27], $p < .001$, $f^2 = .08$; read: $B = .13$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.17], $p = .004$, $f^2 = .01$). The interaction between the two measures predicting fantasy was also significant.[4] This indicates that both reading and rereading are related to the tendency to become involved in stories and the characters (and sometimes collectives) present within them.

Discussion

This research is among the first to examine the common phenomenon of the tendency to reread books. We predicted that the tendency to reread provides an opportunity to fulfill otherwise unmet belongingness needs by socially connecting with familiar characters. In order to examine that hypothesis, we generated a scale that measures the tendency to reread, explored how the tendency to reread is similar and different from the tendency to read more generally, and examined which individual differences and effects are associated with the unique effect of the tendency to reread controlling for the tendency to read.

Our findings supported our hypothesis that the tendency to reread is a unique construct. The tendency to reread scale was statistically reliable and related to, but distinct from, reading tendencies. In addition, the tendency to reread was not significantly correlated with the need for predictability. While we expected that these measures would be positively correlated, a measure of need for predictability was mostly included to rule out concerns that a tendency to reread merely reflects a desire for familiarity in all ways, not unique to reading. This finding demonstrates that that these constructs are not confounded, suggesting that the tendency to reread measure functions as intended.

Rereading and Satisfaction With Belonging

We predicted that the tendency to reread (but not the tendency to read) would be associated with a lack of belonging. We had two measures of satisfaction with belonging: the Need to Belong Scale, which measures the motivation to belong, and a measure of general belongingness, which measures how much an individual feels like they belong, or how much their need to belong is satisfied. The tendency to reread was marginally significantly related to the Need to Belong Scale and was significantly negatively related to general belongingness. These scores reflect a feeling of significant general belongingness decrement and a marginally significant desire to fulfill an unmet meet to belong. The tendency to read was negatively significantly related to the need to belong and positively related to general belongingness suggesting both feelings of general belongingness and possible need satiation. Thus, overall, our results suggest that the tendency to read is associated with high satisfaction with belonging whereas the tendency to reread is associated with low satisfaction with belonging. This may indicate that the tendency to read and the tendency to reread, which are associated with different personality characteristics, are also associated with different levels of belongingness decrements and satisfaction. However additional experimental research is required to better understand how the process of belongingness insufficiency and satiation unfold.

Rereading and Insecurity About Relationships

We predicted that rereading would be associated with anxious-preoccupied and fearful-avoidant attachment styles, which are associated with a desire for intimacy, low self-worth, and a fear of abandonment or social rejection. Our findings provided support for these predictions. We found that the tendency to reread predicted both anxious-preoccupied and fearful-avoidance scores, as well as low self-esteem, suggesting that people who do not receive social benefits from real relationships may reread in order to fulfill their social needs in a more comfortable way. The tendency to reread was not associated with secure attachment or dismissive-avoidance. The tendency to read was associated with secure attachment and high self-esteem, and had negative associations with anxious-preoccupied and fearful-avoidant attachment styles. This pattern of results suggests that the tendency to reread and the tendency to read may be associated with different motivations, and people may engage in these behaviors for different reasons. Neither the tendency to reread nor the tendency to read was associated with dismissive avoidance.

Rereading and Personality

We examined the relationships between the tendency to reread and the tendency to read controlling for one another predicting the Big Five personality traits. The tendency to reread was associated with openness to experience and neuroticism and negatively associated with extraversion and agreeableness, and conscientiousness. These findings suggest that the tendency to reread is associated with a curious and creative but perhaps more solitary personality. Neuroticism, low extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness paint a portrait of anxiety, negative feelings, and emotional instability, as well as low levels of socialization, friendliness, and warmth. The tendency to read was associated with extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, and conscientiousness. The degree to which individuals tend to read, more generally, is associated with an outgoing, kind, and cooperative personality, openness to new ideas and creativity, as well as the presence of a high degree of self-discipline. These findings demonstrate both commonalities and contrasts between the personality traits associated with the tendency to reread versus the tendency to read.

[4] A detailed description of this pattern is described in the online supplemental material.

