

Fandom and the Search for Meaning: Examining Communal Involvement With Popular Media Beyond Pleasure

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The present study expands on current theorizing about fandom by considering how communal involvement with popular media extends beyond pleasure and is more strongly associated with the search for meaning. Using the context of one of the most widespread media phenomena dominating popular culture—the *Harry Potter* franchise, results of an online questionnaire ($N = 235$) indicated that individual differences among fans (i.e., narrative exposure and eudaimonic motivation or the desire to seek meaning from entertainment) predicted involvement in fan communities. Further, perceived membership in fan communities enhanced enjoyment, appreciation, physiological reactions, knowledge acquisition, and intentions to seek fan-related materials. Implications for expanding entertainment scholarship in the study of meaningful media related to fandom and our understanding of contemporary forms of fandom in light of new technological affordances are discussed.

Keywords: fandom, involvement, participation, meaning, eudaimonia

A plethora of research has explored the psychological gratifications that individuals attain from media. In particular, entertainment scholars have examined numerous factors that explain our attraction to media, such as identification with characters (Cohen, 2001, 2006), involvement with narratives (Green & Brock, 2000; Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004), and enjoyment (Zillmann, 2000; Zillmann & Bryant, 1994) and appreciation (Oliver, 2008; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010) of media offerings. Although a wealth of entertainment studies elucidate our understanding of viewers' experiences with entertainment that lead to program liking, investment, and loyalty, investigations into the communal and social entertainment experiences of audiences warrant greater atten-

tion, particularly from a psychological perspective.

Media fandom is a phenomenon that encourages individuals to collectively and socially unite within a subculture based on shared interests or appreciation of a media world or product (Baym, 2000; Hills, 2002; O'Reilly & Doherty, 2006). With time, members of fan communities develop a sense of social identity, and this has been supported across many contexts, such as sports (Branscombe & Wann, 1992; Wann, Royalty, & Roberts, 2000), music (Baym, 2007; Brown & Schulze, 1990; Hansen & Hansen, 1991), literature (Lopes, 2006), TV (Baym, 2000; Bird, 2002; Jenkins, 2000; Wooley, 2001), and video games (Consalvo, 2003; Lowood, 2006). One of the most notable fan communities that has received substantial attention among media scholars is *Star Trek* (Jenkins, 1988; Jindra, 1994; Kozinets, 2001). Common practices of these fans, or "Trekkies," include meeting up at scholarly fan conventions, touring iconic landmarks discussed in books and movies, forming online fan communities, participating in interactive games, and holding celebratory parties before a book or film release.

Clearly, fandom has an important home in entertainment scholarship because entertain-

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ment often serves as the source of the cultural and ritualistic practices of fans, and the formation of such subcultures has implications for shaping social identities, a sense of community, social prestige, and self-esteem (Zillmann, Bryant, & Sapolsky, 1989). The present research examines the concept of fandom in light of one of the most widespread media phenomena to have dominated popular culture in the 21st century. Devoted fans of the *Harry Potter* series not only consumed its books, but also followed its movies, recorded and listened to podcasts, developed online fan sites and groups, attended fan conventions, and created fan art, among other relevant activities. With the prevalence of such participatory behaviors, the goals of the present research are twofold: (a) To examine how individual differences among fans predict involvement in fan communities, and (b) To explore how fandom is associated with a number of affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses. Such inquiries of investigation provide deeper theoretical insight into the central factors driving media fandom and illuminate our understanding of how fans engage affectively, cognitively, and behaviorally as a result of their communal experiences with media.

Fandom and Identification

Fandom refers to a subculture grounded on communal identification among individuals who build upon their shared interests in a media object (Jenkins, 1992, 2006). Contrary to the notion of a passive audience, fans are active in their collection, production, and consumption of media. They are not simply viewers, but rather functional and knowledgeable producers of cultural capital (Fiske, 1992; Jancovich, 2002; Jenkins, 2000). Jenkins (2000) suggests that one of the principal characteristics of fandom is the “ability to transform personal reaction into social interaction, spectator culture into participatory culture” (p. 451). McMillan and Chavis (1986) describe four important elements entailed in fan engagement. In their theory of “sense of community,” fans must (a) perceive themselves as members of the group (feeling a sense of belonging, identification, and personal investment), (b) feel that they have influence in their group and vice versa in order to establish group cohesion, (c) feel rewarded for their participation in the community, and (d) have

shared emotional connection, history, and participation.

According to McMillan and Chavis (1986) and other scholars, for individuals to engage as fans in a participatory culture or community, identification is a critical component. The concept of identification has been examined in a variety of ways by media researchers. Identification can occur with both characters in the narrative and other audience members who experience the narrative. When viewers consume media, identification can take place when they share a character’s perspective and vicariously participate in his or her experiences (Cohen, 2001; Eyal & Rubin, 2003). In the context of *Harry Potter*, fans may feel similarity with, be attracted to, or like certain characters in the narrative, making it easier to take characters’ perspectives and understand these characters’ motives and goals. While identification can happen when viewers consume media text, identification can also be associated with ritualized fan practices (Soukup, 2002), such as engaging in a social network of similar others. Such practices within a fan community may foster stronger mutual connections within the group, and increase involvement in ritualistic social practices of identification (Fraser & Brown, 2002). However, the degree to which either form of identification occurs varies across individuals.

