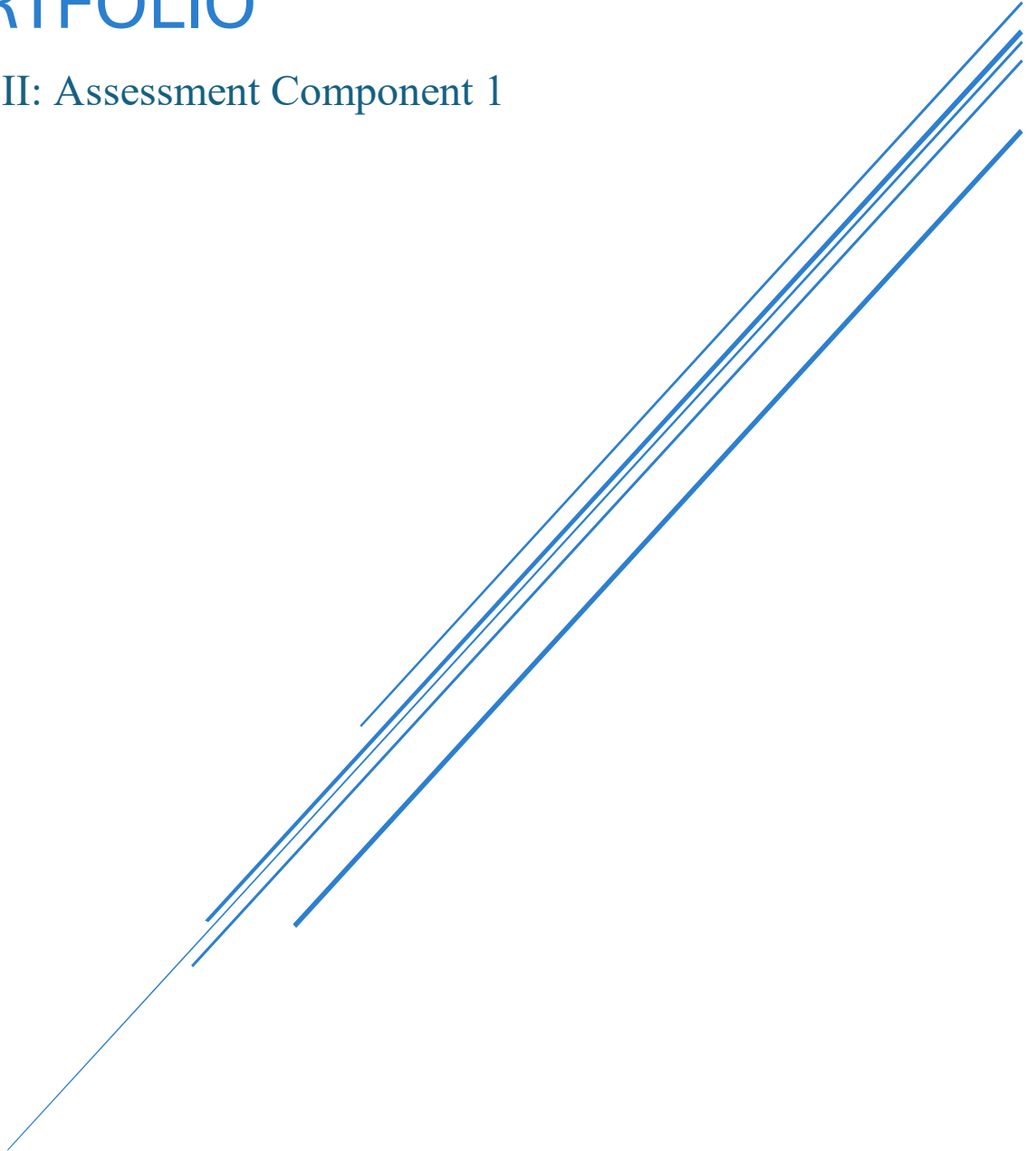


PORTFOLIO

PART II: Assessment Component 1



UWTSD
Aaron Young

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PART 1: RESERCH PROPOSAL

MSC APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY: ECAS7013 PART II DISSERTATION RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Student Details

Student Family / Surname:	Young	
Student Given / First name:	Aaron	
Student Number	2205141	
Proposed supervisor	Dr Paul Hutchings	
Has your proposed supervisor approved your Expression of Interest?	NO ☐	YES ☒

Proposed Research (this section must be no longer than 2,500 words)

Current Proposed Title (20 / 30 words):
A World of Their Own: Exploring Narrative Immersion, Fandoms and Emotional Regulation Through Fictional Worlds
Background & Context <i>(to include rationale and theoretical framework, leading to a clear research question)</i>
Since early literature and storytelling, engagement with fictional narratives has been deeply embedded in everyday life. Across films, television, novels, video games, and multimedia franchises, many people immerse themselves in expansive fictional worlds that provide emotionally/psychologically meaningful experiences. Popular narrative universes such as <i>Star Wars</i>, <i>Lord of the Rings</i>, <i>Harry Potter</i> and <i>Marvel</i> are ongoing narrative worlds that audiences revisit over time (Wolf, 2012). This is typically described as “escapism,” which is often associated with avoidance or withdrawal from reality. However, newer media psychology research suggests that immersive fictional engagement may also serve important emotional, cognitive and social functions, including stress relief, coping, identity, and wellbeing (Barnes, 2018; Eekhof et al., 2022; Mar & Oatley, 2008). Narrative Transportation Theory is one of the best frameworks for understanding how individuals psychologically engage with story worlds. Green and Brock (2000) describe transportation as a state of cognitive and emotional immersion involving focused attention and reduced awareness of real environments. Transportation has since been linked to emotional engagement, attitude change, empathy, and self-reflection (Green et al., 2003; Van Laer et al., 2014). Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) further argued that immersive engagement with narratives involving emotional and mental simulation processes makes narratives psychologically meaningful. Within highly developed fictional worlds, repeated immersion may therefore function as emotionally significant environments that can influence mood and coping.

Mar and Oatley (2008) state that fiction can function as a form of social and emotional simulation, allowing individuals to subconsciously simulate emotional and social experiences and consider alternate perspectives. Identification with characters and perspective-taking may support the self-reflection and emotional reinterpretation associated with adaptive coping. Increased narrative engagement has been linked with increased development of empathy, emotional understanding, theory of mind and reflective thinking (Mar et al., 2011; Kidd & Castano, 2013). These are theoretically relevant to emotional regulation because immersive narratives may allow individuals to reinterpret emotional experiences and psychologically distance themselves from stressors in ways that resemble cognitive reappraisal strategies described by Emotional Regulation Theory (Gross, 1998). Fictional worlds may therefore function as emotionally meaningful “regulatory spaces” or “toolboxes” in which individuals temporarily reorganise or reinterpret emotional experiences.

Traditionally, escapism has been framed negatively as avoidant behaviour associated with problematic media use or withdrawal from real-world responsibilities (Henning & Vorderer, 2001). However, Compensatory Media Use Theory proposes that individuals frequently engage with media to compensate for unmet psychological needs and emotional discomfort (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014). Within this framework, media use is not inherently maladaptive but rather reflects attempts to regulate emotions and restore positive psychological states. Reinecke (2009) similarly found that entertainment media can facilitate psychological recovery from stress and mental fatigue through relaxation, detachment, and mood management. Importantly, immersive fictional engagement may be adaptive when it provides temporary relief and emotional processing opportunities but becomes maladaptive when used chronically to avoid real-world difficulties (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014; Reinecke, 2009). Also, most escapism research focuses on problematic internet use or gaming addiction rather than immersive, lore-rich, fictional worlds and their emotional functions. Relatively little research has examined how the purpose and quality of immersion into personally meaningful worlds may relate to different emotional regulation outcomes.

Research surrounding fandoms demonstrates that engagement with fictional worlds often extends beyond passive consumption and into identity expression, community participation, emotional comfort and social belonging (Duffett, 2013). Chadborn et al. (2017) proposed that fandoms can serve several key psychological functions, including purpose, escapism and belonging. For some individuals, fandom participation may provide inspiration, creativity and self-expression, whereas for others it may serve social connection needs or emotional escape. As such, fandom functions are presented in this study as potential predictors of emotional regulation tendencies, specifically whether different motivations for fictional engagement relate differently to adaptive or avoidant coping strategies.

Furthermore, Social Identity and Self-categorisation Theory propose that group memberships (being part of a fandom) contribute to identity, belonging, and wellbeing (Tajfel & Turner, 2004; Turner & Reynolds, 2012). Additionally, parasocial relationship research suggests audiences may form emotionally meaningful one-sided relationships with fictional characters (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Tukachinsky & Stever, 2019). These social and parasocial processes are considered secondary contributing factors in this investigation that may further strengthen emotional attachment and emotional meaning with narrative fictional worlds.