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In line with previous research, tendencies to read and to reread were both associated with openness to experience. Openness appears to be related to feeling immersed in a story world (as suggested by Kuijpers et al., 2019). Although rereading was associated with transportability, the relationship between the tendency to reread and openness to experience was smaller than that of the relationship between the tendency to read and openness to experience. Furthermore, as tendencies to read and to reread were simultaneously entered into a regression predicting openness to experience, each predicted unique variance. One possibility is that each variable is associated with separate aspects of openness to experience. As a personality dimension, openness to experience includes facets including curiosity, being imaginative, being artistic, having wide interests, excitability, and having unconventional values (John & Srivastava, 1999). While item-level analyses are beyond the scope of this investigation, each Big Five personality dimension includes underlying facets that may explain differences in variance accounted for in the analyses presented.

Rereading and Empathy

The tendency to reread significantly predicted the fantasy and personal distress subscales of the IRI (Davis, 1980), but did not predict empathic concern or perspective taking (which, as discussed, are arguably more traditional conceptualizations of empathy). While we hypothesized that the tendency to reread may be associated with these subscales, we did not have specific predictions aside from the expectation that fantasy (which is closely related to narrative transportation) would be related to the tendency to reread. However, based on our broader hypotheses, it is also fitting that the tendency to reread was associated with personal distress. These findings indicate that those who tend to reread books imaginatively transport themselves into stories and experience self-focused distress in social situations, but the tendency to reread is not related to empathy in the traditional sense (empathic concern or perspective taking).

The tendency to read significantly predicted empathic concern, perspective taking, fantasy, and reduced levels of personal distress. These results are consistent with prior work demonstrating a link between fiction reading and empathy (e.g., Mumper & Gerrig, 2017). Taken together, these findings suggest that rereading may not be a strong additional contributor to the effects of the general tendency to read on empathy.

In addition, these findings demonstrate an interesting interactive effect of the tendency to reread and the tendency to read on fantasy. Rereading predicted fantasy among participants who reported a relatively low (1 standard deviation below the mean), and a relatively high (1 standard deviation above the mean) tendency to reread. However, of note, the effect size of the relationship between rereading and fantasy was larger among individuals who report a relatively high tendency to read ($f^2 = .06$) versus a relatively low tendency to read ($f^2 = .01$). These individuals, who tend to score relatively high on both reading and rereading, are likely to feel especially transported into stories. These findings support our exploratory hypothesis that higher levels of rereading may be associated with greater fantasy as individuals who reread may have more practice immersing themselves in familiar characters' lives and feelings.

Rereading and Narrative Transportation

Finally, as we hypothesized and in line with the significant association between both the tendency to reread and the tendency to read with fantasy, both reading variables independently predicted transportability, controlling for one another. As both the tendency to read and the tendency to reread were entered into a regression analysis predicting transportability, both significantly predicted unique variance. Rereaders were more transportable even when controlling for reading tendencies more generally.

Fulfilling Belongingness Needs

Our findings support the prediction that the tendency to reread is a construct that is unique from the tendency to read, and from generally seeking predictable experiences. We find that the tendency to reread is related to immersion in social worlds, and is most common among people who are motivated to form social connections yet are insecure about their worth in relationships. This is consistent with a view of human beings as flexible and creative in the ways that they fill belongingness needs (Gabriel et al., 2016). Belongingness is critical for maintaining well-being (Ainsworth et al., 2014; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Berkman, 1995; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008). When belongingness needs go unfulfilled, individuals are unable to thrive, and face mental and physical health declines (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Friedman & Kern, 2014). Our research suggests that people who want connections but are worried about rejection can find creative ways to feel connected.

Limitations and Future Directions

While our results support the majority of our hypotheses, our results only partially supported the idea that the tendency to reread is associated with empathy. The tendency to reread marginally predicted scores on the fantasy and personal distress subscales of the trait empathy scale, but we did not find support for the idea that rereading was associated with perspective taking or empathic concern. As discussed throughout, while fantasy and distress are can certainly be related to empathy, additional research suggests that the core aspects of empathy are reflected in measures of empathic concern and perspective taking.

One limitation of the present research is that, due to the correlational nature of the individual difference measures across studies, we cannot infer causality. That is, we cannot infer that people repeatedly engage with narratives because they possess certain individual differences, or that they possess such characteristics because of their engagement with narratives. However, the preponderance of evidence illustrating the need to belong as a powerful motivational force, and the strong foundation of literature implicating narrative engagement as a social experience, lend credence to our suggestions regarding causality. In addition, the associations reported may be more nuanced than we have observed here. Future investigations may benefit from the inclusion of additional variables that could moderate associations between the tendency to reread and personality measures. In line with a focus on belongingness, such additional variables could include measures capturing how much opportunity for non-narrative social engagement people have in their lives, how socially fulfilled people feel, and so on.

