HPA TECH RETREAT 2023

Untwisting the Rope of Character Identification

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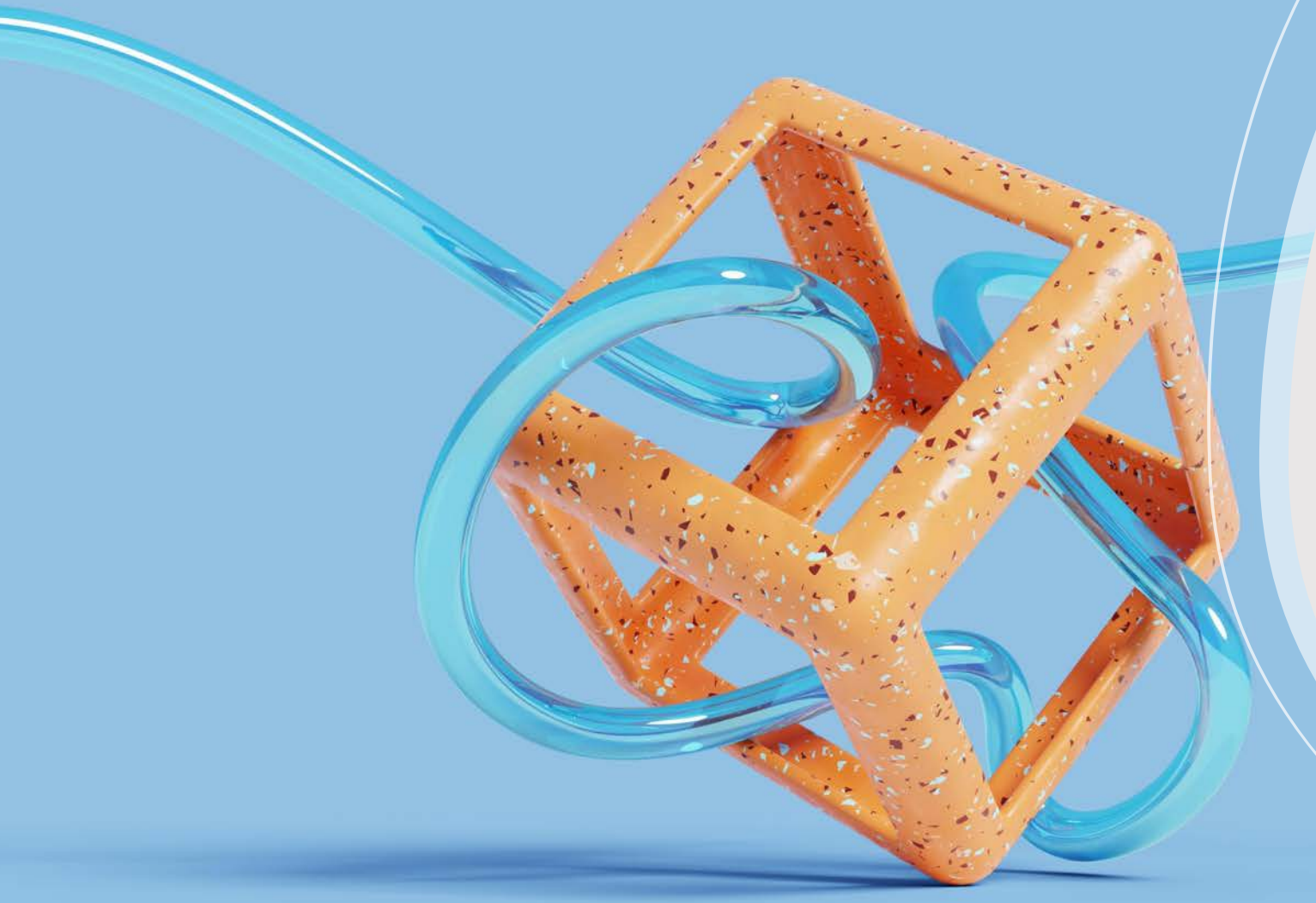
Why: Media Psychology
What: Observed Media Effects

What do your audiences need and want?

What data is currently available to you?

Character identification is central to psychologically processing media.



Differences:

Terms Used?
Type of Media?
Display Type?
Interaction Level?
Who Interaction With?
Who Interacting As?

Predictors & Outcomes
Vs. States of Being

Origin of the Term “Identification” in Psychoanalysis

The Interpretation of Dreams (Freud, 1900)

Myths and Fantasy
Imagination
Unconscious Influences

Freudian Primary Identification:
Modeling and Merging with Parents

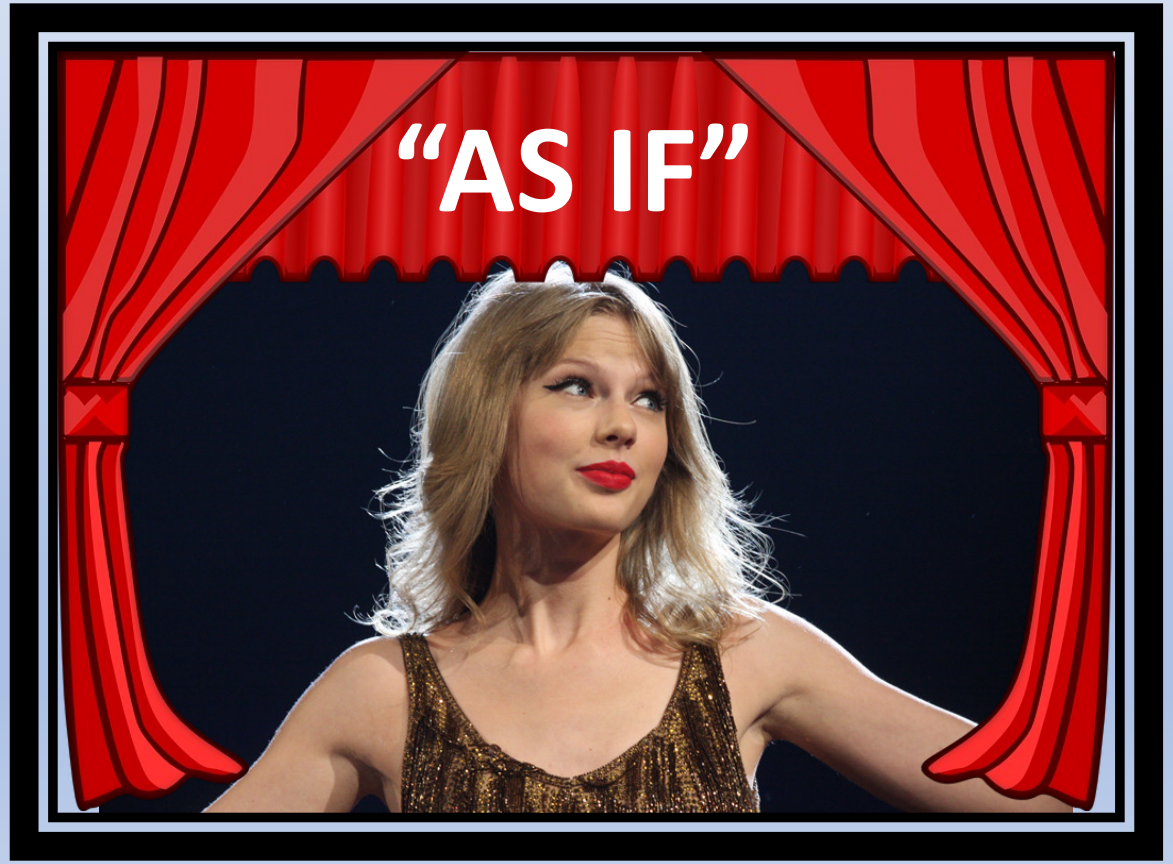
Melanie Klein Object Relations Theory (1882-1960)