Gross' Emotional Regulation Theory (1998) proposed that individuals regulate emotions through two main behavioural strategies: Cognitive Reappraisal and Expressive Suppression. Cognitive reappraisal involves reinterpreting emotional situations to alter their emotional impact and is generally associated with better psychological/wellbeing outcomes (Gross & John, 2003). Alternatively, expressive suppression involves inhibiting emotional expression and is more associated with poorer psychological outcomes and avoidant coping. The distinction between these strategies is highly relevant within the context of fictional engagement and this study because immersive worlds may facilitate emotional processing or emotional avoidance depending on the motivations and conditions of engagement for fans (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014; Reinecke, 2009). This

study uses emotional regulation theory as a core framework for examining whether different patterns of immersive fictional engagement predict tendencies toward adaptive (reappraisal) or maladaptive (suppression) coping styles.

Despite research into narrative immersion, fandom participation, escapism and emotional regulation independently, relatively little research has integrated these concepts into a single applied framework. Existing literature rarely examines whether levels of narrative immersion and different fandom motivations predict distinct emotional regulation tendencies, despite the idea that these may be correlated among many fandom-inclined individuals. Furthermore, media psychology research continues to disproportionately frame escapism as deficit-based, addictive or dysfunctional, often overlooking the possibility that it may also support adaptive emotional coping and wellbeing. As such, research is needed to identify the conditions under which immersive fictional engagement aligns with adaptive versus avoidant coping.

This study aims to address this gap by examining whether immersive engagement levels and fandom motivations relating to purpose, escapism, and belonging are associated with greater use of cognitive reappraisal or expressive suppression strategies. Through integrating narrative transportation theory, fandom function research, compensatory media use theory, and emotional regulation frameworks, the study aims to provide a more nuanced and applied understanding of how fictional worlds may be emotionally meaningful or predict adaptive/maladaptive coping in certain individuals.

Aims and Objectives

AIM

To investigate whether narrative immersion and psychological fandom functions predict differences in emotional regulation strategies among adults engaging with fictional worlds and lore. Specifically, to explore the conditions under which immersive fictional engagement may align with adaptive emotional regulation (cognitive reappraisal) compared to more avoidant emotional regulation tendencies (expressive suppression).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Primary:

- To what extent do narrative immersion and fandom functions predict more adaptive and less adaptive emotional regulation strategies among adults engaging with fictional worlds?

Secondary:

- Which fandom functions (purpose/inspiration, escapism, or belonging) most strongly predict cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression?
- How do individuals subjectively describe the emotional role of immersive fictional worlds in coping and wellbeing?

OBJECTIVES

- 1) To examine the relationship between levels of narrative immersion, fandom functions and emotional regulation strategies.
- 2) To explore participants' subjective experiences of fictional engagement and emotional coping

Methodology

RESEARCH DESIGN

This exploratory study will use a cross-sectional, mixed-methods survey design including quantitative self-report measures and brief qualitative responses. A correlational and predictive approach will examine whether narrative immersion and unique fandom functions predict emotional regulation strategies.

Data will be collected through an online Qualtrics questionnaire distributed via social media and online fandom communities to support the digital and globally relevant nature of fandom engagement and is accessible to participants actively involved with fictional worlds.

Quantitative measures will assess:

- narrative immersion
- fandom functions
- emotional regulation strategies

Open-ended qualitative questions will provide additional insight/context into how participants personally perceive the emotional role of their chosen fictional world. Combining quantitative and qualitative data will strengthen interpretation of findings by providing both statistical relationships and subjective context (Usman et al., 2025).

PARTICIPANTS

Participants aged 18+ will be recruited through online fandom communities and social media platforms, including Reddit, Discord and Instagram. Due to the online nature of fandom participation, responses are expected globally. Participants will be required to identify a preferred fictional world or fandom (e.g., *Star Wars*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Marvel*), to provide a contextual reference for the participant and researcher.

Basic demographic data, including age, gender, and country of residence will also be collected. Online fandom recruitment provides direct access to individuals actively engaging with immersive fictional worlds in naturalistic settings. The study aims for a large sample size of approximately 200 participants.

MEASURES/MATERIALS

Participants will complete an online questionnaire hosted on Qualtrics containing three validated self-report measures alongside qualitative questions.

An adapted **Narrative Transportation Scale** (Green & Brock, 2000) will measure levels of cognitive and emotional absorption/transportation participants experience within their preferred fictional world. The scale assesses the attentional focus, emotional involvement, and mental imagery associated with immersive engagement. Higher scores will indicate greater levels of narrative immersion.

The Fandom Functions Scale (FFS) (Chadborn et al., 2017) assesses three primary psychological fandom engagement functions in subscales of:

- purpose/inspiration
- escapism
- belonging/social connection

Subscales will be analysed separately to observe whether different motivations for fictional engagement predict distinct emotional regulation tendencies.

Emotional regulation strategies will be measured using the **Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ)** (Gross & John, 2003), which assesses preferred use of **Cognitive Reappraisal** and **Expressive Suppression**.

Outcomes of these will provide the framework for examining adaptive versus avoidant emotional regulation tendencies.

Finally, participants will complete brief open-ended qualitative questions to explore the perceived emotional role of their chosen fictional world and whether engagement is experienced subjectively as supportive, comforting, or avoidant. These responses will provide contextual insight into participants' subjective experiences and support the interpretation of quantitative findings.

VARIABLES

The primary **predictor** variables of this study are:

- Narrative Immersion,
- FFS - purpose/inspiration,
- FFS - escapism,
- FFS - belonging/social connection.

Narrative immersion scores will be derived from the adapted Narrative Transportation Scale (Green & Brock, 2000), while fandom function predictors will be derived from the separate subscales of the Fandom Functions Scale (Chadborn et al., 2017).

The primary **criterion** variables will be measured using the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003):

- Cognitive Reappraisal
- Expressive Suppression

Cognitive reappraisal is conceptualised as a more adaptive emotional regulation strategy, whereas expressive suppression is considered a more avoidant or less adaptive strategy.

Several exploratory demographic **moderators** may be explored, including:

- age
- gender
- fandom type

These variables may influence the relationship between immersive fictional engagement and emotional regulation tendencies and will therefore be considered during the analysis of findings.

PROCEDURE

When accessing the questionnaire, all participants will follow the following procedure;

- 1) Access the study through an online Qualtrics link distributed via social media platforms and online fandom communities.
- 2) Read a participant Information Sheet outlining:
 - Purpose of the study
 - Eligibility criteria
 - Confidentiality procedures
 - Right to withdraw
- 3) Provide informed consent electronically before accessing the questionnaire.
- 4) Enter demographic information including:
 - Age
 - Gender
 - Country of residence
- 5) Read a brief instructions page that outlines the general concept of the study, key terms and encourage participants to begin considering their chosen narrative world which will be used throughout the study.

- 6) Complete:
 - The adapted Narrative Transportation Scale
 - The Fandom Functions Scale
 - The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire
- 7) All quantitative items will be completed using Likert-scale responses and is expected to take approximately 15–20 minutes in total.
- 8) Finally, complete a few brief open-ended qualitative questions exploring:
 - The subjective emotional impact of their chosen fictional world
 - Reasons for engagement
 - Whether engagement is experienced as supportive, comforting, or avoidant
- 9) Following completion, participants will receive a debrief sheet explaining the aims of the study in greater detail alongside contact information for relevant support services, the researcher and academic supervisor, should participation raise emotional concerns. Participants will be thanked for their participation.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data will be analysed using SPSS by the researcher. Descriptive statistics and reliability analyses (Cronbach's alpha) will first be conducted to assess scale consistency and overall response patterns.

Pearson correlation analyses will then examine relationships between:

- narrative immersion,
- fandom functions,
- cognitive reappraisal,
- and expressive suppression.

Multiple regression analyses will subsequently be conducted to determine whether narrative immersion and fandom functions significantly predict emotional regulation strategies. Two regression models will be used:

- predictors of Cognitive Reappraisal,
- predictors of Expressive Suppression.

This approach allows examination of the unique contribution of each predictor variable.

Qualitative responses will be analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify recurring themes relating to emotional coping, comfort, escapism, and wellbeing. These findings will be used to contextualise and support interpretation of quantitative results.

Proposed plan of work including Gantt Chart

The proposed study is feasible within an MSc dissertation timeframe due to its low-cost online design and use of established psychometric measures. Ethical considerations will be approved before recruitment and data collection, with enough time allowed for potential changes following ethical review. Questionnaire construction and pilot testing will be completed well before participant recruitment to ensure clarity and functionality of survey materials.

Data collection will take place online, allowing scalable and time-efficient recruitment from a potentially large and diverse participant pool. Following data collection, time will be given for quantitative statistical analysis, qualitative thematic analysis, interpretation of findings, and thesis write-up.

A detailed project timeline outlining each key stage of the research process is provided in the Gantt chart below:

Applied Research Project Timescales	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG	SEP
Initial Project Conception												
Early Literature Search												
Seek Supervisor Support (EOI)												
Finalise Project Idea												
Deep Literature Search												
Identify core theory and materials												
Proposal Submission												
Ethics Submission												
Create Qualtrics Questionnaire												
Thesis - Literature Review												
Thesis - Methodology												
Data Collection												
Data Analysis												
Thesis - Results												
Thesis - Discussion & Conclusion												
Final Thesis Submission												
Showcase Event												

Anticipated Outcomes and Real World Impact

The study is expected to identify meaningful relationships between narrative immersion, related fandom functions and emotional regulation strategies. It is predicted that high narrative immersion in association with fandom functions relating to purpose, inspiration and belonging will be positively associated with cognitive reappraisal, whereas escapism-oriented engagement may show stronger associations with expressive suppression under certain conditions (Gross, 1998; Kardefelt-Winther, 2014). Regression analyses will determine which aspects of fictional engagement uniquely predict emotional regulation tendencies and if narrative immersion contributes independently of fandom functions.

