Gripped by movies: From story-world to artifact absorption

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CHAPTER 2

OUTCOME DELAY AS DETERMINANT FACTOR OF SUSPENSE IN FILM: AN EXPLORATION OF FILM GENRE DIFFERENCES
ABSTRACT

Suspense is a main form of absorption into stories, and it is intuitive that suspense in movies increases enjoyment. However, there is not a significant amount of empirical work investigating the narrative determinants of suspense. This chapter reports on two experimental studies that explore the extent to which Outcome Delay can increase suspense in film across different genres. The studies are particularly interesting because no previous study has investigated determinants of suspense in character-oriented films, suspense being mostly associated with action-oriented genres. The first 2 (Film Genre: action-oriented vs. character-oriented) X 5 (Outcome Delay) between-subjects experiment investigated the effect of Outcome Delay on suspense in two different films. The second 2 (Film Genre: action-oriented vs. character-oriented) X 4 (Outcome Delay) between-subjects experiment, extended the number of films (six films: 3 of a genre, 3 of the other), and extended the Outcome Delay step. The studies revealed that suspense increased linearly as a function of Outcome Delay, regardless of Film Genre. However much Outcome Delay extended, suspense did not drop, but kept increasing. If the first experiment confirmed the expectation that suspense is higher in action-oriented films than in character-oriented films, the second experiment revealed that this is not necessarily the case. When the action-oriented suspense scenes are not typical, not building up the expectation of a negative Outcome Event, but rather a positive one, there is no difference in suspense between film genres. Moreover, Outcome Delay always increases suspense, regardless of Film Genre or typicality.

INTRODUCTION

Stories are an important part of our daily lives. Whether we read books, watch movies, enjoy theater plays, or simply share stories with our friends, stories are an important tool for communicating ideas, desires and emotions. According to theorists of narrative, interestingness is a general defining feature of narrative (Martin, 1986). However, the stories that truly impact us are highly interesting stories, the ones that keep us hooked. And what makes a story interesting? We tend to believe that what makes a story interesting is in the events that are being told. However, theories of narrative acknowledge that there are two main accounts of story interestingness: a story event account and a presentation account.
Events that are worth being the subject of a great story should be impressive, meaningful, but the art of storytelling is mainly about the presentation technique of the events, as even in themselves less striking events could be materials for a gripping story when told in the right way (Chatman, 1978; Sternberg, 1993; Dibell, 1999). Understanding the storytelling presentation techniques that increase interestingness of stories is relevant not only for the storytellers, but also to the communication of scholars and practitioners, who need to know how narratives work to produce desired effects. This chapter contributes to the knowledge of storytelling presentation techniques in film, exploring how they affect viewers with given story events.

Interest in narratives can come in different forms, but the form of interest I will investigate is one of the most popular in narrative film and literature: suspense. Suspense is ubiquitous in popular media narratives nowadays (e.g., Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Sternberg, 1993). It is a feeling of impatience and tension, occurring in the expectation of a specific event of considerable importance (Tan & Diteweg, 1996), a feeling that involves both fear and hope for the event to come (Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988). Suspense has been associated with action-oriented narrative genres, like action, thriller, and adventure in the first place, suggesting that the type of story events presented in these particular films may lead to suspense: car chase, shootings, treasure hunts. However, there are writers (e.g., Child, 2012), filmmakers (e.g., Hitchcock, 1970) and narrative theorists (e.g., Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1982; Truffaut, 1985/1967), who suggest that it is not the events that cause us to feel suspense, but rather that the presentation of the narrative is what has this impact. These practitioners and theorists agree that the particular presentation technique involves delaying events (e.g., Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1982; Truffaut, 1985/1967). The event may matter, deriving its importance from the fact that it represents the outcome of a conflict situation, but given some minimally interesting event, delaying the resolution is considered to be an autonomous factor leading to suspense.

In this chapter, I will focus on the presentation determinant of suspense, Outcome Delay, in the particular medium of film. I aim to empirically test to what extent Outcome Delay can increase experienced suspense in film viewing by itself. Furthermore, I investigate whether Film Genre has any impact on the way Outcome Delay affects suspense. To my knowledge, Outcome Delay has not been
empirically investigated as a determinant of suspense in character-oriented films, like romance or drama. I believe that as a presentation technique of suspense, delay should be effective in increasing the experience regardless of the story events, and therefore regardless of genre, as will be argued hereunder. The studies presented in this chapter are to my knowledge the first to compare two broad genre categories, namely action-oriented film scenes to character-oriented ones, with respect to the way Outcome Delay affects suspense.

Two experimental studies were conducted to identify 1) to what extent Outcome Delay can increase suspense in film in general; 2) whether the level of suspense depends on Film Genre; and 3) whether the effect of Outcome Delay on suspense is dependent on Film Genre.

SUSPENSE

When investigating suspense, it is imperative to distinguish between two different meanings of the concept: suspense as emotional response and suspense as narrative presentation technique within the discourse structure.

SUSPENSE AS EMOTIONAL RESPONSE

In their influential model of the cognitive structure of emotions, Ortony, Clore, and Collins (1988) categorized suspense as a prospect-based emotion. According to them, suspense is an emotion provoked by feared (when negative) or hoped for (when positive) events that are appraised both as uncertain and as likely to occur soon. In the case of viewing a narrative movie, emotional responses have their basis in the subject’s imagining being present in the story-world. Witnessing events from this position stirs participatory responses (Allbritton & Gerrig, 1991) or witness emotions (Tan, 1995). Emotions like suspense are experienced based on narrative expectations regarding future developments in the story. The emotional response of suspense in film viewing involves eager tension for an Outcome Event, which the viewer expects to be revealed imminently, and helpless frustration for having to wait to see it happen (Tan, 1995; Tan & Diteweg, 1996).
SUSPENSE AS A DISCOURSE PRESENTATION TECHNIQUE AND THE (S)TRUCTURAL-(A)FFECT (T)HEORY

From the perspective of storytelling, suspense is not an experience or response but a narrative technique that essentially provokes uncertainty (e.g., Tan & Diteweg, 1996). The best available theory that explains experienced suspense as resulting from a suspense narrative technique is the (S)tructural-(A)ffect (T)heory (Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1982). SAT is based on the distinction between told events and the way they are told. Storytellers work with two elements: 1) a specific selection of events from a story-world, imaginary or not, and 2) a particular presentation of those in the narrative discourse structure of the film, i.e. a particular series of sequences and shots. Two levels of the narrative structure become apparent accordingly (Erlich, 1978; Chatman, 1978; Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1982): The sequence of events as they appear chronologically in the story-world is called the event structure, while the particular presentation of these makes for the discourse structure. A suspense discourse structure has the following story events: an Initiating Event, followed by an Outcome Event. The Outcome Event is an event of high importance that usually represents the resolution of a conflict (e.g., the car of the protagonist explodes when he steps in). The Initiating Event is the event that announces the occurrence of the Outcome Event in the immediate proximity (e.g., the villain places a bomb in the protagonist’s car). In a suspense discourse structure, events are presented in their chronological order, and some retardation is introduced between the Initiating Event and the Outcome Event. SAT does not discuss, however, the nature of the retardation, but it seems that whatever it is: meaningful events, or just slowing down of time (in the case of film, through slow motion, or repetition of shots), their main purpose is to delay the Outcome Event without giving it away in any way.

As discourse structure is taken as the cause of the emotional reaction of suspense, it can be said that two main factors contribute to the experience of suspense in a suspense scene: 1) the story event factor, Outcome Value, that represents the perceived importance of the Outcome Event as determined by manifold factors, and 2) the presentation factor, Outcome Delay, that is determined by the amount of narrative materials inserted between Initiating Event and Outcome Event (be it events or simply prolongation of time). Upon perceiving the Initiating Event, the audience expects, and desires to see the Outcome Event, and the longer the expectations are held without being matched or non-matched.
by an Outcome Event, the more uncertainty, frustration, hopes and fears, meaning suspense, will be experienced (Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988; Tan, 1995). In line with the idea that presentation may be as important, or perhaps more so than the story events themselves, I consider Outcome Delay as the most rational and effective tool for storytellers to use at will (and with skill) to increase suspense, regardless of the story events. Hence, this chapter will focus on Outcome Delay as factor of suspense, and will explore its potential and limitations in increasing suspense.

