



A WORLD OF THEIR OWN

Exploring Narrative Immersion, Fandoms and Emotion Regulation Through Fictional Worlds

Abstract

Engagement with fictional worlds can provide entertainment, social connection and personally meaningful experiences, yet little research has examined whether this engagement relates to habitual emotion regulation. This exploratory study investigated whether narrative immersion and three fandom functions (purpose/inspiration, escapism and belonging) predicted cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression in adults who engage with fictional worlds. A cross-sectional, quantitatively led mixed-methods online survey was completed by 200 adults. Participants completed an adapted Narrative Transportation Scale, the Fandom Functions Scale, the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire and five optional open-ended questions. Two standard multiple regressions found that narrative immersion and fandom functions did not significantly predict either cognitive reappraisal or expressive suppression. A thematic analysis showed that many participants nevertheless described fictional worlds as sources of comfort, escape, reflection, inspiration, social connection and emotional relief. Overall, fictional-world engagement may be more important as a situational and personally meaningful emotional resource than as a predictor of general emotion-regulation tendencies.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW	2
Fictional and Imagined Worlds	2
Narrative immersion and transportation	3
Fandom as a psychological resource	4
Compensatory Media Use	6
Media Use and Emotions	7
AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	9
METHODOLOGY	10
Participants and Recruitment	10
Design	11
Materials and Measures	11
Procedure	13
Ethical Considerations	13
Analysis Plan	14
RESULTS	16
Multiple Regressions	16
Thematic Analysis	18
DISCUSSION	23
Limitations and Future Research	24
Conclusion	25
REFERENCES	27
APPENDICES	34

INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW

Fictional and Imagined Worlds

From the earliest myths and oral traditions to contemporary multimedia franchises, storytelling has been a fundamental and universal part of human culture that has allowed people to communicate knowledge and cultural values beyond everyday life (Boyd, 2009; Mar & Oatley, 2008). While newer psychological research has traditionally examined engagement with individual, self-contained stories, many popular fictional narratives develop into rich, expansive “worlds” characterised by coherent histories, geographies, cultures, languages, and systems of internal logic, that often support multiple narratives across different media. Wolf (2012) describes this process as *subcreation* or “*world-building*”, arguing that the defining feature of an imagined world is the construction of a persistent environment that exists independently of any one narrative. Audiences are invited to explore an environment that continues to evolve through novels, films, television, games, and fan-created works (E.g., the works of Tolkien, George R.R. Martin, H.P. Lovecraft, etc.).

Subcreation is psychologically important because it reframes fictional engagement from one-off/passing interactions with a single narrative into sustained engagement with a complex cognitive and imaginative environment. Such environments provide opportunities for repeated exploration, emotional investment, identity exploration/expression and personal meaning-making, suggesting that fictional worlds themselves may represent psychologically significant spaces for thought and experience (Barnes, 2018; Dubourg & Baumard, 2021). Although media psychology research has demonstrated that narratives can influence cognition, emotion, and social understanding, this research has typically examined responses to individual narratives, characters or media texts rather than engagement with fictional worlds in their own right (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Green & Brock, 2000; Mar & Oatley, 2008). Recognising this provides an important foundation for this study, which treats imagined fictional worlds as meaningful psychological spaces, explores why some individuals become deeply immersed in these environments and how such engagement may relate to broader psychological processes.

Narrative immersion and transportation

The psychological significance of fictional worlds may partly depend on the extent of audience immersion. Narrative transportation theory proposes that engagement with fiction involves a multidimensional psychological state in which cognitive attention, emotional investment and mental imagery create the subjective experience of entering a fictional world. Green and Brock (2000) conceptualised transportation as a distinct state characterised by the integration of focused attention, mental imagery and emotional involvement, whereby individuals become temporarily absorbed in a narrative to an extent that awareness of the immediate environment is reduced. Transported individuals mentally enter the narrative world and experience events from within a psychological framework instead of as detached observers (Green et al., 2004). Expanding upon this, Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) argue that narrative engagement is aided by *perceived realism*, meaning audiences need not believe a narrative is objectively true; rather, it is an acceptance of the fictional world's internal consistency and coherence, allowing audiences to respond emotionally to imagined events, similarly explained by Wolf (2012). Transportation, therefore, involves audiences integrating narrative information, imagining fictional settings and responding emotionally to events through screen or page. Transportation is notably distinguished from related concepts such as identification and parasocial interaction, arguing that while these experiences frequently co-occur, they are theoretically distinct forms of audience involvement (Shackelford et al., 2025). Transportation is also associated with reduced counterarguing and increased persuasive openness, suggesting that immersion may temporarily alter how individuals process information (Slater & Rouner, 2002). Given that this study seeks to understand engagement with subcreated worlds rather than isolated media, transportation provides an important theoretical mechanism through which individuals may enter and experience imagined environments.

The experience of transportation also shares notable similarities with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of *Flow*, particularly in its emphasis on complete absorption, intrinsic enjoyment and lessened awareness of distractions. Although transportation resembles flow in its absorption and reduced awareness of distraction,

transportation happens through imaginative narrative engagement rather than skill-based activity, but still highlights that immersive narrative experiences involve genuine psychological processes (Mar & Oatley, 2008). Research increasingly suggests that immersion may facilitate empathy, perspective-taking and social cognition by allowing individuals to mentally simulate experiences beyond their own lives (Djikic et al., 2013). However, more recent reviews have questioned the consistency of evidence linking narrative exposure to social-cognitive outcomes, arguing that immersion also depends on individual differences among readers/viewers, including prior experience, motivation, and sensitivity to narrative techniques (Eekhof et al., 2022). Consequently, transportation should not be treated as a universal psychological response to fiction, but as an experience shaped by interactions between narrative characteristics, individual differences and contextual factors (van Laer et al., 2014). Although transportation theory provides one of the strongest frameworks for understanding engagement with fictional worlds, it cannot fully explain why some individuals repeatedly return to favourite worlds or integrate them into their everyday lives. Repeated engagement requires consideration of the purpose and functions of fandom participation.

Fandom as a psychological resource

Lasting engagement is best understood through the study of fandom and fanship, which has shifted from being viewed as a niche cultural phenomenon towards a legitimate area of psychological research. Reysen and Branscombe (2010) argue that fanship, referring to identification with a particular interest, is different from fandom, which reflects identification with a wider community of individuals who share interests. Both, however, are forms of identification through which fictional worlds become part of an individual's identity, values and everyday life (Vinney et al., 2019). Wolf's (2012) concept of subcreated worlds provides a framework for understanding this phenomenon, as richly developed fictional worlds may particularly produce fandoms more than ordinary stories through expanding lore and transmedia storytelling, thereby providing repeated opportunities for investment. Engagement with a fictional world (and associated fandoms) allows individuals to repeatedly explore familiar

settings, expand their knowledge of established lore and participate in communities centred around shared interests to create opportunities for belonging, shared identity and interpersonal connection (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Research has demonstrated that fan identity comprises both personal and social components, with stronger social identification predicting aspects of psychological wellbeing greater than enthusiasm for the media alone (Vinney et al., 2019). Recent evidence suggests that the relationship between fandom and wellbeing is mediated by participation in shared social activities surrounding the fandom, highlighting, for some, the importance of community engagement rather than isolated engagement (Reysen et al., 2024). This distinction is consistent with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which suggests that individuals develop part of their self-concept from membership of valued social groups. Within fandoms, identification with other fans may therefore contribute to belonging, social support and collective identity. Self-Categorisation Theory further explains how personal fan identity may become a shared group identity (Turner et al., 1987), helping to explain why participation within fandom communities often becomes psychologically meaningful. This broader perspective is consistent with recent work in media psychology, which argues that audience involvement includes longer-term processes such as fan identification and the fulfilment of interpersonal needs (Shackleford et al., 2025).

Recognising that fandoms fulfil multiple psychological functions has become increasingly important within recent research. Drawing upon social identity and motivational approaches, Chadborn et al. (2017) identified three principal functions of fandom: *purpose/inspiration*, *escapism* and *social connection*, which closely align with broader psychological theories concerning identity, belonging and wellbeing. These functions are supported by growing evidence suggesting that stronger fan identities are associated with higher levels of psychological wellbeing, particularly when engagement facilitates meaningful social interaction (Reysen et al., 2024; Vinney et al., 2019).

Barnes (2018) argues that repeated engagement with fictional worlds allows individuals to derive personal meaning through imagination and emotional investment, while Mar and Oatley (2008) suggest that fiction provides opportunities to simulate complex social experiences that may contribute to self-understanding and perspective-

taking and also provide purpose, opportunities for creativity, mastery of fictional knowledge, self-expression and reflection upon personally meaningful themes. Nevertheless, fandom should not be viewed as inherently beneficial, as most current evidence is correlational and self-reported. The psychological value of fandom likely depends on the motivations underlying participation and the extent to which engagement satisfies psychological/social needs (Chadborn et al., 2017; Ray et al., 2017). This is particularly relevant for escapism, where literature remains divided over whether it reflects adaptive psychological restoration or avoidance of real-world difficulties. Resolving this requires a closer examination of the motivations underlying media engagement.