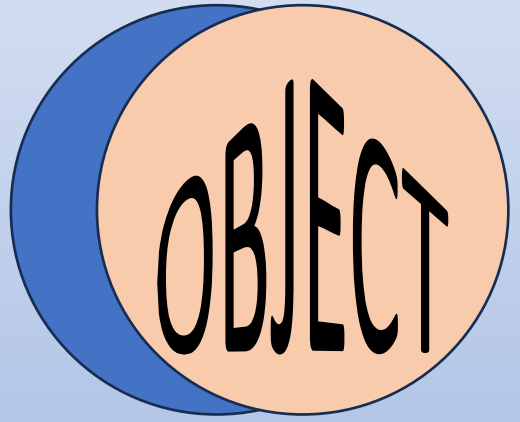
Projective Identification was a narcissistic defense mechanism of projecting oneself into another and thinking, feeling, and behaving through one's merged perspective with another person. (Segal, 1979)

Role Models & Mimicking Fans

Introjective Identification pulling aspects of others into yourself

Integration of these qualities in oneself





Like Characters,

Fully identified feels

Merged while "You are Me"

Carl Rogers Person-Centered psychotherapy

“**Empathic Identification**”:

Feeling through another’s perspective

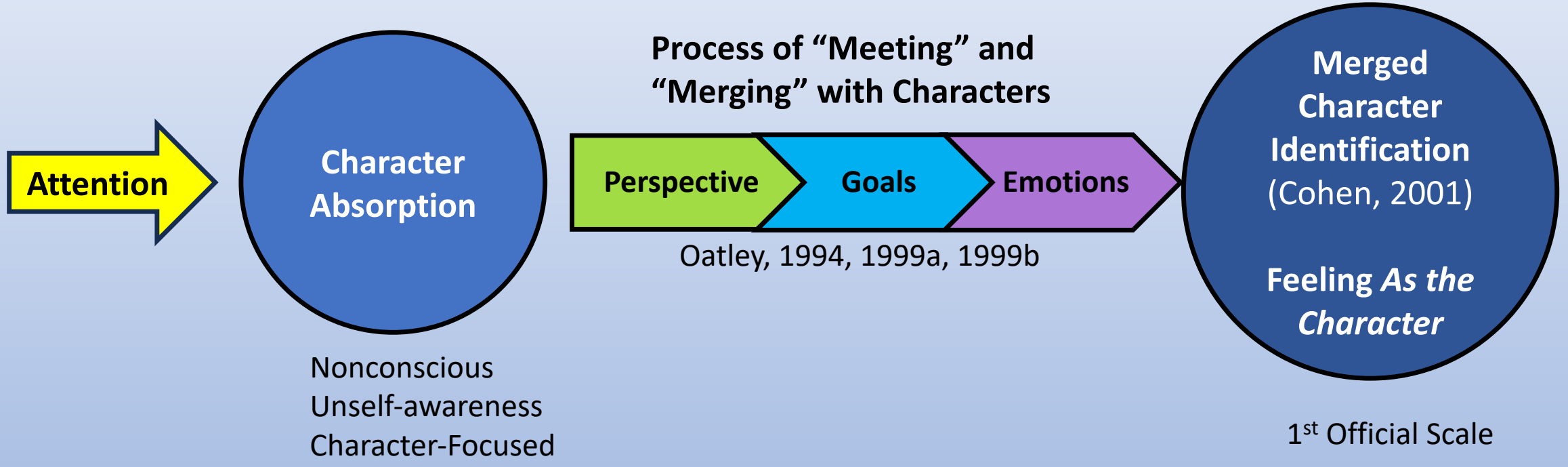
Storytelling

Character Identification

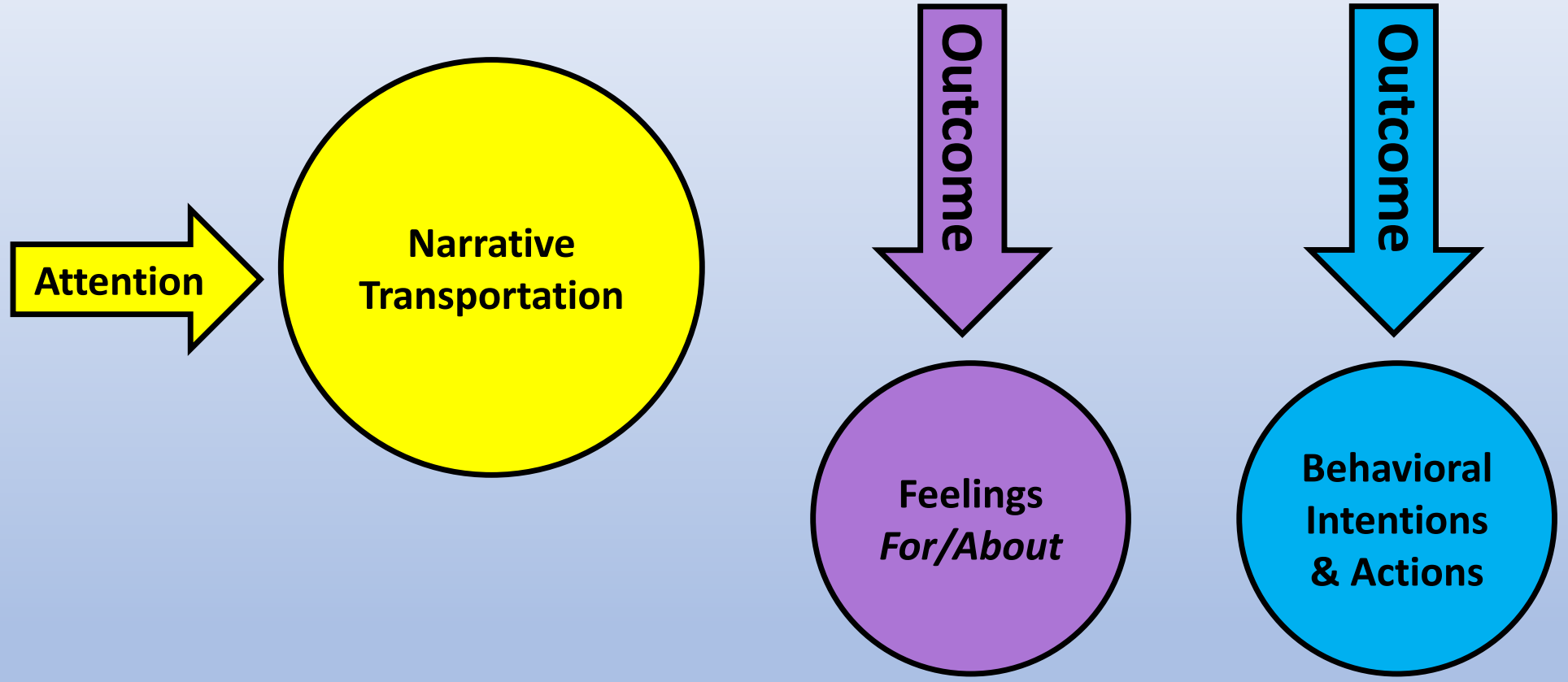
Engineering and User Interfaces

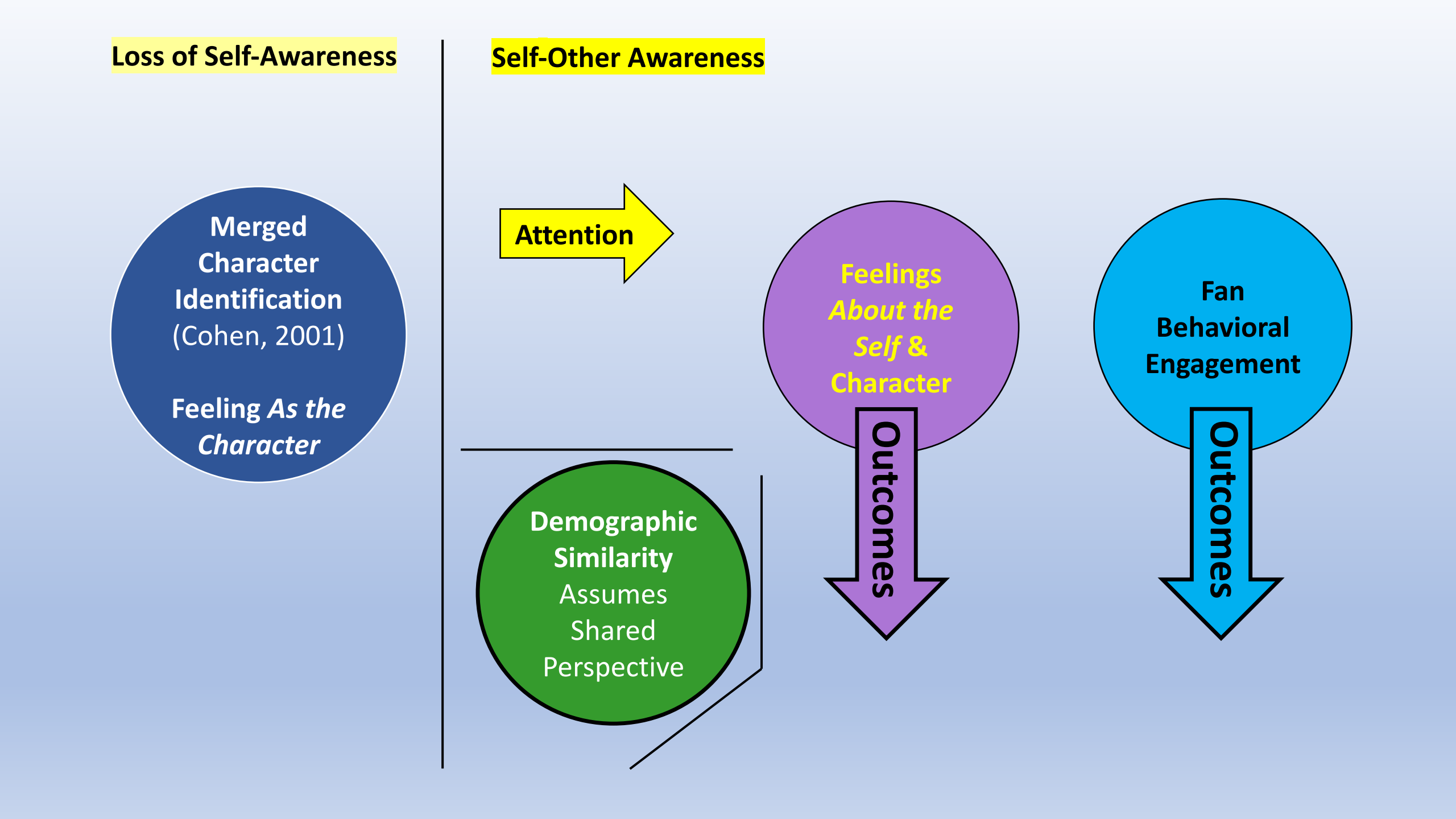
Personas &
Human Centered Design

Character Identification



State of Cognitive Simulation


Attention
Narrative Transportation
Outcome
Feelings *For/About*
Outcome
Behavioral Intentions & Actions


Loss of Self-Awareness
Self-Other Awareness
Merged Character Identification (Cohen, 2001)
Feeling As the Character
Attention
Demographic Similarity Assumes Shared Perspective
Feelings About the Self & Character
Outcomes
Fan Behavioral Engagement
Outcomes

Role Modeling Behaviors

Piaget, 1951 ; Bandura 1986

CHANGED BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, & BEHAVIORS

Merged Character Identification
(Cohen, 2001)

Feeling *As the Character*

≠ Imitation

Narrative Psychological Models

Loss of Self-Awareness

Self-Other Awareness

Predictors:

- **Individual Personality Differences**
- **Character's Personality**
- **Merged Character Identification** (Cohen, 2001)
  Feeling *As the Character*
- **Story Setting**
- **Demographic Similarity**

Outcomes:

- **Sympathy**
- **Liking**
- **Wishful Identification**
- Feelings *About the* ***Character***
- **Perceived Similarity**
- Feelings *About the* ***Self***
- **Perceived Identification**
- **Parasocial Interactions**
- **Parasocial Relationships**

Role Modeling Behaviors

Personal Identity

Group Identification (ID)

