



Information Systems Division
High-Density Paper Session:
“Bias, Tech, and Social Processes”

Character-Driven Insights: How Transitional and Role Model Characters in Entertainment-Education Narratives Influence Attitudes Toward Immigrants

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Entertainment-Education Narratives and prejudice reduction

Entertainment-Education Narratives (EEN) are storytelling formats that aim to engage audiences emotionally while simultaneously delivering educational or pro-social messages intended to improve attitudes toward immigrants (Igartua et al., 2024).

Reducing Prejudice Through Narratives

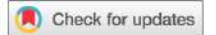
An Examination of the Mechanisms of Vicarious Intergroup Contact

Emily Moyer-Gusé,¹ Katherine R. Dale,² and Michelle Ortiz³




(2019)

MEDIA PSYCHOLOGY
2024, VOL. 27, NO. 2, 211–242
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2023.2235574>

 **Routledge**
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The Effect of Similarity to a Transitional Role Model of an Entertainment–Education Narrative Designed to Improve Attitudes Toward Immigrants: Evidence from Three European Countries

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^aSociology and Communication, University of Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain; ^bPsychology, University Isabel I, Burgos, Spain

(2024)

Entertainment-education effectively reduces prejudice

Sohad Murrar¹ and Markus Brauer¹

(2018)

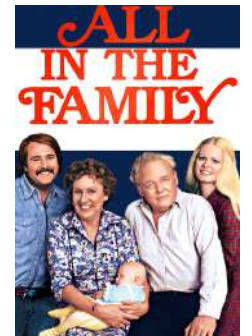
First knowledge gap

Type of characters in EE narratives

Which character type is most successful in driving narrative impact?

Characters in EEN narratives serve specific **persuasive functions**:

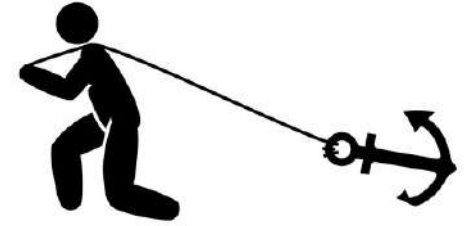
- **Positive role model**: They are **aspirational figures**, demonstrating the positive outcomes of adopting the recommended practices. They are often central to the narrative, **serving as inspiration for other characters and for the audience**.
- **Transitional character**: This “... is one whose behavior **evolves** over the course of a story in keeping with the underlying message the program aims to get across” (Moyer-Gusé et al., 2019, p. 186). Although they initially display problematic attitudes or behavior, **they** then **change** as the plot progresses according to the persuasive objective of the message.
- **Negative role model**: This character exhibits the **undesirable behaviors or attitudes** (e.g., an openly racist character) that the E-E intervention seeks to discourage (see, *Archie Bunker Effect* and the impact of “All in the Family”; Vidmar & Rokeach, 1974).



Second knowledge gap

Modern Racism as a moderating variable

Pre-existing view acts as an **anchor**, which represents a **person's preferred position on an issue**.



- **Modern racism** (McConahay, 1986) refers to subtle forms of prejudice, where individuals reject overt racism but still hold negative views of marginalized groups, often justified through non-racial arguments (e.g., **cultural or economic threats**).
- In the context of narratives about stigmatized groups, and drawing on **Social Judgment Theory** (Dal Cine et al., 2024), we assume that **pre-existing attitudes** shape how people **identify with narrative characters**:
 - **Low modern racism** → Higher identification with **positive role models** (shared inclusive views); lower with **transitional characters** (due to their past prejudice).
 - **High modern racism** → Lower identification with **both** characters, as their pro-immigrant stance creates psychological distance and resistance.

Third knowledge gap

Identification and psychological insight as mediating mechanisms

Psychological insight is a sudden moment of cognitive **illumination** or **revelation** triggered by an inspiring narrative. A shift in understanding where the viewer grasps something they hadn't perceived in the same way before (Igartua, Oliver et al., 2025). It is a **novel mechanism** in the study of narrative persuasion, EE and inspiring media.