Compensatory Media Use

Escapism has often been portrayed as maladaptive and avoidant; however, media psychology increasingly recognises that temporary psychological withdrawal may also facilitate recovery from everyday stress. Katz and Foulkes (1962) were among the first to argue that media use should be understood in terms of the psychological functions it serves, rather than passive escapism. Later research demonstrated that entertainment media may promote relaxation, facilitate psychological detachment from everyday demands and restore depleted cognitive resources after stress (Reinecke, 2009; Zillmann, 1988). Kardefelt-Winther's (2014) *Compensatory Media Use Theory* supports this argument by proposing that media engagement can compensate for unmet psychological needs or adverse life circumstances. This theory gives attention to the circumstances and motivations underlying use, suggesting that outcomes depend on whether engagement alleviates strain or replaces more effective coping responses.

Compensatory media use should not be assumed to be universally adaptive. Wolfers and Schneider (2021) highlight that media-based coping spans three main perspectives: stress and coping, emotion regulation/mood management, and problematic/addictive media use, emphasising that outcomes depend on the motivations and context surrounding media engagement rather than media use itself. Similarly, Reinecke et al. (2014) demonstrated that media use does not automatically

facilitate recovery, as feelings of perceived procrastination or guilt may undermine restorative effects. Emerging work on comfort media also suggests that people often revisit familiar and emotionally significant media because they simply provide comfort, security and reduced arousal instead of long-term emotional improvement (Grady et al., 2026). This suggests that repeated engagement with fictional worlds may represent an adaptive attempt to cope with emotional demands, provided it complements, rather than replaces, other coping strategies (Folkman & Lazarus, 1986). Nevertheless, while compensatory media use explains why individuals may return to fictional worlds during periods of stress, it does not explain the processes by which emotional experiences are modified, requiring consideration of established models of emotion regulation.

Media Use and Emotions

Although the preceding literature explains why fictional worlds become psychologically meaningful to certain individuals, they do not specify how engagement relates to emotion regulation. Emotion regulation theory provides a framework for the processes by which individuals influence the emotions they experience and when/how they are expressed. Gross (1998, 2015) conceptualises emotion regulation as the processes by which individuals modify their emotional experiences and expressions, distinguishing between cognitive reappraisal (reframing emotional situations before responses develop) and expressive suppression (withholding emotional expression after emotions have arisen). Consistent evidence suggests that reappraisal is associated with more adaptive psychological functioning, whereas suppression is generally linked to less favourable emotional and interpersonal outcomes (Gross & John, 2003; Hu et al., 2014).

Narrative immersion may be relevant to emotion regulation because transportation concentrates cognitive attention, imagery and emotional involvement within the narrative world, potentially producing substantial affective responses (van Laer et al., 2014). This absorption may create opportunities to simulate and reinterpret emotional situations; however, transportation should not itself be treated as an emotion-regulation strategy. There is also relevant evidence that media can support

need restoration and emotion regulation following social exclusion (Lutz et al., 2023), but this work often examines parasocial or other mediated relationships rather than world-level immersion. Although emotion regulation has traditionally been examined within clinical and cognitive psychology, media researchers have increasingly suggested that meaningful engagement with entertainment may facilitate regulatory processes in the context of emotional coping (Eden et al., 2020; Schramm & Cohen, 2017). Fictional worlds can provide emotionally safe contexts in which individuals can be offered opportunities for emotional simulation, perspective taking and meaning-making, allowing reflection upon personal experiences and deriving personal meaning (Bartsch, 2012; Mar & Oatley, 2008). Meaningful entertainment has been associated with reflection, emotional insight and personal growth beyond immediate enjoyment (Oliver & Raney, 2011), and together with recent work highlighting media's role in psychological wellbeing and self-regulation (Döveling et al., 2025; Reinecke & Oliver, 2016), these findings suggest that engagement with fictional worlds may provide opportunities that support adaptive emotion regulation. However, direct evidence is limited, particularly regarding adult fandoms and the combined influence of narrative immersion and distinct fandom functions on specific emotion regulation strategies. It is currently unclear whether the psychological benefits associated with fictional/subcreated world engagement reflect greater use of adaptive strategies such as cognitive reappraisal, reduced reliance on expressive suppression, or neither. To address this, this exploratory cross-sectional study examines whether narrative immersion and select fandom functions (purpose/inspiration, belonging and escapism) are associated with cognitive reappraisal or expressive suppression tendencies among adults who regularly engage with fictional worlds.

AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

AIM: To investigate whether narrative immersion and psychological fandom functions predict individual differences in emotion regulation strategies among adults who engage with fictional worlds. Specifically, the study will examine whether narrative immersion, purpose/inspiration, escapism and belonging are differently associated with the use of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression.

Primary research question

RQ1: To what extent do narrative immersion and fandom functions predict cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression among adults who engage with fictional worlds?

Secondary research questions

RQ2: Which aspects of fictional-world engagement are the strongest predictors of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression?

RQ3: How do participants subjectively describe the emotional role of fictional-world engagement within their everyday lives and experiences of coping?

Objectives

1. To examine the relationships between narrative immersion, fandom functions, cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression.
2. To determine the unique contribution of narrative immersion and each fandom function in predicting cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression.
3. To explore participants' subjective accounts of the emotional role and personal meaning of fictional world engagement.

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Recruitment

Target participants were adults who engaged with personally meaningful fictional worlds through media such as books, films, television series, video games, anime or comics. Eligible participants were adults aged 18+ who could read and understand English, provide informed consent and identify a personally meaningful fictional world to base their answers on. Incomplete, ineligible or otherwise unusable responses were excluded following data screening.

A self-selecting opportunity sample was recruited online between 10/7/26 and 4/8/26. Recruitment advertisements were distributed through relevant Reddit communities (primarily r/Multifandom) and Discord servers (Appendix A), as well as on social media (Facebook, Instagram), with permission sought from community moderators where required. Online fandom communities were selected because they provided direct access to adults who actively engaged with fictional worlds and related fan interests. The target sample was between 200–300 participants. Recruitment was voluntary and the advertisement stated that participation was anonymous and open to adults who regularly immersed themselves in fictional universes. A pilot was launched on 9/7/26; no further changes were made, so responses were retained in the final dataset.

Over 450 people accessed the survey. However, after excluding a large number of incomplete responses (<83% completion (up to optional qualitative questions)) and responses deemed inappropriate (clearly invalid or non-serious data), the final sample comprised 200 participants. Participants ranged from 18 to 72 years ($M = 32.85$, $SD = 12.55$). The usable sample included 119 men, 61 women, 12 non-binary/third-gender participants, 2 “other”, and 6 who did not disclose their gender. Participants resided across 26 countries, with the largest proportions living in the USA (35.5%) and the UK (33.5%) (Appendix B).

Design

This study used an exploratory, cross-sectional, quantitatively led mixed-methods survey design. Quantitative self-report data was collected alongside short qualitative responses within a single online questionnaire hosted on Qualtrics. A correlational and predictive approach was used to examine relationships between fictional-world engagement and habitual emotion-regulation strategies. Narrative immersion and the three fandom functions: *purpose/inspiration*, *escapism* and *belonging* were treated as predictor variables. Cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression were treated as separate criterion variables. The predictor variables were examined simultaneously to see their unique contributions to each emotion-regulation outcome. The qualitative component consisted of five optional open-ended questions exploring the personal and emotional significance of participants' chosen fictional worlds. These responses provided context for the quantitative findings. As all variables were measured at a single time point without experimental manipulation, statistical prediction was interpreted as an association rather than causality.

Materials and Measures

The questionnaire contained demographic questions, three self-report measures and five optional open-ended questions:

1. Demographic and Contextual Questions

Participants reported their gender, age, and country of residence (Appendix C) and were also asked to identify one personally meaningful fictional narrative world to keep in mind while completing the measures. The survey introduction clarified that this could include any fictional world encountered through films, television, books, video games, anime or comics, with examples given (Appendix D).

2. Adapted Narrative Transportation Scale

Narrative immersion (NI) was assessed using an adapted version of Green and Brock's (2000) Narrative Transportation Scale (NTS) (Appendix E). The original measure conceptualises transportation as a combination of attentional focus, mental imagery,

and emotional involvement in a recently read written narrative. The scale contained 11 items rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Not at all*) to 7 (*Very much*). Some wording was adapted to reflect repeated engagement with an ongoing fictional world across different media rather than a recently read narrative; for example, “*While I was reading the narrative...*” became “*While I am engaged with the narrative world...*”. Items 2, 5 and 9 were reverse scored. NI mean scores were calculated by dividing participant totals by the number of questions (11), with higher mean scores indicating greater levels of immersion. Internal consistency was relatively low ($\alpha = .63$).

3. Fandom Functions Scale

The psychological functions of fictional-world engagement were measured using the Fandom Functions Scale (FFS) developed by Chadborn et al. (2017) (Appendix F). The original scale was designed to assess the extent to which fandom involvement provides purpose, escape, and social connection. Its structure was supported by factor analyses in the original validation study.