SAT mentions that Outcome Delay leads to suspense, as if suspense would increase linearly as a function of delay, without referring to any limit to its effectiveness. But can Outcome Delay infinitely increase suspense? Common sense leads us to expect that if an awaited event is delayed for too long, the viewer may get bored, and suspense may drop, or at least stop increasing. Lacking a theoretical rationale, such limitations need to be assessed through controlled empirical studies. One aim of this chapter is to amend for this lack of detail in SAT on Outcome Delay limits as determinant factor of suspense. In this chapter I will empirically investigate the possibility that there is a limit to which Outcome Delay can increase suspense.

Another limitation of SAT is that, as a theory of affect produced by general structural features of narrative texts or films, it does not mention how narrative genre relates to the whole suspense technique. In fact, SAT does not discuss genre at all. In scholarly and film production discourse on suspense, as well as in publicity materials, the term is almost invariably used in the context of the action-oriented genres, and especially the thriller (Skillman, 2000; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Porter, 1981; Thompson, 1988). Consistent with this idea, suspense is empirically investigated mostly in relation to action-oriented narratives (e.g., de Wied, 1991; Comisky & Bryant, 1982). However, given the generality of the factors mentioned in SAT, the question arises whether the technique of suspense may be effective only, or mostly with this particular genre. Does Film Genre make a difference when it comes to suspense at all?

It is clearly suggested, not by SAT, but by other scholars and by general belief, that there is a difference in the level of experienced suspense between film genres. Suspense has mostly been associated with action-oriented genres, like thrillers,
crime, action, and adventure, in both written narratives and film (e.g., Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Skillman, 2000). These genres are virtually believed synonyms to suspense.

There are, however, scholars and narrative fiction writers that have argued for the existence of suspense in traditional character-oriented genres too, and by character-oriented I mean genres like romance and/or drama (e.g., Neale, 2000). It is illustrative for the occurrence of suspense in romance that a whole new sub-genre of romantic suspense (e.g., Sheehan, 2014) has been identified. Even the writers of romantic suspense tend to relate the scenes of suspense only to the expectation of a negative event (e.g., the lovers, or one of them may face some sort of danger); however there is acknowledgment of suspense initiated by the expectation of a positive event (e.g., Brewer, 1996), which is actually quite common in romance (e.g., the expectation of a kiss). The discourse structure of a romantic suspense scene seems to be similar to that of an action suspense scene, only the type of events are different: there is an Initiating Event leading to the expectation of a kiss, not of a murder, for example.

Despite the evidence that there is suspense in character-oriented narratives (Neale, 2000), there is a general belief that the level of suspense is higher in intensity in an action-oriented suspense scene than in a character-oriented suspense scene, (e.g., Vorderer, Wulff, & Friedrichsen, 1996; Thompson, 1988; Porter, 1981), because typical suspense genres derive narrative interest from action rather than character development (e.g., Tan, 1995). In action and crime drama, the plot is a series of concrete (rather than psychological, symbolic, or otherwise) obstacles to be overcome by the protagonist: the protagonist must preserve his life, must save someone's life, or must catch a villain. Climactic scenes feature outcomes immediately decisive for the life and death of the protagonist, and it is these that are typically considered suspense scenes. In contrast, in character-oriented films, the protagonists have to overcome rather psychological or symbolic obstacles, for example they must learn a life lesson, improve their personality traits, or gain love. In both experimental studies presented in this chapter, I will for the first time compare action-oriented suspense scenes with character-oriented suspense scenes as to both the level of suspense they evoke, and to the way Outcome Delay affects suspense.
When it comes to the impact Film Genre may have on the Outcome Delay effect on suspense, I expect to find that Outcome Delay is a determinant factor of suspense regardless of genre, as SAT would want it. I do anticipate though differences between film genres in the way the effect of Outcome Delay on suspense works. There are two possible ways in which these genre-based differences might function: 1) suspense grows steeper as a function of Outcome Delay in the action-oriented genres, which are considered to be the typical genres of suspense, than in the character-oriented genres; or the other way around, 2) suspense grows steeper as a function of Outcome Delay in the character-oriented genres. It could be argued that the first option is likely to be true, because action-oriented suspense scenes feature high value Outcome Events (e.g., a murder). However, the second option is as probable, due to a ceiling effect. In action-oriented suspense scenes, suspense level immediately after the Initiating Event is probably higher than in character-oriented suspense scenes (also immediately after the Initiating Event), because of the relatively high value of the Outcome Event in the action-oriented scenes. Sustained Outcome Delay may not add much more intensity to the experience of suspense that is already close to its ceiling. In the case of less suspenseful events, like the events specific to character-oriented genres (e.g., the protagonists may kiss), Outcome Delay can truly make a difference, and increase the level of suspense; the increase in suspense due to Outcome Delay may be much steeper than in the case of action-oriented genres. In this chapter I will explore whether there are differences between film genres in the way Outcome Delay influences suspense, and investigate the nature of these differences.

In sum, there are three main points of SAT that I would like to address in this chapter: 1) re-confirm that Outcome Delay increases suspense; 2) challenge the unlimited increase of suspense with delay, and identify the level of Outcome Delay where the increase in suspense stops; and 3) compare action-oriented genre with character-oriented genre in level of suspense, and in the way Outcome Delay affects suspense.

SAT AND EXTANT RESEARCH ON SUSPENSE
Most of the research on suspense so far focused on determinants of suspense related to Outcome Value, meaning any factors that may contribute to a higher relevance or value of the Outcome Event, like: character likeability, outcome desirability/undesirability, and likelihood that the expected event will actually take place.
(Comisky & Bryant, 1982; Zillmann, 1996; Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1982; Brewer & Ohtsuka, 1988; Gerrig & Bernardo, 1994; Moyer-Guse, 2008; Tan & Diteweg, 1996; Bezdek, 2012). What these studies revealed is that suspense is higher: when the character affected by the events is much liked (e.g., Zillmann, 1991; Zillmann, 1996; Comisky & Bryant, 1982), and when there is a 99% likelihood that something bad will happen to the protagonist as outcome (e.g., Bryant, Rockwell, & Owens, 1994; Zillmann, 1996; Zillmann, 1980; Vorderer, 1996).

In contrast, not much, and inconclusive research has been done on effects of Outcome Delay on suspense, as a main determinant of suspense. Most of the research showed that suspense or stress increases as linear function of Outcome Delay. Nomikos and his colleagues (Nomikos, Opton, Averill, & Lazarus, 1968) had manipulated a video about milling accidents in two versions (short vs. long delay), and showed that the longer version led to more intense stress reactions (measured by heart rate and skin conductance). However, in their study they only compared two levels of delay. Therefore, it is difficult to draw any conclusion regarding the linearity of the Outcome Delay effect on suspense based on their findings. Kassler (1996) also found that longer suspense scenes led to more suspense, but his design was non-experimental, because the scenes he compared belonged to different films, and therefore they differed in many aspects, not just length. The addition of confounding variables make Kassler’s analysis difficult to interpret.

Interestingly, Breznitz (1967) conducted a study in which he let the participants know they would suffer an electric shock at the end of either 3, 6, or 12 minutes. There was a significant linear contrast in heart rate and skin conductance between the three delays, with an increase in stress reaction as a function of delay. However, this study was particular in at least two aspects, and these particularities may be the reasons why there was a linear trend of Outcome Delay on tension: 1) the outcome was physical pain inflicted on the participant directly, not a narrative event; 2) the participants had to count down towards the outcome, so their awareness of the approaching outcome was kept alive in spite of the very long delay.