Qualitative findings are expected to provide additional insight into how individuals personally perceive the emotional role of fictional worlds, with themes potentially including comfort, emotional relief, identity, belonging, involvement with lore, and coping. These findings will contextualise quantitative relationships and provide an understanding of how participants engage with fictional worlds firsthand.

The study hopes to contribute to media psychology, fandom research and emotional regulation literature by integrating these multiple concepts within a single applied framework. By identifying the conditions under which immersive fictional engagement aligns with adaptive emotional regulation versus avoidant coping, the findings may provide a more nuanced understanding of fictional involvement than existing deficit-focused perspectives. This research may inform future work on digital wellbeing, media-based coping, and the unexpected psychological benefits and limitations of engagement with fictional worlds as they become increasingly popular (Chadborn et al., 2017).

PART 2: ETHICS PANNEL SUBMISSION

SECTION A: About You (Lead Researcher)

1. **Full Name:** Aaron Young
2. **Tick all boxes that apply:** Member of staff: ☐ Honorary research fellow: ☐
Undergraduate Student ☐ Taught Postgraduate Student ☒ Postgraduate Research Student ☐
3. **Institute/Academic Discipline/Centre:** University Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD)
4. **Campus:** IQ Campus
5. **E-mail address:** 2205141@student.uwtsd.ac.uk
6. **Contact Telephone Number:** 07917 847976
7. **Project Title:** A World of Their Own - Exploring Narrative Immersion, Fandoms and Emotional Regulation Through Fictional Worlds
8. **Proposed Start Date:** 07/07/2026 **Proposed End Date:** 30/09/2026
9. **Student Number:** 2205141
10. **Programme of Study:** MSc Applied Psychology
11. **Director of Studies/Supervisor:** Dr Paul Hutchings

SECTION C: Internal and External Ethical Guidance Materials

Ethical Guidance Documents Please list the core ethical guidance documents that have been referred to during the completion of this form (including any discipline-specific codes of research ethics, location-specific codes of research ethics, and also any specific ethical guidance relating to the proposed methodology). Please tick to confirm that your research proposal adheres to these codes and guidelines. You may add rows to this table if needed.		
1	UWTSD Research Ethics & Integrity Policy	☒
2	UWTSD Research Data Management Policy	☒
3	UWTSD Open Access Publications Policy	☐
4	UWTSD Export Control Policy <i>Required if Appendix 8 completed</i>	☐
5	UWTSD Trusted Research and Innovation Policy	☐
6	BPS Ethical guidelines for internet-mediated research (June 2021) BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (December 2021) BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (April 2021) BPS Data Protection Regulation – Guidance for Research (December 2018)	☐

SECTION D: External Collaborative Research Activity

1	Does your research involve collaborating partners at another institution or organisation?	YES	Click to continue to appendix 2	NO	Continue to the next section
2	Have you completed appendix 2?	YES	☐	NO	☒

SECTION E: Details of Research Activity

Aims, Vision and Approach of the Research (maximum 200 words per section)

Please outline what are you hoping to achieve with your proposed work and how will you deliver it?

1 Research aims and objectives

This study aims to investigate the relationships between narrative immersion, psychological functions of fandoms and emotion regulation among adults who engage with fictional worlds and fandom communities.

Research suggests that engagement with fictional narratives, franchises and worlds may provide psychological benefits including opportunities for emotional processing, social connection and emotional regulation (Green & Brock, 2000; Mar & Oatley, 2008; Wolf, 2012). Fandom participation has also been associated with functions of purpose, escapism, and belonging (Chadborn et al., 2017).

The objectives of the study are:

- To measure levels of narrative immersion in adults who engage with fictional worlds.
- To assess fandom functions relating to purpose/inspiration, escapism, and belonging.
- To examine relationships between narrative immersion and emotion regulation strategies.
- To examine relationships between fandom functions and emotion regulation strategies.
- To explore participants' subjective experiences of how fictional worlds influence their emotional lives through open-ended survey questions.

The study seeks to contribute to understanding how engagement with fictional worlds may relate to emotional wellbeing and everyday emotion regulation.

2 Vision

Engagement with expansive fictional worlds through books, films, television, games, and online fandoms is a significant part of contemporary modern life. Despite growing interest in narrative and media psychology, little research has examined how immersion into fictional worlds and associated fandom participation relate to emotion regulation in adults.

Narrative Transportation Theory proposes that individuals can become deeply immersed in fictional narratives, resulting in meaningful cognitive and emotional experiences (Green & Brock, 2000). Similarly, Mar & Oatley (2008) suggest that fiction provides opportunities to explore social and emotional experiences in a psychologically meaningful way. Research has also identified fandom participation as a source of belonging, inspiration and stress relief (Chadborn et al., 2017).

By examining the relationship between narrative immersion, fandom functions and emotion regulation, this research aims to advance understanding of the potential psychological significance of fictional engagement. Findings may contribute to future research concerning wellbeing, emotional coping and adaptive uses of media in everyday life as this type of engagement becomes increasingly popular and relevant.

3	Approach
This study will employ an exploratory, cross-sectional, mixed-methods design using an online survey for adults aged 18 years and over. Quantitative data will be collected using established self-report measures. Narrative immersion will be assessed using a lightly adapted Narrative Transportation Scale (Green & Brock, 2000). Fandom functions will be measured using the Fandom Functions Scale (Chadborn et al., 2017), which assesses reasons for engagement such as purpose, escapism, and belonging. Emotion regulation will be measured using the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003), which assesses preferences towards cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Participants will also complete optional open-ended questions exploring how engagement with fictional worlds influences their emotional experiences and wellbeing. Qualitative responses will be analysed using thematic analysis to provide context to findings, while quantitative data will be analysed using descriptive statistics, correlational analyses, and regression analyses. This methodology allows for efficient collection of data from a diverse adult sample while minimising participant burden and risk. Participation will be voluntary, anonymous, and conducted remotely. Potential risks are expected to be minimal and limited to mild emotional discomfort when reflecting on personal experiences.	
4	Location of research activity
Identify all locations where research activity will take place.	
The research will be conducted entirely online using a secure survey platform (Qualtrics). Participants will complete the study remotely using their own devices connected to the internet. Recruitment will take place through online channels, including social media platforms, fandom-related online communities and university-affiliated recruitment opportunities where appropriate. No face-to-face data collection, laboratory procedures or clinical interventions will used. The study will be managed remotely by the researcher from the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in the United Kingdom.	

5	Will any of your research be undertaken outside of the UK?	YES	Click to continue to appendix 3	NO	Continue to the next section
6	Have you completed any of appendix 3?	YES	☐	NO	☒

SECTION F: Research Methods

Will the research activity include:		YES	NO
1	Use of a questionnaire or similar research instrument?	☒	☐
2	Use of interviews?	☐	☒
3	Use of focus groups?	☐	☒
4	Use of participant diaries?	☐	☒
5	Use of video or audio recording?	☐	☒
6	Use of computer-generated log files?	☐	☒
7	Participant observation with their knowledge?	☐	☒
8	Participant observation without their knowledge?	☐	☒
9	Access to personal or confidential information without the participants' specific consent?	☐	☒
10	Administration of any questions, test stimuli, presentation that may be experienced as physically, mentally or emotionally harmful / offensive?	☒	☐
11	Performance of any acts which may cause embarrassment or affect self-esteem?	☐	☒
12	Investigation of participants involved in illegal activities?	☐	☒
13	Use of procedures that involve deception?	☒	☐
14	Administration of any substance, agent or placebo?	☐	☒
15	Working with live vertebrate animals?	☐	☒
16	Procedures that may have a negative impact on the environment?	☐	☒
17	Other primary data collection methods. Please indicate the type of data collection method(s) below.	☐	☐
Details of any other primary data collection method: <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>			

SECTION G: Research Participants

Research participants include people who will be taking part in your research as providers of research data (e.g. being interviewed, answering questionnaires, or doing user testing of hardware or software). This includes animal participants.					
1	Does your research involve human or non-human participants?	Y E S	Continue this section	N O	Click to continue to section N