The scale contained 14 items rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (*Not true at all*) to 5 (*Very true*). The survey instructions asked participants to consider their personal involvement with their chosen *fictional world* rather than a specific fandom community. The measure included three subscales: purpose/inspiration (Items 1–7), escapism (Items 8–11), and belonging (Items 12–14). Example items included “*Provides me with a focus or sense of purpose*” and “*Provides me with a break from life’s stresses*”. Mean scores for each subscale were calculated by dividing participant totals by the number of questions for each subscale, with higher mean scores indicating that the participant experiences more of that function through their engagement. Internal consistency for the present study was $\alpha = .85$ for purpose/inspiration, $\alpha = .69$ for escapism, and $\alpha = .70$ for belonging.

4. Emotion Regulation Questionnaire

Habitual emotion-regulation strategies were assessed using the 10-item Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John, 2003) (Appendix G). The ERQ measures two distinct strategies: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression.

Items were rated on a Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*). The cognitive reappraisal subscale contained six items, and the expressive suppression subscale contained four. No items needed reverse scoring. Mean scores were similarly calculated for each subscale, with higher scores indicating greater habitual use of that particular strategy. Internal consistency was $\alpha = .83$ for the reappraisal subscale and $\alpha = .83$ for the suppression subscale for this study.

5. Qualitative Questions

Five optional open-ended questions asked participants about each specific variable being considered; the personal meaning, escapist function, inspirational influence, social connection, and emotional role of their chosen fictional world (Appendix H). Responses were limited to 150 characters per question and were intended to provide brief contextual insight alongside the quantitative findings.

Procedure

Participants accessed the Qualtrics survey through the recruitment link. After reading the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix I), they provided electronic informed consent (Appendix J) before completing demographic questions. Participants then selected one personally meaningful fictional world to use as a reference throughout the survey. Measures were presented in the following order: adapted NTS, FFS, and ERQ. Participants could then complete five optional open-ended questions concerning the personal, social and emotional significance of their chosen world. Finally, participants received a debrief explaining the full study aims and providing researcher and supervisor contact details (Appendix K).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was granted by the University of Wales Trinity Saint David Research Ethics Committee prior to data collection. Participants read a digital information sheet outlining all ethical considerations and arrangements. Informed consent was obtained electronically where participants confirmed that they were aged

18+, could understand English, had read the study information and agreed to participate.

Participation was voluntary, and participants could decline any question or leave the survey before submission without penalty; it was made clear that withdrawal of already submitted data was not possible because no identifying information was collected. The study used partial disclosure of the precise relationships under investigation to reduce demand characteristics; the full aims were explained in the debrief. Potential risk was limited to mild discomfort when reflecting on emotional experiences. Participants were informed of this in advance and were provided with researcher and supervisor contact details at the end of the survey. Data was stored securely, only accessed by the research team and reported anonymously.

Analysis Plan

Quantitative data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Following data screening and preparation, where the small number of missing scores were substituted using the mean score for that item across the sample, composite scores were calculated for NI, the three fandom-function subscales, cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Descriptive statistics were examined. Pearson's correlations were conducted to assess bivariate relationships between NI, fandom functions, and the two emotion-regulation strategies.

Two standard multiple linear regressions were subsequently conducted. In both models, narrative immersion, purpose/inspiration, escapism, and belonging were entered as predictor variables. Cognitive reappraisal was used as the criterion variable in the first model, while expressive suppression was used as the criterion variable in the second. This allowed the unique contribution of each form of fictional-world engagement to be examined while controlling for the others. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Qualitative responses were analysed separately for each of the five open-ended questions using a thematic analysis approach informed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Coding was theoretically informed by the focus of each question. Coding was refined

iteratively through comparison, merging and grouping of conceptually similar codes. Contrasting cases were retained where they identified further patterns. Two primary themes were ultimately chosen for each question to concisely summarise patterned meanings. Qualitative findings were used to contextualise and elaborate the quantitative findings rather than as independent evidence of the psychometric constructs.

RESULTS

Multiple Regressions

1. Regression Analysis 1 - Cognitive Reappraisal

A standard multiple regression examined whether the predictor variables of NI, purpose/inspiration, escapism and belonging predicted cognitive reappraisal. The overall regression model was not statistically significant, $F(4, 195) = 1.57, p = .185, R^2 = .031$, adjusted $R^2 = .011$, indicating that the predictors collectively accounted for 3.1% of the variance in cognitive reappraisal. No individual predictor made a significant unique contribution to the model: narrative immersion ($\beta = .024, p = .795$), purpose/inspiration ($\beta = .026, p = .783$), escapism ($\beta = .021, p = .805$), or belonging ($\beta = .144, p = .073$). Belonging had the largest positive coefficient but was non-significant. (Appendix L).

2. Regression Analysis 2 - Expressive Suppression

A second regression analysis examined whether the same predictor variables predicted expressive suppression. The overall regression model was not statistically significant, $F(4, 195) = 1.55, p = .190, R^2 = .031$, adjusted $R^2 = .011$, indicating that the predictors collectively accounted for 3.1% of the variance in expressive suppression. Again, no individual predictor made a significant unique contribution to the model: narrative immersion ($\beta = -.037, p = .690$), purpose/inspiration ($\beta = .137, p = .154$), escapism ($\beta = -.067, p = .440$) or belonging ($\beta = -.140, p = .081$). Belonging also produced the largest negative standardised coefficient but was also non-significant (Appendix M). Standardised coefficients predicting reappraisal and suppression for both regressions can be found in Figure 1 below.

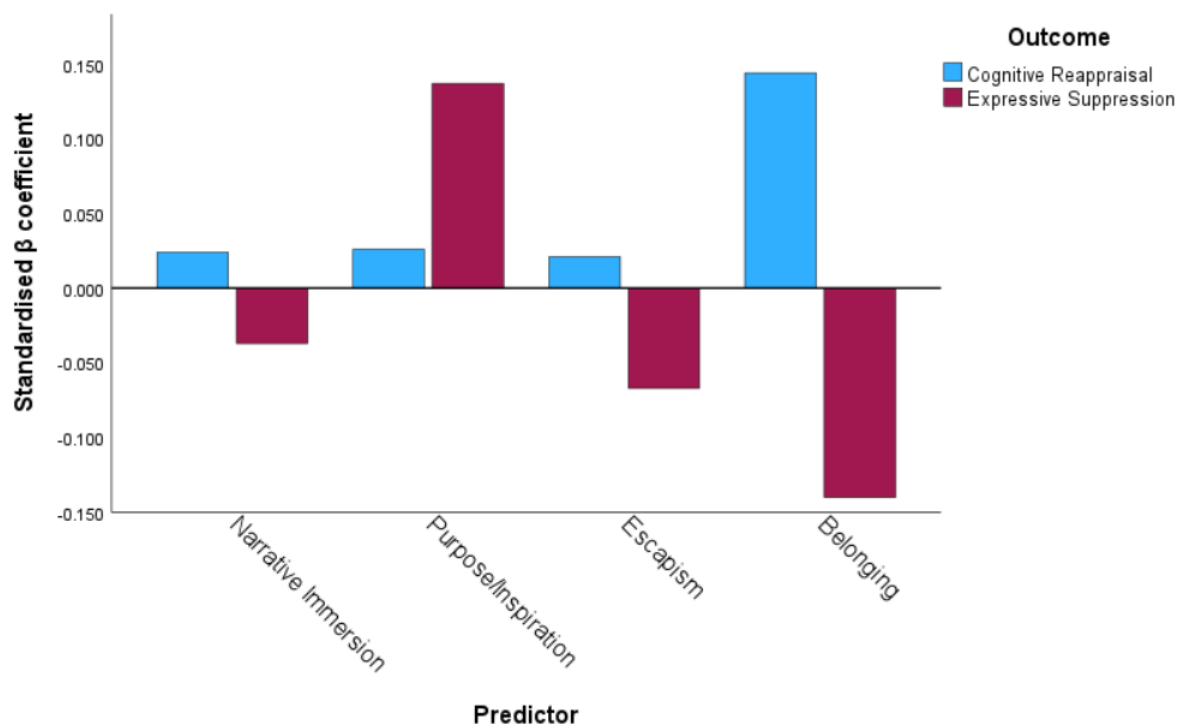
3. Pearsons Correlation

Pearson's correlations were conducted to examine associations between NI, fandom functions, and emotion-regulation strategies. NI was not significantly associated with either cognitive reappraisal ($r = .090, p = .205$) or expressive suppression ($r = -.016, p = .817$). Similarly, purpose/inspiration and escapism were not significantly associated with either emotion-regulation strategy (all $ps > .05$). Belonging

showed a small positive association with cognitive reappraisal ($r = .168, p = .017$) indicating that greater fandom-related belonging was associated with slightly greater use of cognitive reappraisal. Belonging also showed a small negative association with expressive suppression ($r = -.139, p = .050$) although this relationship was at the conventional threshold for statistical significance.

Positive correlations were observed between all four fictional-engagement variables. NI was most strongly associated with purpose/inspiration ($r = .630, p < .001$) and was also positively associated with escapism ($r = .390, p < .001$) and belonging ($r = .286, p < .001$). Purpose/inspiration was positively associated with escapism ($r = .474, p < .001$) and belonging ($r = .304, p < .001$), while escapism was positively associated with belonging ($r = .450, p < .001$). Cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression were not significantly correlated ($r = .065, p = .363$) (Appendix N).

Figure 1: *Standardised Regression Coefficients Predicting Cognitive Reappraisal and Expressive Suppression.*



Note. Figure 1 shows the standardised regression coefficients (β). None of the individual predictors reached statistical significance in either regression model.