The studies on delay that best capture the real experience with narrative film, and that investigate various levels of delay are the studies conducted by Minet de Wied (1991). De Wied’s studies try to identify how delay, or anticipation duration, as she calls the amount of time between the Initiating Event and the Outcome Event,
affects suspense in film (1991). However, she has not obtained a clear pattern of suspense based on Outcome Delay in her studies. She found a significant quadratic trend in one of her seven experimental studies, showing that as a function of Outcome Delay suspense first increased, then decreased. This observation suggests an overall inverted U-shape trend, but the effects are quite weak. Even if this study suggests that Outcome Delay has its limits as determinant factor of suspense, other experimental studies, conducted by de Wied (1991) as part of her dissertation, revealed linearly increasing trends of suspense as a function of Outcome Delay only. Taken together, all studies referred to above attest to a linear increase of suspense with Outcome Delay, and do not show clear evidence of decrease with sustained Outcome Delay, despite large steps of delay having been implemented. The present studies test the reasonable expectation that there must be a limit, which is suspense cannot just continue to increase linearly with increases in Outcome Delay.

STUDIES

PILOT STUDY
To determine which video materials to use for my first study, I ran a pilot study that included both an action-oriented video and a character-oriented video. In the pilot study, I aimed to identify two scenes (one from an action-oriented genre, and one from a character-oriented genre) with high suspense levels that were easy to manipulate in terms of Outcome Delay. I also tried to identify the best and most effective way of implementing Outcome Delay through video editing, and the best location in the suspense scene where to implement delay through added video materials. Two levels of Outcome Delay were implemented in four different film suspense scenes (2 action-oriented, 2 character-oriented). Outcome Delay was implemented in different ways, and at different locations of the original suspense scenes (closer to the Initiating Event, or closer to the Outcome Event). For the sake of isolating effects of Outcome Delay, I also independently varied the value of the Outcome Event for each of the film scenes, by offering two slightly different versions of background information for each suspense scene.

Sample and Design
Participants in the pilot study were recruited either 1) from the University of Amsterdam's survey pool, or 2) through ads placed on social media or distributed
through flyers. 124 participants (86 females) took part in the study. Ages ranged between 18 and 31 ($M = 23$, $SD = 3.41$). The participants received course credits or an amount of money for their participation, and signed for informed consent. Two Outcome Value conditions were crossed with two Outcome Delay conditions resulting in four groups. Four different film scenes (two action-oriented genres and two character-oriented genres) were viewed by each participant. The experiment had a 2 (Outcome Value) X 2 (Outcome Delay) between-subjects X 4 (Film) within-subjects factorial design.

**Materials**
The film scenes used as materials were short scenes extracted from existing feature films. Two films were action-driven, namely a supernatural horror – *The Ring I* (MacDonald, Parks, & Verbinski, 2002), and a French thriller – *13 Tzameti* (Babluani, Legrand, Saadi, & Babluani, 2005). The other two films were character-oriented: a classic romance – *Pride and Prejudice* (Bevan, Fellner, Webster, & Wright, 2005), and an Italian Art House romance – *Ten Winters* (Bessi, Bruscolini, & Mieli, 2009). From each film, a suspense scene was selected for manipulation, considering its climactic emotion potential: e.g., the moment of tension before a potential kiss between the protagonist and his beloved one in *Pride and Prejudice*. The duration of the scenes ranged from 3 minutes and a half (13 Tzameti) and 6 minutes (*Pride and Prejudice*). Tables 1 and 2 provide details.

**Independent variables**

**Outcome Delay**
From each suspense scene two versions were made through video editing, either by introducing more details between Initiating Event and Outcome Event for a Long Outcome Delay version, or by deleting some details for a Short Outcome Delay. The delay was not implemented in the same way or in the same location of the suspense delay was not implemented in the same way, or in the same location of the suspense scene. Table 2 gives details on the differences between Long and Short Outcome Delay versions for each scene.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Pilot Study Outcome Value Manipulation Texts per Condition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pride and Prejudice</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Outcome Value:</strong> Mr. D'Arcy loves Elizabeth and Elizabeth loves Mr. D'Arcy as well, but she is too proud to admit it, struggling with a psychological conflict – this should increase the desirability and the likelihood that the protagonists will kiss when he proposes her and gets physically close to her;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low Outcome Value:</strong> Mr. D'Arcy loves Elizabeth but Elizabeth really despises him for she finds him arrogant and disrespectful with her family based on his superior status in the 18th century England: this should decrease the desirability and likelihood that they will kiss.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **The Ring I**                                      |
| **High Outcome Value:** we know for sure that the protagonist had watched a tape which may cause her death – something strange may come out of the TV and kill her – this information increases the likelihood that she will get killed; |
| **Low Outcome Value:** we know for sure that Katie is joking when saying that she had watched that tape – this decreases the possibility that she will get killed in the clip. |

| **Tzameti**                                   |
| **High Outcome Value:** we know that the crazy situation the protagonist got caught into is real and that the bullets involved in the Russian roulette he must play are real–this information should increase the likelihood that he protagonist will get killed and increase the desirability for him to get saved; |
| **Low Outcome Value:** we know that the crazy situation the protagonist got caught into is just an experiment and the bullets are not real, even if the protagonist doesn't know that – this should decrease the likelihood of him to get killed and should decrease the desirability to get him saved. |

<p>| <strong>Ten Winters</strong>                                      |
| <strong>High Outcome Value:</strong> we know that Camilla likes Marco and that he is truly in love with her but very shy, therefore he is hesitating in approaching her each time they meet – the desirability of having them talking to each other should be increased; |
| <strong>Low Outcome Value:</strong> we know that Camilla likes Marco and that he is just a flirty guy with no serious intentions, he is flirting with every girl, not only with her – the desirability of having them talk to each other should be decreased. |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MOVIE</th>
<th>SUSPENSE SCENE</th>
<th>OUTCOME DELAY MANIPULATIONS BY MEANS OF RE-EDITING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pride and Prejudice</td>
<td><strong>IE:</strong> after a conversation full of tension between Elizabeth and Mr. D’Arcy’s, they stop talking and just look in each other’s eyes in silence; it rains and rain is the only sound which can be heard;(Expected OE: they will kiss (positive OE);</td>
<td><strong>Long delay condition:</strong> extra shots with Mr. D’Arcy and Elizabeth looking in each other’s eyes in silence and progressively getting close to each other should delay the OE (4 min and 15 seconds long – it has 4 shots more (18 seconds more) than the short delay clip) – delay is placed in the end of the suspense scene, right before the OE – longer than the original;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4 min, 10 s)</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Short delay condition:</strong> the OE occurs much sooner (Mr. D’Arcy leaving without kissing Elizabeth) without the exchange of glances: it is shorter than the original (3 min and 57 sec long);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ring I</td>
<td><strong>IE:</strong> Katie and Becca, two teen-ager friends, were having a scary conversation about a video tape – if somebody watches this tape, he/she will get killed by something coming out of the TV. At the IE the TV turns on by itself while Katie is left alone in the room; (Expected OE: something may come out of the TV and kill the Katie (negative OE);</td>
<td><strong>Long delay condition:</strong> the TV set turns on by itself twice, making it more clear that something strange is happening, Katie is in danger and that it’s not Becca playing a trick on her (6 min and 13 seconds long – it has 4 shots more (25 seconds more) than the short delay clip) – delay is placed in the beginning of the suspense scene, right after the IE – this is the original;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6 min, 17 s)</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Short delay condition:</strong> the TV turning on by itself only once – this is shorter than the original (5 min and 48 seconds long);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Tzameti</td>
<td><strong>IE:</strong> a Russian roulette game is about to start and the characters point the guns at each other’s heads (the rule says that they must shoot when a bulb lights up); (Expected OE: they will shoot and some may die, including the protagonist (negative OE);</td>
<td><strong>Long delay condition:</strong> three repetitions of the shots with a bulb expected to light up followed by the terrified faces of the participants in a Russian roulette game waiting to shoot are progressively turned into slow motion – this should delay the OE (3 min and 25 seconds long – no extra shots from the low suspense clip (10 more seconds due to slow motion)) – the delay is placed in the end of the suspense scene, right before the OE – longer than the original;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3 min, 20 s)</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Short delay condition:</strong> the same shots progressively turned into fast motion should have an effect opposite to outcome delay, shortening the delay (3 min and 15 seconds long) – the original;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ten Winters</td>
<td><strong>IE:</strong> Camilla and Marco who are interested in each other meet in the market place. At the IE Camilla starts walking towards Marco; (Expected OE: they will start a conversation (positive OE).</td>
<td><strong>Long delay condition:</strong> four added repeated shots of Camilla walking towards Marco in the market place and of him watching her with interest should delay OE (3 min and 36 seconds long – it has 4 more shots (4 more seconds) than the short delay clip) – delay is introduced in the end of the suspense scene, right before the OE – longer than the original;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3 min, 38 s)</td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Short delay condition:</strong> the lack of these repeated shots, leave only two shots: she is walking towards him, he is leaving. This manipulation decreases delay (3 min and 40 seconds long) – the original version.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To safeguard the results’ external validity, a requirement to manipulations was that the scenes, which were all taken from regular films, would still look natural after the editing. The decision of keeping the original either in the long or in the short delay version depended on whether the scene could, or could not bear that materials were added, or taken away and still look natural.