Participant numbers and source How will you ensure an appropriately convened sample group in order to meet the aims of the research? Give details for subgroups separately, if appropriate. How will any potential pitfalls, for example dual roles or potential for coercion, be addressed?		
1	How many participants will be recruited and how was the number decided upon?	Approximately 200–300 participants will be recruited for this study. This sample size will provide sufficient statistical power for the planned correlational and multiple regression analyses while being achievable in an online-based MSc dissertation project. Previous research examining relationships between multiple variables using surveys have commonly used samples within this range. Recruitment will take place through online fandom communities and social media platforms, making this sample size realistic and achievable. The final sample size will depend on participant availability and the number of complete responses received.
2	Who will the participants be?	Participants will be adults aged 18 years and over who engage with fictional worlds and fictional media franchises through books, films, television series, video games or related fandom activities. Participants will be recruited from online fandom communities, including Reddit and Discord groups, as well as through personal social media networks. The study is open to individuals regardless of gender, ethnicity, nationality or educational background, provided they can understand the participant information sheet and provide informed consent. Individuals under the age of 18 will not be eligible to participate.
3	How will you identify the participants?	Participants will be identified through their engagement with online communities and social media spaces focused on fictional media franchises, including Reddit, Discord, and other fandom-related platforms. Individuals who meet the inclusion criteria, see the study advertisement and choose to access it will be able to participate.
4	Will you be excluding any groups of people, and if so what is the rationale for that?	Individuals under the age of 18 will be excluded from participation. This study is designed for adults and restricting participation to those aged 18 years and over avoids additional ethical and consent requirements associated with research involving minors. Although we cannot completely ensure that all responses will be from people 18 or older due to the anonymous and online nature, recruitment will be sought via typically 18+ online forums such as reddit or discord. Participants will confirm that they are aged 18 years or over as part of the consent process. Individuals who are unable to understand the information sheet (written

		in English) or provide informed consent will also be excluded.
5	Will the research involve any element of deception? If yes, please describe why this is necessary and whether participants will be informed at the end of the study	The study will involve partial disclosure of the broad research topic. Participants will be informed that the study examines engagement with fictional worlds and psychological experiences; however, the precise relationships being investigated between narrative immersion, fandom functions, and emotion regulation will not be disclosed until the debrief stage. This is to minimise demand characteristics and reduce the likelihood that participants alter their responses due to awareness of the study's objectives. Participants will receive a full and comprehensive explanation of the research aims, objectives and why narrative immersion and fandom functions may be related to emotional regulation within the debrief information provided at the end of the study.
6	Describe whether participants will be able to withdraw from the study, and up to what point (eg if data is to be anonymised). If withdrawal is not possible, after a certain point, explain why not.	Participation is entirely voluntary. Participants may skip any questions they do not want to answer and may withdraw from the study at any time before submitting their survey responses by closing their browser window. Withdrawal will no longer be possible once responses have been submitted, as no identifying information will be collected and all data will be anonymous. As a result, individual responses cannot be identified or removed after submission.
7	How long will the participant have to decide whether to take part in the research?	Participants will be provided with a Participant Information Sheet before accessing the survey and may take as much time as they require to decide whether to participate. Participation will only proceed after informed consent has been provided electronically. As the study is conducted online, individuals can choose to access the survey immediately or return later before deciding whether to take part.
8	What arrangements have been made for participants who might have difficulties understanding verbal explanations or written information, or who have particular communication needs that should be taken into account to facilitate their involvement in the research?	All study materials, including the Participant Information Sheet, consent form, and questionnaire, will be written in clear and accessible English. Participants must be aged 18+ and able to read and understand English to provide informed consent and complete the survey. The online format allows participants to complete the study at their own pace and take as long as needed to answer questionnaire items or decide to participate. Individuals who are unable to understand the study information or provide informed consent will not be eligible to participate.

SECTION H: Research with Vulnerable People

1	Are your participants classed as vulnerable people?	Y E S	Click to continue to appendix 4	N O	Cont inue to the next secti on
2	Have you completed appendix 4?	Y E S	☐	N O	☒

SECTION I: Research Involving Animals

1	Are your participants non-human animals?	Y E S	Click to continue to appendix 5	N O	C o n t i n u e t o t h e n e x t s e c t i o n
2	Have you completed appendix 5?	Y E S	☐	N O	☒

SECTION J: Research with the Prison Service or the Probation Service

1	Are your participants staff or offenders within the Prison Service or the Probation service?	Y E S	Click to continue to appendix 6	N O	Cont inue to the next secti on
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2	Have you completed appendix 6?	Y E S	☐	N O	☒
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SECTION K: Health and Social Care Research

1	Are your participants selected due to their health or social care needs?	Y E S	Click to continue to appendix 7	N O	Cont inue to the next secti on
2	Have you completed appendix 7?	Y E S	☐	N O	☒

SECTION L: Types of Personal Data

Personal Data		Y E S	N O
Does the research activity involve personal data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 and the Data Protection Act 2018)?			
1	Personal data means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ('data subject'). An identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier such as a name, an identification number, location data, an online identifier or to one or more factors specific to the physical, physiological, genetic, mental, economic, cultural or social identity of that natural person. Any video or audio recordings of participants and transcription of such are considered to be personal data. If you ticked YES, provide a description of the data and explain why this data needs to be collected:	☒	☐
Limited personal demographic data will be collected, including participant's age, gender and country of residence. This data is needed to describe the study sample and explore whether demographic characteristics may influence the outcomes and variables under investigation. No directly identifiable information, such as names, email addresses, telephone numbers, IP addresses or social media usernames will be collected. Participants will complete the survey anonymously and will be instructed not to include any personally identifiable information in their open-ended responses. No special category data will be collected.			

Special Category Data		YES	NO
Does the research involve the processing of special category data (as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation 2016 and the Data Protection Act 2018)?			
2	Racial or ethnic origin	☐	☒
3	Political opinions	☐	☒
4	Religious or philosophical beliefs	☐	☒

5	Genetic, biometric or health data	☐	☒
6	Sex life or sexual orientation	☐	☒
7	Trade union membership	☐	☒
If you ticked YES to any of questions L2-L7, provide a description of the data and explain why this special category data needs to be collected to support the research and that it is in the public interest to do so:			
8	<i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		
9	Please describe how the research has been designed to gather the minimum amount of personal data necessary for the specified research purpose:		
This study only collects the minimum personal data needed to meet the research objectives. Demographic information only includes age, gender, and country of residence. No directly identifiable information, such as names, email addresses, telephone numbers, IP addresses or social media usernames will be collected.			
10	Demonstrate that the processing is not likely to cause substantial damage or distress to individuals and that their interests will be safeguarded:		
Participation is entirely voluntary, anonymous and focused on non-clinical experiences of engagement with fictional worlds. Participants can skip any questions they do not wish to answer and may withdraw prior to survey submission. Appropriate participant debriefing materials and signposting to online support services will be provided in the debrief.			
11	Demonstrate that the data will not be used to take any action or make decisions in relation to the individuals concerned:		
The data collected will only be used for academic research purposes under academic supervision. No decisions or actions will be taken in relation to individual participants, and no attempt will be made to identify/contact participants from their responses.			
12	Data should be anonymised wherever possible, either at point of capture or once collated. If the data cannot be anonymised, and if pseudonymisation is not possible, demonstrate why that is possible. If special category data cannot be anonymised, explicit consent to share that data must normally be obtained.		
N/A			
13	If special category data cannot be anonymised, will you obtain explicit consent to share that data?	YES ☐	NO ☐
			N/A ☒

SECTION M: Participant Information and Consent

Information for participants It is normally expected that those participating in research should do so having given their informed consent. If this is not appropriate or practical, explicit justification must be provided, in line with prevailing disciplinary conventions. Please note however, that informed consent to participate in the research is separate from consent to process (e.g. collect, analyse, store, reuse or share) personal data, as the University's lawful basis for processing personal data in research activities is part of its 'public task'.		YES	NO	N/A
1	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	☐	☒	☐
2	Will you describe the main research procedures to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	☒	☐	☐
3	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	☒	☐	☐
4	Will you explain to participants that refusal to participate in the research will not affect their treatment or education (if relevant)?	☒	☐	☐
5	If the research is observational, will you ask participants for their consent to being observed?	☐	☐	☒
6	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	☒	☐	☐
7	Will participants be made aware of how you will treat any information that may reasonably be considered as confidential?	☒	☐	☐
8	If your research requires your participants to sign up for a service provided by an external company or organisation will you inform them that their data may be stored and processed outside UWTSD?	☐	☐	☒
9	Will you give participants the UWTSD Privacy Notice for Research?	☒	☐	☐
If you have answered NO to any of questions M1-M8, please provide justification detailing why this is necessary for the research.				
10				

	As all research is conducted online, written consent will not be possible for this study. However, the BPS Ethics guidelines for internet-mediated research states that "It is recommended good practice to include a designated consent page as part of an online questionnaire with check boxes (for example) in response to explicit consent statements". As such, the use of check boxes is sufficient for participants to indicate they have read and understood key consent information.
Informed consent: Describe the arrangements to inform potential participants, before providing consent, of what is involved in participating. Describe the arrangements for participants to provide full consent before the research begins. If gaining consent in this way is inappropriate, explain how consent will be obtained and recorded.	
11	Potential participants will view an Information Sheet before starting the full survey. This will explain the purpose of the study (without risking demand characteristics), describe what participation involves, the eligibility criteria, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality agreements, data handling and the right to withdraw. Participants will read this information and decide whether they wish to take part before continuing. Informed consent will be obtained electronically through a consent form at the start of the survey. Participants will only be able to access the questionnaire after confirming that they have read and understood the study information, met eligibility requirements and consent to participate.
Confidentiality: Confidential information refers to information that can be related to an identifiable individual, whether living or deceased, which is not in the public domain and which is given with the expectation that it will be kept confidential. Under Common Law when an individual entrusts a researcher or research team with confidential information, the team must handle this in line with 'reasonable expectations'. In other words, confidential information should only normally be shared when there would be 'no surprises' for the individuals concerned. Where participants would not expect the researcher to be sharing their confidential information with others, researchers can manage their expectations by informing them of their intentions (e.g. in the participant information sheet or during discussions about participation) and asking them if they are happy with these plans. They should understand what is being proposed and what this might mean for them, before they decide whether the researcher can share their confidential information with others.	
Please detail how you will treat confidential information:	
12	All data will be collected anonymously online via password-protected Qualtrics software and treated confidentially. No directly identifiable information such as names, email addresses, IP addresses, telephone numbers or social media usernames will be collected. Participants will be told of the confidentiality agreement within the Information Sheet and consent form. Raw data will be stored securely on a password-protected University OneDrive and analysed using password-protected personal computer with SPSS software and will only be accessed by the student researcher and project supervisor when necessary. Findings will be reported as a whole after analysis and any quotations used from qualitative responses will be anonymised to ensure that individual participants cannot be identified. Participants will also be instructed not to include personally identifiable information in their responses.
Copies of any written consent form, written information and all other explanatory material should accompany this application. If you have included these then please list the documents included here.	

