

Towards a more complex understanding of our tools and hypotheses

The current issue of SSOL 11.1 is characterized by a certain maturation of the field of the scientific study of literature. Early progress in a new area of inquiry involves the proposition of basic hypotheses and initial findings. These are then followed by the development of measurement tools, properly validated and employed to establish some basic facts in a field. Maturation is characterized by the deepening of inquiry into the questions and most importantly the tools that have been used to establish some basic ideas. In the current edition, Kuiken, Douglas, and Kuijpers revisit an important tool – the Absorption-Like States Questionnaire (ASQ) – with an investigation into how its discernable components function in a predictive role and in relation to other, related measurement tools. The outcome of this study is a more complex understanding of how literary reading is actually manifested. The density and detail of this study remind us all of how multifaceted literary reading actually is and is a welcome, if complex, description of the object of empirical literary studies. The second paper in this edition by Kosch, Stocker, Schwabe and Boomgaarden explores the question of the differences between digital and print reading of literary texts. While this has been explored before, the usage of an in-depth qualitative approach provides new evidence with which to evaluate these modalities. The results present a nuanced understanding of how readers are using these modalities in their decisions about how and what to read in each format. The third paper in this collection from Wimmer, Currie, Friend and Fergusson, explores a widely held hypothesis about the value of literary reading that narrative may have a positive effect on the development of social and moral cognition. In a study comparing among narrative fiction, non-fiction narrative and expository text, no differences were found between the different genres. While this is not a definitive study, it does raise questions about this basic hypothesis in the field. The final paper in this edition by Kuijpers, like the first paper presented here, explores the internal structure of the Story World Absorption Scale. In four different studies and using structural equation modelling, the current analysis shows the central role of attention. Taken together, the current set of papers help us move forward in deepening our understanding of the tools we use and the assumptions we make in our research. I have no doubt you will enjoy reading these papers as much as I have done.

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