Thematic Analysis

Qualitative responses provided additional context by highlighting how participants personally understood and experienced their engagement with fictional worlds. The main themes identified for each question are presented below.

Q1 - "In a few words, what does your chosen fictional world mean to you personally?"

Theme 1: Escape, Comfort and Emotional Refuge

Participants repeatedly described fictional worlds as places they could mentally retreat to during stress or difficulty. For many, this meant relaxation, comfort and temporary distance from everyday pressures rather than complete avoidance of real life. Some responses described this more strongly as a familiar or safe place that could be returned to over time.

R1: "I discovered Lord of the Rings after reading The Hobbit aged 8. It's always been my escape when I'm stressed."

R52: "Tamriel is the equivalent to my Narnia. In a bad household growing up, it was a world I could go into to get away..."

R56: "a home away from home that i can come back to no matter where i am in real life"

Theme 2: Enjoyment, Fascination and Personal Significance

Participants frequently enjoyed fictional worlds for their stories, characters, aesthetics, complexity and lore. Many were especially interested in the world itself rather than only its plot or characters, describing wonder and opportunities for creativity. For others, engagement had developed deeper personal meaning through nostalgia, identity, hope, inspiration, values and social connection, with some worlds enjoyed from childhood into adulthood. A smaller number described their chosen world purely as entertainment, indicating that the depth of personal attachment varied.

R57: "An almost infinite source of stories and things to discover."

R9: "It captured me as a child, and as I grew I found depth in it."

R84: "It gives me an idol to look towards, I think of how if katniss can survive the hunger games I can survive another day in work"

Q2 - "When you engage with your fictional world, what are you usually seeking or hoping to gain from the experience?"

Theme 1: Escape and Emotional Refuge

Participants commonly sought escape, distraction, relaxation, comfort and stress relief and (much like Q1, Theme 1) most descriptions suggested a temporary psychological break from routine or problems, with the desired outcome being calm, restoration or a chance to switch off.

R6: "A sense of peacefulness and an escape where I can just be within the world and ignore any pressures I have"

R161: "Relaxation and entertainment, time to switch off and unwind"

Theme 2: Enjoyment and Immersive Emotional Experience

Participants also looked for enjoyable, absorbing and emotionally engaging experiences through storytelling, characters, lore and immersion. Some specifically wanted fiction to make them "feel", while others described engagement simply as entertainment, fun or enjoyment, showing that deeper psychological meaning was not universal.

R11: "I look for an emotive experience, something that will really make me feel something..."

R70: "Absolute Immersion as if I'm either actually there or observing as a third party"

Q3 - "Has your chosen fictional world influenced your thoughts, values, goals or outlook on life? If so, how?"

Theme 1: Values and Self-Development

Many participants described fictional characters and narratives as models for kindness, courage, perseverance, empathy and doing what they believed was right.

R33: "If the characters in this world got through all of that then I can get through my stuff too."

R75: "The story of Anakin Skywalker and his redemption makes me want to be a better person"

These ideals sometimes extended to personal goals or decisions, with participants using characters and storylines as reference points for goals or careers.

R64: "It was a strong influence for me to pursue a career as an engineer, and my love for outer space."

Theme 2: Perspective, Reflection and Worldview

Participants described fictional worlds as prompting reflection on morality, religion, relationships, politics, nature and wider social issues. Some reported gaining new perspectives, while others said fiction mainly reflected or strengthened values they already held.

R16: "It has changed how I think about religion... and how I think about morality and change"

R98: "It more so just emphasizes many values I hold dear to me..."

Q4 - "Has this fictional world helped you feel connected to other people? If so, how?"

Theme 1: Shared Interests as Social Connection

Many participants described fictional worlds as common ground within existing relationships, creating opportunities for shared viewing, discussion, inside jokes and bonding with friends or family. These shared interests often helped maintain closeness over time.

R1: "Watched with my father since I was a child and have many friends who also watch Star Wars"

R135: "My wife understood me much more after watching it, and I have annual watch parties with my friends"

Theme 2: Belonging and Relationship Formation

Others described fandom communities as spaces where they could meet like-minded people, form new friendships and sometimes develop long-term relationships. A minority reported little or no connection, often because engagement was private or because they experienced online communities negatively.

R4: "As I got older, I met new people who liked it and instantly became friends, some very close"

R137: "I do role playing within related communities. I have made many friends, and even met my partner."

R115: "No, but this is mostly my own choice... I generally keep to myself"

Q5 - "Overall, how do you feel your engagement with this fictional world affect your emotions or help you cope with everyday life?"

Theme 1: Emotional Relief, Regulation and Safe Escape

Many participants described fictional engagement as a reliable way to reduce stress, calm themselves, distract from difficult emotions and temporarily retreat from everyday pressures. For some, fictional worlds became stable emotional resources that provided comfort, optimism and psychological distance from stress.

R35: "If i find myself worried or stressed I know i can always delve into this world to step back for a while & may just come out of it with a clearer mind"

R15: "Rather than an escape, it is my anchor. My connection to the worlds I enjoy keep me steady, give me optimism to keep going."

Theme 2: Reframing, Hope and Emotional Growth

Many also described using fictional characters, narratives or ideas to reconsider their emotions and circumstances, maintain hope, gain perspective or respond better to

difficulties. These responses suggest a more reflective form of coping alongside immediate emotional relief.

R44: "by helping me to recontextualize my feelings at the time in hindsight, after watching the movie or whatever other form of media I consume."

R73: "It has helped my emotions and reminded me to try and be patient and see the bigger picture before reacting in anger"

R158: "It gives me strength and courage when I feel nervous - "

A contrasting minority reported little or no emotional or coping effect, describing fictional engagement as separate from their everyday emotional regulation or primarily as entertainment.

R54: "My daily efforts to better handle emotions are totally separate from my engagement in fictional worlds."

R76: "just enjoy stories, not really a coping mechanism"

DISCUSSION

NI and fandom functions did not significantly predict cognitive reappraisal or expressive suppression, with both models explaining only 3.1% of the variance. This suggests that being highly immersed in a fictional world or gaining purpose, escapism or belonging from engagement does not necessarily relate to how people generally regulate their emotions. Wider research shows that emotion regulation strategies can depend heavily on the situation and the individual, rather than being the same across all contexts (Bonanno & Burton, 2013; Troy et al., 2013). Narrative transportation is also an experience shaped by the individual, the story and reasons for engagement, with different possible outcomes (Green & Appel, 2024). However, immersion was still strongly related to purpose/inspiration and also linked to escapism and belonging, suggesting that fictional-world engagement may be more closely connected to personal meaning than to general emotion-regulation style.

Although none of the predictors were significant in the regression models, belonging showed the clearest patterns with both emotion regulation strategies. Greater belonging was linked with slightly higher cognitive reappraisal and lower expressive suppression compared with other fandom functions and produced the largest coefficients in both regression models. This reflects Social Identity Theory, suggesting that valued group memberships can support wellbeing through shared identity and social connection (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Similar work has also linked social support with lower suppressive tendencies in everyday life (Pauw et al., 2022), while social participation in fandom has been associated with better psychological wellbeing (Reysen et al., 2024; Vinney et al., 2019). This suggests that the social side of fictional-world engagement may be more relevant to emotion regulation than immersion, purpose or escapism alone. However, belonging was not a significant unique predictor, so this pattern should be treated cautiously.

Despite the weak quantitative relationships, the qualitative findings showed that many participants indeed experienced fictional worlds as emotionally useful in everyday life. Participants commonly described using fictional engagement for comfort, relaxation, distraction and temporary relief from stress. This supports Compensatory Media Use Theory, which suggests that media can be used to manage difficult emotions

or circumstances over simply reflecting unhealthy avoidance (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014). Similar findings have shown that entertainment media can support psychological recovery and detachment from stress (Reinecke, 2009), while other work on comfort media highlights its role in providing emotional refuge (Grady et al., 2026). Some participants also described gaining perspective, hope or encouragement from fictional worlds, fitting with the idea that fiction can support reflection and emotional simulation (Mar & Oatley, 2008). However, these experiences were not universal, suggesting that emotional benefits depend on the individual and context of engagement, rather than providing the same for all (Wolfers & Schneider, 2021).

The findings together suggested that fictional-world engagement may be more important as a situational and personal emotional resource than as a predictor for general emotion-regulation style. This may explain why many participants described comfort, life perspective and emotional relief despite the weak regression findings. However, recent experimental research suggests that fictional valence framing can reduce the intensity of immediate negative emotional responses, indicating that regulatory effects may be easier to detect during immediate engagement than through broad measures of habitual emotion regulation (Iosifyan & Wolfe, 2024; Makowski et al., 2019). Furthermore, emotion regulation strategies are known to depend on context and situational demands rather than operating in the same way across all experiences (Bonanno & Burton, 2013; Troy et al., 2013). Similarly, the psychological effects of media depend on the needs, motivations and circumstances surrounding engagement (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014; Wolfers & Schneider, 2021). Therefore, fictional worlds may provide opportunities for regulation without directly influencing a person's general emotion-regulation tendencies.