**Outcome Value**

Outcome Value was varied through plot-related information provided to participants before viewing each suspense scene. For each suspense scene two different background texts were written; they differed based on a combination of three sub-factors: protagonist likeability, outcome likelihood, outcome desirability. Table 1 presents a detailed overview of Outcome Value manipulations.

**Procedure**

Testing took place in groups. Each viewing session was randomly assigned to one of the four resulting manipulation conditions (Outcome Delay/Outcome Value). Once they arrived in the classrooms, participants read the Outcome Value manipulation text for the first movie, watched the clip, and filled in the corresponding questionnaire. The procedure was repeated for all the other three clips. In the end they were debriefed and paid. Sessions typically lasted 90 minutes.

**Measures**

All measures involved Likert-type scales ranging from 0 (‘not at all’) to 6 (‘very much’). One item was presented after each scene, probing the level of suspense participants experienced right after the IE (‘I felt suspense when the TV turned on by itself’, $M = 3.98, SD = 1.46$ – The Ring I). As control variables, familiarity with the films used as materials (‘Have you seen this movie before?’) gender and age were included in the questionnaire.

**RESULTS**

**Outcome Delay**

To test the Outcome Delay hypothesis, a repeated measures ANOVA was conducted with experienced suspense as the dependent variable and Outcome Delay (longer vs. shorter) and Outcome Value (higher vs. lower) as between-subjects factors. Film was a within-subjects factor, while gender and two dummy variables for film order were taken into the analysis as covariates.
As expected, the manipulations of Outcome Delay did have a significant main effect on experienced suspense ($F(1,117) = 5.85, p < .05, partial \eta^2 = .05$). Higher suspense was experienced in the High than in the Low delay condition (High: $M = 4.27, SD = 1.31$; Low: $M = 3.98; SD = 1.47$).

**Film Genre**

Data also revealed a significant main effect of the film materials on experienced suspense ($F(3,351) = 25.95, p < .001, partial \eta^2 = .18$). This means that there are significant differences in the level of experienced suspense among the four scenes that belong to different genres, and the differences are as expected (Table 3). I found a significant linear contrast between the levels of suspense elicited by the four films ($F(1,117) = 17.93, p < .001, partial \eta^2 = .13$). The highest level of suspense was associated with the thriller 13 Tzameti, followed by the supernatural horror The Ring I, the classic romance Pride and Prejudice and finally the art house romance Ten Winters.

A significant interaction effect between Outcome Delay manipulations and film materials on experienced suspense was found ($F(3,351) = 6.2, p < .001, partial \eta^2 = .05$). Outcome Delay did affect experienced suspense in response to both romances: Pride and Prejudice ($F(1,123) = 15.55, p <= .001, Partial \eta^2 = .12$) and Ten Winters ($F(1,123) = 4.29, p = .04, partial \eta^2 = .03$). Participants experienced higher suspense when watching the High Outcome Delay versions. Nonetheless, there was no effect of Outcome Delay on experienced suspense in the scenes from action-oriented films: The Ring I and 13 Tzameti. There was no main effect of Outcome Value on suspense ($F(1,117) = 1.07, ns, partial \eta^2 = .01$). No effect of the interaction between Outcome Delay and Outcome Value on experienced suspense was found ($F(1,117) = .003, ns, partial \eta^2 <= .001$).

**Table 3. Experienced Suspense for Each Film (Pilot Study)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FILM</th>
<th>SUSPENSE M</th>
<th>SUSPENSE SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ring</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Winters</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. PP = Pride and Prejudice; Ring = The Ring I; 13 = 13 Tzameti; 10 Winters = Ten Winters.*
DISCUSSION

The pilot study revealed levels of experienced suspense well above minimum values for all films. Even when viewing character-oriented films, in which Outcome Events were less articulated, and the anticipation of positive events was created, participants reported quite high levels of suspense, indicating that the involved materials represented typical suspense scenes. As expected, the two action-oriented scenes were found to produce higher levels of experienced suspense than the two character-oriented ones (See Table 3).

On the one hand, the data revealed that Outcome Delay significantly influenced experienced suspense across different Outcome Value variations; on the other, effects of Outcome Delay were limited to two films: the character-oriented ones (*Pride and Prejudice* and *Ten Winters*). That effects of Outcome Delay increased experienced suspense in response to character-oriented films more than in response to action-oriented films was not unexpected. I can explain it with a ceiling effect in mind in the case of the action-oriented films. The Outcome Value in these films was that high, that suspense was already high even at short levels of Outcome Delay. That suspense did not increase at all with Outcome Delay in the case of action-oriented films was unexpected. In de Wied’s studies, Outcome Delay was found to increase experienced suspense in action-oriented genres (de Wied, 1991).

There is an alternative explanation for the discrepancy between action and character-oriented films that could also explain the lack of Outcome Delay effect on suspense in the case of action-oriented scenes: Outcome Delay was implemented in the same way and in the same location in both character-oriented films – at the climax (right when the Outcome Event is expected to be revealed), and through repetitions of shots added to the original (in the case of a kiss – the couple of screenshots: boy’s face/girl’s face can be repeated several times before the kiss). In contrast, the action-oriented films had delay implemented either in a different way, or in a different location than the character-oriented films: 13 Tzameti had it at the climax, but through slow motion. The Ring I had delay implemented through repetitions of shots, but right after the Initiating Event, not at the climax. Slow motion as technique of increasing Outcome Delay brought a quite subtle change in the aspect of the film scene, and it may actually be that viewers cannot perceive a difference between the normal film scene and the one in slow motion, and
therefore, I may not be able to capture suspense differences through self-report. When it comes to Outcome Delay location, it is not unexpected that Outcome Delay implemented at the climax is the most successful in increasing suspense. At the climax the tension is higher, as the immediacy of the Outcome Event is more intensely felt. Therefore, Outcome Delay implemented as insertion of shots right after the Initiating Event is less impactful than as insertion at the climax, where the tension and the impatience are already quite high.

I find as plausible the explanation that Outcome Delay may increase experienced suspense in film if it is implemented at the climax, especially through repetitions of shots. This method of Outcome Delay implementation will be applied in my subsequent experiments for both action-oriented and character-oriented films.