Brand ID

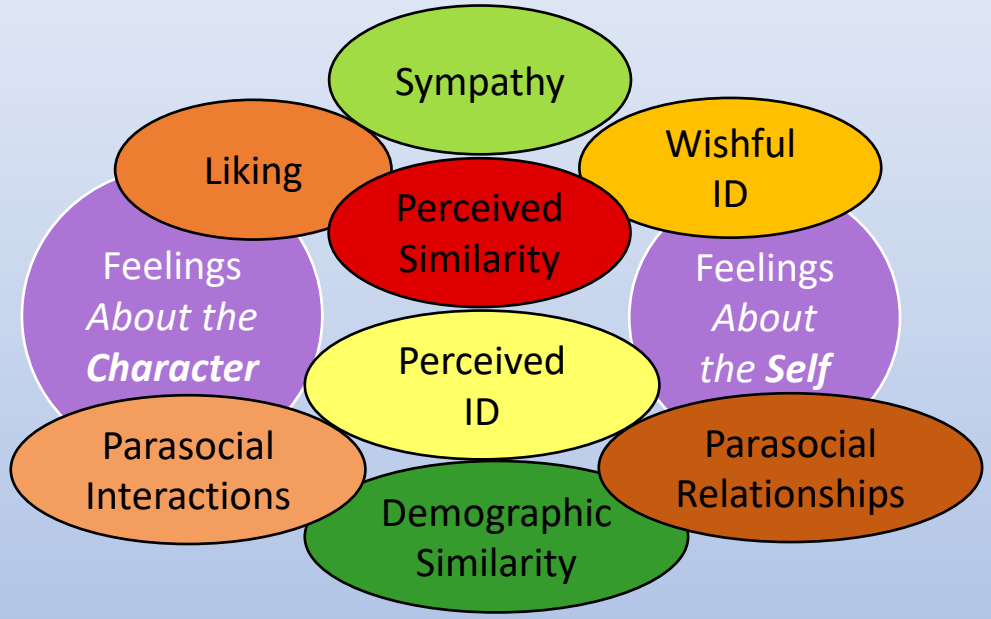
Political ID

Moral Judgment

Merged Character Identification (Cohen, 2001)

Feeling *As the Character*

Fan ID



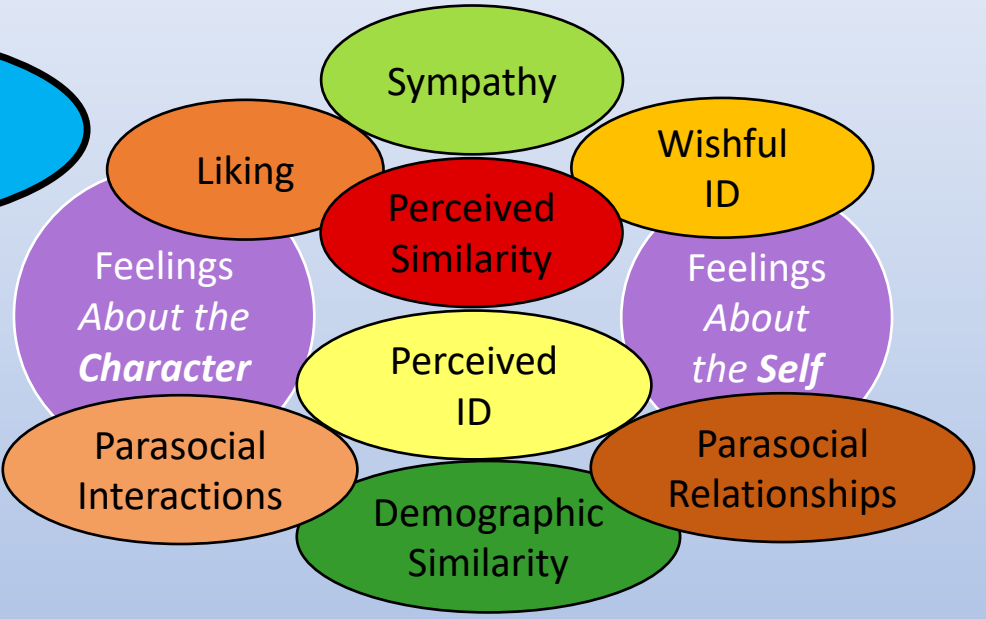
Emotional Motivation

FAN BEHAVIORAL ENGAGMENT

Moral Judgment

Media Choice & Frequency

Enjoyment



Outcome & Marketing Data

Search Results: 6,194 Research Studies

Fictional/Dramatic Characters in Entertainment

Books, Radio Dramas, Television, Motion Pictures

APA PsycInfo®	APA PsycArticles®	Mass Media and Communication Complete
4,721	1,179	294

145 Peer-Reviewed Empirical Studies

Research Question:
Within the empirical literature measuring character identification,
how many studies also used Cohen's (2001) full concept of character identification?

Crosstabulation Data Analyses of Full Character Identification

Studies were 16.23 times more likely to use the full operational with the full conceptual definition of character identification.

Internally Consistent/Matching:

Concept = **Measure**

$\chi^2(1, N = 145) = 45.43, p < .001, \phi = .56$

Consistency of Concepts and Measures for Character Identification

86 studies used one or both, and 59 (40.7%) used both conceptual and operational definitions for full character identification.

40.7%

Full Character Identification

(Cohen, 2001)