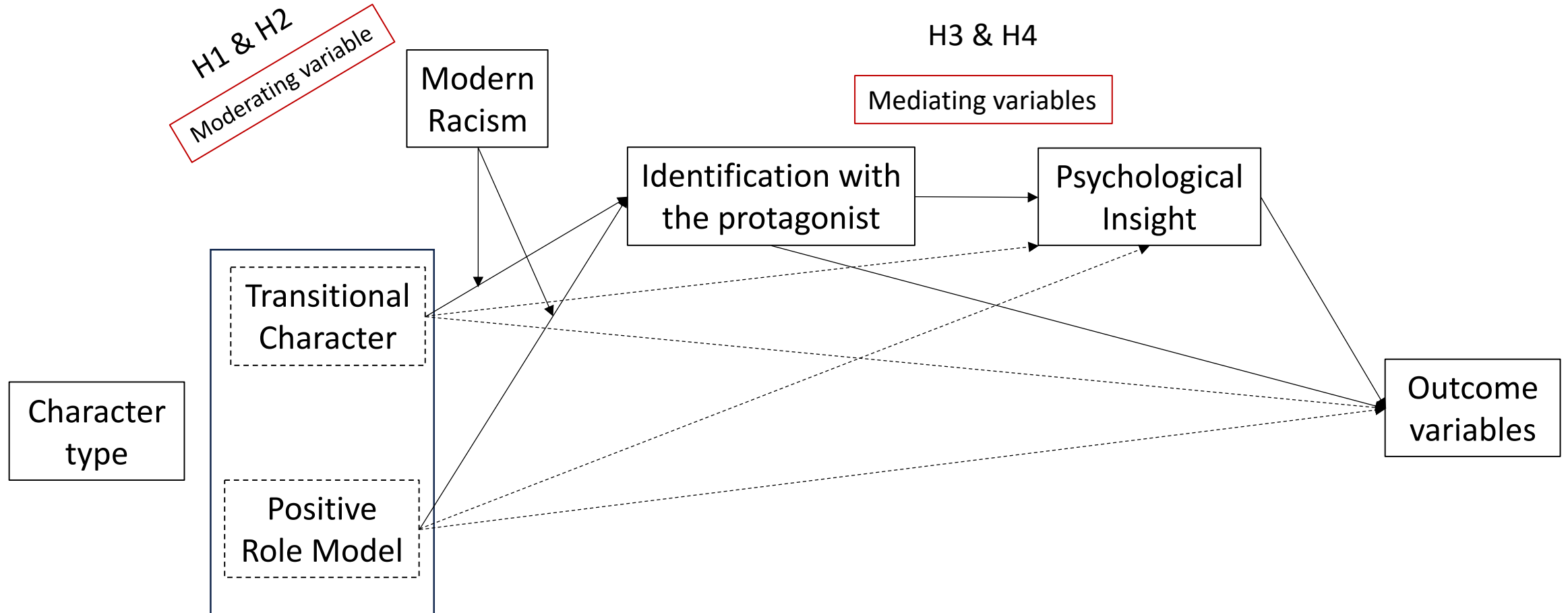
Identification with the protagonist is key to triggering **psychological insight**:

- Viewers may identify with a **positive role model**, an idealized figure who consistently demonstrates compassion when facing complex social issues, inspiring moments of cognitive clarity or insight that reshape attitudes.
- Alternatively, they may connect with a **transitional character**, whose narrative arc portrays change as an inspiring and achievable journey.

In both cases, identification enables a transformative realization that can reshape attitudes.

Igartua, J. J., Oliver, M. B., González-Vázquez, A., Piñeiro-Naval, V., Marcos-Ramos, M., & Rodríguez-Contreras, L. (2025). Psychological insight as an effect of inspiring narratives: validating the psychological insight self-report scale. *Human Communication Research*, 51(2), 93-111.

Hypothesized conditional-indirect effects model



Outcome variables: liking (participants' overall evaluation of the video), message sharing intention, attitude towards immigrants, and money allocation to an immigrant aid association.

Method: Main experiment¹ with EE audiovisual narratives

- **Participants** ($N = 927$)

- Age: 18-76 years ($M = 45.36$ years; $SD = 13.57$).
- Gender: 50.7% female, 49.2% male, and 0.1% non-binary or third gender.
- QUALTRICS participants: quotas based on gender, age, and education.
- Only people born in Spain and with Spanish parents were selected.

- **Design:**

- Online experiment with 3 x 3 between-subjects factorial design.
- IV1: type of character (transitional character, positive role model, control group).
- IV2: type of anti-immigration rumor (public insecurity, labor market, migration and social welfare).
- Questionnaire with pre-test measures (e.g., modern racism), EE video and post-test measures (identification, insight, attitudes towards immigrants, etc.).