**STUDY 1**

My first main study tested the effect of Outcome Delay on suspense for the two genres: action-oriented and character-oriented, using the materials selected following the pilot study. In this study I varied Outcome Delay by no less than a factor five, hypothesizing that Outcome Delay would increase experienced suspense, but to some maximum (H1). Intuitively, I consider the possibility that increasing Outcome Delay for too long could bring irritation and even loss of interest, harming experienced suspense. I expect that with increasing Outcome Delay at some value, the increase in suspense will end. The clearest pattern of results conforming to this expectation is an inverted-U shaped quadratic trend in suspense for increasing Outcome Delay, an increase ending in a flexing point where increase is followed by decrease. In addition, the study also probes differences between genres. Based on previous research on suspense and narrative genre (e.g., Vorderer, Wulff, & Friedrichsen, 1996), my second hypothesis was that the level of suspense would be significantly higher in the action-oriented film than in the character-oriented film (H2).

**Participants and Design**

160 participants (108 women) took part in the experiment, and they included students, alumni of the University of Amsterdam, and friends and relatives of the experimenter. Students received course credits in return of their participation. Average age was 22.08 ($SD = 4.73$), with a minimum of 16 and a maximum
of 59. The study had a 5 (Outcome Delay) X 2 (Film Genre) between-subjects experimental design.

**Materials**

Two suspense scenes from Study 2 were retained in this study, one from an action-oriented film, 13 Tzameti (Babluani, Legrand, Saadi, & Babluani, 2005), and the other from a character-oriented film, Pride and Prejudice (Bevan, Fellner, Webster, & Wright, 2005).

**Independent Variables**

**Outcome Delay**

Both scenes used in this study were modified through video editing to obtain five degrees of Outcome Delay. The editing technique used was repetition of shots right at the climax. The lowest degree of Outcome Delay had the Outcome Event revealed immediately after the Initiating Event (Figure 1 represents the intervals between Initiating Event and Outcome Event for both films), while in the highest degree versions of the two scenes a number of shots in between the Initiating Event and the Outcome Event were repeated five times: e.g., in Pride and Prejudice, the couple of shots – man close-up/ woman close-up – before the expected kiss were repeated five times (Figure 1).

**Film Genre**

Film Genre had two values: action-oriented and character-oriented.
Procedure
The procedure was identical to that of the pilot study, except that participants only watched one scene, and did not receive any scene-related information prior to the viewing. Immediately after the viewing, they filled in a questionnaire.

Measures
All measures involved Likert-type scales ranging from 0 (‘not at all’) to 6 (‘very much’). Three items were used for measuring experienced suspense, which were developed following interviews with 12 Dutch students after watching suspense scenes from various films. The items reproduce formulations often used to refer to their experience of suspense. They tap into the theoretical components of tension and impatience associated with suspense (Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988; Tan & Diteweg, 1996). The items were adapted to each of the two scenes so as to match the Outcome Event. As example, for 13 Tzameti the items were: ‘I held my breath while waiting to see what happens when the light turns on’, ‘I felt impatient to find out what happens when the bulb lights up’, ‘I was on the edge of my seat while waiting for the bulb to light up’, Cronbach’s $\alpha = .75$, $M = 4.44$, $SD = 1.11$). For Pride and Prejudice the items sounded like: ‘I held my breath waiting to see whether they will kiss or not’, $\alpha = .75$, $M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.26$. The questionnaire also included control variable measures: age, gender, and familiarity with the film.
RESULTS
An overview of experienced suspense scores for the Outcome Delay and Film Genre conditions can be found in Table 4. It can be seen that in all conditions a considerable level of suspense was experienced. The lowest score in the least prototypical suspense scene condition is 2.37 on a scale from 1 to 6.

To test the Outcome Delay hypothesis, a two-way ANOVA was run with Film Genre and Outcome Delay as independent variables and experienced suspense as dependent variable. Gender, age and familiarity with the film were taken into the analysis as covariates. The results showed, as expected, a significant main effect of Film Genre, $F(1,147) = 44.36$, $p <= .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .23$. Participants who had watched the suspense scene from the action-oriented film reported to have experienced significantly higher suspense ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 1.11$) than those who had watched the character-oriented film ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.26$). I didn’t find a significant main effect of Outcome Delay on experienced suspense. However, a significant linear contrast was observed across the levels of Outcome Delay in experienced suspense, $F(1,147) = 5.75$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. The linear trend can be seen in Figure 2a and in Table 4. Thus, experienced suspense was found to increase linearly from the shortest to the longest Outcome Delay condition. Counter to expectations, I did not find any significant quadratic contrast in suspense as a function of Outcome Delay ($p > .05$).

In an attempt to explore different trends in the effect of Outcome Delay on experienced suspense based on genre, I looked at the data for each film separately. Separate ANOVAs were run for each film in part. In the analysis of the character-oriented scene, a significant linear contrast was found across the five levels of Outcome Delay, $F(1, 72) = 6.01$, $p = .017$, partial $\eta^2 = .08$. This means that experienced suspense increases linearly from the lowest degree of Outcome Delay version to highest (see the Figure 2b and Table 4). The linear trend does not occur in the case of the action-oriented film (See Figure 2c and Table 4). In the case of the action-oriented film, suspense oscillates steadily along the five delay versions.
Table 4. Mean Suspense Ratings as a function of Outcome Delay and Film Genre (with Standard Deviations in Parentheses) – Study 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film Genre</th>
<th>Delay--</th>
<th>Delay-</th>
<th>Delay</th>
<th>Delay+</th>
<th>Delay++</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Character-oriented</td>
<td>2.37 (.89)</td>
<td>2.77 (1.69)</td>
<td>3.0 (1.23)</td>
<td>3.29 (1.2)</td>
<td>3.25 (1.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action-oriented</td>
<td>4.25 (1.11)</td>
<td>4.54 (1.23)</td>
<td>4.27 (.94)</td>
<td>4.37 (1.36)</td>
<td>4.75 (.92)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.31 (1.37)</td>
<td>3.66 (1.71)</td>
<td>3.62 (1.26)</td>
<td>3.83 (1.38)</td>
<td>4.00 (1.26)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Delay-- (1 X climax shots), Delay- (2 X climax shots), Delay (3 X climax shots), Delay+ (4 X climax shots) and Delay++ (5 X climax shots) correspond to the manipulation conditions of Outcome Delay. Suspense was rated on a 7-point scale.
DISCUSSION

Once again, the data showed that suspense is experienced in a character-oriented film, just as well as in an action-oriented film, with significantly higher levels of suspense in the action-oriented film than in the character-oriented film. Study 1 confirms also that Outcome Delay increases experienced suspense. Experienced suspense tends to increase with degree of Outcome Delay when the two scenes are jointly considered. However, this relation was much clearer for the character-oriented, than for the action-oriented scene (See Table 4 and Figures 2b and 2c). I therefore did notice differences in the way Outcome Delay affects suspense between the two films of different genres.

I could not find any significant quadratic contrast of suspense as a function of Outcome Delay, as I was expecting, therefore my first study did not support H1 that there is a limit to the extent to which Outcome Delay can increase suspense. In the character-oriented film, there was a significant linear increase in experienced suspense due to Outcome Delay, suggesting that suspense does increase with Outcome Delay, as expected.

In the action-oriented scene, suspense does not grow as a function of Outcome Delay, counter to expectation. A ceiling effect may be the possible
The level of suspense was quite high at the shortest level of delay, and that may be reason why delay could not bring any significant increase in suspense further on. This finding suggests that Outcome Delay may be most effective as factor of suspense with less typical suspense scenes and with story events that are themselves less suspenseful because these orientations of suspense allow for suspense to increase.