Individual Differences in Relation to Fandom

Taking into consideration the important role of identification in fandom, the current study suggests that certain individual difference characteristics are expected to predict fan engagement, given its characteristics as informed by the work of McMillan and Chavis (1986).

Narrative Exposure

Fans of any media product may vary in their level of exposure to the content universe. Media coverage has been found to elevate not only audience members’ awareness of a media entity but also their interest (Abelman & Atkin, 2002). From a cultivation perspective, constant exposure to common themes in media can help shape viewers’ perspectives of the world (Gerbner, 1998; Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). Frequent exposure to narratives would likely impact au-

dience responses (Sanders & Tsay-Vogel, 2014) and values, such that heavier consumption of these products is perhaps related to agreement with values embedded in the narratives (e.g., loyalty, morality, search for personal value, and friendship). Greater exposure to products such as books and movies could also foster interest in being involved with those who share similar values. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Narrative exposure is positively related to fandom.

Entertainment Preferences

In addition to exposure levels, individuals also differ in their preferences for entertainment. Although early work in the area of enjoyment focused primarily on motivations among viewers to seek entertainment for pleasure, excitement, or suspense (Zillmann, 1988, 2000), Oliver and Raney (2011) recently differentiated between two types of entertainment motivations—hedonic and eudaimonic motivations. Whereas hedonic motivation is characterized as more positively valenced and driven by pleasure and diversion, eudaimonic motivation is the desire to seek meaning and insight into human experiences from media texts. This latter form of motivation that focuses on the pursuit for and contemplation over life's truths and purpose is defined as a general need and one that may vary in strength across individuals. In light of motivational differences between the search for pleasure and meaning from media, eudaimonically driven individuals are perhaps interested in more cognitively involved media experiences that enhance psychological well-being (i.e., the search for meaning in life), rather than media offerings which solely provide excitement, delight, and escapism. Eudaimonic motivations, thus, are connected closely with more serious entertainment fare such as documentaries/nonfiction, dramas, and science fiction, and are directly related to mixed affect (Oliver & Raney, 2011). With these considerations in mind, we apply theories of identity from social psychology to propose a link between entertainment preferences and fandom.

Role-identity theory (McCall & Simmons, 1978) suggests that individuals strive to behave in ways that adhere to how they prefer to see

themselves and how they prefer others to see them. While this theory focuses on individual roles, Tajfel and Turner's (1979) social identity theory argues that self-perceptions are inherently based on both personal and social identifiers, emphasizing the importance of group processes and intergroup relationships. Based on the fundamental premise of social comparison (Festinger, 1954), people identify with those who are similar or slightly better than themselves. In essence, social identity is a function of the value and emotional attachment individuals place on group membership, and such relationships within a group meaningfully represent their sense of self. In the context of fandom, it is clear that identity plays a critical role, particularly as members of a fanbase develop strong social identities based on the degree to which they perceive themselves to share personal interests and values with other fans in the community. As seeking these commonalities and mutual interests plays an integral role in fandom and this notion could be driven more prominently by the inclination to search for meaning or deeper insight either through media texts or from those with shared values and interests, the present research proposes that individuals with stronger eudaimonic motivations are more likely to exhibit stronger levels of fandom. Specifically, those who are more guided by gaining greater life perspectives, understanding of the human condition and relationships, and human connectedness should have a greater tendency to engage in fan communities due to high cognitive involvement when consuming media and the role of media in the development of social identities. Therefore, it is logical that the search for meaning rather than mere pleasure in entertainment is linked to greater fan participation. Hence, the following hypothesis is expected:

H2: Eudaimonic motivations will be more strongly associated with fandom as compared with hedonic motivations.

Traits of Reflectiveness and Personal Growth

Whereas individuals may seek entertainment for different purposes, the current study also suggests that traits of reflectiveness and personal growth may engender fandom. Reflectiveness is defined as one's propensity to reflect on

life experiences and take part in self-reflective thinking (Trapnell & Campbell, 1999). Such a characteristic is associated with a greater need to understand the self with regard to one's motives, goals, and relationships with others (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Gibbons, 1990). Taking into consideration these attributes, it is reasonable to expect that those who are more self-reflective and introspective about their desires and interests would be more likely to engage in fan communities based on the symbolic and pronounced awareness of their interests. Literature supports that fandom is facilitated by a meaningful and affective bond between the self and the object world, and the deep connection one shares with a community is manifested by central aspects of the fan's identity and the values on which one reflects (Sandvoss, 2013). Furthermore, while fandom is fundamentally grounded on social connectivity and mutual identification with similar others, it is possible that perceptions of group membership, sense of community, and shared emotional connections with those who facilitate the development of one's identities are more salient for individuals who value self-reflection.