13	The participant information sheet and consent form attached will both be included at the start of the Qualtrics survey. Consent will be gained electronically using a single check box following consent statements to confirm participants have read and understood this information. PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET LINK – Information Sheet.pdf PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM LINK - Consent Form Final.pdf			
14	Consent form attached?	YES ☒	NO ☐	N/A ☐

SECTION N: Research with Potential Military Application

1	Does your research have any potential military application?	Y E S	Click to continue to appendix 8	N O	C o n t i n u e t o t h e n e x t s e c t i o n
2	Have you completed appendix 8?	Y E S	☐	N O	☒

SECTION O: Use of Artificial Intelligence Tools

Use of generative AI and other AI-based tools There are a number of ethical issues relating to the use of generative AI and other AI-based tools, including data security, output bias, and output errors. In general you should assume that any generative AI or other AI-based tool that you pay to use is more secure and accurate than one which is free to use.		Y E S	N O	N / A
Will the research use AI tools to do any of the following:				
1	Capture data?	☐	☒	☐
2	Generate and/or edit text?	☐	☒	☐
3	Generate graphics?	☐	☒	☐
4	Generate video?	☐	☒	☐
5	Generate sound/music?	☐	☒	☐
6	Generate code?	☐	☒	☐
7	Generate synthetic data?	☐	☒	☐
8	Analyse data?	☐	☒	☐

9	Analyse personal or sensitive data?	☐	☒	☐
10	Classify data?	☐	☒	☐
11	Do you intend to use the free version of any AI tools?	☐	☒	☐
If you have answered YES to any of questions O1-O11, please provide justification detailing why this is necessary for the research.				
12	(this box should expand as you type)			

SECTION P: Research Data Management Plan

1	Data Summary
The research will generate anonymous quantitative and qualitative data collected through an online survey on Qualtrics. Quantitative data will include responses to demographic questions (age, gender and country of residence) and psychometric measures assessing narrative immersion levels, fandom functions and emotion regulation preferences. Qualitative data will include written responses to open-ended questions exploring participants' experiences of engagement with fictional worlds. No directly identifiable personal data will be asked for or collected.	
2	Responsibilities
The researcher will be responsible for the management of all data, including data collection, storage, security, analysis and disposal in accordance with university policies and GDPR. The research supervisor will provide oversight and have access to the anonymised research data when necessary for supervisory purposes. No external organisations or partner institutions are involved.	
3	Assessment of existing data
N/A. This study will not use any existing datasets or previously collected participant data. All data will be generated specifically for this research project through an anonymous online survey.	
4	Management and curation of data
Data will be gathered, prepared and organised using Qualtrics and SPSS. Quantitative data will be exported from Qualtrics, checked for errors and cleaned before analysis by the researcher. Qualitative responses will be reviewed and anonymised where needed to remove any identifying information. Data files will be clearly labelled, securely stored and documented to ensure accurate analysis and access throughout the research project data analysis stage.	

5	Quality assurance of data
Data quality will be maintained using a structured online survey hosted on Qualtrics, reducing the risk of data entry errors. Responses will be reviewed for consistency following data collection. Any incomplete or invalid responses will be removed. Data will be checked during the cleaning process before analysis to ensure accuracy for the statistical and thematic analyses.	
6	Short-term data storage
Data will be collected and stored securely within Qualtrics and subsequently exported to a password-protected OneDrive account on a personal laptop for SSPS analysis. Access to the data will be kept to only the researcher and the research supervisor for supervisory purposes. No identifiable personal data will be collected. Regular backups will be maintained through University OneDrive to reduce the risk of data loss, and all data will be stored in accordance with UWTSD data protection and GDPR requirements.	
7	Long-term data storage and preservation
At the conclusion of the study, anonymised data will be retained securely for a minimum of 10 years following completion of the research, in accordance with UWTSD Research Data Management Policy. Data will be stored on a secure, password-protected university OneDrive and may be retained for dissertation assessment and potential publication. At the end of the retention period, data will be deleted from personal devices and cloud storage systems in accordance with university policies. Only anonymised data will be retained, and no directly identifiable information will be stored at any stage of the research.	
8	Documentation and metadata
Data files will be clearly organised by the researcher with accurate file naming. Documentation will be kept to describe datasets, variable names, coding procedures, and any data cleaning decisions made during the research process. Survey measures (ERQ, FFS), study materials (Information, consent & debrief sheets) and analysis files will also be kept ensuring that the research process is transparent and reproducible.	
9	Data sharing
The anonymised research data may be shared with the research supervisor and dissertation examiners for assessment and academic review. Findings from the study may be used for future academic presentations, showcase events and potential future publications. Data sharing restrictions are in place to protect participant anonymity, particularly in relation to qualitative responses. The dataset is not expected to require future updates and there are currently no plans to make the data publicly available or charge for access.	
10	Copyright and intellectual property ownership

Copyright and intellectual property rights for the research data created in this study will be owned in accordance with University of Wales Trinity Saint David policies and regulations. The researcher will generate and analyse data as part of the MSc dissertation under research supervision and any wider sharing of findings will acknowledge the researcher and the University. Intellectual property rights relating to the research data during this study will belong to the student researcher and data will be managed and retained in accordance with university regulations and ethical requirements.

11 Resources

Resources required for this project includes access to Qualtrics for data collection, SPSS for data analysis and secure University OneDrive storage for research data. No additional costs are expected as these resources are provided by the University. Data storage requirements are minimal due to the relatively small expected size of the anonymised survey dataset and all storage and software needs will be met by existing University resources and the researcher's personal computer.

SECTION Q: Risk Assessment

Outline any anticipated risks that may adversely affect any of the participants, the researchers and/or the University, and the steps that will be taken to address them.

If you have completed a full risk assessment (for example as required by a laboratory, or external research collaborator) you may append that to this form.

1	Full risk assessment completed and appended?	YES ☐	NO ☒
Risks to participants, researchers, and the University			
2	Social risks: <i>disclosures that could affect participants standing in the community, in their family and their job.</i>	YES ☒	NO ☐
Risk: In the unlikely event of a data breach, information regarding fandom involvement and emotional regulation may be disclosed. Lifelong involvement with fandoms or self-reported "poor" emotional regulation may be potentially stigmatising and has a low risk of impacting participants social status.		How will you address any risks? UWTSD keeps all collected data securely and anonymously. As such, no breached data could be traced back to or identify any one individual participant. Additional mitigation and relevant information about this can be found in sub-sections Q5 & Q7 below.	
3	Legal risks: <i>activities that could result in the participant, researchers and / or University committing an offence; activities that might lead to a participant disclosing criminal activity to a researcher which would necessitate reporting to enforcement authorities; activities that could result in a civil claim for compensation</i>	YES ☐	NO ☒

Risk: <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		How will you address any risks?	
4	Economic harm: financial harm to participant, researcher and / or University through disclosure or other event.	YES	NO
		☐	☒
Risk: <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		How will you address any risks?	
5	Reputational risk: damage to public perception of University or the University / researchers' reputation in the eyes of funders, the research community and / or the general public.	YES	NO
		☒	☐
Risk: Although the study is anonymous, there is a small risk that unauthorised access to research data could result in participants' responses being disclosed. Some participants may regard information about their fandom engagement or emotional coping as private if confidentiality were breached. A data breach could also adversely affect the reputation of the researcher and the University.		How will you address any risks? The study will not collect any directly identifiable information such as names, email addresses, IP addresses or social media usernames. Data will be collected anonymously through Qualtrics and stored securely on password-protected University OneDrive systems and password-protected devices. Access to the data will be restricted to the researcher and research supervisor. Findings will be reported in aggregate form and any qualitative quotations used will be anonymised.	
6	Safeguarding risks: Risk to young people, vulnerable adults and / or researcher from improper behaviour, abuse or exploitation. Risk to researcher of being in a compromising situation, in which there might be accusations of improper behaviour.	YES	NO
		☐	☒
Risk: <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		How will you address any risks?	
7	Sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics. If research activity may include sensitive, embarrassing or upsetting topics or issues likely to disclose information requiring further action (e.g. criminal activity), give details of the procedures to deal with these issues, including any support/advice (e.g. helpline numbers) to be offered to participants. Note that where applicable, consent procedures should make it clear that if something potentially or actually illegal is discovered in the course of a project, it may need to be disclosed to the proper authorities.	YES	NO
		☒	☐
Risk: Some participants may experience mild discomfort when answering questions about emotional experiences, coping strategies or personally meaningful engagement with			

fictional worlds. Some participants may also consider parts of their fandom involvement to be private or potentially embarrassing. In the unlikely event of a data security breach, disclosure of such information could cause distress.