- **Quality checks** with QUALTRICS (e.g., watching the full video, attention check question) and memory test for narrative relevant details.

Summary plot
(rumor “public insecurity”)

Antonio, a shopkeeper, has two unsettling encounters: a customer falsely accuses him of theft, and a young man wrongly accuses him of trying to steal his wallet. These incidents leave Antonio disheartened, leading him to reflect on how **people quickly jump to negative conclusions**. Later, at a bar, after the bartender makes a prejudiced comment about immigrants, Antonio argues with his friend, recounting a story of an immigrant who helped the police, challenging their biases and hasty judgments.



¹ A **pilot study** (with EE written narratives) was conducted to refine the experimental materials and procedures; although its results are not reported here, full details are available in the **OSF repository**.

Experimental Stimuli

- The EE audiovisual narratives were **short stories** (4:22 to 4:59 minutes, 3 scenes) featuring a **protagonist**—Antonio, **a middle-aged Spanish citizen**.
- **Critical incident:** The theme of immigration is introduced at the end of the narrative, when the protagonist hears a negative rumor against immigration (scene 3 in the bar).
- **Dialogue:** A conversation with a friend serves to **illuminate Antonio's perspective on immigration**, revealing his personal stance on the issue.

The **key difference across conditions** lies in how Antonio reacts to that rumor:

- **Positive Role Model:** Antonio calmly rejects the rumor and shares inclusive views, supported by personal stories.
- **Transitional Character:** Antonio acknowledges that he once believed the rumor but explains how his perspective changed by sharing personal stories that challenged his former beliefs.
- **Control:** Antonio is interrupted by a phone call before responding, so his opinion remains unknown.



Scene 1



Scene 2



Scene 3



Results: Modern racism as a moderator in the relationship between character type and identification with the protagonist

Moderation analysis using PROCESS (Model 1) (H1 & H2)

Outcome variable: Identification with the protagonist				
Model summary: $R^2 = .12, p < .001$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Constant	3.84	0.12	29.99	<.001
Transitional character vs. control (X1)	0.43	0.18	2.39	.016
Positive role model vs. control (X2)	0.71	0.18	3.96	<.001
Modern racism (MR)	-0.04	0.03	-1.55	.119
Interaction X1 × MR	-0.16	0.04	-3.86	<.001
Interaction X2 × MR	-0.19	0.04	-4.47	<.001

```
PROCESS Y = IDENT  
/X = IV1R  
/W = MR  
/MCX = 1  
/MODEL = 1  
/PLOT = 1  
/BOOT = 0  
/MATRICES = 1.
```