In a similar vein, those who seek personal development and strive to meet life challenges, characteristic of individuals who value personal growth (Ryff, 1989), may be more inclined to engage in fandom. Taking into consideration that one's social identity entails the appreciation of the emotional attachment fans share with group members, the present research suggests that being part of fan communities helps members to not only enhance and reflect on their own personal interests and values, but also strive for personal growth and development. Research documents that curiosity and exploration encourage people to seek out personally meaningful desires and novel experiences (Kashdan, Rose, & Fincham, 2004), which may include being involved in a fan community where such interests are reinforced. Therefore, individuals who value self-progression are perhaps more likely to continually learn, mature, and cultivate their interests in media texts through their connections with others. Thus, the present study proposes the following two hypotheses:

H3: Reflectiveness is positively related to fandom.

H4: Personal growth is positively related to fandom.

Fandom and Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral Responses

In addition to relationships between individual differences and fandom, the present research also endeavors to examine how fan participation is associated with a variety of affective, cognitive, and behavioral audience responses. As fandom is a social experience, communal membership, investment, and engagement are likely to also impact individuals within and outside the mediated experience due to group cohesion, identification, congruence, and reinforcement of media gratifications, interests, and values (Kelman, 1958; Plante et al., 2015; Raghunathan & Cofman, 2006).

Enjoyment, Appreciation, and Physiological Responses

Entertainment scholars have focused extensive work on explaining how media can produce different experiences for audiences. One concept that continues to receive significant attention is enjoyment. Enjoyment has generally been defined as a favorable disposition toward media content (Zillmann & Bryant, 1994), a pleasurable affective response to the consumption of media (Raney, 2003), and a state that results from undergoing sensory delight, suspense, and achievement from media experiences (Vorderer, Klimmt, & Ritterfeld, 2004). However, there has been growing support for the examination of counterhedonic media choices (Knobloch, 2003; Nabi, Finnerty, Domschke, & Hull, 2006; Oliver, 1993; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010). Vorderer and Ritterfeld (2009) argue for a two-factor model of enjoyment in which hedonic enjoyment serves as a lower-order factor representing more immediate experiences, while appreciation is the higher-order factor representing experiences that go beyond immediate satisfaction. While the two factors have been found to be distinct, both are conceptualized as positive valuations of entertainment and can even co-occur.

Most recently, meta-emotions or the appraisal of one's emotional state (Bartsch, Vorderer, Mangold, & Viehoff, 2008; Oliver, 2008) have been under scrutiny and some argue that

the appreciation of media involves contemplating human poignancies and vulnerabilities and deriving meaning from media text (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010). Appreciation is thus characterized by both positive and negative affect and capable of leading to outcomes such as elevation that subsequently enhance the desire to be a better person and do good things for others (Oliver, Hartmann, & Woolley, 2012). While enjoyment and appreciation constitute affective responses, with appreciation also entailing a cognitive component due to its emphasis on sense-making and pensive evaluation of a media experience (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010), viewers may also exhibit physiological reactions to media offerings. Some responses to entertainment that have resulted in unique physical reactions, such as crying, increased heart rate, and warmth in the chest have emerged as a result of meaningful media consumption (Oliver et al., 2012; Silvers & Haidt, 2008) and feelings of elevation (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Haidt, 2003). While these physiological responses could account for affective arousal, they also serve as behavioral indicators of reactions to media engagement.

Because fandom involves individuals collectively uniting based on shared interests or appreciation of a media object, it is reasonable to expect that members experience enjoyment not only in sharing their passion and devotion toward the media entity with other fans, but also in experiencing the narrative and universe—the foundation of their fan community and social identity. In addition to pleasure that can be attained from the series, it is also likely that fans have a greater appreciation for the series as mutual connections within the fan community meaningfully reinforce and heighten the value of their media interests. As fandom is suggested to be related to affective and cognitive dimensions of audience engagement, fan involvement is potentially related to physiological reactions as well, particularly if fans are enthusiastically engaged in being emotionally, mentally, and behaviorally invested in a narrative series. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H5: Fandom is positively related to (a) enjoyment, (b) appreciation, and (c) physiological responses to the series.

Knowledge Acquisition

Because fandom constitutes a communal experience in which individuals socially unite through shared interests, it is common that such a form of mutual identification fosters social practices and behaviors (Fraser & Brown, 2002; Soukup, 2002). For example, to sustain identification with a group, maintaining rituals that reinforce one's social identity is critical. Such practices may include keeping informed with the entities that tie a social network together. In the case of a fiction series, becoming knowledgeable about the narrative, characters, and related topics the stories convey may result from participation in fan communities, as well as be encouraged by it. With the proliferation of new media technologies, online fan networks have become popular over the years and even helped to facilitate richer forms of communication and participation among fans (Castells, 2000; Fernback, 1999; Jones, 1997). With these considerations in mind, the present study suggests that fandom should also likely increase one's knowledge about issues or values related to the media product (e.g., via greater accessibility to information and diverse perspectives and networks of interpersonal discussions). Furthermore, the act of evaluating the values and lessons presented in the narrative as socially relevant may be deemed as a positive valuation of the content and viewing experience, but also tangentially related items and broader life aspects within and outside the community. Therefore, fan participation may elicit the attainment of knowledge in a variety of topics, including relationships and friendships, popular culture, and literature and reading. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Fandom is positively related to knowledge acquisition.