How will you address any risks?

Participants will be informed about the nature of the study before providing consent and will be reminded that participation is voluntary. They may skip any questions they do not wish to answer and may withdraw from the study at any time before submitting. No directly identifiable information will be collected, and data will be stored securely in accordance with university data protection requirements. A debrief sheet will be provided at the end of the study, including signposting to appropriate online support services should participation raise any concerns or emotional discomfort.

(this box should expand as you type)

Health and safety risks			
8	Location hazards: for example: fire; visiting or working in participant's homes; working in remote locations and in high crime areas; overseas travel; hot, cold or extreme weather conditions; working on or by water. Also hazardous work locations, such as construction sites, confined spaces, roofs or laboratories. For overseas travel, researchers will need to check country / city specific information, travel health requirements and consider emergency arrangements as part of their research planning. In all cases the University's International Travel Policy must be followed.	YES	NO
		☐	☒
Risk: <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		<i>How will you address any risks?</i>	
9	Activity hazards: for example: potentially mentally harmful activities; distressing and stressful work and content; driving; tripping, or slipping; falling from height; physically demanding work; lifting, carrying, pushing and pulling loads; night time and weekend working.	YES	NO
		☐	☒
Risk: <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		<i>How will you address any risks?</i>	
10	Machinery and equipment: for example: ergonomic hazards, including computer workstations and equipment; contact with electricity; contact with moving, rotating, ejecting or cutting parts in machinery and instruments; accidental release of energy from machines and instruments.	YES	NO
		☐	☒
Risk: <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		<i>How will you address any risks?</i>	
11	Chemicals and other hazardous substances: the use, production, storage, waste, transportation and accidental release of chemicals and hazardous substances; flammable, dangerous and explosive substances; asphyxiating gases;	YES	NO
		☐	☒

	<i>allergens; biological agents, blood and blood products.</i>		
<i>Risk:</i> <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		<i>How will you address any risks?</i>	
12	Physical agents: for example: excessive noise exposure, hand-arm vibration and whole body vibration; ionising radiation; lasers; artificial optical radiation and electromagnetic fields	YES	NO
		☐	☒
<i>Risk:</i> <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		<i>How will you address any risks?</i>	
13	Environmental risks: for example: accidental spillage of pollutants, damage to local ecosystems	YES	NO
		☐	☒
<i>Risk:</i> <i>(this box should expand as you type)</i>		<i>How will you address any risks?</i>	

PART 3: PROGRESS REPORT & CRITICAL REVIEW

Progress Report

Milestone	Approx. Date	Successes, challenges and Adaptations
Topic Identification and Initial Project Development	1/1/26	• Explored potential project ideas, including psychotherapy and sleep psychology investigations but found an interest in media psychology and the psychological significance of fiction narrative worlds. • Learned terms such as ‘narrative immersion’ and explored links with fandom participation and emotional well-being. Began looking at relevant theories and literature. • Identified early key literature; fictional engagement can potentially serve emotional and social functions as well as entertainment (Green & Brock, 2000; Wolf, 2012). • Needed narrowing down into a feasible MSc project. • Initial project conception continued into January rather than being completed between October and December. • Although this delayed the initial schedule, exploring several topics prevented premature commitment and helped identify a project that was personally engaging and suitable for applied psychology.
Initial supervision meetings with Paul	28/01/26	• Discussed project feasibility and identified initial aims, objectives and research questions. • Explored potential variables (Predictor, criterion and moderator) and considered different theoretical approaches. • Refined aspects of the project following supervisor feedback. • Integrated multiple psychological theories into a single framework and study design. • Identified core papers and a clearer understanding of how theory, methodology and analysis should be used. • Supervisor feedback highlighted the need to distinguish fictional world engagement from parasocial attachment to individual characters to prevent the project from becoming overly broad. • Supervision also demonstrated the importance of allowing research questions to develop naturally rather than treating the original proposal as fixed.

Measure Selection and Study Design	March 2026	• Reviewed literature for validated measures appropriate for the research aims. • Selected the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gross & John, 2003), Narrative Transportation Scale (Green & Brock, 2000) and Fandom Functions Scale (Chadborn et al., 2017). • Decided to include a qualitative component to provide context alongside quantitative findings. • Revised data analysis techniques and selected Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses. • Worked on balancing survey length with participant burden. • Adapted the design by focusing on the most relevant fandom functions: Purpose/Inspiration, Escapism and Belonging. • Adapted the Narrative Transportation Scale to address engagement with a preferred fictional universe created issues between improving relevance and preserving the validity of the original measure. • Restricting the Fandom Functions Scale to the most relevant aspects reduced participant burden but meant that other potentially important functions of fandom were not considered. • The qualitative element was kept because quantitative data/associations alone may not explain how or why participants use fictional worlds for emotional purposes.
EOI and Proposal development	Feb – May 2026	• Drafted and submitted the Expression of Interest outlining the proposed study aims, variables and methodology. • Conducted further literature searching using core papers supporting the project. • Developed the theoretical framework using Narrative Transportation Theory, Emotion Regulation Theory, Compensatory Media Use Theory and the Fandom Functions Framework. • Finalised research questions based on the literature. • Changed the project from a broad wellbeing/fandom focus towards emotional regulation and fandom psychological meaning, providing a stronger psychological framework. • Gained further experience in critically evaluating literature and using theory to guide methodological decisions.

Survey Construction (Qualtrics)	May/ June 2026	• Began constructing the survey using Qualtrics, including selected measures and created an altered transportation scale to better address the current research aims. • Developed participant information, consent procedures, survey questions, online recruitment advert and debrief materials. • Designed qualitative questions exploring emotional meaning, inspiration, belonging, escapism and emotional regulation. • Considered participant burden when determining survey length and structure. • Introduced a 150-character limit for qualitative responses to encourage concise answers and manageable thematic analysis. • Revised question wording to improve clarity and consistency.
Ethics Panel Submission	15/06/26	• Prepared the participant information sheet, consent form, debrief sheet and supporting ethics documentation in organised files. • Addressed online informed consent using an electronic tick-box procedure. • Ensured procedures aligned with BPS guidance for internet-mediated research and GDPR requirements (BPS, 2021). • Outlined anonymity, confidentiality, withdrawal rights and data security throughout the design. • Faced challenges in ensuring all documentation language met university's ethical standards. • Adapted materials to improve clarity and accessibility for participants. • Successfully submitted ethics documentation to the university ethics panel and Turnitin (15/06/26). • Ethical preparation took longer than predicted, with submission in June rather than May, but the additional time allowed the participant materials and research questions to be refined.

Survey Publication and Data Collection	July– August 2026	• Finalised the Qualtrics survey following ethical review and checked the information sheet, consent process, questionnaires and debrief materials. • Piloted the complete survey with friends and family to identify unclear wording, technical errors and problems with survey flow before publication. • Published the survey into r/Multifandom subreddit on 18/7/26 and distributed the survey by reposting through other relevant online reddit fandom communities, personal social media and other approved platforms. • Monitored recruitment and response rates throughout data collection, aiming to obtain N = 200 and globally diverse adult sample. • Faced challenges in gaining permission to advertise within some Reddit communities, with the study advert sometimes being banned even after permission by other moderators. • Data collection began slower than anticipated but later grew to a steady pace that was easily monitored. • Adapted recruitment by reposting to a wider range of fictional-world communities across film, television, literature, gaming, comics and anime. • Actively monitored data collection to remove any ineligible, substantially incomplete or non-serious responses. Currently at 135/200 responses. • Recruitment remained mostly in line with the Gantt chart, which scheduled data collection for July, although reaching the target sample may require collection to continue into August. • Recruiting through fandom communities provided access to the target population but may produce self-selection bias, as fans may be more motivated to participate. • The globally distributed recruitment strategy may broaden the sample, but it could also introduce cultural differences that the study is not designed to examine.
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Thesis (Literature review and methodology)	May – August 2026	• Began a wider literature search looking at fictional-world engagement, narrative transportation, fandom functions, escapism and emotional regulation strategies. • Structured the literature review around fictional worlds as psychologically meaningful environments instead of focusing only on individual narratives or characters. • Used Wolf's (2012) work on imaginary worlds and Subcreation to distinguish engagement with an entire fictional universe from engagement with a single story. • Critically examined how narrative immersion may offer emotional, cognitive and social resources, while also being critical that fictional engagement is not automatically beneficial. • Reviewed research on fandom identity, belonging and compensatory media use to develop a balanced review of adaptive and potentially avoidant/maladaptive forms of engagement. • Refined the argument linking the predictor variables (narrative immersion, purpose/inspiration, escapism and belonging) to cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. • Identified gaps in previous research, particularly the limited consideration of fictional-world engagement and fandoms in the context of established emotion-regulation strategies. • Drafted and revised the literature review to improve critical comparison between studies, strengthen transitions between paragraphs and expanding/varying my sources and reference list. • Began writing the methodology section, covering the mixed-methods survey design, participants, recruitment, measures, procedure, ethical considerations and proposed analyses. • Ensured that methodological decisions were clearly justified in relation to the research questions, participant burden and practical limitations of an MSc project.
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Critical Reflective Report on the Research Journey to Date

Project conception and theoretical development

My dissertation topic began from broad interests in how psychology can explain experiences that are personally meaningful in everyday life. Although I briefly considered sleep psychology and emotional coping among paramedics, which stemmed from my own and my family's experiences, I never became committed to these ideas as I decided to pursue my more light-hearted personal interest in media psychology. This focus grew from me noticing the tendency from those around me that adults repeatedly return to expansive fictional worlds for comfort and connection. My own connection with fandom helped me recognise this as a potential applied psychological topic, but I also recognised possible bias. I initially approached fictional engagement as largely beneficial, whereas a critical study needed to consider both supportive and avoidant patterns of media use.