Despite my finding that action-oriented genres lead to more suspense than character-oriented genres, which is certainly the more common belief, it can be argued that it is not the genre that brings a difference in the level of suspense, but the valence of the Outcome Event. The action-oriented suspense scenes usually used in research create the expectation of a negative Outcome Event (e.g., protagonist will get killed), while the so-called romantic suspense scenes usually bring the expectation of a positive Outcome Event (e.g., the protagonists will finally kiss). But action-oriented films may also contain suspense scenes leading to the expectations of a desirable event (e.g., punishment of a villain, or the protagonist gaining resources), whereas character-oriented scenes can create the expectation of a negative outcome (e.g., protagonists would break up). The notion that it is genre rather than event value that determines level of suspense may be due to a correlation between the two that can easily be observed: the most climactic suspense scenes in action movies revolve around a favored protagonist in peril, whereas climactic scenes in romance dramas feature a couple about to declare love to each other. However this may be, to make sure that genre category is what brings differences in the level of experienced suspense, and not simply outcome valence, it is important to control for variations in outcome valence when comparing character-oriented suspense scenes to action-oriented suspense scenes. In the second experimental study of this chapter, I will keep outcome valence constant across film genres, and check whether there are still differences in the level of suspense between genres.

**STUDY 2**

To get a clearer picture of how Outcome Delay affects suspense, and to obtain more generalizable findings, I ran a second, more powerful study, in which I used more films of both genres as materials. Four levels of Outcome Delay were compared in Study 2, but the step between two consecutive levels was higher than the step manipulated in study 1, to the extent that the longest delay exceeded the one of...
Study 1. This enabled me to investigate how suspense reacts to more extreme levels of Outcome Delay. It was hypothesized again that Outcome Delay would increase experienced suspense, but to a certain maximum, after which suspense would decrease (H1). To exclude confounding of Film Genre with Outcome Value effects, I only picked suspense scenes that brought the expectation of a positive Outcome Event in both genre categories.

Six film clips were used as materials (3 character-oriented and 3 action-oriented), and all of them inducing an expectation of positive Outcome Events. Positive Outcome Events rather than negative ones were opted for, because there hasn’t been much research on this type of suspense scenes, as all the previous empirical studies dealt with determinants of suspense in scenes leading to the expectation of negative Outcome Events (Comisky & Bryant, 1982; Zillmann, Hay, & Bryant, 1975; Brewer & Lichtenstein, 1982; Brewer & Ohtsuka, 1988; Gerrig & Bernardo, 1994).

Zillmann (1991; 1994) pinpointed that the more likely it was that a negative event would happen to the protagonist, the more suspense would be experienced. What if the reason why suspense is higher in action-oriented genres than in character-oriented genres is because typically the suspense scenes in in an action-oriented films are built around the expectation of negative Outcome Events, while the suspense scenes in character-oriented genres are typically built around the expectation of positive Outcome Events? To test whether the level of suspense is still higher in a genre atypical action-oriented scene than in a genre typical character-oriented scene, the atypical positive outcome action-oriented scenes were compared with typical positive outcome character-oriented scenes. In the design of my second study I kept Outcome Valence constant and positive for two contrasting genre categories, and I hypothesized that when outcome valence is constant, the difference in suspense based on Film Genre disappears (H2).

Participants and Design
I had 188 (149 women) participants, mostly comprised of students of the University of Amsterdam, who participated for research credits. The average age was 21 (SD = 3.26), with a minimum of 16 and a maximum of 59. The study had a 4 (Outcome Delay) X 2 (Film Genre: action-oriented vs. character-oriented) between-subjects experimental design. The participants in each condition
watched three different film styles of the same film genre, and the same Outcome Delay level in randomized order.

**Materials**

**Film**

Six suspense scenes with positive Outcome Event were used as materials in this study: three action-oriented film scenes extracted from already existing feature films – The Girl with Dragon Tattoo (Chaffin, Rudin, Staermose, Sondberg, & Fincher, 2011), Cutter's Way (Gurian & Passer, 1981), and For a Fistful of Dollars (Colombo, Papi, & Leone, 1964) – and three character-oriented film scenes – Pride and Prejudice (Bevan, Fellner, Webster, & Wright, 2005), Silver Lining Playbook (Cohen, Gigliotti, Gordon, & Russell, 2012) and the TV series Lost, episode 8 of the first season (Caplan & Gates, 2004). The scene from Pride and Prejudice was the same with the one used in Study 1.

All the action-oriented scenes led to the punishment of a villain: a serial killer gets chased by the female positive character who explicitly intends to kill him, but he ends up dying in an explosion ("The Girl with Dragon Tattoo"), a rich man who had murdered a young girl, but who cannot be put to jail due to a corrupted system, ends up facing the gun of the main protagonist ("Cutter's Way"), the villain in a typical Western story is being stopped by the hero from hanging an innocent man, and then gets shot in a duel ("A Fistful of Dollars"). All of the above mentioned scenes portray a typical action-oriented level of violence, but the expected Outcome Events are positive and desirable.

The character-oriented scenes portray as expected Outcome Events, kisses between the protagonists (in all the stories it is the first kiss – usually the most awaited for and the most desirable of the whole film). The selected scenes were 2 to 4 minute-long.

**Introductory text**

Each film was preceded by a short text that provided some background information to the short scene: 1) who the hero was; 2) who the villain was; 3) the motivations of each character. However, no suggestions were given regarding the outcome of the film.
Independent Variables

Outcome Delay

All six scenes were modified through video editing to obtain four degrees of Outcome Delay. The editing technique used was repetitions of shots right at the climax, meaning before the Outcome Event. The shortest Outcome Delay had the Outcome Event revealed immediately after the Initiating Event (in all films this involved one couple of the screenshots: villain's face/hero's face or girl's face/boy's face, before the Outcome Event was revealed). Each next step of delay involved four additional screenshots to the previous ones (two couples of the screenshots villain's face/hero's face; girl's face/boy's face). The longest level of Outcome Delay (level 4) contained 7 of the above mentioned couple of screenshots (14 screenshots between the Initiating Event and the Outcome Event), and a length between the Initiating Event and the Outcome Event of 36 seconds in the case of the character-oriented films, and 44 seconds in the case of the action-oriented films (see Figure 3). It is important to mention that the duration of time between the Initiating Event and the Outcome Event reported above represents averages of the longest Outcome Delay lengths in all three action-oriented film scenes, respectively all three character-oriented film scenes. The limits of Outcome Delay are pushed even further in this study than in study 1, when the longest level of Outcome Delay (level 5) contained 5 repetitions of the main pair of screenshots before the Outcome Event was revealed (10 screenshots). For a clear idea of the Outcome Delay lengths for each condition and for each genre in part in Study 1, see Figure 1. Only the Pride and Prejudice scene was used in both studies, and it is the only scene for which I can compare the length of the longest Outcome Delay in study 1 (30 seconds) to the length of the longest Outcome Delay in Study 2 (33 seconds). The difference is not so large, because the added shots in Study 2 were quite short to keep the film look natural.

Film Genre

Film Genre had two values: action-oriented and character-oriented. For the sake of generalizability, I used three film scenes for each film genre, and all of them were edited to vary Outcome Delay.

Procedure

This was an online experiment. Participants got to view three short suspense scenes belonging to the same genre (either character-oriented or action-oriented),
and at the same Outcome Delay level (1, 2, 3 or 4). The order of the three films was randomized. After each film scene a questionnaire was applied, in which suspense was assessed.

In the end of all films, an additional questionnaire was presented, requiring information about individual habits and tastes with film, and more general personal information.