Behavioral Intention

In addition to fan engagement enhancing knowledge acquisition, it is also likely that fans will exhibit behaviors that include seeking out repeated consumption or maintaining mediated relationships with characters in the series (Cohen, 1999; Hoffner, 1996). Entertainment scholars have found that with the end of a series, viewers may feel intense emotional distress and anxiety, almost as if they terminated long-term

interpersonal relationships with the characters (Cohen, 2003, 2004; Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Sanders, Tsay, & Marks, 2012); such a phenomenon has been characterized as a parasocial breakup. Previous research has found that after reading the final book, fans of the *Harry Potter* series experienced strong breakup emotions, desires to extend or repeat their contact with the characters, and were less likely to search for alternative media and characters to connect with (Schmid & Klimmt, 2010). While fans of the series may continue seeking information to help maintain their psychological connection to their favorite characters, it is also possible that such fans desire to also find ways to sustain their perceived membership in the community, as fandom is largely predicated on socially ritualized practices. Therefore, this research expects that fandom should be associated with intentions to seek both media-related products (e.g., buy *Harry Potter* DVDs/BluRays, read and re-read the *Harry Potter* books, and seek out *Harry Potter* fan fiction) or related products (e.g., find another fantasy series to follow). Hence:

H7: Fandom is positively related to intention to seek fan-related products.

Method

Participants and Procedure

An online questionnaire was administered to a total of 235 *Harry Potter* fans via a variety of nonprobability sampling methods (74.3% females). Between July 15 and September 30, 2011 while the final installment of the film saga, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2*, appeared in the box office, *Harry Potter* fans were recruited from: (a) mass communication courses at two large universities in the south and northeast regions of the United States and (b) online platforms including *Harry Potter* fan forums, *Harry Potter* Facebook fan pages, and Twitter using *Harry Potter* series-related hashtags. The ages of the participants ranged between 18 to 30 years ($M = 19.52$, $SD = 1.71$). The sample comprised 86.8% Caucasians, 5.5% African Americans, 5.5% Latinos, 4.3% Asians, 1.7% Pacific Islanders, 1.3% Native Americans, and .9% indicating no race. All participants were asked to respond to a series of

items assessing: (a) fandom, (b) narrative exposure, (c) entertainment motivations, (d) reflectiveness, (e) personal growth, (f) enjoyment, appreciation, and physiological responses to the series, (g) knowledge acquisition, (h) behavioral intention, and (i) general demographic information. In an effort to prevent order effects, all variables except for demographics were randomly ordered.

Measures

Fandom. Being a fan of the *Harry Potter* series was assessed by 21 items on Likert-type scales anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*), adapted from McMillan and Chavis' (1986) conceptualization of psychological sense of community or the degree to which members identify with or belong to that community. For the purpose of this study, fandom refers to the extent to which participants feel they are a part of the *Harry Potter* community in which people possess shared values and emotional connections with the series. A factor analysis using varimax rotation revealed two primary factors of fandom with eigenvalues greater than 1 (see Table 1). The first factor accounted for 55.95% of the variance (eigenvalue = 14.55) and was labeled "Membership in Fanbase" ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.63$, $\alpha = .97$). Example items include: *I see myself as belonging to the Harry Potter fanbase; Generally, I feel good when I think about being a member of the Harry Potter fanbase; I feel at home and comfortable in the Harry Potter fanbase; I feel strongly attached to the Harry Potter fanbase.* The second factor accounted for 9.48% of the variance (eigenvalue = 2.46) and was labeled "Contact with Fanbase" ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.60$, $\alpha = .95$). Example items include: *I contact fellow fans often; I often help my fellow fans with small things, or they help me; If I need a little company, I can contact a member from the Harry Potter fanbase I know; If I feel like talking, I can generally find someone in the Harry Potter fanbase to chat to.*

Narrative exposure. To measure narrative exposure, participants were asked to report the total number of books they read in the series by selecting the following book titles: *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*, *Harry Potter and the Goblet*

Table 1
Fandom Items

Dimensions of Fandom	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Factors	
			1	2
Membership in Fanbase				
1. I plan to remain a member of the <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase for a number of years.	4.34	2.04	.85	.26
2. Overall, I am very attracted to being a part of the <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase.	3.92	1.95	.84	.32
3. I think the <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase is a good thing for me to be a part of.	4.27	1.76	.83	.32
4. I see myself as belonging to the <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase.	4.13	2.00	.83	.32
5. In general, I'm glad to be a member of the <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase.	4.48	1.83	.83	.24
6. The <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase is a good thing to belong to.	4.52	1.66	.80	.29
7. I feel like I belong in the <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase.	4.09	1.91	.80	.32
8. Generally, I feel good when I think about being a member of the <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase.	4.19	1.81	.78	.36
9. I feel at home and comfortable in the <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase.	4.13	1.83	.78	.39
10. It is important to me to be a part of the <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase.	3.52	1.83	.74	.50
11. The <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase is a part of me.	3.42	2.04	.71	.50
12. I feel strongly attached to the <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase.	3.47	1.98	.70	.46
13. I often think about being a member of the <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase.	3.25	1.98	.64	.48
Contact with Fanbase				
14. I contact fellow fans often.	3.14	1.95	.33	.81
15. My friends in the <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase are part of my everyday activities.	3.41	1.89	.40	.77
16. I often help my fellow fans with small things, or they help me.	3.36	1.77	.33	.76
17. If I need a little company, I can contact a member from the <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase I know.	3.41	1.93	.35	.74
18. I exchange favors with fellow members of the <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase.	3.13	1.80	.36	.73
19. The <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase plays a part in my everyday life.	2.92	1.86	.33	.69
20. Being a member of the <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase is an important part of my self-image.	2.98	1.78	.36	.61
21. If I feel like talking, I can generally find someone in the <i>Harry Potter</i> fanbase to chat to.	3.93	1.94	.35	.60