The Factors and Partial Definitions of Character Identification Coded Separately

$f = 5$
0.0%

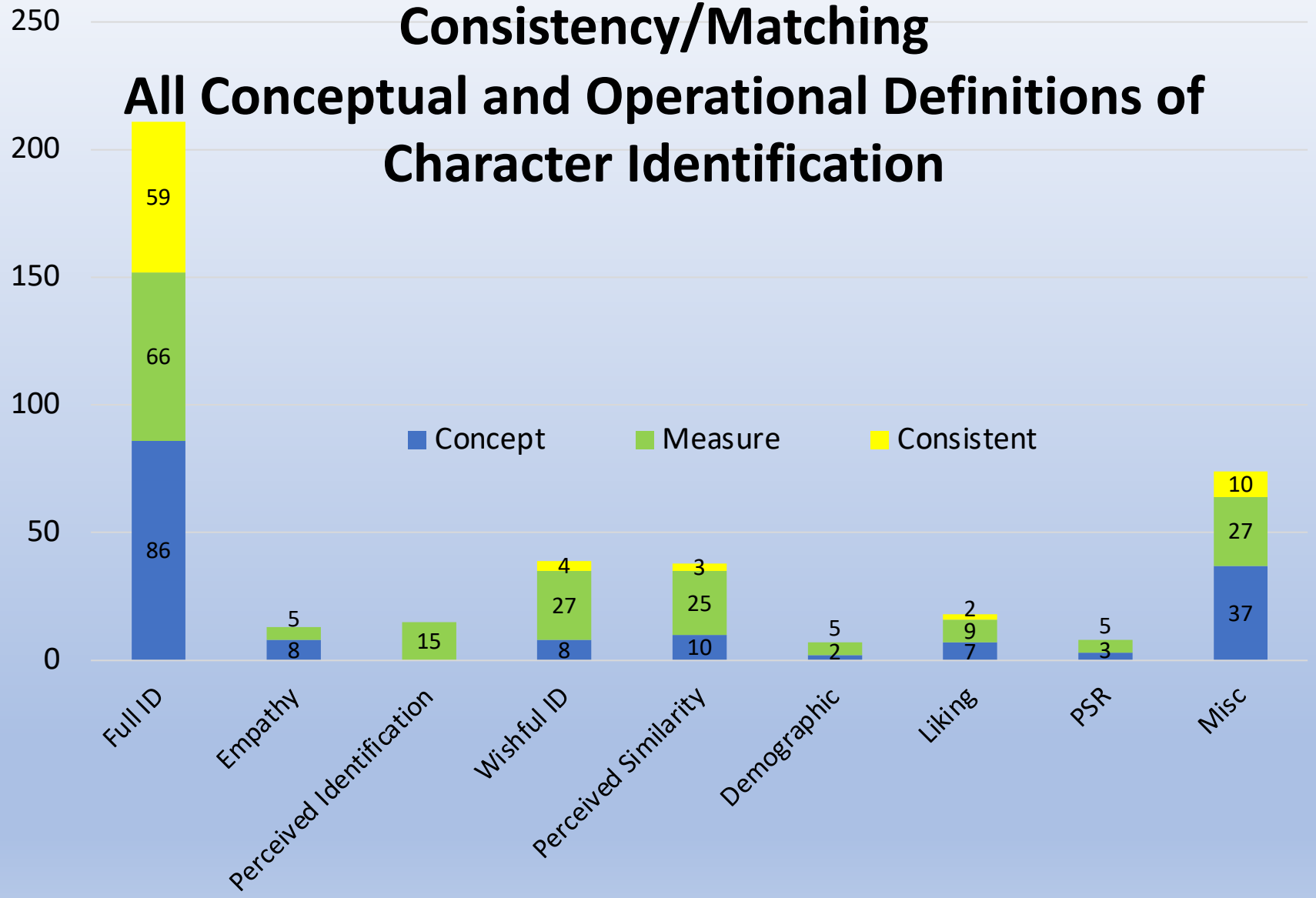
Perspective-Taking

$f = 1$
0.0%

Goals

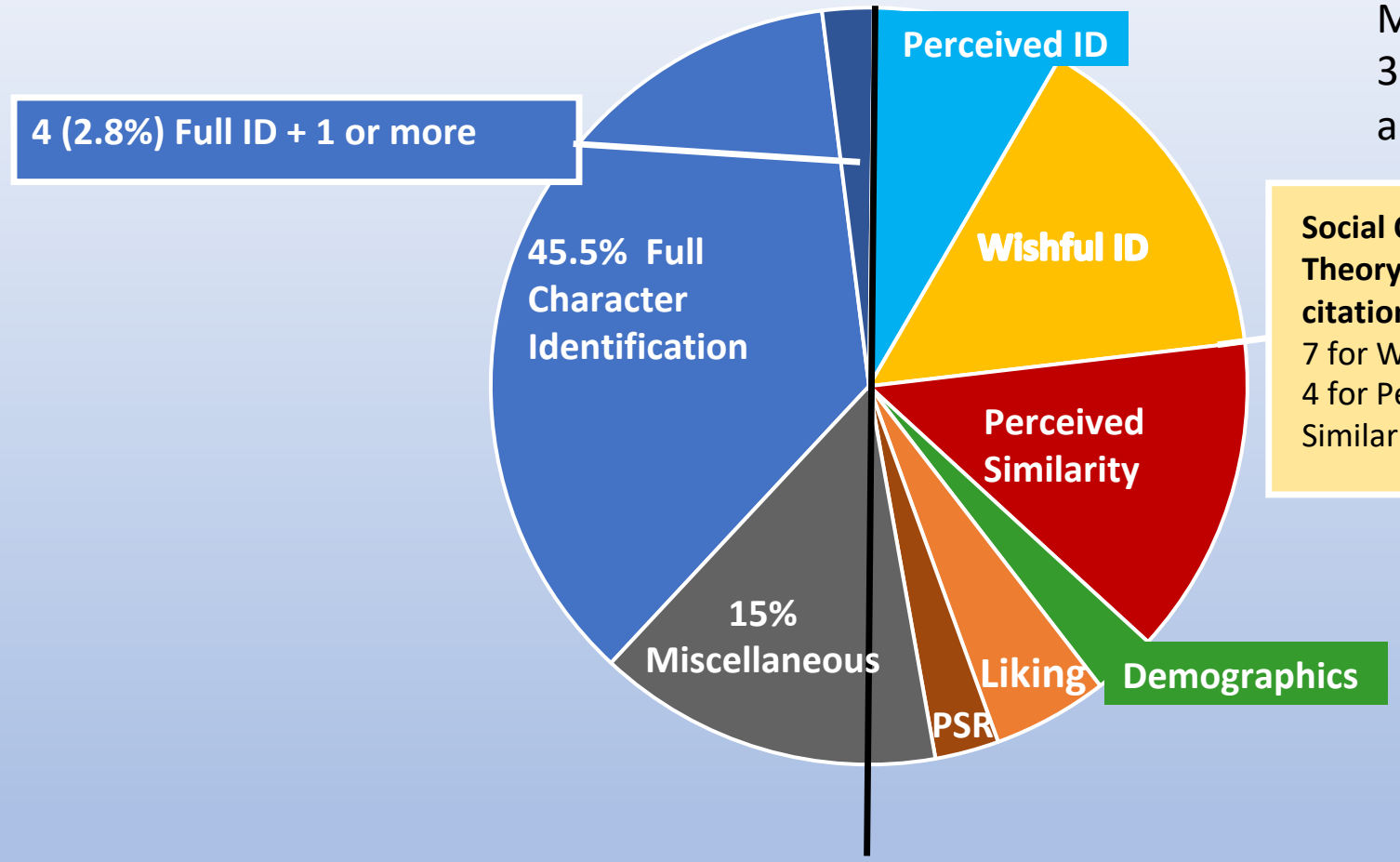
$f = 13$
0.0%

Empathy



Note: Sample of 145. Full ID is character identification defined a merged perspective, goals, and emotions. When both definitions had frequencies <5, they were omitted because they are not statistically significant using crosstabulations.