Feedback from an early project expression of interest (Appendix A) was that this topic was too broad to completely include emotional attachment, escapism, belonging, parasocial relationships, coping and wellbeing. Supervision from Dr Paul Hutchings was important in understanding that, although an interesting topic, it was not yet a workable research model. Paul's feedback required me to distinguish one-sided parasocial relationships with characters from social participation within fandom and engagement with a fictional world as a whole. This led me to reconsider social and parasocial processes as contextual rather than primary variables. After buying a physical copy of *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* by Mark J.P. Wolf (2012) and learning the concept of subcreation, I established the more distinctive and academically unique "world-level" focus: fictional worlds can extend across multiple stories, media types and create coherent and consistent imagined environments, meaning they are not the same as a single narrative or favourite character and so may hold more emotional meaning.

The most successful conceptual change was replacing generic wellbeing with specifically reappraisal and expressive suppression. Gross's (1998) model provided specific and measurable outcomes that made the study empirically viable. Additionally, (after learning about predictor and criterion variables from Paul), the variables were

narrowed to narrative immersion and the fandom functions of purpose/inspiration, escapism and belonging (Chadborn et al., 2017). This created a clearer framework between depth of engagement, reasons for engagement and emotion-regulation tendencies. However, it meant avoiding labelling reappraisal as always adaptive and suppression as automatically maladaptive, as their effects can be context dependent. My reading of Compensatory Media Use Theory also challenged my early assumptions of excessive escapism as vaguely negative, as media engagement may compensate for unmet needs or distress without necessarily being pathological (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014) and entertainment can support recovery through detachment and mood management (Reinecke, 2009). The project then became less about deciding whether fandom is “good or bad” and more exploratory of the functions linked with different patterns of regulation.

Methodology decisions and adaptations

A cross-sectional mixed-methods approach, involving the use of a Qualtrics survey, was selected because it allowed for easy and realistic access to globally diverse fandom communities. The quantitative measures selected allowed for relationships between immersion, fandom functions and emotion regulation to be examined, while the short qualitative questions allowed participants to explain what their chosen world means to them in their own words. This was important because similar escapism scores, for example, may represent temporary recovery for one participant and sustained avoidance for another. Nevertheless, the qualitative items are limited and optional and will be presented as contextual (but valuable) support rather than equivalent to a full qualitative study. The design is also correlational, meaning it can identify associations and assess whether variables statistically predict emotion-regulation scores, but it cannot establish that fictional-world engagement causes a particular regulation style.

Using existing measures strengthened the study, but the Narrative Transportation Scale required adaptation. It was originally designed around participant immersion with a new and one-off read narrative (Green & Brock, 2000), whereas my study asks participants to consider their favourite ongoing narrative world they were highly familiar with. I therefore changed several items' wording to reflect “narrative worlds”, changed to the present tense, such as “I could” to “I can”, and adjusted items that assumed a one-

off or unfamiliar story could now be answered in reference to a participant's favourite fictional world (Appendix B). These changes improved face validity for the research question but may have weakened comparability with the original scale and altered its construct validity. The adaptation, however, was necessary for the specific focus of the project.

The Qualtrics build itself was relatively straightforward because I had experience from my undergraduate dissertation. The main issue was the uncertainty around reverse-scored items being calculated correctly, which reinforced the need for a clear scoring plan for SPSS, rather than assuming that software would calculate these automatically. The completed survey was released for piloting on 10/7/2026. As no changes were made following the pilot, these responses were retained because all participants had completed the same final version of the survey.

Ethics and Procedure

Preparing the ethics application took longer than planned, but it became the first useful critical look of the study. One key consideration was explaining enough for informed consent in the materials while not stating the emotion-regulation hypotheses so explicitly that demand characteristics were increased. The information sheet (Appendix C) therefore described the general focus, with the full purpose explained during debriefing (Appendix D). Anonymous participation, electronic consent, the right to skip questions, limited demographic identifier collection and the inability to withdraw unidentifiable data after submission were also made explicit (Appendix E).

Ethical approval was given while I was on holiday, with no amendments needed, allowing data collection to begin when I returned. This was a significant success and suggests that the additional preparation and material changes ensured an ethically appropriate procedure. However, the scale adaptation, self-selection bias and the limits of anonymous online data remain issues for critical evaluation outside the panel's decision and will be discussed in the limitations section of the thesis.

Timescales, workload and recruitment

Progress has not followed the original Gantt chart exactly. Topic development continued into January, and ethics was submitted in June instead of May. These delays

are partly due to the concept and procedural refinement, particularly narrowing the theoretical framework down to core papers and preparing participant materials. Timekeeping issues also arose from the sheer workload demands of combining employment and Part 2's secondary course requirements, such as this critical reflection and the portfolio, which interrupted the literature review write-up just as it was gaining momentum.

Recruitment showed the value and unpredictability of online fandom spaces. r/Multifandom was particularly supportive, pinning my advert and providing a central post that could be shared elsewhere (Appendix F). In contrast, posts were frequently removed from anime, *The Hunger Games* and *Star Wars* communities, sometimes even after moderators had given permission. I continued by distributing across a broader range of smaller fandoms rather than relying on a few large communities. This was a practical adaptation within the approved procedure, but it does not remove sampling bias. Reddit recruitment is likely to overrepresent active online and highly engaged fans, and moderator gatekeeping decisions may shape which fandoms are more represented in the final sample.

Preliminary observations

The survey currently has 148 responses out of the minimum target of 200. No inferential or thematic analysis has yet been conducted, so the following are observations about incoming responses rather than findings. Ages currently range from 18 to 70, with most participants from the UK or USA. *Star Wars* is the most frequently named franchise so far, while fantasy book series including *A Court of Thorns and Roses* and *Throne of Glass* also appear very regularly among female participants. More participants than expected have completed the optional qualitative items, supporting my view that people often enjoy discussing personally meaningful fandoms. However, enthusiasm for the topic may itself intensify self-selection, so response quality should not be confused with representativeness until the analysis stage.

Learning and development

My main area of development has been the ability to summarise and connect various sources into a coherent argument. Earlier in the project I tended to collect related

theories and literature based on a search engine; I am now more able to decide what role each theory plays within my framework, follow citation pathways through various papers to create a strong literature map and decide what evidence is needed. I have also become more confident in treating feedback as a way to improve the substance of a project, instead of simply editing its presentation.

I would not necessarily redesign the study if starting again, as I believe the final design appropriately addresses the target population and psychological processes at the centre of the research question, but I would set earlier timeframes for literature searching and dedicate more time to writing. The immediate priorities are to complete recruitment, apply predetermined screening and scoring procedures, assess the adapted scale's reliability and leave enough time for regression and qualitative analysis. Overall, the project is behind parts of its initial timetable and where I would personally like to be, but methodologically stronger than my initial conceptual ideas. One final challenge is to keep my critical way of working into analysis stages, particularly by avoiding causal claims and objectively interpreting any relationships considering measurement and sampling limitations.