of *Fire*, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* ($M = 4.31$, $SD = 2.76$). In a similar vein, participants were asked to report the total number of movies they saw by selecting from the same list of aforementioned titles ($M = 6.31$, $SD = 1.61$). The sample comprised 43.4% who read all the books and 64.6% who saw all the movies in the series.

Entertainment motivations. Two types of entertainment motivations were assessed using 12 items on Likert-type scales anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*) from Oliver and Raney (2011). Six items tapped into hedonic motivations, the degree to which participants seek entertainment for pleasure and excitement ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.05$, $\alpha = .85$). Example items include: *It's important to me that I have fun when consuming entertainment*; *For me, the best forms of entertainment are ones that are purely entertaining*. Six items measured eudaimonic motivations, the extent to which participants seek entertainment for meaning and greater life understanding ($M = 5.48$,

$SD = 1.25$, $\alpha = .95$). Example items include: *I like entertainment that challenges my way of seeing the world*; *I like entertainment that has profound meanings or messages to convey*.

Reflectiveness. Participants also reported the degree to which they reflect on life events and are naturally inclined to engage in self-reflective thinking. Twelve items on Likert-type scales anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*) from Trapnell and Campbell's (1999) reflection scale were used to assess one's level of reflectiveness ($M = 4.56$, $SD = .91$, $\alpha = .82$). Example items include: *I often look at my life in philosophical ways*; *I find myself to be a deep, introspective type of person*; *I find myself being very self-inquisitive by nature*.

Personal growth. To measure the extent to which participants strive for continued personal development, nine items on Likert-type scales anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*) were used from Ryff's (1989) Psychological Well-Being scale to assess personal growth ($M = 5.22$, $SD = .97$, $\alpha = .79$). Example items include: *I think that life has been a continuous process of learning, changing, and growth*; *I think*

it is important to have new experiences that challenge how I think about myself and the world; I am interested in activities that will expand my horizons.

Enjoyment, appreciation, and physiological responses. Affective, cognitive, and physiological reactions were measured to tap into participants' level of enjoyment, appreciation, and physiological intensity when exposed to the *Harry Potter* series. Six items were adapted from Oliver and Bartsch (2010) to measure enjoyment of the *Harry Potter* series ($M = 5.95$, $SD = 1.27$, $\alpha = .93$). Example items include: *I had a good time experiencing the world of Harry Potter; I found the world of Harry Potter to be exciting.* Six items were adapted from Oliver and Bartsch (2010) to assess appreciation of the *Harry Potter* series ($M = 5.41$, $SD = 1.51$, $\alpha = .96$). Example items include: *I found the world of Harry Potter to be very meaningful; The world of Harry Potter was thought-provoking.* The enjoyment and appreciation items used Likert-type scales anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*). Participants also reported the extent to which they exhibited physiological reactions to the narrative series using 11 Likert type scales anchored from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). These bodily reactions have been reported by Algoe and Haidt (2009) and Silvers and Haidt (2008). Example items include feeling: *warm in the chest, lump in the throat, increased heart rate, chills, and light/bouncy* ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 1.44$, $\alpha = .94$).

Knowledge acquisition. Knowledge acquisition was assessed by the extent to which the *Harry Potter* series influenced participants' knowledge of relationships and friendships outside of the fanbase, popular culture, and literature and reading ($M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.60$, $\alpha = .85$). These items were measured on Likert-type scales anchored by 1 (*strongly disagree*) and 7 (*strongly agree*).

Behavioral intention. The degree to which individuals continue to engage in fan-related behaviors was assessed through intention to buy *Harry Potter* DVDs/BluRays, find another fantasy series to follow (e.g., *Hunger Games*, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, etc.), read and reread the *Harry Potter* books, and seek out *Harry Potter* fan fiction ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.82$, $\alpha = .79$). These items were rated on Likert-type scales anchored by 1 (*not at all*) and 7 (*very much*).