Figure 3. Interval between the Initiating Event and the Outcome Event for: a) Character-oriented film; b) Action-oriented film (Study 2 – averages for the three films of each genre).
Measures

All measures involved Likert-type scales ranging from 0 (‘not at all’) to 6 (‘very much’). The same suspense scale was used as in the second study, adding to it an item that directly points to the emotion (‘I felt suspense’), and an item that refers to hope that the positive Outcome Event would take place (‘I was hoping they would kiss’). In the end they were six items that were averaged across the three films viewed by each participant, and proved to be highly reliable, $\alpha = .87$, $M = 4.13$, $SD = .89$). Items were adapted to the two film genres to match the type of outcome expected. As example, for Pride and Prejudice and the other character-oriented scenes, the items were: (e.g., ‘I held my breath waiting to see whether they will kiss or not’). The questionnaire also included control variable measures: age, gender, and familiarity with the film.

RESULTS

To test whether there was any significant difference between film genres in terms of experienced suspense, and whether Outcome Delay truly increased experienced suspense, I ran a two-way ANOVA with experienced suspense as dependent variable, Film Genre and Outcome Delay as independent variables and age and gender as covariates. For experienced suspense I used the average scores from all three films viewed by each participant. As expected, there was no main effect of Film Genre on experienced suspense ($F (1,178) = .06$, $ns$), meaning that both film genres led to almost equal levels of suspense (action-oriented films: $M = 3.12$, $SD = .94$; character-oriented films: $M = 3.14$, $SD = .85$).

I found a significant main effect of Outcome Delay on experienced suspense, $F (1,178) = 2.87$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .81$. The effect shows that Outcome Delay does increase experienced suspense. The data also showed a significant linear contrast in experienced suspense between the levels of Outcome Delay ($p < .05$), no quadratic trend, but a close to significant cubic contrast ($p = .056$). For a clearer view of the course of suspense with increasing Outcome Delay see Figure 4a. An LSD post-hoc test showed that the only significant increases in experienced suspense were from levels 1 ($p < .05$) and 2 ($p < .05$) of Outcome Delay to level 3 of Outcome Delay that brought the highest level of suspense with the films. A close to significant difference in experienced suspense was observed between the level 4 of experienced suspense and the level 2 of experienced suspense, which is the lowest registered ($p = .055$).
I did not find any interaction effect between Film Genre and Outcome Delay on experienced suspense, $F(3,178) = .98, ns$. How Outcome Delay affects experienced suspense in each Film Genre differently was explored through one-way ANOVAs ran for each Film Genre in part. Both ANOVAs looked at Outcome Delay as independent variable, experienced suspense as dependent variable and genre and age as covariates. It seems that the main effect of Outcome Delay on experienced suspense still remains significant when it comes to action-oriented films, $F(3,86) = 3.25, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .1$, meaning that the more delayed the Outcome Event is in an action-oriented film, the more suspense is experienced (See Table 5 and Figure 4c). The action-oriented genre data show a significant cubic contrast between the levels of delay in terms of experienced suspense ($p < .05$), and a close to significance linear one ($p = .057$). An LSD post-hoc test showed that the level 2 of delay brought significantly lower experienced suspense than the levels 3 ($p < .05$), and 4 of suspense ($p < .05$). There is also a close to significant difference in the level of experienced suspense between the level 1 of suspense and level 3 of suspense ($p = .054$). There is no significant main effect of Outcome Delay on experienced suspense when it comes to the character-oriented films, $F(3, 90) = .16, ns$. To have a clearer view of the trend, see Table 5 and Figure 4b.
Figure 4. Suspense as function of Outcome Delay for: a) the entire dataset; b) the character-oriented film; c) the action-oriented film (Study 2).

Note. The numbers on the X-axis (1, 2, 3, 4) represent the four Outcome Delay manipulation conditions. For each condition: the number of climax shots occurrence = number on X-axis + (number on X-axis – 1). Gender and age were used as covariates.
Table 5. Mean Suspense Ratings as a function of Outcome Delay and Film Genre (with Standard Deviations in Parentheses) – Study 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film Genre</th>
<th>OUTCOME DELAY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delay--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character-oriented</td>
<td>2.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action-oriented</td>
<td>2.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Delay-- (1 X climax shots), Delay- (3 X climax shots), Delay + (5 X climax shots), Delay++ (7 X climax shots) correspond to the manipulation conditions of Outcome Delay. Suspense was rated on a 7-point scale.

DISCUSSION

Outcome Delay emerged again as a determinant factor of experienced suspense, and this time a significant main effect was revealed. The effect is stronger in this study most likely because 1) All films had a positive valence, the type of suspense scene that proved in the previous studies to be most affected by Outcome Delay in increasing suspense, and 2) I had more participants than in Study 1. As expected, suspense increased linearly with Outcome Delay over all films. But the most noteworthy outcome of the study is the fact that I could still not observe a flexing point where suspense increase makes way for a decrease. No significant quadratic contrast of suspense as a function of Outcome Delay was obtained. Suspense seems to increase with Outcome Delay, but even when extending Outcome Delay to the point where it seemed to distract viewers’ attention from the story, I could not fully confirm H1. No upper limit to the increase in suspense with growing Outcome Delay was established.

A finding of study 2 that is almost as surprising is that there is no significant difference in experienced suspense between the character-oriented films and the action-oriented ones. The differences in experienced suspense between films of different genres found in my first study, but also in previous ones (e.g., Oliver & Bartsch, 2010), may not have been caused by the genre per se. It may be that the differences in Outcome Event valence brought about the differences in experienced suspense: a suspense scene that primes the expectation of a negative Outcome Event seems to bring more suspense than the scene that primes the expectation of a positive Outcome Event. People may add more value, and invest more emotions, like fear and/or hope (Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988) in the prospect of suffering a loss than in the projection of an achievement.
The data also show that compared to study 1, in which the action-oriented scene had a genre-typical negative outcome valence, suspense in response to action-oriented scenes featuring genre-atypical positive Outcome Events is lower. However, to draw a definite conclusion regarding the difference in suspense based on genre typicality outcome valence, or based on Outcome Valence, it would be necessary to replicate this study, using also scenes with negative Outcome Events of each genre.

When looking at each film genre separately as to the way Outcome Delay affects suspense, I noticed that the effect of Outcome Delay is significant only for the action-oriented films, following exactly the same pattern I found with the overall data. The data showed a significant cubic trend, and only a close to significance linear trend, no quadratic trend being found; the data show that no flexing point where suspense started decreasing due to too much delay could be found regardless of Film Genre (See Figure 4).

When it comes to the character-oriented films, experienced suspense increases linearly, in a similar trend with the one in Study 1, but the increase is small and not significant (See Figure 4b). To conclude, for this category of film genres it cannot be said based on the data in Study 2 whether there truly is a significant linear increase in suspense due to Outcome Delay. I will discuss possible reasons for such findings, in the light of the findings in Study 1, in the general discussion.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

This chapter presented two empirical studies through which I attempted to address three aspects of SAT. I wanted 1) To confirm that in accordance to SAT, Outcome Delay increases experienced suspense; 2) To investigate whether the Outcome Delay effect on suspense goes up not linearly as SAT seems to suggest, but ceases to increase at degree of Outcome Delay; and 3) To investigate to what extent suspense and the effect of Outcome Delay on suspense depend on Film Genre.

I expected Outcome Delay to increase suspense, but I also wanted to see at which level of delay, suspense may stop increasing. All my studies showed either a significant main effect of Outcome Delay on experienced suspense (pilot study and
Study 2), in the way that delay increased suspense, or a significant increasing linear trend in suspense as a function of delay (Study 1). None of the studies revealed a flexing point for suspense, i.e. there was no quadratic trend of suspense due to increased delay for any of the film genres. Both studies confirmed entirely the claims of SAT regarding the effect of Outcome Delay on suspense; however much I tried to extend the level of delay (longer in Study 2 than in Study 1, and even unnaturally looking in the most extreme delay conditions) suspense did not start dropping significantly. I found a linear increasing trend in suspense as a function of delay in both Studies 1 and 2. This finding is not only in line with SAT, but also with previous empirical studies (e.g., Nomikos et al., 1968; Breznitz, 1967). De Wied (1991) ran seven experimental studies in which she investigated the effect of Outcome Delay on suspense in film, implementing considerably long steps of delay between conditions. However she only found linear trends in the increase of suspense due to Outcome Delay, except one study in which she found a quite weak quadratic trend; this study was the study in which she used the longest levels of delay.