Measures of Character Identification in the Sample



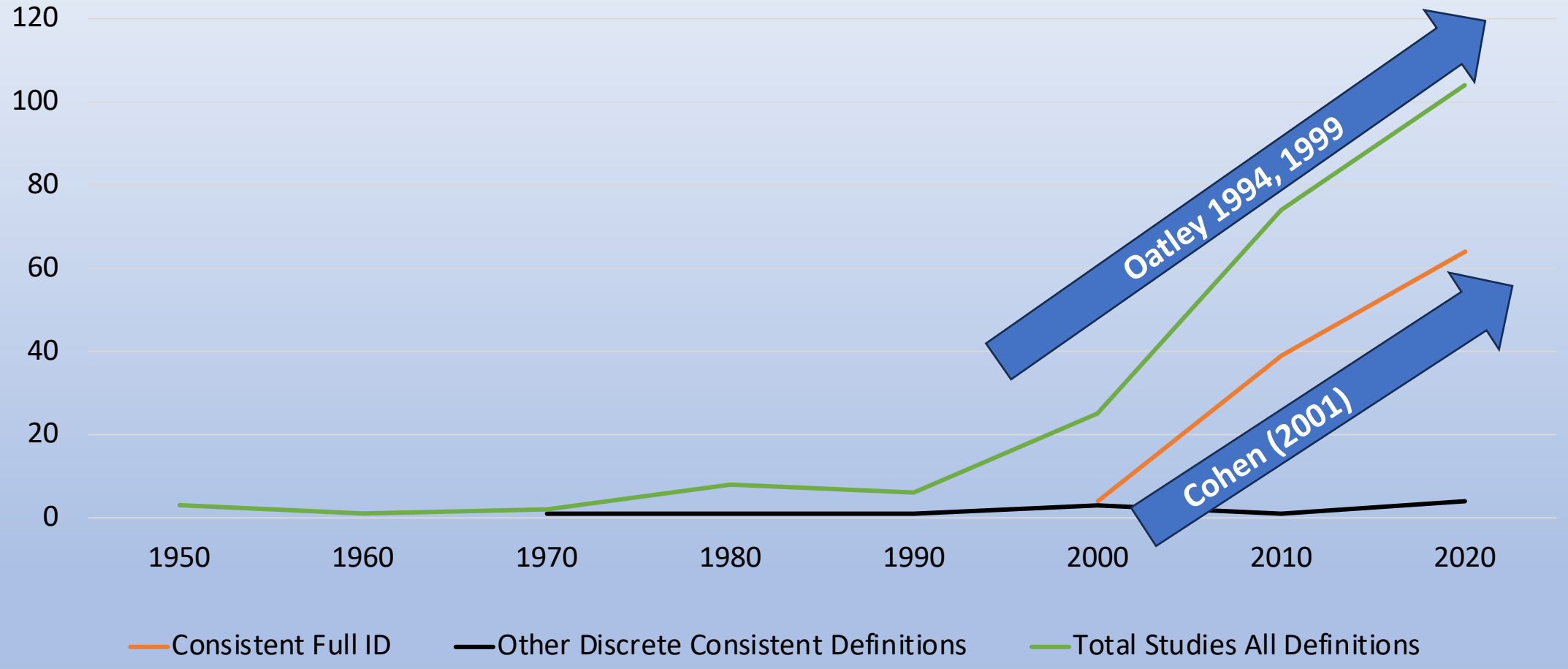
More measures per study: 39.3% of Studies used around half the measures

Social Cognitive Theory Bandura citations:
7 for Wishful ID,
4 for Perceived Similarity

- Full ID
- Full ID + Non-ID Definition
- Perceived ID
- Wishful ID
- Perceived Similarity
- Demographic Similarity
- Liking
- PSR
- Miscellaneous

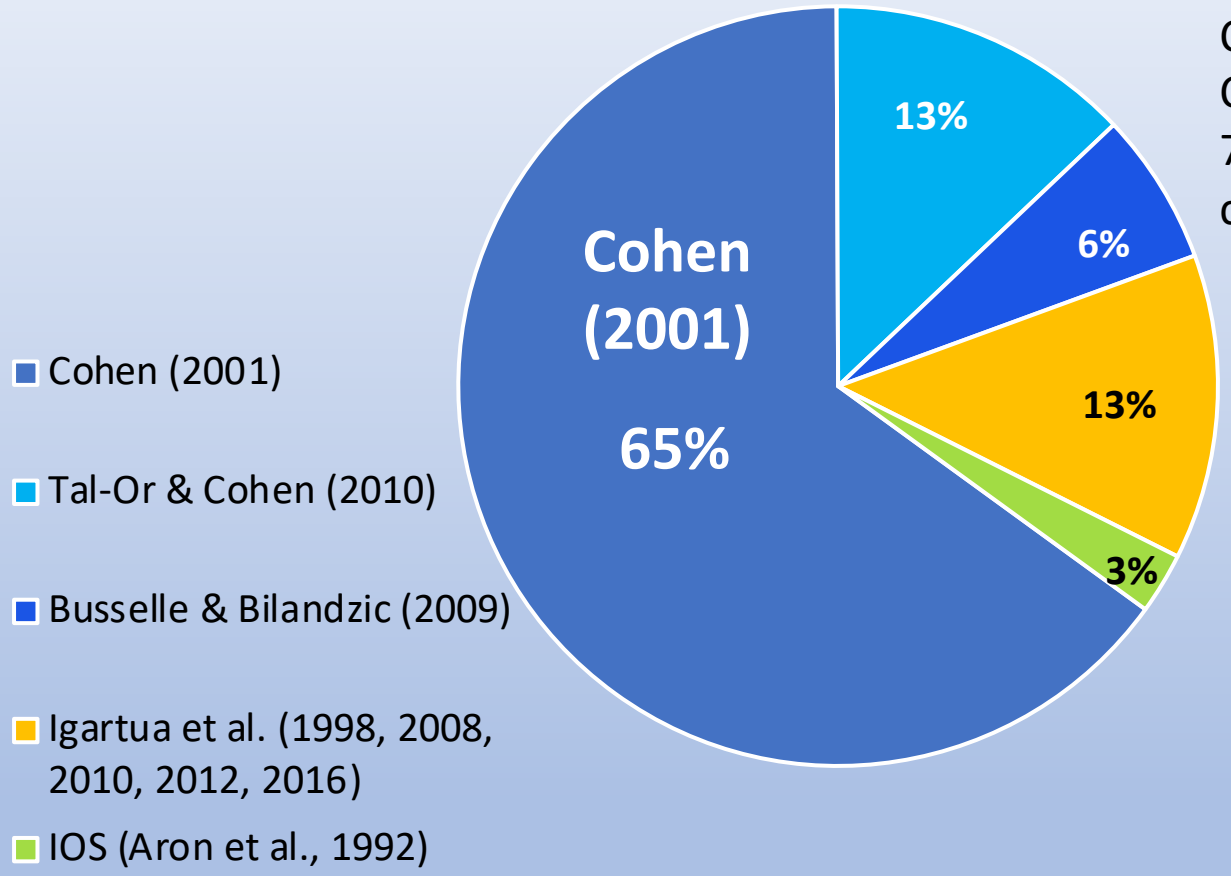
Note: N=145. Only frequencies >5 were included due to statistical significance.