Results

Individual Differences Predicting Fandom

A series of multiple regressions were conducted to test H1–H4 such that gender and age were entered stepwise in Block 1, and narrative exposure, entertainment motivations, reflectiveness, and personal growth were entered stepwise in Block 2. The two dimensions of fandom, membership and contact, were entered as dependent measures separately (see Table 2). Gender and age were included as covariates, as

Table 2
Individual Differences Predicting Fandom

Dependent measures	Block 1			Block 2		
	Predictors	β	ΔR^2	Predictors	β	ΔR^2
Membership in Fanbase	Gender	.06		Number of books read	.23***	.05***
	Age	-.14		Number of movies seen	.26***	.11***
				Eudaimonic motivation	.30***	.20***
				Hedonic motivation	.03	
				Reflectiveness	.02	
				Personal growth	-.07	
Contact with Fanbase	Gender	.05		Number of movies seen	.22***	.05***
	Age	-.10		Eudaimonic motivation	.28***	.13***
				Personal growth	-.16*	.02*
				Number of books read	.10	
				Hedonic motivation	-.02	
				Reflectiveness	.10	

Note. Stepwise procedures were used with entry criterion set at * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

women tend to be more engaged in fandom (Jenkins, 1988) and contemporary accounts of fandom are more intense among teens and younger adults (Morey, 2012).

Narrative exposure. H1 predicted that exposure to the narrative is positively related to fandom. The analysis showed that the number of books ($\beta = .23, p < .001$) and the number of movies consumed ($\beta = .26, p < .001$) were significant predictors of membership in the fanbase. In other words, the greater the exposure to the narrative series through literature and cinematic presentations, the more they perceived themselves as members of the fan community. Only number of movies seen ($\beta = .22, p < .001$) increased contact with other fans within the community. In general, our data indicate that narrative exposure facilitates fandom, supporting H1.

Entertainment motivations. H2 proposed that eudaimonic motivations are more strongly related to fandom as compared with hedonic motivations. The analysis showed that eudaimonic motivations enhanced both membership in the fanbase ($\beta = .30, p < .001$) and contact with the fanbase ($\beta = .28, p < .001$), while hedonic motivations did not significantly predict either of the fandom dimensions. Specifically, those who had a higher drive to seek meaningful entertainment reported stronger perceived membership in the fan community and were more likely to contact other fans within the community. Therefore, findings show support for H2.

Reflectiveness and personal growth. The next set of expected relationships pertains to

personality traits and fandom. H3 predicted that reflectiveness is positively associated with fandom. The analysis revealed that the trait of reflectiveness did not significantly predict either of the fandom dimensions, showing no support for H3. H4 proposed that personal growth is positively related to fandom. Although the analysis indicated that personal growth was not significantly associated with membership in the fanbase, personal growth decreased contact with other fans in the community ($\beta = -.16, p < .05$). This finding demonstrates the reverse of the patterns we expected with regard to the positive relationship between personal growth and contact with the fanbase. Therefore, the data do not support H4.

Fandom Predicting Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral Responses

The final three proposed relationships suggest that fandom would be associated with a series of affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses (i.e., enjoyment, appreciation, and physiological responses to the *Harry Potter* series, knowledge acquisition, and intention to seek fan-related materials). A series of multiple regressions were performed to test H5–H7 such that gender and age were entered stepwise in Block 1, and membership in the fanbase and contact with the fanbase were entered stepwise in Block 2. Enjoyment, appreciation, physiological responses, knowledge acquisition, and behavioral intention were entered as dependent measures separately (see Table 3).

Table 3
Fandom Predicting Affective, Cognitive, and Behavioral Responses

Dependent measures	Block 1			Block 2		
	Predictors	β	ΔR^2	Predictors	β	ΔR^2
Enjoyment	Gender	.17*	.04*	Membership in Fanbase	.78***	.28***
	Age	.14*	.28***	Contact with Fanbase	-.34**	.04**
Appreciation	Gender	.20**	.05**	Membership in Fanbase	.85***	.43***
	Age	.12*	.43***	Contact with Fanbase	-.21*	.02*
Physiological responses	Gender	.20**	.06*	Membership in Fanbase	.69***	.33***
	Age	.00		Contact with Fanbase	-.12	
Knowledge acquisition	Gender	.15*	.04*	Membership in Fanbase	.63***	.31***
	Age	-.03		Contact with Fanbase	-.06	
Behavioral intention	Gender	.19**	.08**	Membership in Fanbase	.68***	.33***
	Age	.04		Contact with Fanbase	-.13	

Note. Stepwise procedures were used with entry criterion set at * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Enjoyment. H5a predicted that fandom would be positively associated with enjoyment of the series. The analysis indicated that both membership in the fanbase ($\beta = .78, p < .001$) and contact with the fanbase ($\beta = -.34, p < .01$) predicted significant variance in enjoyment, such that feeling like a member of the fan community increased enjoyment, whereas contacting members within the community reduced enjoyment. Further, women ($\beta = .17, p < .05$) and older fans ($\beta = .14, p < .05$) were more likely to enjoy the *Harry Potter* series. Although perceived membership enhanced enjoyment, due to patterns revealing that contact with other fans hindered enjoyment, partial support for H5a was found.

Appreciation. H5b proposed that fandom would be positively associated with appreciation of the series. The analysis yielded similar results to enjoyment. While feeling like a member of the fan community increased appreciation ($\beta = .85, p < .001$), contacting members within the community decreased appreciation ($\beta = -.21, p < .05$), showing partial support for H5b. Similar to the patterns above, women ($\beta = .20, p < .01$) and older fans ($\beta = .12, p < .05$) were more likely to appreciate the series.

