Fan Fiction as a Vehicle for Meaning Making: Eudaimonic Appreciation, Hedonic Enjoyment, and Other Perspectives on Fan Engagement With Television

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Fan fiction has received minimal attention from psychological researchers. To begin to fill that gap, we analyzed fan fiction about the TV show *Mad Men* to investigate how fans use fan fiction to make meaning from the source text. A sample of fan fiction stories was coded for the presence of eudaimonic and hedonic story components, the emotions expressed in the stories, the perspectives adopted by the fan writers, and plots that function as wish fulfillment. Findings indicated that fan fiction writers' motivations were more eudaimonic than hedonic, the stories often contained mixed or negative emotional content, the writers frequently took the perspective of a female character in their stories, and in some cases the stories enabled characters to achieve positive resolutions denied them by the source text. Taken together, the results point to the many ways in which fans engage with and make sense of a popular TV show. Future psychological research on fan fiction of additional popular culture texts would be valuable for understanding the ways fans grapple with various elements of those texts.

Keywords: appreciation, enjoyment, eudaimonic and hedonic motivations, meaning-fulness, fan fiction

Television fandom has sometimes been construed as a degraded social status; fans are commonly criticized for eschewing real life for the make-believe of TV and accused of not quite knowing the difference between fantasy and reality (Dill, 2009; Larsen & Zubernis, 2013; Zubernis & Larsen, 2012). However, although many assume that TV viewing is largely passive and motivated by a shallow desire for distraction or light entertainment, fans are often "actively engaged in dealing with cognitive and affective challenges posed by the media content" (Bartsch & Hartmann, 2015, p. 2).

Indeed, TV fans often strive to derive meaning from their favorite series. In some cases this activity goes beyond the analysis and discussion of a given TV series to become a creative pursuit.

Creative fan works, which take numerous forms including artwork, videos, and cosplay, enable fans to consider, critique, and comment on their favorite shows while making these fictional worlds their own (Hellekson & Busse, 2014).

One noteworthy form of creative fan practice is the writing of fan fiction. Fan fiction uses the settings, plotlines, and characters of a source text, such as a movie, TV show, or book, to create new narratives. Although fan fiction first appeared in the pages of science fiction fanzines in the 1930s (Coppa, 2006a), the growth of the Internet has allowed it to proliferate (Thomas, 2011). Today, writers can easily share their latest work of fan fiction with a large online community of like-minded fans and can quickly receive feedback about their stories.

It is noteworthy that most of the literature on popular culture fans comes from the humanities. Though this work is fruitful and important, it is surprising that popular culture fans have received minimal attention from psychology researchers—especially as it would seem that the discipline of psychology has much to offer this field (Dill-Shackleford, Hopper-Losenicky, Vinney, Swain, & Hogg, 2015).

This study takes a first step toward filling this gap by applying psychological theory to the domain of fan fiction. Specifically, this study analyzes fan fiction based on the TV show *Mad Men* (Weiner, 2007–2015) to investigate whether the stories are written for fun or to explore something deeper, the emotional content of the stories, the perspective adopted by the writers, and whether the stories are written out of a wish to see characters achieve positive resolutions.

Previous Fan Fiction Studies

In the earliest incarnation of contemporary fan studies, fans were conceptualized as disempowered poachers who appropriated and reinterpreted mass media texts to evade the messages of the powerful (Gray, Sandvoss, & Harrington, 2007). Jenkins (1992) claimed that fan cultures were the result of both fans' fascination and frustration with works of popular culture, and that fan fiction writers "do not so much reproduce the primary text as they rework and rewrite it, repairing and dismissing unsatisfying aspects, developing interests not sufficiently explored" (p. 162). In this way, fan fiction gave voice to those who could not affect the source text directly, empowering fans to transform the source text in ways that were more reflective of their desires and interests.

Because of this ability to revise and subvert established popular media texts, some scholars still consider fan fiction writing a transgressive practice (Thomas, 2011). This is particularly so in the case of slash fan fiction in which two same-sex characters are romantically paired. Yet, Costello and Moore (2007) contend that although fan fiction writers and readers exercise a kind of power, fan fiction's influence is not often felt beyond the circles in which it is shared.

While some scholars emphasize the boundaries fan fiction writers transgress, others emphasize the ones within which they work. Stein and Busse (2009) observed that a fan fiction story is shaped by the parameters of the media text a fan writer appropriates. And Kaplan (2006) characterized fan fiction writing as an interpretative act that must balance numerous factors, including the source text itself, the fan community's established interpretations of that text, and the writer's personal interpretations of the text.

Thus, although fan fiction is often derided as lacking originality, it could be seen as one example of the way limitations can spark creativity and free fans to play with and transform source texts (Stein & Busse, 2009). Numerous other perspectives on and explanations for fan fiction exist in addition to those explored here. However, psychological theory has rarely been used to understand the reasons fans write and read fan fiction. In the following section, we explore some psychological theories that may be especially salient to the study of fan fiction.

Responding and Relating to Popular Culture

Hills (2002) notes that "fan" is a designation one must claim, and participating in a fan community is an active way of exercising one's fandom. From the uses and gratifications perspective, audiences actively select the media they consume to gratify specific wants and needs (Potter, 2012; Rubin, 1993). Thus, individuals may be motivated to consume a particular popular culture offering for a host of reasons. The desire for enjoyment and pleasure, called *hedonic motivation*, is often considered the ultimate reason for media consumption (Oliver & Raney, 2011). However, recently scholars have started to investigate motivations for media consumption beyond pleasure. Some researchers have suggested people may be motivated to use media because of its ability to gratify higher order needs, such as those specified by self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000): autonomy, competence, and relatedness (e.g., Ryan, Rigby, & Pryzbylski, 2006). Tamborini, Bowman, Eden, Grizzard, and Organ (2010) proposed and tested a model that defined media enjoyment as the satisfaction of these three needs. They found that media enjoyment could successfully be explained, at least in part, by its ability to fulfill autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs.

Oliver and Raney (2011) observed that in addition to the needs of self-determination theory, people may also consume media for more transcendent reasons, such as the desire to seek insight into the deeper truths and meanings of life, which they referred to as *eudaimonic motivation*. Bartsch and Oliver (2011) have used the term *appreciation* to label positive experiences with serious entertainment, defining this

kind of audience response as, "an experiential state that is characterized by the perception of deeper meaning, the feeling of being moved, and the motivation to elaborate on thoughts and feelings inspired by the experience" (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010, p. 76). Such experiences are also often accompanied by mixed emotions and the desire to ponder larger questions such as what makes life valuable and meaningful (Oliver & Bartsch, 2011).

Of course, entertainment experiences of hedonic enjoyment and eudaimonic appreciation are not mutually exclusive. However, given its emphasis on emotional and cognitive investment and its experience of deep meaning, it is reasonable to believe that appreciation is often a key ingredient in the decision to become a fan of a given popular culture text. Further, by enabling fans to extend and elaborate on not only experiences of pleasure, but also experiences of appreciation, fan fiction may be an outlet through which they can reflect on a media narrative's deeper significance.

Bartsch and Oliver (2011) cite personal relevance as one reason an individual would respond to a media text with appreciation. They explain that personal relevance may be felt when one relates to media characters in the context of parasocial interaction or identification, responses to characters that may also be especially valuable when considering the writing and reading of fan fiction. Parasocial interaction is a one-sided interaction with a character (Horton & Wohl, 1956). When an individual considers a character beyond a discrete viewing situation, their interest can develop into a parasocial relationship (Giles, 2010). Though also one-sided, these relationships are psychologically similar to the experience of real-life interpersonal relationships (Giles, 2002).

Viewers maintain their sense of self within the context of parasocial interaction, but this is not the case with identification. During identification, a viewer adopts the perspective of a character and experiences the events of the media text as if they were happening to him or her (Cohen, 2001). Identification provides viewers with opportunities for vicarious experiences that they could not access in their real lives. Yet, although the events a viewer experiences are those of a character, the emotions the viewer experiences as a result of those events are their own (Oatley, 1999a). Such emotions arise out of both empathy for the character and the evocation of the fan's memories, making the connection a fan experiences during identification a personal one (Oatley, 1999b). In this way, fictional narratives provide a psychological space in which fans can make sense of their own relevant emotions by allowing them to distance themselves from their real lives and consider their emotions through the less personally fraught lens of the text (Mar, Oatley, Djikic, & Mullin, 2011; Oatley, 1999a, 1999b).

It is likely that fans often identify or respond parasocially to the characters in their favorite texts. Moreover, because fans often think about their favorite characters outside of media interactions, they likely develop parasocial relationships with those characters. These are responses that may extend to the reading and writing of fan fiction, which offers an outlet beyond the official text to explore parasocial bonds or act out identifications with specific characters. Fan fiction, then, may be one means through which fans can process the personal connections they feel to a piece of popular media.

The Present Study

Okdie et al. (2014) observe that media psychologists tend to focus on media's contribution to social problems like violence by treating media as a means for presenting stimuli. However, this emphasis largely neglects how audiences understand and derive meaning from popular media. While prior studies about *Mad Men* fans provide insight into the ways fans analyze and discuss the show, these activities are considered the work of affirmative fans. Transformative fans, on the other hand, are those strongly emotionally invested individuals who respond to a text through creative acts like writing fan fiction (Hellekson & Busse, 2014). Thus, the present study examines *Mad Men* fan fiction to explore the ways fans engage with and make meaning from the show.

Mad Men

Mad Men is a critically acclaimed, award-winning TV series that follows the professional and personal lives of Don Draper and his colleagues at a 1960s-era Madison Avenue advertising agency. The show ran from 2007 to 2015 on the American cable network AMC. The

show's setting enables it to explore a turbulent period in U.S. history. For example, sexism and racism are depicted as established parts of office culture, even as the feminist and civil rights movements challenged those practices. The show's mix of complex themes creates a compelling series that has drawn a devoted fan base (Adalian et al., 2012).

Previous studies on *Mad Men* and its fans have explored how fans make sense of this complex TV drama through content analyses of online fan commentary. In one study, Dill-Shackleford and colleagues (2015) analyzed fan comments in response to blog posts about the show to understand how fans approached and evaluated *Mad Men*'s main characters. They found that fans discussed the characters as if they were real people, assessing them like they were fully formed personalities whose lives extend beyond what is seen on screen. In addition, fans used the complex drama to grapple with their own values and beliefs regarding issues such as what makes a good parent, a good spouse, and a good person.

Similarly, in a study of online discussions on *Mad Men* fan sites, Webb, Chang, Hayes, Smith, and Gibson (2012) found that fans made sense of the show by stating the reasons for character behaviors or plot developments, describing the characters or their relationships, speculating about what could happen on the show, predicting what will happen on the show, and analyzing and interpreting the shows' plot and characters. The fans in this study also made comparisons between the show and the real world, including between the show's 1960s time period and the present day. In another study, Webb, Hayes, Chang, and Smith (2012) examined online fan conversations about weddings on *Mad Men* and found that fans often became so immersed in the show that their critiques were based on present day values rather than those of the show's historical context.

For the present investigation, we coded a set of *Mad Men* fan fiction to explore the following questions: Do fan fiction stories contain content that is purely for fun and pleasure, reflecting hedonic motivations? Or do fan fiction stories contemplate various aspects of the show and explore what is meaningful and important in life, reflecting eudaimonic motivation? What emotions do fan fiction stories explore? Do fan fiction authors write from the perspective and explore the thoughts of specific characters? And, finally, do fan fiction writers use their stories to fulfill their wish to see characters successfully achieve desired ends?

Method

Data Collection

Mad Men fan fiction was collected from two publicly available fan fiction-dedicated archives: the well-established FanFiction.net and the more recently formed Archive of Our Own (archiveofourown.org). Both websites collect fan fiction for numerous fandoms. However, FanFiction.net is somewhat restrictive in the content it will allow writers to share, prohibiting users from posting stories featuring real people or in script format (FanFiction.net, 2008). Archive of Our Own, run by the Organization for Transformative Works, is open to all forms of fan-created content and allows fans to share works in addition to fan fiction, such as art and videos. Although both sites enable readers to leave comments about the fan fiction stories they have read, FanFiction.net also contains a forum where users can interact via message boards, adding a social element to the archive.

Stories were collected between mid-July and early September 2014. Every piece of *Mad Men* fan fiction available on both FanFiction.net and Archive of Our Own was collected, with the exception of crossovers, which combine the characters and settings of *Mad Men* with those of another popular culture text. For example, crossovers between *Mad Men* and the TV shows *Supernatural*, *Glee*, and *Game of Thrones* are available but were not included in the dataset. Several writers cross-posted their fan fiction to both FanFiction.net and Archive of Our Own, but their stories were only collected and included in the dataset once. Writers are identified only by pseudonymous usernames on the sites. Consequently, demographic and other details about them are unavailable.

Although FanFiction.net does not allow stories with explicit descriptions of sex or violence, Archive of Our Own has no such restrictions. The inclusion of fan fiction from both archives thus ensured that stories with a wide range of content were analyzed. Both completed and unfinished stories were collected. The ini-

tial dataset consisted of 340 pieces of fan fiction by 167 writers. Three stories were eliminated because they were not written in English, leaving 337 pieces of fan fiction by 164 writers.

Sample Selection

Because the dataset was quite large, it needed to be narrowed down to a manageable number of stories before it could be subjected to a coded content analysis. Therefore, our first step was to conduct an analysis of the data with the automated text analytic software, Leximancer (Leximancer Pty Ltd., n.d.). Leximancer analyzes bodies of text to determine the frequency of concepts within the text and the strength of the connections between concepts. By examining the major concepts that arise from the text and the relationships that exist between them, a comprehensive overview of the text can be obtained. Although fan fiction writers often include metadata with their stories that could be employed for these purposes, the metadata is often incomplete or not provided at all. Thus, Leximancer enabled us to take every story in the dataset into account while also removing the issue of researcher bias (Isakhan, 2005).

We ran the data through Leximancer twice. The first time we analyzed the entire dataset in aggregate. The second time we reviewed the data for any instances in which a writer wrote multiple stories about the same main character or the same relationship. We then randomly selected only one story from each writer focusing on a given character or couple to include in the analysis. In this way, we ensured that no especially prolific writer who was particularly devoted to a given character or relationship skewed the results of the analysis. No major adjustments were made to the software before running each analysis. In the first and second analyses, the most popular concepts and the most frequent connections between concepts were the same. As a result, we do not discuss the second analysis further.

The most salient findings from the lexical analysis were the most popular characters and relationships between characters that appeared in the data. As can be seen in the name concept list in Table 1, by far the character who came up most frequently in the *Mad Men* fan fiction was *Peggy*. This name was counted 5,219 times. In comparison, the next most frequently occurring

Table 1
List of Ranked Concepts Generated by Leximancer of Frequently Occurring Names

Names	Count	Names	Count	Names	Count
Peggy	5,219	Stan	1,434	Ken	613
Don	3,588	Pete	1,383	Sal	611
Joan	2,975	Lane	1,063	Sally	548
Ted	2,180	Roger	804	Megan	473
Betty	1,760	Ginsberg	691		

character name, *Don*, was counted 3,588 times. The name *Peggy* was highly connected to the names *Ted* and *Stan*, meaning these names frequently appeared in close proximity to one another within the text. Ted is the character with which Peggy is most frequently romantically paired in the fan fiction stories. Peggy is also romantically paired with Stan in several stories. However, Peggy and Stan also appear in stories as friends and coworkers who have a platonic relationship like the one they share for the majority of the show. The name *Don* often co-occurred in the text with the name of his first wife, *Betty*, reflecting the fact that many of the stories with Don featured him in romantic or domestic situations.

On the basis of the findings from the automated lexical analysis, the subset of data selected for coding focused on stories in which Peggy and Don were identified as the main characters or in which the romantic pairings of Peggy/Ted, Peggy/Stan, or Don/Betty were featured. We relied on the descriptions of the fan fiction stories provided by their writers to assess which characters and couples each story centered on and made our selections on the basis of this information. To further cull down the dataset, we also excluded any stories that were not yet complete. In addition, we again examined the data for cases of authors who wrote multiple stories and included only one randomly selected story from each writer about a given character or relationship in the subset of data to be coded. This left us with a subset of 52 fan fiction stories to code. Peggy was the focus of 19 of the stories, Don the focus of 15, the Peggy/Ted relationship was featured in five, the Peggy/Stan relationship in six, and the Don/Betty relationship in seven.

Data Analysis

Trained raters coded the subset of fan fiction stories. The coding scheme was generated on the basis of the psychological theory covered earlier and our knowledge of the focus of and emotions evoked by fan fiction. We relied heavily on Oliver and Bartsch's (2010) definition of appreciation to generate codes for the cognitive and emotional aspects of the eudaimonic components of fan fiction stories. We also created lists of the terms used in the literature to explicate both eudaimonic entertainment experiences and hedonic entertainment experiences and used them to ensure that our codes covered various facets of each experience.

Codes and operational definitions denoting eudaimonic story components were as follows:

> *Reflection/Elaboration* was coded when a writer used the text of his or her fan fiction story to contemplate or reflect on elements of or ideas brought up by *Mad Men*. Such stories also provoke thought about the issues explored in the reader. This code could be further subcoded for *Character Reflection* or *Relationship Reflection* for cases in which the fan fiction writer used his or her story to contemplate or reflect on a particular character or relationship, respectively.

> *Meaning of Life* was coded when a fan fiction writer used his or her story to consider what makes life meaningful and valuable, in a broad sense.

> *What is Important in Life* was coded when a fan fiction writer used his or her story to consider the parts of daily life that are important and make life worthwhile, such as family, relationships, and career.

> *Moving* was coded when the content of a fan fiction story was written to move the reader by evoking poignant or tender feelings.

Codes and operational definitions denoting hedonic story components were as follows:

> *Enjoyable/Pleasurable* was coded when a fan fiction story contained content that was pleasurable or fun, and when the story described its characters enjoying themselves.

> *Humorous* was coded when a fan fiction story contained content that was funny.

In addition, because other work on fan fiction has often focused on expressions of sexuality in these stories, the coders recorded when a fan fiction story contained one or more sex scenes.

Emotion codes were also included in the coding scheme. Because appreciation often involves mixed affect (Oliver & Bartsch, 2011), these codes were used to explore whether specific emotions or combinations of emotions came up more frequently in conjunction with codes denoting eudaimonic or hedonic story components.

Emotions codes and operational definitions were as follows:

> *Happiness*, *Sadness*, *Fear*, and *Anger* were coded when the specific emotion was experienced by a character or characters in a fan fiction story. We selected these four basic emotions based on Oliver and Hartmann's (2010) use of them to explore mixed emotional responses in their qualitative study about appreciation and meaningful films.

> *Angst* was coded when a character or characters in a fan fiction story experienced feelings of anxiety, anguish, or uncertainty, especially about a relationship or sexual encounter. This additional emotion was included due its frequent evocation as a descriptor of fan fiction.

Finally, to explore the perspectives taken by fan fiction writers and whether they used their fan fiction to resolve story lines that remained unresolved on the show, we coded for the following:

> *Character's perspective* was coded when a story articulated a specific character's point of view by describing that character's perspective, including what the character thinks and feels. This code was divided into subcodes for *Character's Perspective, Female*—coded when the point of view of a female character was articulated—and *Character Perspective, Male*—coded when the point of view of a male character was articulated.

Wish fulfillment was coded when a positive desired ending was successfully achieved in a story—especially in the case of a relationship. This code was also applied if the outcome of a fan fiction story positively resolved a plotline that was left open-ended on *Mad Men*.

Each code was applied on the basis of its presence or absence in a piece of fan fiction. A code was assigned if its presence in the story was obvious and deeper evaluation of the story was not required to notice it. In other words, if the average fan fiction reader would agree that a specific code applied to a story, the code was assigned. Both authors coded the data. The coders initially applied the coding scheme to 10 fan fiction stories from the dataset. Interrater reliability for 16 codes was calculated for these 10 stories; Cohen's kappa ranged from .615 to 1.0 (see Table 2 for codes and kappas), indicating substantial to almost perfect agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977). In addition, interrater agree-

ment was 90% or higher. The few discrepancies that existed were resolved through discussion. Subsequently, the remainder of the stories was split in half and each coder individually coded 21 additional pieces of fan fiction.

Results

Description of Data

Of the 52 pieces of fan fiction that were coded, nearly half were rated appropriate for general audiences (25 stories, 48.08%), whereas 15 (28.85%) were rated appropriate for readers 13 and older, and 12 (23.08%) contained mature or explicit content. Stories were not always categorized by genre, and at times stories were tagged with multiple genres, however the category information available indicated that 15 stories focused on a heterosexual relationship. Nineteen stories did not involve a romantic pairing. Additionally, there were no slash stories in our dataset. This was not altogether surprising,

Table 2
Codes, Their Presence by Number and Percentage of the Total Stories (N = 52), and Interrater Reliability

Code	n	Percentage of total	Cohen's kappa
Eudaimonic story components			
Reflection/Elaboration	46	88.46	—[a]
Character reflection	17	32.69	1.0
Relationship reflection	29	55.77	.737
Meaning of life	9	17.31	1.0
What is important in life	16	30.77	1.0
Moving	21	40.38	.783
Hedonic story components			
Enjoyable/Pleasurable	28	53.85	.737
Humorous	9	17.31	.615
Sex scene	16	30.77	.80
Emotions			
Happiness	20	38.46	.783
Sadness	22	42.31	.80
Fear	12	23.08	1.0
Anger	21	40.38	.80
Angst	27	51.92	.783
Character's perspective	51	98.08	—[a]
Character's perspective, female	39	75	1.0
Character's perspective, male	24	46.15	1.0
Resolution			
Wish fulfillment	11	21.15	.783

[a] The number of times each of these codes was present in the stories was dependent on the number of times the sub-codes listed below them were present. This resulted in constants in the coding data and undefined kappa coefficients. Thus, only Cohen's kappa for the sub-codes was calculated.

given we selected the stories in our sample on the basis of our lexical analysis, which found the strongest connections between characters of the opposite sex. In addition, according to the information provided by the writers of the 337 stories originally collected, over half focused on heterosexual pairings, whereas only 20% were tagged as slash.

Findings From Coded Content Analysis

Eudaimonic story components. As can be seen in Table 2, the component of reflection was present in the majority of fan fiction in the dataset (88.46%). This code was used more frequently than any of the other eudaimonic codes and, in fact, any of the codes in general. Most of the elaboration in the fan fiction stories was about either the *Mad Men* character or the relationship featuring *Mad Men* characters on which a particular story focused. Most of these stories centered on events or character revelations from *Mad Men*. Thus, the writers used their fan fiction to grapple with the issues presented or alluded to on the show. Moreover, the perspectives supplied by these stories provoked further thought and elaboration on the implications of a given story element in the reader. For example, there were multiple stories that focused on Don's life and identity, especially in the wake of the revelation that he is really a person named Dick Whitman. In stories like *Some Enchanted Evening* by Sillycritter and *The Light of April* by Bowles, the character contemplates who he is and the extent to which Don Draper is a façade. In one instance, in the story *Cipher*, wildcard47 wrote the following:

> Don Draper, such as he is, only represents life in the simplest sense. The name's not a cipher for identity. It's an embossed typeface on a glossy page; a brand meant to draw allure and leave the buyer wanting at the peak of satisfaction.

Similarly, several stories reflected on the complexities of the relationship between the characters of Peggy, who is single, and Ted, who is married. The couple's affair ended abruptly on the show, leaving a great deal unresolved between the pair. The stories that feature this couple, then, seek to explore what might happen if their relationship continued. The various futures envisioned for the couple are thought-provoking because of the different ways the stories grapple with the moral impli-

cations of what it means for these characters to have a relationship. For instance, in the story *Broken Pleasure*, writer Mrs Don Draper describes the shame and guilt that comes from the couple continuing their affair, but also their longing to be together.

As Table 2 shows, several fan fiction stories also considered what makes life meaningful either in a broad, transcendent sense or by exploring what is important in daily life. The nine stories (17.31%) that contemplated the meaning of life explored the value and purpose of life and how characters might be realizing those purposes. For example, in Delilah_Joy's story *Please Please Me*, the character Sal compares his life to Peggy's and realizes that after leaving the advertising agency where she still works he has been able to lead a more authentic life. Furthermore, 16 stories (30.77%) considered the things that make life worthwhile on a daily basis. These stories examined the aspects of work, family, and relationships that can improve one's life and whether characters were meeting, or failing to meet, those needs. In andibeth82's *If I Were to Lose My Way*, Peggy considers how much she misses her old colleagues after she moves to a new advertising firm and resolves to do a better job maintaining her relationships with them.

Finally, 21 (40.38%) fan fiction stories were coded as moving, as indicated in Table 2. These poignant stories often evoked negative or mixed emotions and caused the reader to feel empathy for one or more of the characters. For example, *My Feet Could Step and Walk* by orangesparks presents Stan's internal monologue as he walks back to the office from lunch with Peggy while contemplating whether their relationship would survive if their firm went under. He wants to voice his concerns to her but is unable to bring himself to do so. This story moves the reader by providing an inside look at Stan's thought process, evoking sympathy for the character's worries about the uncertain future of a relationship that is important to him.

Hedonic story components. Over half of the fan fiction in our dataset was coded as enjoyable/pleasurable (53.85%). Meanwhile, nine stories (17.31%) were humorous (see Table 2). Most of the stories that were coded with a hedonic story component also were coded with a eudaimonic component. There were only two stories in which this was not the case. In the

first, scarletts_awry's enjoyable story *Western Union*, the *Mad Men* characters discuss how to land an account at their newly opened ad agency. The light banter between the characters captured in this story makes it an entertaining diversion. In the second, the enjoyable and humorous *Shaggy Dog Story*, writer The_Whelk presents a scenario in which a woman murders Don for stealing her dog. On *Mad Men* the dog in question, who is named "Mr. Peanut" by the fan writer, was presented by Don as a gift to his children. However, the show never explained where Don got the dog. This story answers that question in a funny, if violent, way.

In addition, 16 of the stories (30.77%) in the dataset contained at least one sex scene, as seen in Table 2. Every one of these stories was also coded with at least one eudaimonic component, whereas 13 were also coded as either enjoyable or humorous. Thus, although the sexual encounters in these stories are typically described as pleasurable and fun, the circumstances surrounding them tend to lead to the consideration of issues of a more serious nature.

Emotions. A majority of the 52 stories in our dataset (90.38%) were coded for at least one emotion. As Table 2 indicates, over half the stories contained angst (51.92%), whereas a large number also contained happiness (38.46%), sadness (42.31%), and anger (40.38%), and a slightly smaller number contained fear (23.08%). All of the 20 stories that contained happy content were also coded for at least one eudaimonic story component, whereas 16 were also coded for at least one hedonic component. In 18 of the 20 stories that contained happiness, an additional negative emotion also occurred. That is, the majority of these stories contained either mixed or negative emotional content.

Characters' perspective. All but one story in the dataset (98.08%) expressed the perspective of at least one character. Table 2 shows that a majority of the time (75%) the perspective of a female character was expressed. Meanwhile, a male character's perspective was expressed in almost half (46.15%) the stories. In almost a quarter of the stories (23%) both a female and male perspective are represented. Given the nature of our dataset it is not surprising that Peggy and Don were the male and female perspectives most likely to be articulated in the stories. How-

ever, Peggy's point of view appeared far more often—32 times—than Don's 14 times. Although none of the stories in the dataset were written in the first person, the characters' perspectives were still clearly articulated in the third person.

Many of the stories expressing Don's perspective find him thinking about his identity, as can be seen in the excerpt by wildcard47 quoted previously, or his relationship with Betty. In two different stories, *A Girl With a Watering Can* by rebecca-in-blue and *We Were, We Are, We Will Be* by Angearia, Don thinks about Betty and his children, especially his daughter Sally, and considers ending his marriage.

In contrast to many of the stories detailing Don's perspective, Peggy's perspective is more frequently described in the context of her career. Many stories see Peggy focused on her struggles as a working woman and her creative highs and lows as a copywriter. For instance, in Mary Jane Parker's story *Say It Without Saying It*, Peggy works on an ad campaign with Don the night before Thanksgiving until she finally arrives at an idea that garners his approval. This causes her to muse on how much of her life is wrapped up in her work:

> So much of her happiness these days seemed to balance on her work life; the few accolades she received on a weekly basis could fuel a month of sitting in that stuffed room with Stan while putting up [with] every other male presence in the office as well.

Wish fulfillment. Just under a quarter of the stories (21.15%) had an ending that was coded as wish fulfillment, as shown in Table 2. Most of these fan fiction stories took plotlines from the show that had an unhappy ending and revised or reenvisioned them with a more positive outcome. In Scarlett88's story *The End of Camelot*, for example, Betty decides to stay with Don in the wake of her discovery of his true identity as Dick Whitman, instead of divorcing him as she did on the show.

It is interesting to note, though, the most popular wish fulfillment story imagined Peggy and Stan starting a romantic relationship. Peggy and Stan are the only couple featured in the fan fiction in our dataset that had not had a romantic relationship on *Mad Men* at the time of our data collection. Moreover, in contrast to the other pairings in the fan fiction stories, Peggy and Stan have a friendly, light rapport on the show

with minimal baggage between them. Thus, in writing about this relationship, fan fiction writers fulfill their desire to see these characters' friendship develop into a romance that is unburdened by past transgressions against one another—something that cannot be achieved by the other couples featured in the fan fiction stories because of the obstacles the show has created for them.

Discussion

Eudaimonic appreciation in the context of narrative fiction is a relatively new area of research. This investigation is one application of this emerging idea. It is also, to our knowledge, the first study to empirically investigate eudaimonic and hedonic motivations in the domain of fan fiction—one means through which fans of narrative fiction interact with a story world.

This analysis of *Mad Men* fan fiction provides insight into whether fans write fan fiction purely for enjoyment or to explore something deeper arising from eudaimonic motivation, the emotional content contained in the stories, the characters whose perspectives the fan fiction writers adopt, and the wishes for the characters the writers fulfill through their stories.

Eudaimonic Story Components, Hedonic Story Components, and Emotions

One of this study's most interesting results is that the fan fiction stories analyzed were more likely to contain at least one eudaimonic component than they were a hedonic component. Our findings indicate that many of the stories were written out of appreciation for *Mad Men*. Oliver and Bartsch (2010) defined appreciation as "an experiential state that is characterized by the perception of deeper meaning, the feeling of being moved, and the motivation to elaborate on thoughts and feelings inspired by the experience" (p. 76). The majority of fan fiction in our dataset contained at least one of these elements. In particular, our findings showed that writers used their fan fiction to reflect on their emotionally and cognitively engaging experiences with *Mad Men*, especially when these pertained to the characters and their relationships. In many cases, the writers also used their fan fiction to consider the things that make life meaningful both day-to-day and in a broader, transcendent

sense, and to provide moving, empathy-provoking descriptions of a character's unique perspective on his or her circumstances.

Further, this analysis suggests that even when much of a fan fiction story's content is motivated by hedonic enjoyment, fans' motivations for writing are also, at least partially, eudaimonic. Stories that focus on the relationship between Peggy and Stan, in particular, fall into this category, because the light dynamic between the couple, which the writers borrow from the show, make the fan fiction enjoyable. However, the fan writers often use their stories as a vehicle for contemplating what makes a good relationship as well. There are many additional examples of stories in which the writers explore an enjoyable scenario while also striving to make sense of and derive meaning from a specific character, relationship, or plotline from the source text.

In addition, only a small portion of the stories contained sex scenes. A great deal of scholarly work on fan fiction focuses on the reasons sex is frequently included in these fan-written stories, particularly in slash fan fiction (e.g., Russ, 1985/2014; Driscoll, 2006). Yet, this investigation showed that even when explicit sexual content is present in a story, there is at least some content that attempts to explore something deeper and more meaningful.

Finally, the fan fiction in our dataset often featured a combination of positive and negative emotions or only negative emotions. Bartsch, Kalch, and Oliver (2014) found that affective states mediated the extent to which an individual reflected on a given entertainment experience. Specifically, affective states that included negative valence and mixed affect provoked greater elaboration on an experience. Thus, the mixed or negative emotions present in *Mad Men* fan fiction may be indicative of the emotional experiences conjured by the show and the fan writers' attempts to make sense of them.

Scholars suggest that when telling stories of emotional or tense memories to others, both the teller and the listener strive to make meaning from the story (Rimé, 2009; Thorne, McLean, & Lawrence, 2004). This same push for meaning may happen when a fan has an emotionally resonant experience with a fictional narrative. In this case, the fan cannot interrogate the media producer about their reasons for creating a specific narrative. Moreover, because the emotions

experienced are specific to the individual fan, the project of making sense of them is highly personal. Fan fiction offers one way for fans to reflect on and create meaning out of the thoughts and feelings the source text evoked in them, while also allowing them to do so from the perspective of the narrative that evoked those thoughts and feelings in the first place (Oatley, 1999a). Although this may not be true for fan fiction written about every source text, we would argue that writing fan fiction about a serious drama like *Mad Men*, in which much goes unsaid and many events and emotions go unexplored, offers one opportunity for fans to grapple with and attempt to make sense of the show's characters, relationships, and plotlines, and what their conclusions imply for their own self-understanding.

Characters' Perspective

Our results also indicate that in most of the stories analyzed, the fan writer detailed the perspective of at least one of the story's characters. Peggy was the character whose perspective was represented most frequently in our dataset. This was an interesting finding because although Peggy is a major character on the show, she is not its star, so we would posit that the fact that many fan fiction authors expressed Peggy's point of view in their writing suggests that many of them identify with her character and wish to continue looking at the world through her eyes with their stories. Although many writers also represented the perspective of Don, the show's protagonist, this happened far less frequently.

Studies have found that it is primarily women who write fan fiction (Busse & Hellekson, 2006). More specifically, research has shown that the majority of users of the two fan fiction archives from which we collected our data are female (FFN Research, 2011; Lulu, 2013). In addition, fans are most likely to identify with characters they consider similar to themselves (Cohen, 2001; Giles, 2002). Thus, it is not altogether surprising that these mostly female fans would write fan fiction about and from the perspective of one of the most modern female characters on *Mad Men*. Writing about Peggy's experiences and using the opportunity to explore her emotions enables women to vicariously walk in this character's shoes, opening up a new set of experiences they might not other-

wise have, or enabling them to explore their own confusions about work and relationships through the eyes of a character with whom they believe they share important traits.

Oatley (1999b) claims that fiction can encourage an individual to either act as a spectator or to identify with the protagonist, but that more often than not, the narrative operates on a continuum where the degree to which the individual identifies or spectates varies. The fact that some *Mad Men* fan fiction stories are written from multiple characters' perspectives, some are written from only a single character's perspective, and in one instance is not written from any character's perspective, demonstrates the various interests fan fiction writers may have in the characters about which they write. Thus, we propose that fan fiction writers' focus on specific characters, especially when their perspectives are not represented in the stories, may indicate that the fan writer has taken a spectator role in relation to the character and has sympathized with him or her (Oatley, 1999b), which could be seen as a form of parasocial interaction.

Wish Fulfillment

We also found that fan fiction sometimes functions as wish fulfillment when fans make the events they would like to see on *Mad Men* happen in their stories. These stories typically involve a romantic relationship that has either gone sour on the show or has not yet happened. In the case of relationships that ended poorly on *Mad Men*, such as Betty and Don's marriage, fan fiction enables fans to envision a better outcome for the relationship than the one depicted on the show. In stories featuring extratextual romances, like the stories that focused on Peggy and Stan embarking on a relationship before they did so on the show itself, fan fiction offers an opportunity to remix the characters' relationships in whatever ways seem interesting, fun, and logical to the fan. Scholars have argued that slash fan fiction arises from the desire to increase the intimacy between two male characters (Smith, 2014; Woledge, 2006), however, this claim could also likely be applied to many of the extratextual relationships explored in fan fiction, even those that are heterosexual. Therefore, by maneuvering Peggy and Stan into a romantic relationship, the fan fiction

in our dataset, which was written prior to the end of the show, may represent fan writers' desire to see the intimacy of their friendship intensified and increased through a sexual relationship.

Grossberg (1992) observed that

> [p]eople are constantly struggling, not merely to figure out what a text means, but to make it mean something that connects to their own lives, experiences, needs and desires. The same text will mean different things to different people, depending on how it is interpreted. (p. 52)

Taken together, our results reveal the many ways in which *Mad Men* fan fiction writers, and by extension *Mad Men* fans in general, may actively interpret this text. Despite the fact that the fan writers were all starting from the same source text, the various characters, relationships, and situations explored in their stories demonstrate that they are motivated and engaged by different elements of the show, come to different interpretative conclusions, and wish to derive meaning from different aspects of the show. In addition, some of the fan fiction stories are transformative, enabling the writers to correct or reimagine the parts of the narrative they feel *Mad Men*'s producers got wrong. Thus, this study provides evidence for the strength of TV audiences' active cognitive and affective engagement with the shows of which they are fans.

More and more Western popular culture features new remixes or reinterpretations of the same stories. Superhero stories, for example, are often adapted from comic book to movie. And sequels, prequels, and remakes enable audiences to visit the same stories and characters over and over again. Much like fan fiction, in these cases, a source text creates the parameters within which a new story is established, but within those parameters new plotlines, additional information about characters, and different relationships can be explored. This enables audiences to repeatedly spend time with the characters and plots they love, while also experiencing something new. In addition, it provides fresh opportunities for audiences to ponder their thoughts and emotions about a given narrative and its characters, enabling them to look at the story from new angles, discover new meanings, and establish new understandings of the text.

Although fan fiction is unsanctioned storytelling and is often dismissed as derivative and repetitious (Coppa, 2006b), we would argue that writing and reading fan fiction often fulfills the same psychological gratifications as consuming an adaptation, remake, or reenvisioning of a well-known, previously produced popular media narrative. Regardless of whether they are watching the latest big screen reimagining of Batman's origin story or reading Batman fan fiction, media fans' attraction to new versions of the same stories appears to go beyond mere name-recognition.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study's results point in interesting directions, several limitations exist. First, the subset of data subjected to coding was small in comparison to the larger dataset. Whereas the choice to focus on the subset was intended to make coding more manageable, coding the entire dataset or a larger portion of it would likely turn up interesting additional results. Further, future studies could focus on especially active fan fiction writers from a particular fandom and the subjects they focus on to determine what themes come up in a specific writers' fan fiction and how these themes vary between writers. Such research would likely point to the many perspectives different fans can have about a single text and the various motivations each one may have for writing fan fiction about the source text.

Another limitation of this study is the lack of attention to the influence of the show's time period on the fan fiction stories analyzed. *Mad Men*'s 1960s setting is thought to be a major part of its appeal. The stories we coded did not focus a great deal of attention on this aspect of the series, which may provide additional evidence for Webb et al.'s (2012) finding that fans relate to the show based on the values of the present day. However, additional research should concentrate on writers' focus, or lack thereof, on period cues and details, both in *Mad Men* fan fiction and in fan fiction based on other popular media with a period setting.

Finally, this study only focused on fan fiction available at two large online fan fiction archives and only focused on *Mad Men* fan fiction. There are other places where fan fiction can be found, including personal blogs, show-related commu-

nities, and other fan-dedicated websites that would be valuable to mine for data. Also, there are many other entertainment offerings for which fan fiction is written, some a great deal more popular to write for than *Mad Men*. Thus, future research that employs a similar method but analyzes fan fiction from other fandoms would be valuable in creating a larger picture of what fan fiction authors write about and why.

Although the content of fan fiction stories have previously been analyzed in close readings by literary scholars (e.g., Kaplan, 2006; Leavenworth & Isaksson, 2011), to our knowledge analysis has not previously been conducted on the content of a larger quantity of fan fiction. Moreover, we are not aware of any previous studies that use psychological theory to understand the ways fans engage with and make sense of a popular culture text through fan fiction. It is our hope that this study, in taking the first steps to close these gaps, will inspire more psychological researchers to study how fans use fan fiction to make meaning from the popular media texts they favor.

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