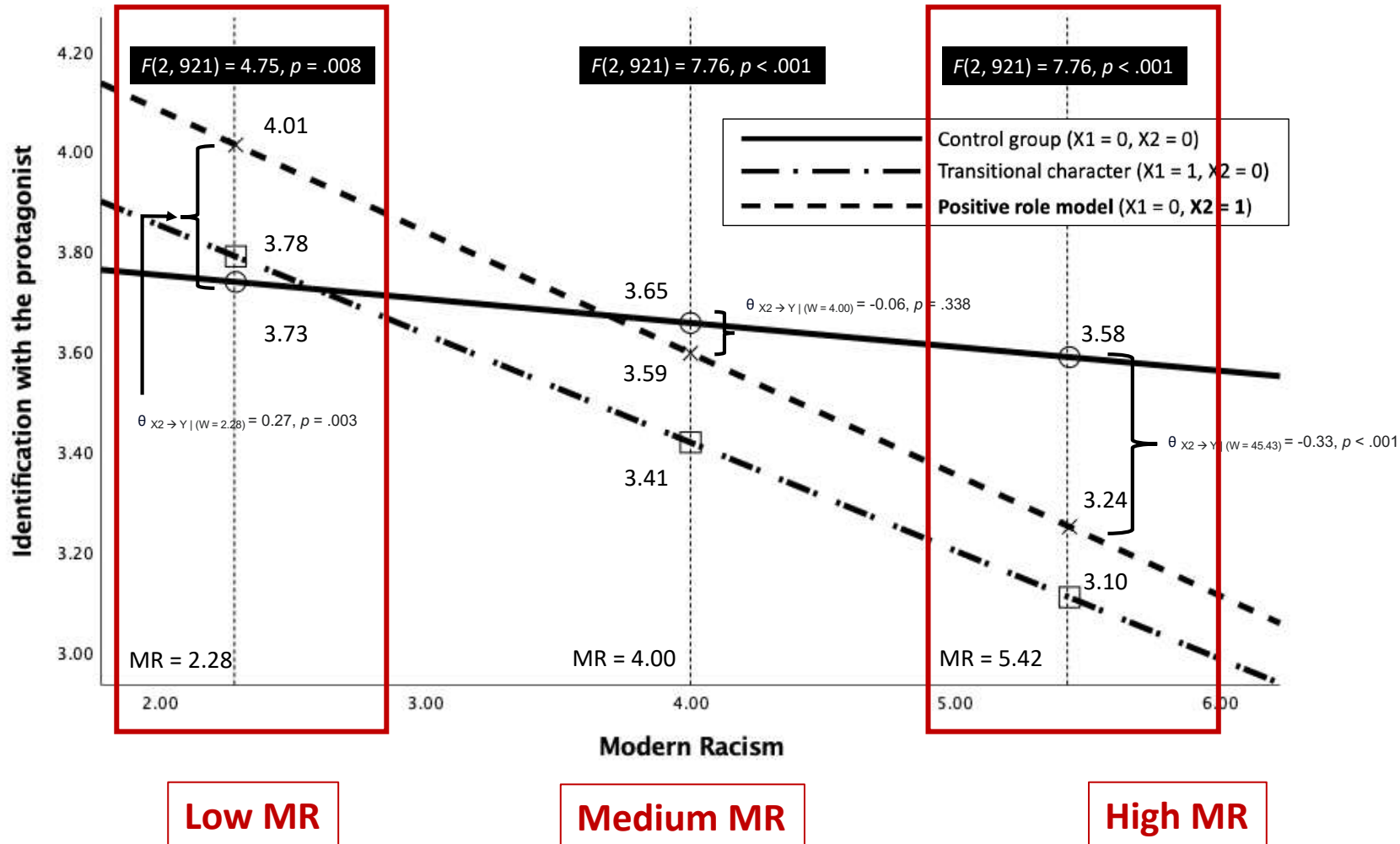
The experimental condition is a **multicategorical variable** with three values: 1 = control group, 2 = transitional character, and 3 = positive role model. X1 and X2 are dummy-coded variables created using **indicator coding**, with the control group as the reference category. In X1, 0 = control group and 1 = transitional character; in X2, 0 = control group and 1 = positive role model. **Modern racism (MR)** is a composite measure with values from 1 (low) to 7 (high).

Pearsons' correlation between **modern racism and identification with the protagonist** by experimental condition:

- Control: $r(307) = -.09, p = .051$
- TC: $r(307) = -.34, p < .001$
- PRM: $r(307) = -.42, p < .001$

Moderating role of participants' levels of modern racism (H1)