The findings in my studies and in the previous studies, referring to the limit of delay as factor of suspense, are surprising. Despite the fact that the longest levels of delay in my studies also made the films look almost unnatural, suspense still seemed to increase. My results invite further empirical research push Outcome Delay to even more extreme values, going beyond usual norms. However, if Outcome Delay was stretched further and still increased suspense, it would introduce challenges to SAT. How could it be that an outcome delayed almost endlessly, to use a figure of speech, still increases suspense? I feel that maximum Outcome Delay values in my Study 2 already pose the question of how boredom and fatigue that would seem to inevitably occur with such a prolonged Outcome Delay are overcome. SAT needs to be extended with a mechanism theoretically explaining why people entertain hopes and fears, and bear impatience for so long. The theory needs to explain rather than postulate virtually unlimited increases of suspense.

My findings were inconclusive with respect to how genre impacts the way delay affects suspense. In the case of the character-oriented films in Study 1 I found a significant increasing linear trend in suspense due to delay, trend that was not there anymore in Study 2 for this category of genres. On the other hand, in the case of the action-oriented films, I found a significant cubic trend in suspense due
to Outcome Delay, but only in Study 2; in Study 1 there was no significant trend for the action-oriented films. To conclude, none of the significant trends (linear for the character-oriented films, or cubic for the action-oriented films) were found in both studies. More research is needed to determine whether a film’s genre modulates the relationship between delay and suspense, or if the relationship is more significantly impacted by other factors within the particular films used as materials.

A genre particularity worth mentioning that was noticed in both studies is that in the action-oriented films experienced suspense dropped at three repetitions of the shots before the Outcome Event (at level 3 of delay in Study 1, and at level 2 of delay in study 2). After that drop suspense started increasing again. This finding should be treated with caution, as the drop in suspense is low and insignificant, but considering the fact that it occurred in both studies (four film scenes of different outcome valence being used in total), I will give it some attention, and try to understand why it may be there. The detail that makes this observation interesting and surprising is the exact moment of Outcome Delay where the drop occurs, at three repetitions of the shots before the Outcome Event. Expectation and anticipation are particularly important in the case of suspense (Tan & Diteweg, 1996; Ortony, Clore, & Collins, 1988), and some repetition is needed to have anticipation. However, with more than three repetitions it is considered to have a risk of disengagement from the audience due to boredom. Moreover, if I look at action-oriented and character-oriented Hollywood films, they almost always use three-time repetitions in suspense scenes. My studies suggest that this may not be the best technique, if the goal is to reach the highest suspense, because I found in both studies that at three repetitions of the last two shots before the Outcome Event there is a tendency for suspense to decrease. However, more suspense scenes should be tested at different delay levels, to draw a conclusion universally applicable.

When it comes to differences in experienced suspense between film genres, I first need to mention that suspense has been shown in my studies to be experienced to considerable degrees in response to both action and character-oriented films. This finding should in my view be regarded as support for the general claim of SAT that events of some minimum interest can raise suspense when there is some delay. Consistent with current intuitions and previous research (e.g., Oliver & Bartsch,
2010; Thompson, 1988), action-oriented films, like thriller, action and mystery films, proved to bring significantly higher levels of experienced suspense than the character-oriented films (e.g., romance). However, this was the case only when the Outcome Event in the action-oriented films was expected to be negative, and the one in the character-oriented films was expected to be positive (pilot study and Study 1). When I controlled for outcome valence (Study 2), and only used films with positive outcome valence, there was no significant difference in experienced suspense between the film genres, and the level of suspense was lower than it had been for the action-oriented films with negative Outcome Event. This is a truly novel finding, as it was considered as common sense that some action-oriented genres, like thrillers, would be synonymous to the word suspense, character development–oriented genres, like romance, that would be very low in suspense (Vorderer, Wulf, & Friedrichsen, 1996; Zillmann & Vorderer, 2000). The data in study 2 suggest that valence of the expected outcome may be more important than genre in determining the level of experienced suspense; specifically, genre does not have a significant impact when the valence is positive.

However, it is important to acknowledge that narrative genres typically portray either negative Outcome Events or positive ones. Suspense in action films or thrillers is mostly based on the fear that something negative will happen; whereas suspense in romance is primarily based on hope that love will conquer all. Even though my second study showed that outcome valence is generally sufficient for determining high variations of suspense, it is not inaccurate to conclude that there is more suspense in action-oriented genres than in character-oriented genres.

A major implication of the studies is that they illustrate the power of presentation techniques as one of the two tools that storytellers avail of. Events widely different as to their interest value could be shown to have an impact on suspense through their particular presentation, in this case degree of delay. There seems to be a world to win in systematically studying the functioning and effects of presentation techniques that add to the events themselves for the sake of narrative interest. Such presentation techniques consist of ordering of events, manipulating salience of particular story events, manipulating perspective on events, and other such techniques known from narrative theory.
LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

This chapter investigated the strengths and limitations of Outcome Delay as determinant of suspense: I tested the best option to manipulate delay, looked into different film genres, a variety of films for each genre for the sake of generalizability of my findings, looked into outcome valence differences, stretched delay at two different steps, and used a new and encompassing instrument to measure suspense. However, there are still some aspects that could be improved, leading to suggestions for further research.

First, future research should look into alternative ways of implementing Outcome Delay, as I only used one, and real movies use many other ways of delaying an event: various images, information from the suspense scenes, cutting to other locations, cutting to different time. Even when implementing a repetition of shots, it would be interesting to look into the quality of the shots (type of information given: e.g., close up, clock, action), and how it may affect experienced suspense. Second, I recommend that in future studies Outcome Delay will be stretched even more.

CONCLUSION

The present chapter achieved an important step towards understanding suspense in vivo. Not only does the chapter bring important empirical support for some tenets of Structural Affect Theory, but it also enriches SAT by tackling the issue of narrative genre within its theoretical framework. Perfectly in line with SAT, both studies presented in this chapter showed that Outcome Delay linearly increases experienced suspense. Also consistent with SAT, but unexpected, there seemed to be no limit to Outcome Delay having this effect, as I did not find a level of delay when suspense stopped increasing even when delay was racked beyond the limits of naturally looking scenes. Moreover, for the first time this chapter compared action-oriented genres to the character-oriented genres. This is the first set of empirical studies showing that suspense is experienced in genres that differ a great deal, and more in particular that it is even experienced in viewing denouement scenes in romance. Also in line with SAT, I found that Outcome Delay increases suspense regardless of genre, with slight differences in trends that still need to be explored more in detail in further research.
Moreover, using carefully crafted designs, and paying attention to the details that might have influenced my findings and the findings in previous studies, I then challenged the belief that it is genre per se that leads to more or less suspense, by illustrating the necessity of focusing on outcome valence and on its impact on suspense. A pilot and two experimental studies were combined to provide clear directions to empirical researchers interested in suspense, and to filmmakers or advertisers of how to successfully implement suspense. Specifically, my experiments suggest that adding delay at the climax of a suspense scene through shot repetition is a technique to be used with any film genre and with any story events to effectively increase suspense. If I extrapolate my findings, large delays may be employed without the fear of disrupting the experience, as I could not identify a limit to the effectiveness of Outcome Delay in increasing suspense.

My findings illustrate the potential of research for exploring how the particular ways in which interesting events are presented may add to an understanding of how to improve the art of film storytelling. I hope that my attempt to complement in vitro studies of suspense will inspire other researchers in narrative discourse processing.
REFERENCES