Limitations and Future Research

The quantitative and qualitative parts of the study may not have measured emotion regulation at the same level. The ERQ assesses general, habitual use of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression (Gross & John, 2003), whereas the optional questions asked participants how one personally meaningful fictional world affected them emotionally. This may partly explain why participants frequently described comfort and emotional refuge despite weak regression findings. Fictional

engagement may support more situational forms of coping that the ERQ does not fully capture. The ERQ also measures only two regulation strategies, while participants described additional processes such as distraction, emotional relief, social support and psychological detachment.

The NTS wording adaptations, although necessary for the aims of the study, resulted in a relatively low internal consistency of the adapted scale ($\alpha = .63$). This suggests that some items may not have worked together as strongly as intended, potentially reducing relationships with other variables. Similarly, the FFS was originally designed around fandom participation, whereas participants answered in relation to their chosen fictional world, which may have blurred the distinction between engagement with a world and engagement with its wider fan community for participants (Chadborn et al., 2017).

Finally, the cross-sectional, self-report design prevents causal conclusions, while recruitment mainly through online fandom communities may limit generalisability to more casual audiences and introduce slight self-selection bias, although recruiting from these communities was appropriate to the study aims, as they provided direct access to the population most relevant to the research question. The 150-character qualitative answer limit also restricted depth. Future research could use diary or longitudinal methods, rely more heavily on qualitative measures for fuller and personal responses or, alternatively, develop measures designed specifically for world-level immersion and situational emotion regulation to examine these processes more directly.

Conclusion

This study explored whether narrative immersion and the psychological functions of fictional-world engagement were associated with cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Overall, the quantitative findings showed that immersion, purpose/inspiration, escapism and belonging did not significantly predict either emotion-regulation strategy, suggesting that engagement with fictional worlds does not directly relate to general habitual regulation style. However, the qualitative findings showed that many participants still experienced fictional worlds as meaningful

emotional resources, particularly through themes of comfort, escape, reflection, inspiration and social connection.

These findings suggest that the emotional value of fictional-world engagement may be more situational and personal than dispositional. Therefore, fictional worlds may offer opportunities for coping, perspective and emotional relief without necessarily shaping how individuals regulate emotions in everyday life. Importantly, this highlights the need to distinguish between a fictional world being emotionally meaningful and predicting wider psychological traits. This study contributes to a developing area of media psychology by positioning rich fictional narrative worlds as psychologically meaningful spaces where emotional functions appear to depend on how, why and when people engage with them. For many adults, these worlds can still provide something meaningful to return to when everyday life becomes difficult.

REFERENCES

- Barnes, J. L. (2018). Imaginary engagement, real-world effects: Fiction, emotion, and social cognition. *Review of general Psychology*, 22(2), 125-134.
- Bartsch, A. (2012). Emotional gratification in entertainment experience: Why viewers of movies and television series find it rewarding to experience emotions. *Media Psychology*, 15(3), 267–302. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2012.693811>
- Bonanno, G. A., & Burton, C. L. (2013). Regulatory flexibility: An individual differences perspective on coping and emotion regulation. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 8(6), 591–612. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691613504116>
- Boyd, B. (2009). On the origin of stories: Evolution, cognition, and fiction. Harvard University Press.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Busselle, R., & Bilandzic, H. (2008). Fictionality and perceived realism in experiencing stories: A model of narrative comprehension and engagement. *Communication Theory*, 18(2), 255–280. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2008.00322.x>
- Chadborn, D., Edwards, P., & Reysen, S. (2017). Displaying fan identity to make friends. *Intensities: The Journal of Cult Media*, 9(9), 87-97.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). Flow: The psychology of optimal experience. Harper & Row.
- Djikic, M., Oatley, K., & Moldoveanu, M. C. (2013). Opening the closed mind: The effect of exposure to literature on the need for closure. *Creativity Research Journal*, 25(2), 149–154. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10400419.2013.783735>
- Döveling, K., Festl, R., Reinecke, L., & Krämer, N. C. (2025). Emotion regulation through media use: Theoretical developments and future directions. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, 49(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2024.2432946>

- Dubourg, E., & Baumard, N. (2021). Why imaginary worlds? The psychological foundations and cultural evolution of fictions with imaginary worlds. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 1-52.
- Eden, A. L., Johnson, B. K., Reinecke, L., & Grady, S. M. (2020). Media for coping during COVID-19 social distancing: Stress, anxiety, and psychological well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, Article 577639. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.577639>
- Eekhof, L. S., van Krieken, K., & Willems, R. M. (2022). Reading about minds: The social-cognitive potential of narratives. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 29(5), 1703–1718. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13423-022-02079-z>
- Folkman, S., & Lazarus, R. S. (1986). Stress Processes and Depressive Symptomatology. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* (1965), 95(2), 107–113. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-843X.95.2.107>
- Grady, S. M., Eden, A., & Wolfers, L. N. (2026). Examining comfort media: A tool for self-regulation and refuge? *Mass Communication and Society*, 29(2), 245–268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2025.2519191>
- Green, M. C., & Appel, M. (2024). Narrative transportation: How stories shape how we see ourselves and the world. In B. Gawronski (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 70, pp. 1–82). Academic Press. <https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.aesp.2024.03.002>
- Green, M. C., & Brock, T. C. (2000). The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79(5), 701–721. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.5.701>
- Green, M. C., Brock, T. C., & Kaufman, G. F. (2004). Understanding media enjoyment: The role of transportation into narrative worlds. *Communication Theory*, 14(4), 311–327. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2004.tb00317.x>
- Gross, J. J. (1998). The emerging field of emotion regulation: An integrative review. *Review of General Psychology*, 2(3), 271–299. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.2.3.271>

- Gross, J. J. (2015). Emotion regulation: current status and future prospects. *Psychological Inquiry*, 26(1), 1–26.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/1047840X.2014.940781>
- Gross, J. J., & John, O. P. (2003). Individual differences in two emotion regulation processes: Implications for affect, relationships, and well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(2), 348–362. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.2.348>
- Hu, T., Zhang, D., Wang, J., Mistry, R., Ran, G., & Wang, X. (2014). Relation between emotion regulation and mental health: A meta-analysis review. *Psychological Reports*, 114(2), 341–362. <https://doi.org/10.2466/03.20.PR0.114k22w4>
- Iosifyan, M., & Wolfe, J. (2024). Buffering effect of fiction on negative emotions: Engagement with negatively valenced fiction decreases the intensity of negative emotions. *Cognition and Emotion*, 38(5), 709–726.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2024.2314986>
- Kardefelt-Winther, D. (2014). A conceptual and methodological critique of internet addiction research: Towards a model of compensatory internet use. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 31, 351–354. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2013.10.059>
- Katz, E., & Foulkes, D. (1962). On the use of the mass media as "escape": Clarification of a concept. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 26(3), 377–388.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/267111>
- Lutz, S., Schneider, F. M., & Reich, S. (2023). Media as powerful coping tools to recover from social exclusion experiences? A systematic review on need restoration and emotion regulation through using media. *Media Psychology*, 26(4), 388–413.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2022.2147085>
- Makowski, D., Sperduti, M., Pelletier, J., Blondé, P., La Corte, V., Arcangeli, M., Zalla, T., Lemaire, S., Dokic, J., Nicolas, S., & Piolino, P. (2019). Phenomenal, bodily and brain correlates of fictional reappraisal as an implicit emotion regulation strategy. *Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioral Neuroscience*, 19(4), 877–897.
<https://doi.org/10.3758/s13415-018-00681-0>

- Mar, R. A., & Oatley, K. (2008). The function of fiction is the abstraction and simulation of social experience. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3(3), 173–192.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1745-6924.2008.00073.x>
- Oliver, M. B., & Raney, A. A. (2011). Entertainment as pleasurable and meaningful: Identifying hedonic and eudaimonic motivations for entertainment consumption. *Journal of Communication*, 61(5), 984–1004.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2011.01585.x>
- Pauw, L. S., Medland, H., Paling, S. J., Moeck, E. K., Greenaway, K. H., Kalokerinos, E. K., Hinton, J. D. X., Hollenstein, T., & Koval, P. (2022). Social support predicts differential use, but not differential effectiveness, of expressive suppression and social sharing in daily life. *Affective Science*, 3(3), 641–652.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s42761-022-00123-8>
- Ray, A., Plante, C. N., Reysen, S., Roberts, S. E., & Gerbasi, K. C. (2017). Psychological needs predict fanship and fandom in anime fans. *The Phoenix Papers*, 3(1), 56–68.
- Reinecke, L. (2009). Games and recovery: The use of video and computer games to recuperate from stress and strain. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 21(3), 126–142.
<https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105.21.3.126>
- Reinecke, L., & Oliver, M. B. (2016). Media use and well-being: Status quo and open questions. In L. Reinecke & M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of media use and well-being* (pp. 3–13). Routledge.
- Reinecke, L., Hartmann, T., & Eden, A. (2014). The guilty couch potato: The role of ego depletion in reducing recovery through media use. *Journal of Communication*, 64(4), 569–589. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12107>
- Reysen, S., & Branscombe, N. R. (2010). Fanship and fandom: Comparisons between sport and non-sport fans. *Journal of Sport Behavior*, 33(2), 176.
- Reysen, S., Plante, C. N., Roberts, S. E., & Gerbasi, K. C. (2024). Social activities mediate the relation between fandom identification and psychological well-

being. *Leisure Sciences*, 46(5), 681–701.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2021.2023714>

Schramm, H., & Cohen, E. L. (2017). Emotion regulation and coping via media use. In P. Rössler, C. A. Hoffner, & L. van Zoonen (Eds.), *The international encyclopedia of media effects* (pp. 438–447). Wiley-Blackwell.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118783764.wbieme0162>

Shackelford, K. E., Green, M. C., & Cohen, J. D. (2025). Social psychological perspectives on audience involvement: On the self and other in identification, parasocial experiences, and social surrogacy. In K. E. Shackelford & N. D. Bowman (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of media psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 69–84). Oxford University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197689875.013.0005>

Slater, M. D., & Rouner, D. (2002). Entertainment-education and elaboration likelihood: Understanding the processing of narrative persuasion. *Communication Theory*, 12(2), 173–191. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00265.x>

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.

Troy, A. S., Shallcross, A. J., & Mauss, I. B. (2013). A person-by-situation approach to emotion regulation: Cognitive reappraisal can either help or hurt, depending on the context. *Psychological Science*, 24(12), 2505–2514.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797613496434>

Turner, J. C., Hogg, M. A., Oakes, P. J., Reicher, S. D., & Wetherell, M. S. (1987). *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory*. Basil Blackwell.

Van Laer, T., De Ruyter, K., Visconti, L. M., & Wetzels, M. (2014). The extended transportation-imagery model: A meta-analysis of the antecedents and consequences of consumers' narrative transportation. *Journal of Consumer research*, 40(5), 797–817. <https://doi.org/10.1086/673383>

- Vinney, C., Dill-Shackleford, K. E., Plante, C. N., & Bartsch, A. (2019). Development and validation of a measure of popular media fan identity and its relationship to well-being. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 8(3), 296–307.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/ppm0000188>
- Wolf, M. J. P. (2012). Building imaginary worlds: The theory and history of subcreation. Routledge.
- Wolfers, L. N., & Schneider, F. M. (2021). Using media for coping: A scoping review. *Communication Research*, 48(8), 1210–1234.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650220939778>
- Zillmann, D. (1988). Mood management through communication choices. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 31(3), 327–340.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/000276488031003005>

I confirm that I have not used any AI tools in the research and creation of this assignment. I confirm that I have not presented any AI-generated materials as my own work. I confirm I have copies of my drafts, notes, and other resources I used, which I may be asked to provide in evidence.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Recruitment advertisement in r/Multifandom subreddit




r/Multifandom • 1mo ago
aaronyoung5555




FANDOM RESEARCH PROJECT - Everyone Invited

Question

HELLO EVERYONE! I have permission from the admin to post a link to my MSc dissertation survey.

https://uwtsdyrathrofa.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_4Pi1LOLyshNjMmW ✓

It looks at the role of Fiction, Fandom, and Worldbuilding in our emotions and everyday lives. Everyone in this community has a clear interest in Fandom, and so your responses would be highly valuable to my investigation, which will, hopefully, contribute to new psychology research in our niche area of interest.

This questionnaire is light-hearted and invites you to think about and discuss your favourite fictional fandoms and worlds. It shouldn't take more than 15 minutes. All responses are welcome (please in English if possible). Any questions, feel free to ask. If you feel as if other family or friends would enjoy this questionnaire, feel free to pass it along.

Thank You
Aaron

Appendix B – Breakdown of country demographics

COUNTRY	COUNT
Argentina	1
Australia	8
Canada	12
Denmark	2
Finland	1
France	1
Germany	12
Gibraltar	1
Greece	1
Hungary	1
Iceland	1
India	1
Italy	1
Mexico	1
Netherlands	1
New Zealand	1
Pakistan	1

Philippines	1
Poland	2
Portugal	1
Russia	2
South Africa	1
Spain	2
Sweden	4
Thailand	1
Turkey	1
UK	67
USA	71

Appendix C – Demographic page

Please state your GENDER

☐ Male

☐ Female

☐ Non-binary / third gender

☐ Prefer not to say

☐ Other

Please state your AGE

Please state the COUNTRY you live in

Appendix D – Introduction Page

Welcome to: A WORLD OF THEIR OWN

From Middle-earth to Hogwarts, from Marvel to Star Wars, fictional stories and franchises have a unique ability to capture our imagination and become meaningful parts of our lives.

For many people, engagement with fictional worlds is more than entertainment. Stories can provide inspiration, comfort, a sense of belonging, and an escape from everyday pressures. Some people join fan communities, while others simply enjoy revisiting the characters, lore and worlds they love.

This study aims to better understand these experiences. Before you begin, please think about your favourite fictional narrative world. This could be any franchise that is personally meaningful to you, such as Twilight, The Hunger Games, Marvel, Star Wars, The Lord of the Rings, or absolutely any world from films, television, video games, anime, books, or comics.

Keeping your chosen world in mind, you will be asked questions about your engagement with it and the personal meaning it holds for you. You will also answer questions about your emotional experiences, allowing us to explore how emotional engagement with fictional worlds relates to our emotions in everyday life. Finally, you will have the opportunity to describe what your chosen world means to you in your own words.

When you are ready, press the forward **BLUE** arrow below to begin

Appendix E – Adapted Narrative Transportation Scale Items

1. While I *am engaged with the narrative world*, I can easily imagine events in it taking place.
2. While I *am engaged with the narrative world*, activity going on in the room around me was on my mind. (R)
3. I *can* picture myself in the events shown *in the narrative*.
4. I *become* mentally involved in the *narrative world* while engaged.
5. After *leaving* the narrative world, I *find* it easy to put it out of my mind. (R)
6. I *want* to learn how the *story ends*.
7. The narrative *world* affects me emotionally.
8. I find myself thinking of ways the *story* could have turned out differently.
9. I find my mind wandering while *engaged with* the narrative world. (R)
10. The events in the narrative *world* are relevant to my everyday life.
11. The events in the narrative *world* have changed my life.

NOT AT ALL

VERY MUCH

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Appendix F - Fandom Functions Scale (FFS) Items

My involvement with the [*Insert Name of Fan Interest*] fandom...

1. Provides me with an opportunity to grow and discover more about aspects of myself.
2. Provides me with answers/information/guidance I need to face situations in my life.
3. Provides me with an experience of captivating beauty and inspiration.
4. Provides me with a sense of fulfillment as I feel like something is missing when I am not involved.
5. Provides me with an opportunity to express myself and my uniqueness.
6. Provides me with an outlet for my creativity.
7. Provides me with a focus or sense of purpose.
8. Provides me with a break from life's stresses.
9. Provides me with an engaging and entertaining experience.
10. Provides me with a good laugh and/or cry.
11. Provides me with a chance/way to retreat from difficult life situations.
12. Provides me an opportunity to share with my family and bring us closer.
13. Provides me with an activity to share with my existing friends/ ways to stay connected.
14. Provides me with a chance to expand my circle of friends.

Not at all True 1 2 3 4 5 *Very True*

Appendix G – Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) Items

1. When I want to feel more positive emotion (such as joy or amusement), I change what I'm thinking about.
2. I keep my emotions to myself.
3. When I want to feel less negative emotion (such as sadness or anger), I change what I'm thinking about.
4. When I am feeling positive emotions, I am careful not to express them.
5. When I'm faced with a stressful situation, I make myself think about it in a way that helps me stay calm.
6. I control my emotions by not expressing them.
7. When I want to feel more positive emotion, I change the way I'm thinking about the situation.
8. I control my emotions by changing the way I think about the situation I'm in.
9. When I am feeling negative emotions, I make sure not to express them.

10. When I want to feel less negative emotion, I change the way I'm thinking about the situation.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5-----6-----7
strongly disagree neutral strongly agree

Appendix H - Qualitative Questions

- 1) In a few words, what does your chosen fictional world mean to you personally?
- 2) When you engage with your fictional world, what are you usually seeking or hoping to gain from the experience?
- 3) Has your chosen fictional world influenced your thoughts, values, goals or outlook on life? If so, how?
- 4) Has this fictional world helped you feel connected to other people? If so how?
- 5) Overall, how do you feel your engagement with this fictional world affect your emotions or help you cope with everyday life?

Appendix I – Information Sheet

The title of the research project:

A WORLD OF THEIR OWN: Exploring Narrative Immersion, Fandoms and Emotional Regulation Through Fictional Worlds

Invitation to take part

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part.

Who is organising/funding the research?

This research is organised by an MSc student at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) under academic supervision for a dissertation assessment. This research is not directly funded.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved by the UWTSD Research Ethics Committee.

What is the purpose of the project?

This research is being conducted as part of an MSc in Applied Psychology at UWTSD. The study aims to explore how adults engage with fictional worlds and fandom communities, and the different ways people experience this engagement.

Many people spend time reading books, watching films and television series, playing video games, or participating in online fan communities involving large-scale fictional worlds and franchises. While these activities are a common part of our everyday life, researchers are still developing an understanding of the experiences and motivations associated with engagement in fictional worlds.

By completing this survey, you will help researchers better understand how people interact with fictional media and fandoms, and what role these experiences may play in our lives. The findings will contribute to psychological research on media engagement and fandom and may help inform future research in this area. The study is for research purposes only and is not designed to assess or diagnose any individual participant.

Why have I been chosen?

If you have seen the advert for this research study, you have likely been identified as a key participant due to your association with online fictional fandom communities (Such as Reddit or Discord). This means that you are part of the demographic that would be of great interest to this study's aims. We aim to recruit 200-300 participants from online fan communities to achieve a diverse, global sample. All participants in this investigation must be 18 years or older and be able to read English.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a participant agreement form and read this information page, as we want you to understand what participation involves, before you make a decision on whether to participate. If you or any family member has an ongoing relationship with UWTSD or the research team, e.g. as a member of staff, as a student or other service user, your decision on whether to take part (or continue to take part) will not affect this relationship in any way.

Can I change my mind about taking part?

Yes, you can stop participating in study activities at any time, without giving a reason, by closing your browser tab. Please note that withdrawal of data and responses will not be possible after submission, as all data is immediately anonymised and individual participants' responses cannot be identified.

If I change my mind, what happens to my information?

After you decide to withdraw from the study, we will not collect any further information from or about you. As regards information we have already collected before this point, your rights to access, change or move that information are limited. This is because we need to manage your information in specific ways to ensure the research is reliable and accurate. Further explanation about this is in the Personal Information section below. Incomplete Qualtrics responses will be removed by the researcher and will not form part of the final dataset.

What would taking part involve?

If you decide to take part, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire hosted on Qualtrics. After reading this information page and providing electronic consent, the

survey will begin with a small number of demographic questions, including your age, gender, and country of residence, as well as identifying your chosen fictional “world”. Next, you will be asked to answer a series of short questionnaires about your engagement with fictional worlds and fandoms. Two of these questionnaires will focus on your experiences of engaging with your favourite fictional media franchises and worlds, such as books, films, television series, video games, and related fandom activities, specifically your levels of narrative immersion into your world and the reasons you engage with wider fandoms. You will also be asked to complete a third questionnaire about your thoughts, feelings, and everyday experiences managing emotions for the study's ultimate aim (more information about this will be available at the conclusion of the study).

In addition, the survey will include a small number of optional open-ended questions where you may choose to describe your experiences in your own words. This will give you an opportunity to explain subjectively what engagement with your chosen fictional world means to you emotionally and include any thoughts that would bring overall context to the questionnaire findings.

Participation is entirely voluntary. You may skip any question you do not wish to answer and may stop the survey at any time before submitting your responses. The full survey is expected to take approximately 15–20 minutes to complete.

What are the advantages and possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits nor risks to you participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will inform and inspire future research on fandom engagement, narrative psychology and their relevance to our emotional experiences. As the phenomenon of multi-media franchises, binge watching and engaging with wider fictional lore, stories and characters becomes increasingly popular, it is important to understand why this type of media engagement is emotionally meaningful and stimulating.

Whilst we do not anticipate any risks to you in taking part in this study, you may experience mild discomfort in disclosing emotional experiences as part of this questionnaire. However, these questions have been taken from a popular and validated psychometric measure.

What type of information will be sought from me, and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project’s objectives?

The survey will collect basic demographic information, including your age, gender, and country of residence, as well as asking you to complete three established psychological questionnaires. These questionnaires will involve you answering validated items exploring your depth of immersion into your chosen narrative world, the reasons you engage with related fandom communities and what this type of engagement means to you emotionally. You may also provide optional written responses to open-ended questions about your experiences with your chosen fictional world.

This information is necessary to help the researchers understand patterns of

engagement with fictional media and fandoms, and to explore how these experiences vary across individuals and influence our emotions. Collecting this information will allow the research questions to be investigated and contribute to a better understanding of engagement with fictional worlds from a psychological perspective.

How will my information be managed?

University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) is the organisation with overall responsibility for this study and the Data Controller of your personal information, which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it appropriately. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest, as part of our core function as a university. Undertaking this research study involves collecting and/or generating information about you. We manage research data strictly in accordance with:

- Ethical requirements;
- and Current data protection laws.

These control use of information about identifiable individuals, but do not apply to anonymous research data: “anonymous” means that we have either removed or not collected any pieces of data or links to other data which identify a specific person as the subject or source of a research result. UWTSD’s Research Participant Privacy Notice sets out more information about how we fulfil our responsibilities as a data controller and about your rights as an individual under the data protection legislation. We ask you to read this Notice so that you can fully understand the basis on which we will process your personal information.

Research data will be used only for the purposes of the study or related uses identified in the Privacy Notice or this Information Sheet. To safeguard your rights in relation to your personal information, we will use the minimum personally-identifiable information possible and control access to that data as described below.

Publication

You will not be able to be identified in any external reports or publications about the research without your specific consent. Otherwise, your information will only be included in these materials in an anonymous form, i.e. you will not be identifiable. Research results may be published in research journals and academic output.

Security and access controls

UWTSD will hold the information we collect about you in hard copy in a secure location and on a UWTSD password-protected secure network, where held electronically. Personal information which has not been anonymised will be accessed and used only by appropriate, authorised individuals and when this is necessary for the purposes of the research or another purpose identified in the Privacy Notice. This may include giving access to UWTSD staff or others responsible for monitoring and/or audit of the study, who need to ensure that the research complies with applicable regulations.

Further use of your information

The information collected about you may be used in an anonymous form to support other research projects in the future, and access to it in this form will not be restricted. It will not be possible for you to be identified from this data. To enable this use, anonymised data will be added to either UWTSD online Research Data Repository: this is a central location where data is stored, which is accessible to the public.

Keeping your information if you withdraw from the study

If you withdraw from active participation in the study, we will keep information which we have already collected from or about you, if this has ongoing relevance or value to the study. This may include your personal identifiable information. As explained above, your legal rights to access, change, delete or move this information are limited as we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. However, if you have concerns about how this will affect you personally, you can raise these with the research team when you withdraw from the study. You can find out more about your rights in relation to your data and how to raise queries or complaints in our Privacy Notice.

Retention of research data

Project governance documentation, including copies of participant agreements: we keep this documentation for a long period after completion of the research, so that we have records of how we conducted the research and who took part. The only personal information in this documentation will be your age, gender and country of residence, and we will not be able to link this to any anonymised research results.

Research results:

As described above, during the course of the study, we will anonymise the information we have collected about you as an individual. This means that we will not hold your personal information in identifiable form after we have completed the research activities.

You can find more specific information about retention periods for personal information in our Privacy Notice. We keep anonymised research data indefinitely, so that it can be used for other research as described above

Contact for further information

If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact the lead researcher; Aaron Young, at 2205141@student.uwtsd.ac.uk or the academic supervisor at paul.hutchings@uwtsd.ac.uk

In case of complaints

Any concerns about the study should be directed to the University's Data Protection Officer by email at: foi@uwtsd.ac.uk.

Appendix J – Consent Page**ELECTRONIC CONSENT FORM**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the Information Sheet for the above study.
2. I confirm that I am over 18 years old
3. I confirm that I can read and understand English
4. I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time during the study without penalty or giving any reason.
5. I understand that I may contact the research team for further information.
6. I understand that my fully anonymised data will be utilised only for this research study, which is being conducted by an MSc Applied Psychology student for their postgraduate research project, and will be deleted once external examiner approval for the project has been obtained.
7. I have been informed that if I feel I would be uncomfortable answering personal questions or completing a questionnaire relating to narrative immersion, fandom functions or emotional regulation, that I should not take part in this study.
8. I understand that I may decline to answer any questions.
9. I understand that any data collected will be anonymised and stored in an anonymous format and it will not be possible to trace the data back to me to withdraw
10. I understand that the anonymised data provided will be securely stored and accessible only to the members of the research team directly involved in the study, and that confidentiality will be maintained.
11. I agree to take part in the study.

☐ I agree with all the above statements

☐ I do not agree with one or more statements

Appendix K – Debrief information page**DEBRIEF INFORMATION**

Thank you for taking part in this study.

The aim of this research is to better understand how engagement with fictional narrative worlds relates to emotional regulation in adulthood. While fictional stories are often viewed as entertainment, they can also hold significant personal meaning and may play an important role in how people think, feel, and cope with everyday experiences.

In this survey, you were asked to focus on a fictional world that is meaningful to you. The questions explored several aspects of your relationship with that world, including:

- How deeply you become immersed in its stories and characters.
- The functions it serves in your life (Inspiration, belonging, escapism, etc)
- The ways you typically manage and respond to your emotions in everyday life.

By examining these areas together, this study aims to explore whether different forms of engagement with fictional worlds are associated with different patterns of emotional regulation. In particular, we are interested in whether immersion in fiction and the benefits people gain from fandom are related to the ways they experience and manage emotions.

The final written questions were included for you to describe what your chosen fictional world means to you emotionally, in your own words. These responses will be analysed alongside the questionnaire data to provide a richer understanding of the personal significance of fictional worlds and fandom. Your responses will be combined with those of other participants and analysed for overall patterns and themes.

Thank you again for your time and contribution. Your participation helps further our understanding of the psychological role that fiction and fandom may play in people's lives. Please press the forward BLUE arrow to conclude.

