

Individual differences in reading experiences: The roles of mental imagery and fantasy

Marloes Mak

Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands

Roel M. Willems

Radboud University, Nijmegen, Netherlands

Abstract

It is well established that readers form mental images when reading a narrative. The influence of mental imagery on the way people experience stories is however still unclear. In two experiments reported here, participants received instructions aimed at encouraging or discouraging mental imagery before reading literary short stories. After reading, participants answered questions about their reading experiences. The results from the first experiment suggested an important role of mental imagery in determining reading experiences. However, the results from the second experiment showed that individual trait differences in how imaginative participants are predicted reading experiences much better than guided mental imagery. Moreover, the role of mental imagery did not extend to aspects of the reading experience other than mental imagery. The implications of these results for the relationship between mental imagery and reading experiences are discussed.