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Our assumption here was that certain personality traits create chronic types of needs that can be temporarily satisfied by reading or rereading. Thus, when positive associations are observed, these results can be interpreted as evidence that higher needs are associated with more of a certain behavior. However, an alternative interpretation is possible. If the association is negative, then it can be argued that the needs have been satiated by engaging in the behavior. Cross-sectional studies like the one presented here cannot easily disentangle these possibilities. Thus, experimental work that primes certain types of needs or uses pretest/posttest designs to directly assess need satisfaction is an important next step to provide further tests of the theory.

In addition to the effects of stable personality variables, rereading may also be affected by situations or contexts. The current data was collected immediately before the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States; future research might examine how reading and rereading habits are changed by the factors such as social distancing or other large-scale social events. Although our sample size was somewhat smaller than originally intended due to stopping data collection at the start of the pandemic shutdowns, we believe that the study is still well-powered to detect the relevant effects.

Furthermore, rereading may not always be motivated by a lack of belonging or dissatisfaction with belonging; individuals may have other goals or reasons for revisiting beloved stories. It may be that some individuals reread simply because of the pleasure of revisiting their "fictional friends," even when they have fulfilling other relationships in their lives. Future research might examine the role of these parasocial relationships in greater depth.

Rereading of more literary texts may provide an opportunity to find deeper meanings in a text or may allow a fuller appreciation of the aesthetic properties of the text (e.g., Kuijpers & Hakemulder, 2018). For example, a reader may return to a text because they appreciate the author's skillful use of language. This type of rereading may be distinct from the social motivations we have explored in the current paper, but is also an exciting topic for further study.

Our work relied on self-reports of reading and rereading behavior, rather than more direct measurements of individuals' reading tendencies or experiences. Although it is difficult to gather behavioral data on reading experiences that may happen over a long period of time (e.g., months or years may pass between the time an individual reads a book and then rereads it), future research might consider methods such as daily diary studies or other longitudinal research to examine these questions. Additionally, although our studies included a range of ages and ethnicities, we used a convenience samples rather than a representative one. Thus, the generalizability of these effects remains to be determined.

Future research may also examine the utility of rewatching narratives (in addition to rereading).[5] A portion of the existing literature that demonstrates the social function of narratives involves connections to groups and characters in TV shows (Derrick et al., 2009; Gardner & Knowles, 2008; Greenwood, 2008). However, we suspect that reviewing is more mindless and frequent than rereading. For example, one way that individuals rewatch TV shows is through reruns that they do not necessarily choose to play. Thus, rewatching requires less effort and direct choice.

Additionally, future research should explore the tendency to reread among adolescents, possibly investigating whether the tendency to reread is associated with the same personality characteristics across age groups. For example, some age groups may be more likely to reread for comprehension or to find new meanings rather than to meet social goals. Additional work may also explore motivations for rereading among both adults and adolescents in order to form a more nuanced and complete understanding of when and why individuals reread.

Finally, future work may also explore the tendency to reread certain genres of narratives. For example, the personalities of those who tend to revisit romance narratives may differ from the personalities of those who tend to revisit crime narratives, and individual people may have different rereading tendencies across genres. Rereading provides predictable social connection, but may provide other genre-dependent benefits. Rereading may serve to reinforce beliefs about the world in a certain domain. For example, rereading romance novels in which characters live happily ever after may reinforce the belief that such relational dynamics are possible and occur in real life. This may provide comfort, hope, or a sense of satiation to individuals who seek romantic experiences. The same may be true for individuals who tend to reread crime dramas in which safety and order is restored. The influence of the role of genre choice in rereading was not explored in the present work, but may provide additional information about how reading habits and personality variables are related, and would be a meaningful contribution to future research on personality and reading behavior.

Conclusion

Whether reading a narrative for the first time, or traveling a well-worn path into a familiar story, narratives are fundamental to human communication and expression. We present data supporting the idea that the tendency to reread is unique from the tendency to read, that the tendency to reread is associated with easily become engaged with fiction and connected to the social worlds presented in such narratives, and that the tendency to reread may be associated with a desire for social bonds and insecurities about real relationships. Of course, other factors can also influence the decision to reread, and readers may have a variety of imaginative experiences while rereading. However, the current study highlights one important motivation for rereading, and sheds light on the types of people who may be most likely to reread.

[5] Indeed, our preliminary work on this topic suggests that rewatching shows a different pattern of correlations with personality variables than rereading.

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