Researcher: Aaron Young

Supervisor: Dr Paul Hutchings

MSc Applied Psychology, University of Wales Trinity Saint David

Contact: 2205141@student.uwtsd.ac.uk

Appendix L - Regression Analysis 1 - Cognitive Reappraisal

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.176 ^a	.031	.011	.98407	1.981

a. Predictors: (Constant), FF_BelongingTotal, NI_TOTAL, FF_EscapeTotal, FF_PurposeTotal

b. Dependent Variable: Reappraisal_Total

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.068	4	1.517	1.567	.185 ^b
	Residual	188.836	195	.968		
	Total	194.904	199			

a. Dependent Variable: Reappraisal_Total

b. Predictors: (Constant), FF_BelongingTotal, NI_TOTAL, FF_EscapeTotal, FF_PurposeTotal

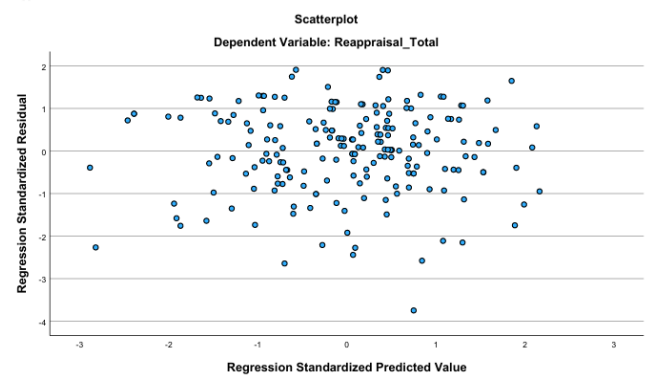
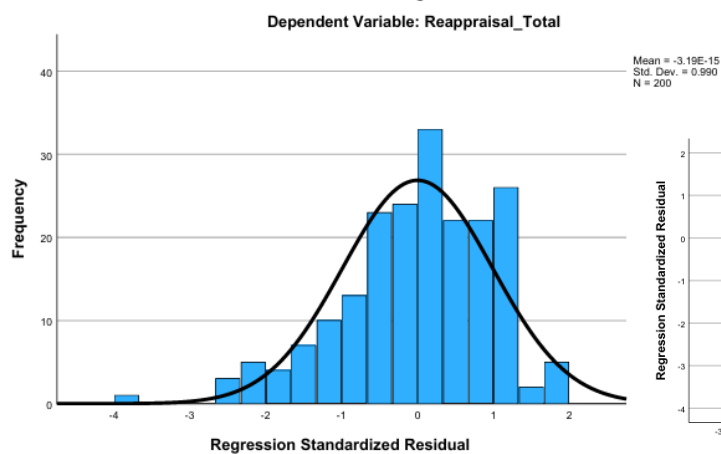
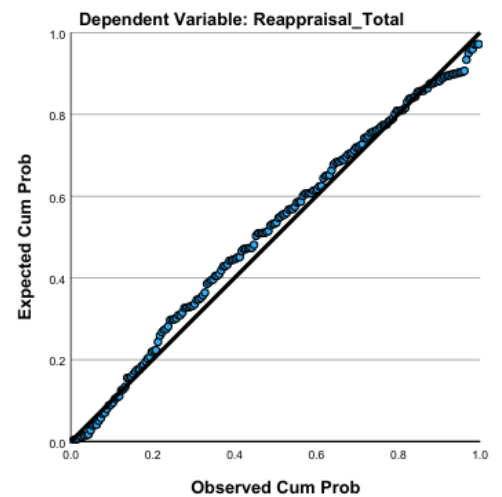
Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.924	.651		6.026	<.001
	NI_TOTAL	.032	.122	.024	.260	.795
	FF_PurposeTotal	.034	.124	.026	.276	.783
	FF_EscapeTotal	.040	.161	.021	.247	.805
	FF_BelongingTotal	.153	.085	.144	1.801	.073

Coefficients^a

Model		95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Correlations		
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Zero-order	Partial	Part
1	(Constant)	2.640	5.209			
	NI_TOTAL	-.209	.272	.090	.019	.018
	FF_PurposeTotal	-.211	.280	.095	.020	.019
	FF_EscapeTotal	-.277	.356	.108	.018	.017
	FF_BelongingTotal	-.015	.320	.168	.128	.127

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual



Appendix M – Regression Analysis 2 – Expressive Suppression

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.175 ^a	.031	.011	1.34915	2.049

a. Predictors: (Constant), FF_BelongingTotal, NI_TOTAL, FF_EscapeTotal, FF_PurposeTotal

b. Dependent Variable: Suppression_Total

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	11.273	4	2.818	1.548	.190 ^b
	Residual	354.941	195	1.820		
	Total	366.214	199			

a. Dependent Variable: Suppression_Total

b. Predictors: (Constant), FF_BelongingTotal, NI_TOTAL, FF_EscapeTotal, FF_PurposeTotal

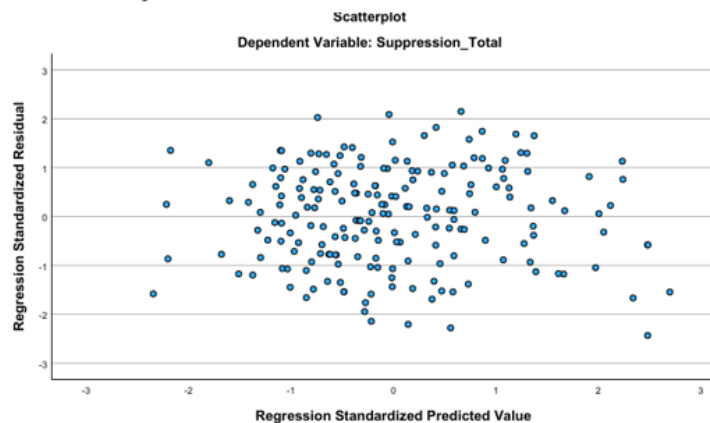
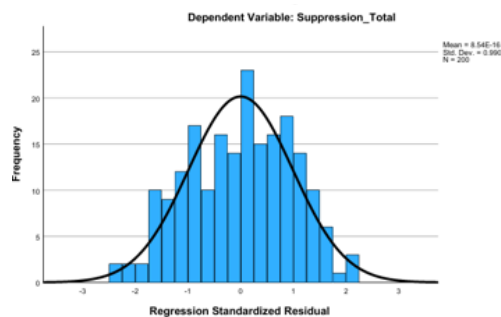
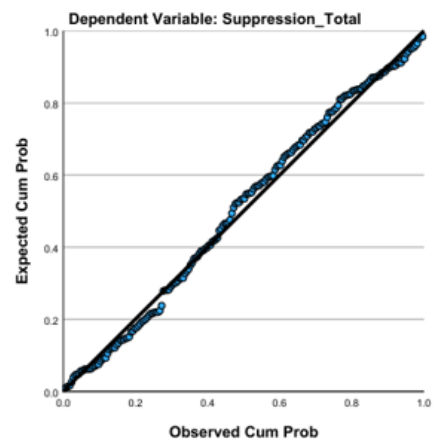
Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	4.805	.893		5.382	<.001
	NI_TOTAL	-.067	.167	-.037	-.399	.690
	FF_PurposeTotal	.244	.171	.137	1.430	.154
	FF_EscapeTotal	-.170	.220	-.067	-.774	.440
	FF_BelongingTotal	-.204	.116	-.140	-1.755	.081

Coefficients^a

Model		95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Zero-order	Correlations	
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound		Partial	Part
1	(Constant)	3.044	6.566			
	NI_TOTAL	-.396	.263	-.016	-.029	-.028
	FF_PurposeTotal	-.093	.581	.040	.102	.101
	FF_EscapeTotal	-.604	.264	-.079	-.055	-.055
	FF_BelongingTotal	-.433	.025	-.139	-.125	-.124

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual



Appendix N – Pearsons Correlation Output

		Correlations		
		NI_TOTAL	FF_PurposeTotal	FF_EscapeTotal
NI_TOTAL	Pearson Correlation	1	.630**	.390**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001	<.001
	N	200	200	200
FF_PurposeTotal	Pearson Correlation	.630**	1	.474**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001		<.001
	N	200	200	200
FF_EscapeTotal	Pearson Correlation	.390**	.474**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	
	N	200	200	200
FF_BelongingTotal	Pearson Correlation	.286**	.304**	.450**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001
	N	200	200	200
Reappraisal_Total	Pearson Correlation	.090	.095	.108
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.205	.179	.128
	N	200	200	200
Suppression_Total	Pearson Correlation	-.016	.040	-.079
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.817	.577	.265
	N	200	200	200

		Correlations		
		FF_BelongingTotal	Reappraisal_Total	Suppression_Total
NI_TOTAL	Pearson Correlation	.286**	.090	-.016
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.205	.817
	N	200	200	200
FF_PurposeTotal	Pearson Correlation	.304**	.095	.040
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.179	.577
	N	200	200	200
FF_EscapeTotal	Pearson Correlation	.450**	.108	-.079
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	.128	.265
	N	200	200	200
FF_BelongingTotal	Pearson Correlation	1	.168*	-.139*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.017	.050
	N	200	200	200
Reappraisal_Total	Pearson Correlation	.168*	1	.065
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.017		.363
	N	200	200	200
Suppression_Total	Pearson Correlation	-.139*	.065	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.050	.363	
	N	200	200	200

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).