Positive role model versus Control group



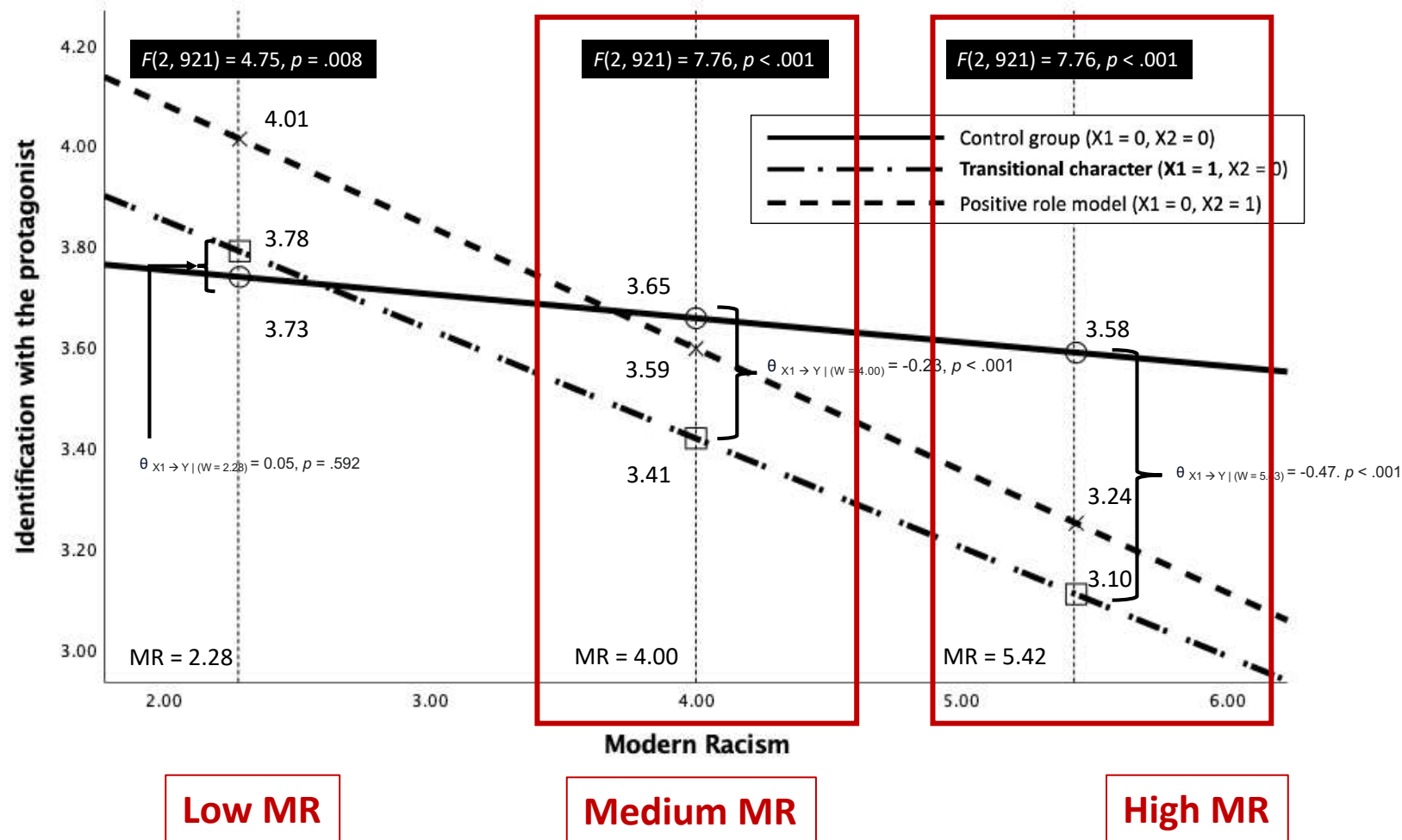
Conditional effects

Participants with **low** levels of **modern racism** showed **greater identification** with the protagonist in the EE narrative featuring a **positive role model** compared to the control group narrative.

Participants with **high** levels of **modern racism** showed **lower identification** with the **positive role model** compared to the protagonist of the control group narrative.

Moderating role of participants' levels of modern racism (H2)