Internal Consistency (Matching) of All Definitions for Character Identification



Note: Results from the first 2.5 years were multiplied by four to estimate the decade following 2020. *N* = 145

Scales Measuring Full Character Identification in the Sample



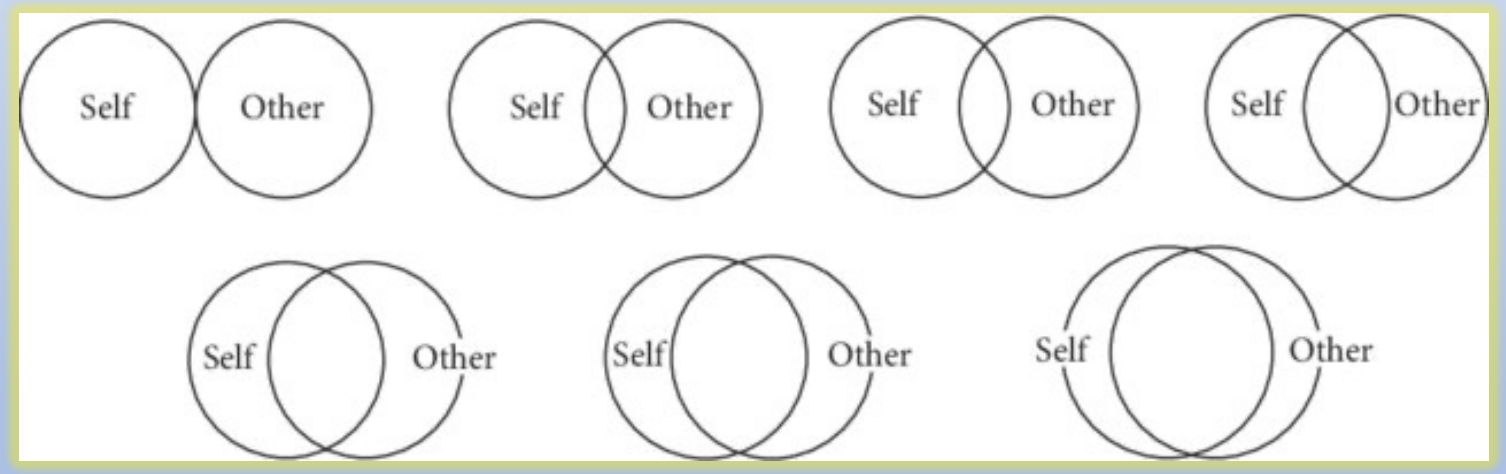
Combined Cohen (2001) and Tal-Or & Cohen (2010):
78% of the 66 studies measured full character ID in sample of 145

Note: Eyal and Rubin (2003) studies are grouped with Cohen (2001), and de Graaf (2012, 2014) are grouped with Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) because of the items' origins.

Inclusion of Other in the Self Scale (IOS; Aron et al., 1992)

2 Studies Used the IOS out of the 66 Measuring Full Character Identification (Full ID)

The IOS Measure:



Character-Consistent Attitudes & Behaviors

Conscious Willingness to Pay, Support Policies, etc.
Demonstrate changed attitudes, behaviors, and character-aligned goals.

Implicit Association Tests:
Baseline Predictors
Reaction Times Reveal Subconscious Biases

Same-Valence Emotions: Type

Facial Expression Analysis

Computer Automated or Manually Coded by Trained Observers

Webcam or Live Camera

Photo 215437617 | Brain © Martinmark | Dreamstime.com

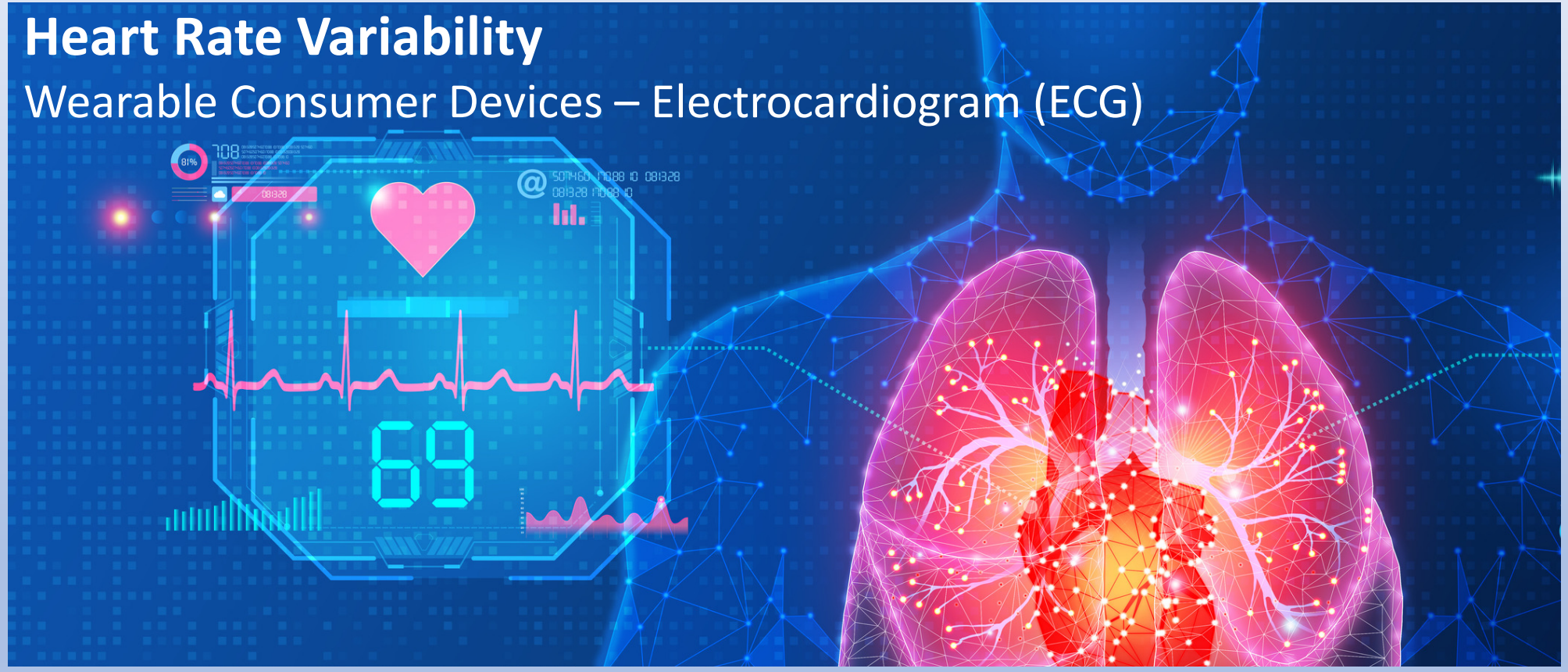
Cognitive Perspective-Taking: Aligned Visual Cues

True Eye Tracking

Are they looking where the character's looking?

Photo 164787535 © Ivan Rochev | Dreamstime.com

Same-Valence Emotions: Intensity by Excitement/Relaxation



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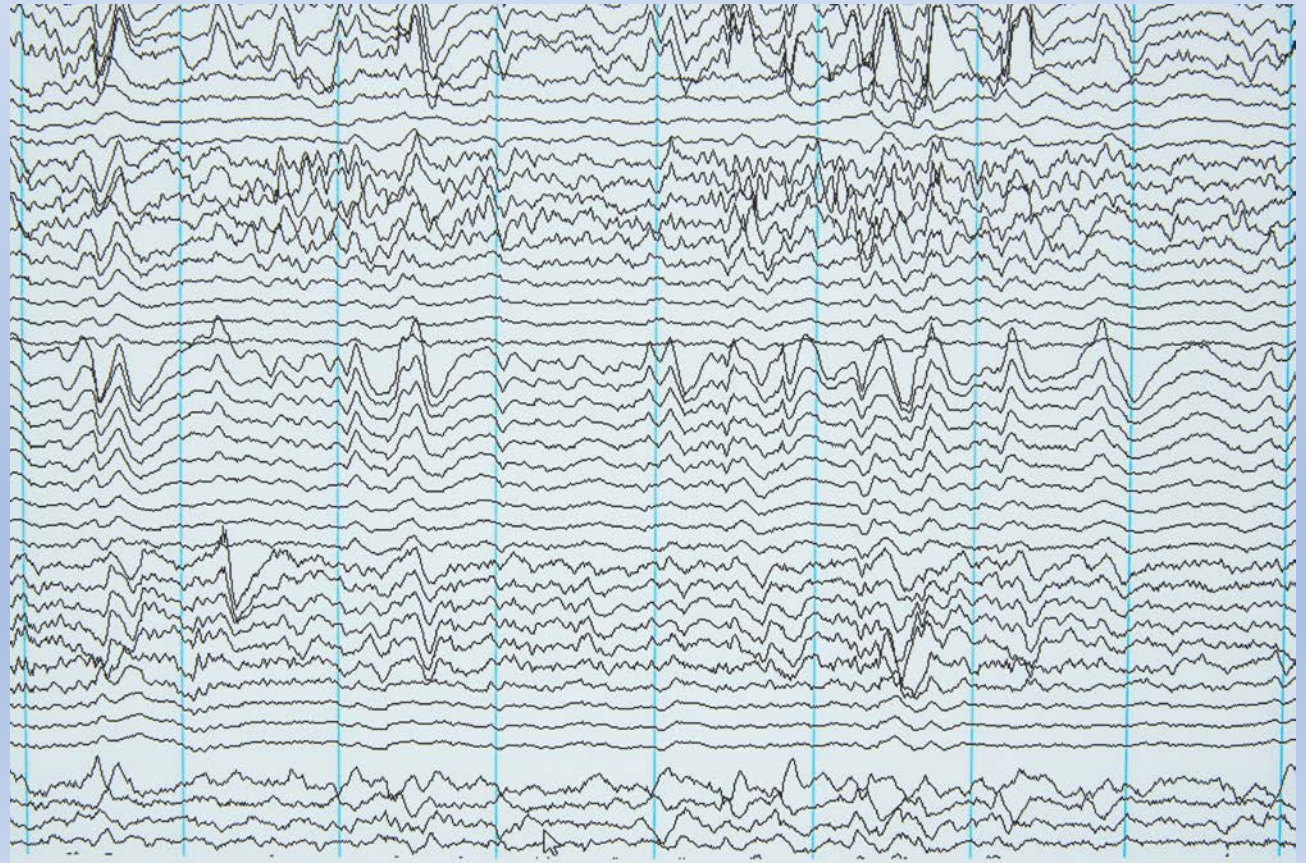
Motivation: Approach/Avoidance

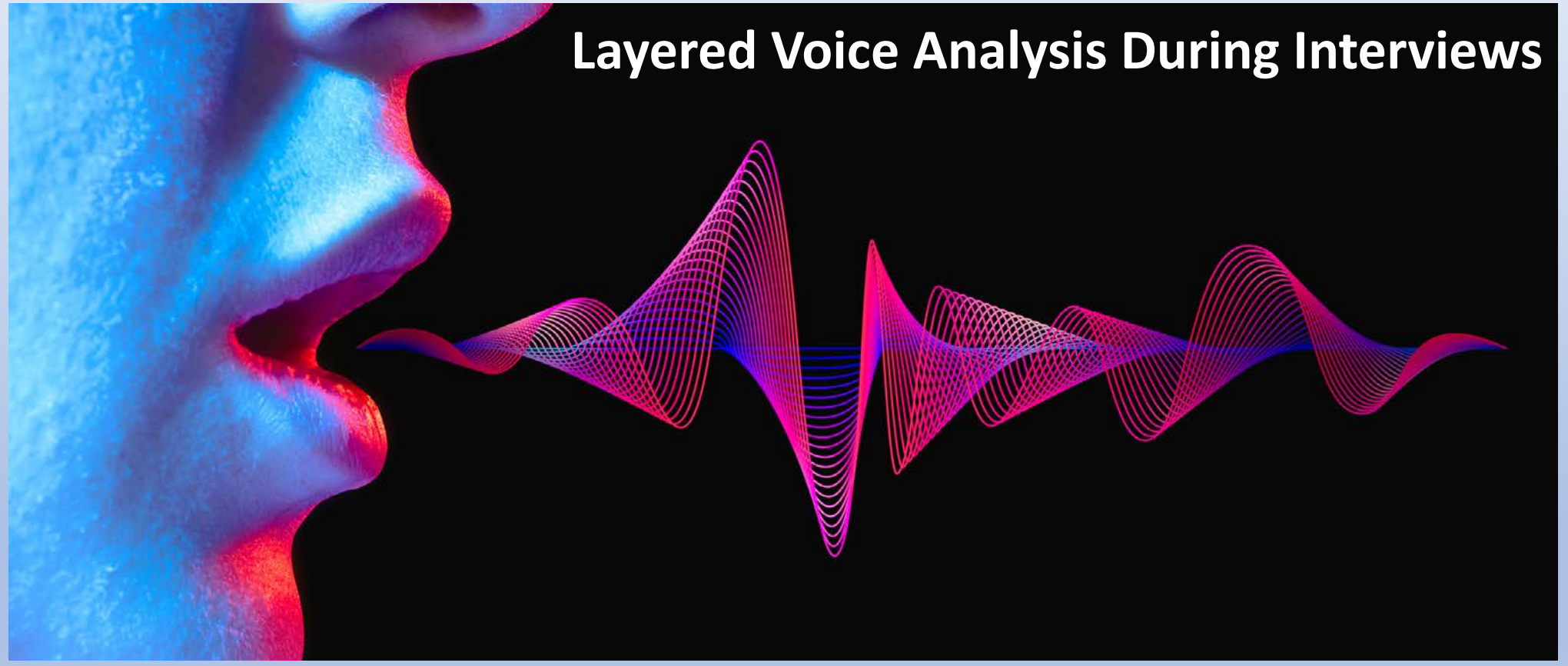
Cognition: Focus/Distraction

Electroencephalogram (EEG)

Wearable Headgear



Same-Valence Emotions: Type & Intensity



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Biochemical

Oxytocin – Saliva test for positive, empathetic emotions

Carbon dioxide exhaled by the audience measures the rate of respiration. (Poppy Crum at Dolby Labs)

Character Identification is the cognitive shift into the character's perspective, goals, and emotions that moves audiences into a new state of being and can integrate new attitudes and behaviors in the process.

Character Involvement includes other pathways to long-term engagement and changes to the audience's self-identity.

References

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