Physiological responses. H5c expected fandom to be positively associated with physiological responses to the series. The analysis indicated that perceived membership in the community increased physiological responses ($\beta = .69, p < .001$), supporting H5c. Women were also more likely to report greater physiological responses to the series ($\beta = .20, p < .01$).

Knowledge acquisition. H6 predicted that fandom would be positively related to knowledge acquisition. The analysis revealed that perceived membership in the fan community increased attainment of knowledge ($\beta = .63, p < .001$), showing support for H6. Furthermore, women reported greater knowledge acquisition than men ($\beta = .15, p < .05$).

Behavioral intention. H7 proposed that fandom would be positively associated with seeking fan-related products. The analysis indicated that membership in the fanbase facilitated intention to pursue other series-related materials ($\beta = .68, p < .001$). In addition, women had stronger behavioral intentions than men ($\beta = .19, p < .01$).

Discussion

The present research provides a richer theoretical understanding of fandom from a psychological perspective, particularly in the way that individual difference characteristics such as exposure to a narrative series and eudaimonic motivations serve as central factors driving involvement in fan communities. Furthermore, our findings reveal that membership in a fan community enhances enjoyment, appreciation, physiological responses, knowledge acquisition, and intention to seek fan-related materials, implying that being a fan entails high degrees of affective, cognitive, and behavioral involvement aside from simply being a passive media consumer.

It is worthy to note that *fandom* is a multifaceted construct. Our data show that fandom has two primary dimensions—one which involves the perception of group membership and the other that entails communication with members in the group. With respect to perceived membership, this component of fandom considers the degree to which one is attracted to, feels comfortable with, and believes there are important benefits of being part of the fan community. In relation to contacting other members, this dimension of fandom takes into account the extent to which one contacts, helps, and exchanges favors with others in the fan community or perceives other members as part of their everyday lives. Thus, membership in a community is distinct from, yet related to, one's willingness to contact other fans/members. Our factor analysis results expand on previous research using this measure, suggesting fandom is not solely about perceived membership but also active communication with group members.

Furthermore, the current research interestingly demonstrates variations in how individual differences predict these two fandom dimensions. Our data revealed that the more fans were exposed to the narrative world and tended to seek entertainment with profound meaning, the stronger these individuals perceived themselves as fans of the community and communicated with other members. It is unsurprising that eudaimonic motivations were strongly related to fan community membership and contact. Quite often when joining a community, individuals are seeking an outlet that allows them to make sense of life and the world (nonmediated and

mediated) around them, but they do so in a way that connects them to others. As self-perceptions are inherently based on both personal and social identifiers, intergroup relationships play a significant role in shaping one's social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In the context of *Harry Potter*, our prediction was supported that fans who prefer entertainment that is thought-provoking and meaningful (as compared with funny, silly, or shallow) had deeper attachment to others who share similar values and interests. Thus, our research demonstrates that stronger perceived membership and contact with other fans could help strengthen social identity, which has important theoretical implications for perceived sense of community, social prestige, and self-esteem, supported by Zillmann et al. (1989). If one considers today's technological affordances such as social media, social TV, community fan forums, outlets for fan fiction, and Facebook groups, it is evident that fan communities are more numerous, varied, and connected in ways that fans were previously limited (i.e., through direct, face-to-face contact). Hence, in this regard, our study's findings should not be considered context-specific and could be replicated in other fan communities especially when one considers the strong emotional ties that are arguably represented in various forms of entertainment (i.e., film series, sports, etc.) and literary genres.

Moreover, a striking finding that emerged from the data was that the trait of personal growth negatively predicted communication with other fans. In other words, fans who strive for personal development were less likely to contact other members in the fan community. Although we expected the reverse to be true, an explanation for this finding may lie in the perceived functionality of fan communities. It is possible that those who seek personal improvement and progress view fan communities as a place where social identities are strengthened, not personal or individual identities. Because the trait of personal growth focuses on challenging individual experiences and fostering change, it is understandable why communication with members in fan communities that is predicated on mutual connection and shared interests may not appeal to those who strive for more individually based processes of learning and growth.

In addition, this research found that those who perceived themselves as members of the fanbase were more likely to enjoy and appreciate the world of *Harry Potter*. Such fans found their experience consuming the series as not only exciting but also meaningful, thought-provoking, and unforgettable. In other words, membership in the fan community evoked both enjoyment and appreciation which imply that hedonic and eudaimonic gratifications are prominent in fan engagement. However, one unexpected finding was that contact with the fanbase negatively predicted enjoyment and appreciation of the series. This research was limited in that it did not examine the nature of the communication among fans in the community. Therefore, it is difficult to draw accurate conclusions as to why contact with other fans could lead to reduced levels of enjoyment and appreciation of experiencing the narrative world. Nevertheless, our findings imply that while feeling part of the community has high yield, actual interactions perhaps diminish the rewards. One potential explanation for the negative effects of contact could be that when fans communicate with other members in the community, they are perhaps exposed to different perspectives related to feelings and thoughts about the series, characters, and overall fan experience. Due to increased exposure to potentially diverse or inconsistent opinions, enjoyment and appreciation of the narrative may decrease based on expectations or assessments impacted by other fans. Alternatively, an element of fandom is having influence in the group and vice versa in order to establish group cohesion (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). It is also possible that contact with other members may not fulfill such expectations related to group influence or cohesion. In essence, interpersonal discussions could have bearing on audience responses and play a mediating role in the effects of fandom. Such theorizing supports the important role of opinion leaders (in this case, other fans), as suggested by the two-step flow model (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Hence, future research should consider examining the nature of communication that occurs between fans within such communities in order to provide a more thorough investigation into these claims.

Additionally, this study found that perceived membership in a fan community increased the degree to which fans responded physiologically

to the series. These responses included warmth in the chest, increased heart rate, laughter, tensed muscles, tears, high energy, and so forth. While entertainment scholars have given less attention to physiological reactions to media fare (as compared with affective and cognitive reactions), the present research points to the importance of examining less explicit and observable audience responses. It is important to note that our research was limited to tapping into physiological reactions recalled by the participants (Oliver et al., 2012) and thus, it is possible that the memory of such bodily responses may not have been accurately reported. Consequently, future research should consider collecting psychophysiological data in an experimental setting to capture real time physiological measures. Nevertheless, the physiological responses reported in our research enhance our understanding of other noteworthy experiences among fans, suggesting that research on meaningful media that elicit feelings of elevation warrants greater consideration and may be applied to fandom (see Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Haidt, 2003; Oliver et al., 2012).

The current investigation also demonstrates that the more fans perceived themselves as members of the community, the more likely they reported knowledge in a number of areas including relationships and friendships, popular culture, and literature and reading. In addition, these fans elicited stronger motivations to buy additional content, find another fantasy series to follow, read and reread the *Harry Potter* books, and seek out related fan fiction. While our behavioral intention measures were limited in that they did not provide an exhaustive list of all potential fan-related actions, such as consuming other *Harry Potter* universe books (e.g., *The Tales of Beedle the Bard*), playing video games, buying action figures and Halloween costumes, rewatching previously purchased videos, and so forth, future research should, indeed, consider tapping into a greater variety of relevant behaviors that potentially took place among fans after the series ended. Nevertheless, our data from this study support the critical role of fan membership in predicting both the attainment of knowledge outside the mediated experience and the intention to display actions that reflect the desire to preserve identification with the media product and connections with group members due to social identities that fans develop. In

other words, even though a series may come to an end, fandom is not short-lived but can be experienced through motivations for sustained consumption in other relevant domains.

Several limitations of this research are noteworthy to address. First, although the *Harry Potter* phenomenon has generated a strong, multigenerational, and diverse cultural fanbase, which makes it a meaningful context for investigation, our research is potentially limited in generalizability. Contrary to most fandom research showing that women and younger individuals are more likely to engage in fandom (Jenkins, 1988; Morey, 2012), the absence of age and gender differences in fandom reflected in our data may have occurred due to the universal appeal of its narrative, characters, and moral lessons. Furthermore, because of its widespread appeal, it is possible that the link between eudaimonic motivations and fandom were more pronounced for this particular franchise. However, as previously noted, when considering newer forms of fandom that exist in our current media landscape, there are certainly more creative avenues for fan interactions through social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and blogs) and opportunities for more diverse and repeated media exposure (e.g., Hulu, Netflix, and HBO Go) which facilitate binge watching. Therefore, the search for meaning through entertainment could result in qualitatively different fan communities today based on advances in richer communication affordances and increased media offerings that did not exist for older fandoms (e.g., *Star Trek*). Additionally, given the cross-sectional nature of our data, the temporal order of the variables should be further explored through study replications and experiments. For example, it is possible that a deep connection to the media text could enhance eudaimonic motivation or that the search for meaning in entertainment and fandom have a symbiotic relationship. Therefore, the direction of causality is a limitation that warrants investigation in future studies. Moreover, although the present research found a theoretically insightful connection between fan engagement and meaning-seeking, the nature of the meaning that fans make from media content is unclear. Hence, future scholarship should certainly examine whether the meaning derived from media texts is in fact constructive (e.g., guiding one toward moral decision-

making) or destructive (e.g., guiding one toward a delusional worldview). Lastly, future research should also consider the hierarchical nature that fandom can take, with fans self-identifying as novices, rookies, experts and/or veterans and the role such stature brings to one's sense of self-importance and connection with the fan community. With higher ranks may come a stronger sense of personal growth or a relationship with hedonistic enjoyment rather than appreciation.

In sum, entertainment scholars should continue to expand on our theoretical understanding of the ways in which involvement in fan communities helps members establish and develop social identities. Furthermore, it would be fruitful to examine how individual differences in personality traits and entertainment preferences continue to play meaningful roles in the experiences of fans. In light of the wealth of fandom literature, the concept of being a "fan" of a media product not only is complex and multifaceted, but also associated with a plethora of affective, cognitive, and behavioral audience responses that cannot be relegated to the periphery. Fandom clearly entails more than being a passive consumer of media, and the current investigation raises important theoretical implications for how motivations for meaning and greater life purpose guide fans to have richer and more gratifying entertainment experiences.

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