Transitional character versus Control group

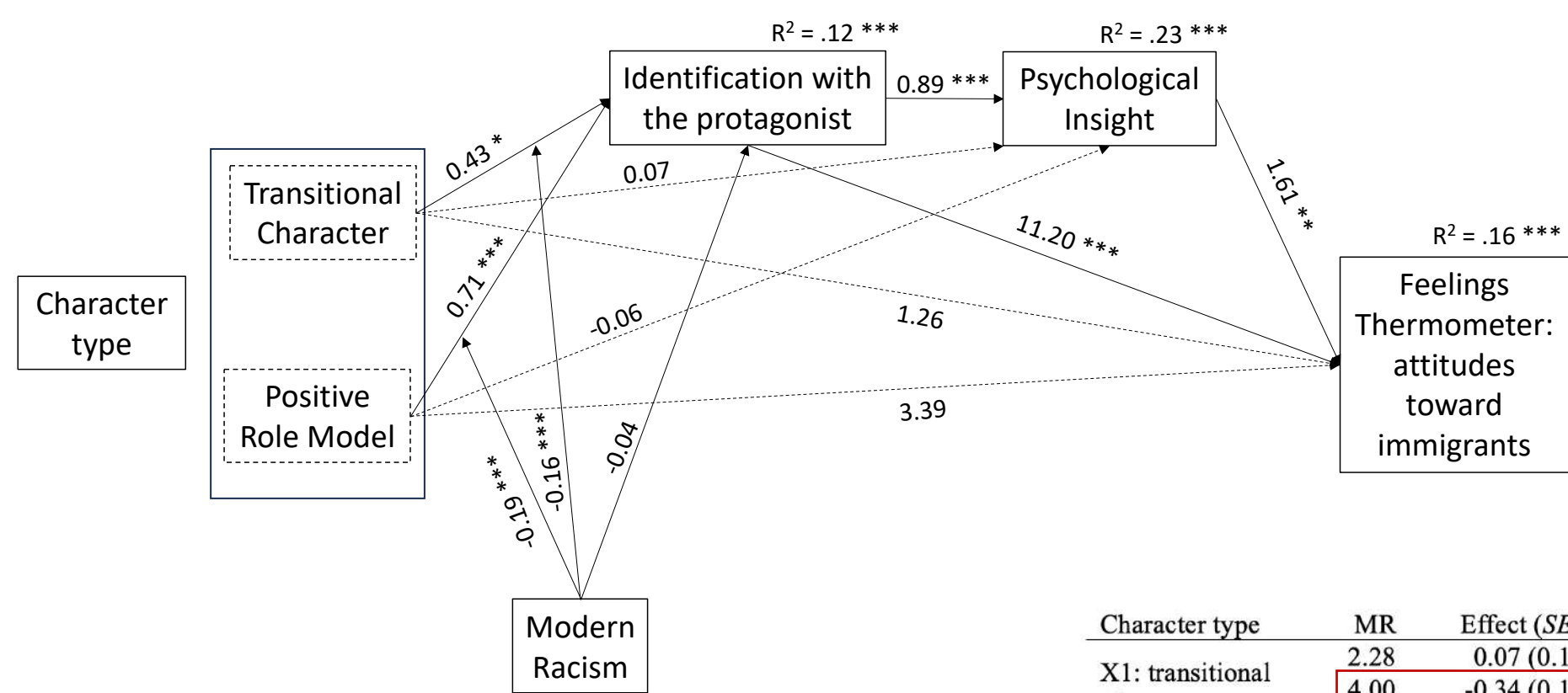


Conditional effects

Participants with high and medium levels of modern racism showed lower identification with the transitional character compared to the protagonist of the control group narrative.

Conditional-indirect effects model (H3 & H4)

Dependent variable: Attitudes toward immigrants



```
PROCESS Y = TS3
/X = IV1R
/W = MR
/MCX = 1
/M = IDENT INSIGHTS
/MODEL = 83
/PLOT = 1
/BOOT = 10000
/MATRICES = 1
/SEED = 01072024.
```

Relative conditional indirect effects of character type via Identification with the protagonist → Psychological insight

Note: Results shown here refer to *attitudes toward immigrants*. Full results for all dependent variables are available in the handout and extended abstract.

Character type	MR	Effect (SE)	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
X1: transitional character	2.28	0.07 (0.16)	-0.23	0.41
	4.00	-0.34 (0.16)	-0.72	-0.06
	5.42	-0.69 (0.31)	-1.37	-0.14
IMM =		-0.24 (0.12)	-0.51	-0.04
Character type	MR	Effect (SE)	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
X2: positive role model	2.28	0.39 (0.20)	0.06	0.88
	4.00	-0.08 (0.10)	-0.31	0.09
	5.42	-0.49 (0.24)	-1.02	-0.09
IMM =		-0.28 (0.13)	-0.57	-0.05

Conclusions and general discussion

- This study highlights how **character design** influences attitudes toward polarized social issues in Entertainment-Education Narratives.
- This study **expands the understanding of Entertainment-Education Narratives** as tools for social change, going beyond traditional health communication interventions to address broader social issues.
- The **moderating role of modern racism** highlights the nuanced effects of Entertainment-Education Narratives: individuals with low modern racism are more receptive to positive role models, while those with high modern racism *resist* both positive role models and transitional characters.
- **Identification with characters** and **psychological insight** are **key mechanisms** explaining the impact of different character types in Entertainment-Education narratives, supporting recent theories on narrative processing (Igartua et al., 2025; Moyer-Gusé & Wilson, 2024).

Thank you for your attention!

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All **materials** related to the online experiments (pilot and main study, links to videos, written narratives, measures, dataset and syntax files) are available through **OSF**:

This study was **pre-registered** in **OSF**:

