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Hyper-Diversity in Sampling Strategy for Reader Response Studies in an Urban Context

Melina Ghasseminejad, University of Antwerp, Belgium
Anneke Sools, University of Twente, the Netherlands
Luc Herman, University of Antwerp, Belgium
María-Ángeles Martínez, Universidad de Alcalá, España

Abstract

Research on readers of literary fiction is predominantly carried out by institutions situated in culturally complex cities. However, the participant selection process for these empirical studies often overlooks the city's cultural diversity. Therefore, this article aims to present a participant sampling strategy for empirical reader response research, focusing on urban readers in a European context, with Antwerp as the study location. Opting for a qualitative approach and considering the hyper-diverse nature of major cities, we advocate for a purposeful sampling strategy. We suggest using a social milieu rather than traditional descriptive markers by recruiting from different neighbourhoods, as neighbourhoods have their own culture and play an important role in a person's identity. Turning to local libraries for participant recruitment means a step towards studying actual readers and will lead to a deeper insight into the effects of texts on readers. Moreover, apart from obtaining a wider variety of idiosyncratic responses, this can also result in a deeper understanding of (sub)cultural responses to narratives.

Keywords: empirical studies, hyper-diversity, participant selection, qualitative research methods

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Introduction

Early strategies of researching readers of literary fiction turned literary scholars to hermeneutic shortcuts like Iser's (1978) implied reader, which is an image of the reader "who is not fixed in the text but exists merely in the imagination of the author" (Schmid, 2014, "Explication" section),) or Fish's (1970) informed reader, which is a reader who is capable of handling literary conventions. Although these shortcuts cannot be seen as dealing with actual readers—in other words, the "flesh-and-blood person reading the text" who is not trained in analysing narratives (Prince, 2013, "Precursors" section)—implied and informed readers bypass a challenging aspect, namely, reader responses can be highly idiosyncratic. Moreover, even though there will always be culturally expected responses from readers (i.e., rooting for the hero), "it is the individual that actualizes narrative meaning by anchoring it to some specific context of interpretation and to the deepest and most private recesses of the experiencing mind" (Martínez, 2018, p. 1). This leads us to the question of whether the consideration of culturally complex geographies in empirical research will affect those responses (Tasan-Kok et al., 2013; Wessendorf, 2014).

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This article presents a participant sampling strategy for empirical reader response research to explore this question, focusing on the theory that "identifies the significant role of the reader in constructing textual meaning" (Browne et al., 2021)(p.1). In this sampling strategy, libraries play a central role. The study looks at Antwerp, Belgium, as the location for examining urban readers in a European context. When discussing hyper-diverse locations in the Global North, cities such as New York, Toronto, and London come to mind. Antwerp is a less prominent hyper-diverse city, and while relatively small (26 x 11 km), it houses 172 nationalities (Antwerpse diversiteit in cijfers, n.d.). Consequently, the diversity in Antwerp calls for a complex approach to participant selection if the goal is to have a representative sample. In simpler terms, this paper introduces the concept of culturally complex geographies in the context of reader response research.

When examining culturally complex geographies, which refers to the "demographic complexity of cities and the multi-categorical differentiations found in specific areas" (Wessendorf, 2014, p. 24), it becomes necessary to simplify the concept. In the context of Britain's social landscape, Vertovec (2007) argued that the complex social makeup in Britain had outgrown the term multiculturalism, a notion that is often used in politics and mainly focuses on ethnicity. Aiming to re-evaluate the nature of diversity in Britain, he introduced the term superdiversity, arguing that "it is not enough to see diversity only in terms of ethnicity, as is regularly the case both in social science and the wider public sphere" (Vertovec, 2007, p. 1024). He specifically refers to the myriad of additional variables people carry with them, such as differential immigration statuses, age profiles, and spatial distribution patterns (Vertovec, 2007). Building on Vertovec's theory of superdiversity, Tasan-Kok et al. (2013) argue that urban groups have become hyper-diverse, as even when people appear to belong to the same group, they can express different lifestyles, attitudes, and activity patterns.

This complexity can also be found in responses to narratives, which may be affected by our personal experiences (Martínez, 2018). To tackle the difficulty of examining those individual differences in literary processes, literary scholars such as Siegfried Schmidt advocated for an empirically oriented science of literature in the 1970s, aiming to bridge the gap between the humanities and the sciences whilst not depending on sociological or psychological procedures. Bortolussi and Dixon (2003) mention that Schmidt's (1983) pioneering work led to "a variety of empirical investigations [that] have contributed to our understanding of literature and literary narrative" (p.23). In narratology, which is the study of narratives, empirical narratology came into being as a means of examining the "psychological mechanisms of text processing" by almost exclusively using positivistic methods (Herman & Vervaeck, 2019, p. 112). According to Bortolussi and Dixon (2003),

> [h]ow readers process narrative is essentially an empirical question that can only be answered by systematic observation of actual readers reading actual texts; it cannot be answered solely based on intuition, anecdotal evidence, or even sophisticated models of human experience. (p. 13)

Traditional quantitative empirical investigations often require large sample sizes, and this convention has also been translated to quantitative reader response research. As a result, convenience sampling has been commonly adopted as a sampling strategy, wherein "research participants are selected based on their ease of availability" when studying actual readers (Saumure & Given, 2008, p. 124). However, as Patton (2014) argues, "convenience sampling is neither strategic nor purposeful. It is lazy and largely useless" (p. 306). Instead, when studying

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idiosyncratic actual reader responses, opting for a purposeful sampling strategy is more likely to ensure "insights and in-depth understanding" (Patton, 2014, p. 401).

Hence, if a study's research question looks at readers in general, a sample of actual readers brings about a complication when designing an empirical case study: how can it be ensured that the sample consists of actual readers? Moreover, how can the sample be ensured to include actual readers when dealing with a culturally complex population? In other words, we are considering a sample that takes reader diversity into account as well. The present article focuses on these issues and aims to present a participant selection strategy for empirical research into actual urban readers by looking at Antwerp, Belgium. Still, the proposed strategy can be used to research readers in any Western urban context. As Flick (2007) argues, "constructing a research design successfully means to define who or what shall be studied (and who or what shall not)" (p. 44). In the case of empirical research, participants must be selected carefully. As Reybold et al. (2013) argue, researchers do not "just collect and analyze neutral data; they decide who matters as data. Each choice repositions inquiry, closing down some opportunities while creating others" (p. 699). When looking at individual and culturally determined responses, it is valuable to have participants that are part of the target group, in this case, the actual Flemish urban reader. For example, a study from 2011 by the marketing research company Synovate found that among 750 Flemish residents spread across cities and rural areas, a little over 50% of the participants reported that they read books as a favourite pastime, with women tending to favour reading more than men (Synovate, 2011). People from urban areas (66%) slightly preferred reading more than those from rural areas (51%) (Synovate, 2011). Regarding age, the category that seems to read the most as a pastime was 55-64 (66%), followed closely by the age category 35-44 with 63 percent (Synovate, 2011). Migration background was not included in the analyses as there were not enough participants with a migration background (3%) to reach reliable and valid conclusions (Synovate, 2011). This is problematic because the latest study into readers in Belgium could not reach a minority population.

Traditional Samples: University Student Population

Due to language proficiency, the pool of possible participants may become smaller when studying readers. Hence, reader studies tend to have a sample of highly educated people as participants. In practice, this means that researchers often turn to their student population, raising the question of whether participants in such a sample can be seen as actual readers (Wild et al., 2022). In addition to not being the leading group of Flemish readers, other limits should be considered when working with a student population. Convenience sampling certainly has its advantages, as students are easily accessible, thus affording a large population from which to sample, and they can be rewarded with credits, thus low costs. However, research by Hanel and Vione (2016) that looked at students across 59 countries showed that although their results were as heterogeneous as those of the general public, the differences and variability between students could not be explained. Moreover, in a gambling study, Gainsbury et al. (2014) compared university students to the general public and concluded that using student participants from one university is only appropriate if the study aims to investigate students' behaviors from that specific university. In other words, even though they are part of the same group on the surface, students from separate universities display dissimilar responses, making the results unrepresentative. Hence, if the study aims to investigate the behaviours of the general public, it is not sufficient to only include university student participants in the research sample.

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An extra element must be considered when discussing university students' use in empirical studies. The students approached for studies into readers are usually language students. If the target group for a reader response study is a diverse group of urban readers, like a group with demographic complexity and multi-categorial differentiations (Wessendorf, 2014), then those students are not suitable, as they are trained in narrative from day one, turning them into skilled readers. Moreover, the student population is overwhelmingly white, whilst populations of cities that house research institutions, including Antwerp, are ethnically diverse. As Sugden and Moulson (2015) argue,

> [a] sample from the population should include participants representing that population's diversity. If the population is not homogenously or nearly homogenously White, but research samples recruited from the population are nearly ubiquitously White, this disconnect should be probed and remediated. (p. 2)

Moreover, composing a sample out of a student population threatens the internal validity of a study as well, "likely due [to] the differences in knowledge between student participants at different stages in their education and chosen course of study" (Meltzer et al., 2012, p. 252). Additionally, even though the students might follow the same programme, some major in linguistics and others in literature.

Sample Selection

Static Categories

As results from an experiment amongst a student population would not be representative when discussing the urban reader, descriptive categories are necessary to ensure a representative sample. This automatically brings the discussion to the traditional categories, namely the big eight: "race, gender, ethnicity/nationality, organisational role/function, age, sexual orientation, mental/physical ability and religion," with three of those especially prominent in the West, namely gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background (Bührmann, 2015, p. 24).

Gender is understood as the "socially produced differences between being feminine and being masculine" (Holmes, 2007, p. 2) and is generally considered to come in two forms: male and female (Richards et al., 2016). In addition to people identifying with the binary system of male and female, some people have a non-binary gender identity—an umbrella term for several identities such as genderqueer, pangender, bigender, and agender—and should be taken into account as well (Richards et al., 2016).

The second descriptive category of ethnicity/nationality is more challenging to examine. As Salentin (2014) states,

> [e]thnic categories are vague and multidimensional, and at the same time essentialist, constructed, and not entirely amenable to objective characterization, often apparently arbitrary and almost always politically contested, embedded in country-specific circumstances, and subject to rapid change; their semantics are language-specific, and their labels change constantly and quickly become pejorative. (p. 27)

Especially in continental Europe, the concepts of race and ethnicity are difficult to broach due to the consequences of the Second World War and Nazism (Salentin, 2014). Hence, we will forgo

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the terms race or ethnicity, which are mainly used in the American context (Bührmann, 2015). Instead, we will use the term *migration background,* which is used more commonly in the European context, including Belgium (Salentin, 2014). This article will use the term migration background similarly to how Wessendorf (2014) uses the term *ethnic background*, which is a term that refers to "people's references to a common ancestry, shared culture, history and language" (p. 11). That is not to say that the term does not have its shortcomings. The official legal definition of a person with a migratory background given by the European Commission (n.d.) is "a person who has (a) migrated into their present country of residence; and (b) previously had a different nationality from their present country of residence; and (c) at least one of their parents previously entered their present country of residence as a migrant"(paragraph 1). According to Will (2019), this indicates that the concept is "grounded on citizenship, not migration experience" and therefore remains "an 'ethnic' rather than a migration category" (p. 550). In the context of research on German politics, the statistical category is turned into a social category that is "framed in terms of language and class" and thus implicitly becomes "ethnic and produces a version of membership in German society that excludes […] (some German citizens) from the core national group" (Elrick & Schwartzman, 2015, p. 1546). In other words, a necessary consequence is that migrants are still labelled as "foreigners" based on the public perception of them, regardless of their legal migration status (Asbrock et al., 2014).

The last descriptive category, socioeconomic status, seems straightforward to use—after all, most scholars have a general idea of its meaning—but there are numerous ways to measure and define the construct. The most widely accepted measure of socioeconomic status is a "composite measure of education, income, and occupation" (Baker, 2014, p. 2210). When discussing socioeconomic status, it would be remiss to omit class as a notion, especially as class is often used and preferred in the public sphere instead of socioeconomic status. Class has many definitions, but it generally refers to a "combination of socioeconomic status, parental and educational background, and, related to this, differences in speech, tastes, mannerisms, and other cultural practices" (Wessendorf, 2014, p. 11). We will follow Wessendorf's use of the term class and her accompanying definition.

Intersectionality and Superdiversity as a Sampling Strategy

The abovementioned parameters have a history of being studied separately and individually. As classifiers, they often function as a default when defining diversity by making distinct categories and counting the numbers (Meissner, 2016). However, this started to change when Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in her influential 1989 article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," which introduced the importance of the interaction and dynamic between two or more factors. Hence, intersectionality might help design a purposive sample strategy when selecting participants in an urban context. Initially introduced as a term to point out that a "single-axis framework erases Black women in the conceptualization, identification, and remediation of race and sex discrimination" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140), the concept was quickly picked up by scholars and applied to fields beyond Black feminist critique and has since seen an increase in interest in academia and a widespread awareness in the public sphere. An earlier manifesto by the Combahee River Collective, a Black lesbian feminist organization, emphasises the inseparability of several systems of oppression with their declaration: "We also find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously" (Combahee River Collective, 1981/2021, p. 212). Accordingly, Crenshaw (2002, p. 177) defines intersectionality as follows:

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> Intersectionality is a conceptualization of the problem that attempts to capture both the structural and dynamic consequences of the interaction between two or more axes of subordination. It specifically addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression and other discriminatory systems create background inequalities that structure the relative positions of women, races, ethnicities, classes, and the like. Moreover, it addresses the way that specific acts and policies create burdens that flow along these axes constituting the dynamic or active aspects of disempowerment. (as cited in Lutz, 2015, p. 364)

Even though the concept offers a way to look at the interactions between social structures and identity, there are still some gaps in the theory. The main caveat concerns the gender, race, and class triangle and the fact that more categories could play a role, such as religion and geopolitical location (Lutz, 2015). More importantly, although intersectionality makes room for including several categories in an analysis and has been used as a methodology in the past (i.e., Acevedo-Garcia et al., 2003; Berger & Guidroz, 2009; Samra & Hankivsk, 2021), it does not suffice as a methodology when it comes to hyper-diverse cities. This can be observed in Marfelt's (2016) development of an "empirically grounded methodology" where he incorporates diversity research as a factor when proposing intersectionality as a methodology (p. 32). Marfelt suggests that intersectionality needs another theory to become a well-defined methodology. Although he acknowledges that intersectionality's "open-endedness and vagueness" contributes to its successes (Marfelt, 2016, p. 34), he also highlights its somewhat ambiguous definition and the lack of a coherent methodology. To transform intersectionality into a methodology, Marfelt (2016) incorporates factors from diversity studies, which are already addressed in hyper-diversity as a framework, namely the fluidity of social categories, as elaborated below.

Before delving further into hyper-diversity, it is helpful to look at superdiversity first. In her book *Commonplace Diversity*, Wessendorf (2014) uses the notion of superdiversity as a lens to "describe an exceptional demographic situation characterized by the multiplication of social categories within specific localities" (p. 2). She criticises how individuals are traditionally described solely based on their social categories without considering the relationships between group and individual. For instance, as Anthias (2011) points out, when only ethnic position is considered as a marker, it is often assumed to imply ethnic identity, which in turn implies "belonging to a particular culture with contents which are generic (and homogeneous) to the group" (p. 205). As mentioned previously, this article aims to present a participant selection strategy for empirical research into urban readers. However, Wessendorf's (2014) and Anthias'(2011) critiques show that it is insufficient to look at traditional markers when aiming to incorporate the target audience's diversity into the sample, as it fails to incorporate complex social relations, such as differences between class, cultural background, and language.

In its broadest definition, superdiversity refers to a "multi-dimensional perspective on diversity" (Vertovec, 2007, p. 1026), as merely observing ethnicities leads to a one-dimensional understanding of diversity and thus fails to include the "multiplication of significant variables that affect where, how and with whom people live" such as immigration statuses, gender, age, labour market experiences, and patterns of spatial distribution (Vertovec, 2007, p. 1025). In short, superdiversity is a lens with which it is possible to examine intersections in cities where superdiversity has become commonplace, in other words, where "diversity has become habitual and part of the everyday human landscape" (Wessendorf, 2014, p. 3). Additionally, Vertovec (2007) uses superdiversity to transcend traditional scientific framings on multicultural studies that tend to look at cultures as something fixed and bound (Jones et al., 2015). Instead, he

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describes the often-present interplay of variables in groups and individuals (Vertovec, 2007). Another key feature of the concept is that it acknowledges differences within groups of the same ethnic or national origin (Vertovec, 2007). This notion is in accordance with intersectionality but overcomes the aforementioned triangle problem. As Wessendorf (2014) argues, "it is easy to deconstruct ethnic categories when looking at specific ethnic 'groups' and their members' patterns of identification," but "it is more difficult to write about contexts with numerous migrants and minorities from various ethnic and national backgrounds without using these categories" (p. 11). In addition, there is an increase in mixed-ethnicity populations and established migrant populations, bringing a new type of identity (Jones et al., 2015). This complexity thus calls for another way of grouping city dwellers. As Hoekstra and Pinkster (2019) argue,

> [s]uper-diversity invites researchers to go beyond a focus on diversity that is the result of international migration and explore how differences in nationality, race, and ethnicity intersect with other dimensions of difference, such as gender, age, life course, class, religion, migrant trajectories, and language. (p. 223)

That said, critics argue that superdiversity remains to be "tethered to rather more traditional identity categories, even if these are emergent or complicated" (Kraftl et al., 2019, p. 1192). Although it might seem like a case of semantics, Kraftl et al. (2019) argue that although superdiversity begins to emphasise the "dynamic, performative and contingent ways in which superdiverse identities and spaces extend beyond traditional social (and especially ethnic) identity categories," it does not encompass it entirely as these complexities are far more extensive (p. 1192). For instance, "an individual's eating habits, or their leisure pursuits, or even their emotional disposition to particular places in a city, may differ quite markedly from those of others in the same superdiverse sub-group" (Kraftl et al., 2019, p. 1191). Thus, Peterson (2017) argues that urban groups are not merely becoming superdiverse, they are becoming hyper-diverse, "because even people who appear to belong to the same group express different lifestyles, attitudes and activity patterns" (p. 1069). In other words, superdiversity still adheres to static and traditional categories, whereas hyper-diversity takes the complexity of the blurring of traditional categories into account. This distinction underpins the difference between the two terms in secondary literature. As Tasan-Kok et al. (2013) state,

> [p]eople belonging to the same population or ethnic group may show quite different attitudes, for example, concerning school, work, parents and other groups; they may have very different daily and lifetime routines. Some adolescents and adults may exhibit extensive daily mobility patterns, while others may be locally oriented. While the sphere of daily interaction of a native resident may be restricted to his immediate surroundings, his foreign-born immigrant neighbour may be quite mobile both with respect to social and professional relations. (p. 5)

To clarify, although Wessendorf's (2014) research departs from superdiversity, her take on group forming seems to include some hyper-diversity elements. However, to avoid confusion, we will follow Peterson (2017) and use hyper-diversity as a lens when developing a selection strategy for reader response studies.

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Hyper-Diversity to Guide Sampling in Superdiverse Cities

This means that an approach must be found to mark boundaries in a hyper-diverse population if we opt for using hyper-diversity as a methodology. Wessendorf (2014) suggests taking social milieus into account as a demarcation by using Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*—the system of "durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" which consist of acquired schemes of perceptions and practices (Bourdieu, 1972/1977, p. 72). By using social milieus, Wessendorf (2014) says it is possible to include and accept that for some people their categorical background (i.e., ethnic, religious, etc.) forms "the primary criterion for social relations" and that for others it is based on "other commonalities that they create their social relations [with]" (p. 32). She emphasises that the kinds of social milieus in a superdiverse context "cannot be defined along the more classical lines of milieu theory," which focuses on "historically grown groups based on social stratification and class hierarchies (e.g., the working-class milieu or the milieu of the educated bourgeoisie)" (Wessendorf, 2014, p. 32). Instead, Wessendorf (2014) argues that a social milieu in a superdiverse context is characterised by "a variety of social groupings with different histories of stratification, education, religious affiliations, etc." (p. 32). In her research into the superdiverse London borough of Hackney, her fieldwork revealed exciting results:

> Although it is impossible to calculate the number of friendships formed across class and ethnic boundaries, my fieldwork has shown that class trumps ethnicity in terms of mixing, and people were more likely to mix with people of other ethnic or racial backgrounds within the same class, than to mix with someone of the same ethnic background but whom they identified as being of a different social class. (p. 134)

This suggests that sharing similar backgrounds, values, and attitudes towards life plays a more significant role than sharing traditional markers, which is ingrained in the definition of hyper-diversity. However, this brings with it its own set of difficulties. It raises the question of how social milieus can be charted and, most importantly, how it can be ensured that participants belong to these separate milieus.

Social Milieus and Neighbourhoods

While the word hyper-diverse might suggest conviviality, socioeconomic segregation still expresses itself in neighbourhoods. For instance, even though the levels of segregation in Europe are not as high as in the United States, there are still socio-spatial inequalities (Cassiers & Kesteloot, 2012). This mainly concerns urban development and the housing market segmentation, resulting in cities with a prosperous centre and poorer peripheries or, the opposite, a poor centre with affluent suburbs (Cassiers & Kesteloot, 2012). Antwerp is an example of the former, and data shows a clear clustering of migrants and socioeconomic status in Belgian cities (Costa & de Valk, 2018). In other words, neighbourhoods have socioeconomic profiles.

Although there seems to be an overlap between migration background and socioeconomic status, migration background does not necessarily play a big part in people's construction of their identity in hyper-diverse cities. Noble and Watkins (2014) warn that even though there is some "'cultural coherence' and stability in relation to customs and language" (p. 175), it does not necessarily mean that people are defined by their origins and are supposed to be determined by them in terms of behaviour. Combined with the hyper-diverse nature of Antwerp, this cultural complexity leads to neighbourhoods playing an essential role in the feeling of belonging.

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Referring to the supposed loss of community in city dwellers, Castells (2010) argues that people still cultivate a community in the shape of territorial identities; they "generate a feeling of belonging, and ultimately, in many cases, a communal, cultural identity" (p. 63). Galster (2001) defines a neighbourhood as "the bundle of spatially based attributes associated with clusters of residences, sometimes in conjunction with other land uses" (p. 2112). While this does not mean that neighbourhoods are necessarily homogeneous, a "distribution or profile can be ascertained once a space has been demarcated" (Galster, 2001, p. 2113). Having established that separate neighbourhoods have their own culture, it is possible that living in a certain neighbourhood might influence the results of reader response studies.

Recruitment Strategy: Semi-Public Places and Spaces

Having recognised that neighbourhoods have an identity and that they can be described as a social milieu, it is now possible to specify the recruitment strategy for the Antwerp context, which can optimally account for urban hyper-diversity in an empirical reader response study. The municipality of Antwerp consists of nine neighbourhoods. Participants from each of these neighbourhoods would be needed to attain representative findings. A viable option would be recruiting participants in public libraries. Aside from the apparent advantage of almost certainly encountering readers in a library, libraries exist as a unique space in cities: the semi-public realm. In addition to the traditional public and private space, Lofland (1998) proposes the third space of the parochial realm (also called the semi-public realm). She defines these semi-public spaces as "characterized by a sense of commonality among acquaintances and neighbors who are involved in interpersonal networks that are located within 'communities'" (Lofland, 1998, p. 10). In addition, she provides a simple distinction between the three realms or spaces: "[T]he private realm is the world of the household and friend and kin networks; the parochial realm is the world of the neighbourhood, workplace, or acquaintance networks; and the public realm is the world of strangers and the 'street'" (Lofland, 1998, p. 10). Although semi-public spaces (i.e., community centres, cafes, and libraries) are open to everyone, they have a private character due to "changes in control and behaviour with semi-public spaces possibly imposing stricter rules regarding behaviour than purely public spaces might do" (Peterson, 2017, p. 1071).

A recent study into Antwerp libraries provides an in-depth analysis of customer profiles (van Geel, 2020). The study shows that 530,000 inhabitants use the sixteen public libraries, three library buses, and one prison library (van Geel, 2020). Interestingly, the municipal libraries are aware that different neighbourhoods have different needs and aim to fulfill those needs. For instance, the library in the city centre, Permeke, focuses on non-Dutch speakers and people experiencing homelessness in addition to children, teens, and Dutch-speaking adults, thus adapting its collection as such. Hence, it keeps the make-up of the neighbourhood in mind as the library is situated on the border of the Antwerpen and Borgerhout neighbourhoods. Although these aspirations of attracting everyone in the community are commendable, it does not necessarily translate to inclusion. However, the report uses its data to draw up nine client profiles showcasing library-goers' diversity and considering several variables, including age groups, education levels, and socioeconomic status (van Geel, 2020). In other words, the library aims to accommodate the hyper-diversity of the city by developing distinct profiles that cater to the specific needs of its audience.

In practice, this leads to the following selection strategy. First, all settings or organisations where the target group can be found should be listed when looking for participants in an urban setting (David, n.d.). In the case of the present study, the target group is actual readers; there are three

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options for the target group: bookshops, book fairs, and libraries. However, as this study wants to include a representation of social milieus, the latter is the recommended location for participant recruitment. Hence, the relevant organisation is the city library, and the settings are the various neighbourhoods. After contacting the library representatives to discuss the experiment and the possibility of recruiting participants, the next step in the selection strategy is outlining the inclusion and exclusion criteria before contacting individuals (David, n.d.). This way, the potential participants will know whether they can participate in the study. The most important criterion in this case would be confirming that the participant lives in the same neighbourhood as the library. With that outline, it is possible to start approaching individuals. The library in Antwerp allows the distribution of fliers, but other possible options are contacting individuals by providing an information session or using the organisation's email lists (David, n.d.). However, the latter option may introduce bias, as it relies on internet and email accessibility and should be used as an additional strategy to the former options. The above-described strategy is supported by Roscoe's (2021) strategies for inclusive sampling, as it consists of purposeful sampling (intentional recruitment of specific groups of people), community sampling (recruiting and collaborating with community members) and removing barriers (accessibility regarding distance and finance).

Conclusion

This article aimed to present a participant sampling strategy for empirical reader response research with Antwerp, Belgium as the location for a study of urban readers in a European context. We argue that static, unidimensional sample strategies, such as looking at student populations, fail to lead to data on the target group, especially when the research sample is part of a hyper-diverse city. Even though intersectionality could be considered as a framework for participant selection, it fails to include the cultural complexity of cities. Hyper-diversity, on the other hand, promises a more suitable framework. Combining hyper-diversity with the notion of social milieus allows researchers to demarcate broad borders by looking at neighbourhoods. As reader response studies look at individual and cultural responses, a suitable location for recruiting participants is the semi-public space of a public library. Since different neighbourhoods have different target audiences, and the library branches aim to reach their target, this will ensure a representative sample of Antwerp readers.

The main limitation of this strategy lies in the fact that cities are continuously being gentrified. Gentrification in Antwerp has resulted from more than just a lack of affordable housing. As seen in Loopmans's (2008) analysis of the history of gentrification in Antwerp, livability became a core concept in the early aughts to create a "safe" environment that could attract higher-income groups. Actual policies to this end were created and implemented, with policymakers making it no secret that the plans were meant to replace marginalised groups with middle-class gentrifiers (Loopmans, 2008). In other words, because of these newcomers, the make-up and culture of the neighbourhood might change, or two separate cultures come into being in one neighbourhood. Although research might suggest that newcomers mix with and adopt the neighbourhood culture, Blokland and van Eijk (2010) have found that, even if the newcomers are open to such a mixture and even moved to an area because of its diversity, the original inhabitants and the gentrifiers move in separate networks, "divided by class, ethnicity and level of education" (p. 328). Consequently, the suggested selection strategy can become skewed as the same neighbourhood can consist of two or more cultures. However, adding neighbourhood-specific markers like a screening question can counter this, such as asking for the number of years that the participant has lived in the neighbourhood or whether they or their parents were born in the neighbourhood.

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In short, the hyper-diversity in Antwerp calls for a complex sampling approach. Dividing the city into neighbourhoods with their own demographics and cultures is a first step in ensuring the inclusion of the target group in reader response studies. Using local library branches as recruitment locations ensures that the possible participants are readers and are a part of the neighbourhood and thus are most likely part of its culture. Even though the abovementioned strategy is designed explicitly for Antwerp, it can also be applied to other Western hyper-diverse cities. Applying this strategy can have several implications for reader response research and sampling strategies in qualitative research in general. Turning to local libraries for participant recruitment can help with taking yet another step toward studying actual readers. Stepping into the real world, and thus away from working with skilled readers in the form of students, will lead to a deeper insight into the effects of texts on readers. Moreover, this can lead to the possible inclusion of people often excluded from these types of studies, yet again enriching our understanding of texts. Additionally, obtaining a wider variety of idiosyncratic responses can result in a deeper understanding of subcultural responses to narratives. Moreover, in a time when the call for inclusion has been taken seriously, using hyper-diversity and social milieu as a strategy can ensure an inclusive and representative sample.

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Melina Ghasseminejad (melina.ghasseminejad@uantwerpen.be) holds an MA degree in English and Literary Theory from the University of Antwerp. Since 2020, she has been working at the University of Antwerp (the Antwerp Centre for Digital Humanities and Literary Criticism (ACDC)) on her PhD project "This is Who I Could Be: Storyworld Possible Selves and Fictionality." In this project, she uses empirical research methods to examine the effects of fictionality on narrative engagement, more specifically on the creation of storyworld possible selves. Her research interests include cognitive narratology, reader response research, fictionality studies, and qualitative research.

Dr. Anneke Sools (a.m.sools@utwente.nl) is Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology, Health, and Technology at the University of Twente in The Netherlands. She is also Program Director of the Storylab at the same university. Sools published widely on social-scientific narrative research and on narrative futuring in particular. She is the recipient of the 2018 Early Career Award from the American Educational Research Association Narrative SIG.

Dr. Luc Herman (luc.herman@uantwerpen.be) (MA in Comparative Literature, Harvard University 1981; PhD in Comparative Literature, Princeton University 1989) is Professor of Narrative Theory and American Literature at the University of Antwerp. His publications include *Gravity's Rainbow: Domination & Freedom* (U of Georgia P 2013, with Steven Weisenburger), *Handbook of Narrative Analysis* (second edition U of Nebraska P 2019, with Bart Vervaeck), *Becoming Pynchon: Genetic Narratology and V.* (The Ohio State UP 2022, with John Krafft), and a variety of (often co-authored) essays in journals including *Narrative*, *Poetics Today*, *Style*, *Language and Literature*, *Critique*, and *Contemporary Literature*. He is currently Dean of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Antwerp.

Dr. María-Ángeles Martínez (ma.martinezm@uah.es) is an Associate Professor in English Philology at the University of Alcalá where she lectures on Literary Linguistics. Her research is in the fields of cognitive literary linguistics and cognitive narratology. She is the author of the monograph *Storyworld Possible Selves* (De Gruyter, 2018), and her work has been published in journals such as *Narrative*, *Language and Literature*, *Journal of Literary Semantics*, and *Poetics Today*. She currently leads the research project NARRALINCOG (Narrative, Linguistics and Cognition: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Storyworld Possible Selves and Narrative Engagement), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, which explores the connections between narrative form and reader response from a variety of cognitively oriented theoretical and empirical perspectives.

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