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APPENDECIES

Appendix A: Expression Of Interest

ECAS7013 Part II Expression of Interest Form
Project Title: FICTIONAL WORLDS AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION: Relationships between narrative immersion levels and adaptive/maladaptive emotional coping in adults (temporary)
Brief lay description of the purpose of the project (300 words max): Many adolescence and adults frequently and deeply engage with fictional narratives that feature detailed and immersive worlds through the medium of books, television, films and video games. Such engagement is often described as “escapism”, a term sometimes framed negatively as a form of avoidance of real-world stressors. Although this can be true, escapism into popular narrative worlds can also serve as psychological/emotional functions, such as providing comfort, stress relief and identity expression or formation. My project will investigate how immersive engagement with fictional worlds (and associated fandoms) relates to emotional regulation strategies, specifically if fictional engagement patterns (depth of engagement, immersion and purpose for engagement) can predict degrees of cognitive reappraisal vs suppressive methods of emotional regulation. Participants recruited online via social media and online fandom communities will complete questionnaires of validated measures capturing: 1) How deeply they become immersed in their preferred fictional world 2) Why they engage (inspiration, escapism, belonging, social connection, parasocial connections) 3) How they typically regulate their emotions 4) Open ended Qualitative questions will also allow participants to (in a few words) describe what their chosen fictional world means to them emotionally in their own words to provide context to quantitative measures. The aim of the project is not to classify fictional engagement as positive or negative, rather to identify and explore under what conditions does this age-old phenomenon support adaptive coping and when it may reflect avoidant coping.
Scientific justification for project, including reference to relevant background literature and theory (500 words max) Previous narrative engagement research has shown that individuals can become completely cognitively and emotionally absorbed into stories and narrative worlds, a phenomenon known as narrative transportation or immersion. This immersion/transportation into narrative worlds involved fixed focused attention, emotional involvement and a temporary reduction in awareness from the real environment (Green & Brock, 2000). Individuals frequently engage with fictional media, particularly expansive narrative and multimedia worlds, to achieve psychological needs. Compensatory Media Use Theory proposes that individuals may turn to fiction to help cope with negative emotions or unmet needs (Kardefelt-Winther, 2014) Escapism in particular, has been considered as both an adaptive coping mechanism that provides temporary emotional relief but also as potentially maladaptive avoidance (Henning & Vorderer, 2001). However, most existing research only

focuses on problematic and addictive media use and fails to consider depth of immersion into a narrative/narrative world and the psychological reasons/functions of engagement.

Research into fandom engagement surrounding common narrative worlds has shown that, this too, can serve multiple psychological functions, including social belonging, identity expression and emotional comfort (Chadborn et al., 2017). This supports the ideas behind Self Categorisation Theory and social identity processes which both contribute to self-concept, identity and wellbeing (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). The functions behind engaging with a fandom may influence if immersion can operate as a supportive and collective coping resource or encourage avoidance.

Emotional regulation theory provides a clear framework for examining differences in regulation styles. According to Gross (1998), individuals regulate emotions through two primary strategies, Cognitive Reappraisal (reframing a situation) and Expressive Suppression (inhibiting emotional expression). Reappraisal is typically considered as a more adaptive strategy that results in more positive psychological outcomes, whereas chronic suppression is more linked to poorer wellbeing.

Although there are existing theoretical links between immersion, escapism and coping, there is limited research that integrates 1) depth of immersion (particularly in the context of narrative worlds), 2) psychological fandom functions of engagement, and 3) emotional regulation strategies, within a single model, particularly using a globally recruited sample. This study will address this gap and examine whether levels of narrative immersion and different fandom functions predict adaptive (reappraisal) vs less adaptive (suppression) regulation strategies. And so, go beyond simple “good or bad” media use and provide a more nuanced and applied understanding of the use of fictional engagement for wellbeing.

Summary of proposed methodology (how the work is going to be carried out): (300 words max)

This study will use a cross-sectional online survey recruiting adult (18+ responses only included, unless ethics allow <18) participants from online social media platforms and fandom communities. Due to the online nature of these fandom communities, I predict that responses will be global.

Participants will state demographic data of age, gender, country and also state the name of their chosen fandom/narrative world (Star Wars, Lotr, Twilight, etc) that will provide the context of how they will complete the following questionnaires.

Participants will complete three self-reported measures including.

- 1) An adapted **Narrative Immersion** scale (Green & Brock, 2000) capturing the depth of psychological absorption in fictional worlds
- 2) **Fandom Functions scale**, assessing the psychological purposes of narrative engagement including emotional comfort, escapism and social identity (Chadborn et al., 2017).
- 3) Emotional regulation strategies measured using **Emotion Regulation Questionnaire** (Gross & John, 2003) which assess levels of cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression.

Pearson correlations will assess whether immersion levels, fandom functions, and emotional regulation strategies are associated. Multiple regression analyses will then be conducted to look at conditional predictors for coping strategies;

- Immersion and fandom functions predicting reappraisal.
- Immersion and fandom functions predicting suppression.

This approach allows examination of whether immersion and functions uniquely predict adaptive versus less adaptive coping strategies. Open-ended questions will be analysed using thematic analysis to provide

context into how participants perceive their narrative immersion use and the emotional impact of fictional engagement firsthand. Inferences for an exploratory can be drawn from Quant and Qual responses to inform a discussion on this phenomenon.

What are the expected outputs from this project (what will this project achieve and how will you show this?) (200 words max)

This project aims to identify associations between narrative immersion, psychological functions of engagement and emotional regulation strategies in a globally representative population, while also considering parasocial and social elements of fandom engagement as secondary contributors towards emotional regulation.

Findings may infer whether certain patterns of immersive engagement with an individual's favourite narrative worlds can predict them aligning more strongly with adaptive regulatory strategies or potentially maladaptive regulation strategies. This will allow identification under what conditions (depth of immersion and reasons for engagement) engagement with fictional worlds and media may function as an emotionally supportive wellbeing tool, and when it may reflect avoidant tendencies.

The use of Qualitative findings to support quantitative ones will allow for first hand interpretation of individuals experiences and perceptions of their engagement (and reasons for engaging) with fictional worlds. Outcomes will likely provide a multifaceted framework for understanding immersive fictional engagement in relation to everyday emotional coping which may inform future research into digital wellbeing, media psychology and applied emotional regulation research.

What are the key ethical and data protection considerations from this project? (200 words max)

The project will follow BPS ethical guidelines for internet-mediated research and the code of human research ethics including Informed consent procedure (via an information sheet and consent form prior to questionnaires), Right to withdraw, anonymisation of data (gathered via Qualtrics and anonymised), GDPR-compliant storage (password protected devices and accounts).

Aside from demographic information of age, gender and country, no personally identifying information will be collected. Questionnaire responses will be anonymised at the point of collection and qualitative responses will be anonymised prior to analysis to ensure confidentiality.

Effort will be made to ensure that language used in the study materials avoids pathologising fictional engagement, framing it as inherently problematic or invoking stigma. Participants will receive a debrief explaining the purpose of the study and providing contact information for support services should the coping strategy elements of this study raise any emotional concerns.

Feedback from Module Team/Supervisor

Conceptual

- Strengthen argument for *why* cognitive reappraisal is important to explore.
- Connect fandom and immersion literature more tightly to emotional regulation frameworks.

Methodology

- Switch to predictor/criterion terminology.
- Add possible moderators.
- Clarify analytic plan (correlation + regression).
- Ensure scales and variables are unambiguously defined.

Expected Outputs

- Replace general statements with specific testable outcomes.
- Link outputs to the regression model and qualitative themes.

Ethics

- Recheck ethics after methodological updates.

Appendix B: Rewording of Narrative Immersion Scale Items

Items from the Narrative Transportation Scale will need to be slightly modified to better reflect the concepts being investigated in my own research. Care has been taken not to change what the item is capturing, rather changing wording to be more relevant to what is now being investigated. Green & Brock investigated newly read written short narratives with a conclusion, my investigation looks at the larger worlds these narratives take place in that can be returned to, sometimes without a concrete conclusion and in different forms of media (screen, video games, books, etc).

Original (Green & Brock, 2000)

1. While I was reading the narrative, I could easily picture the events in it taking place.
2. While I was reading the narrative, activity going on in the room around me was on my mind. (R)
3. I could picture myself in the scene of the events described in the narrative.
4. I was mentally involved in the narrative while reading it.
5. After finishing the narrative, I found it easy to put it out of my mind. (R)
6. I wanted to learn how the narrative ended.
7. The narrative affected me emotionally.
8. I found myself thinking of ways the narrative could have turned out differently.
9. I found my mind wandering while reading the narrative. (R)
10. The events in the narrative are relevant to my everyday life.
11. The events in the narrative have changed my life.

LIKERT SCALE SCORING

NOT AT ALL

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

VERY MUCH

Reworded items to better fit the context of “Narrative/Immersive world” rather than a new written narratives

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.

Summary of changes

1. Changes are in *italics* – Likert scale scoring remains the same
2. For most items, the construct of “the narrative” has been changed to “the narrative world”. This allows for participants to envision their chosen immersive fictional world rather than a brand-new written narrative shown to participants in the original study.
3. Tense of each item has been changed from past to present to emphasise a narrative world that participants CONTINUE to engage in, rather than are reflecting on (“I was” to “I am”, “I could” to “I can”, “affected” to “affects”, etc).
4. Item 3 removes “the scene of” and changes “described” to “shown”, and this investigation will also include visual narratives rather than solely written ones.
5. Item 5 changes from “finishing the narrative” to “leaving the narrative” as, again, this study concerns narrative worlds that participants repeatedly return to and leave, rather than finish and never revisit.
6. Items 6 and 8 changes “the narrative” to “the story” as these items *do* concern narrative content (the plot) rather than the world as a whole.
7. Explanations, instructions and definitions will be provided to participants before filling out the scale to ensure comprehension.

Appendix C: Participant Information Page

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION

Please read this information sheet and click the BLUE arrow below to continue

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 D: Debrief Information

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 E: Electronic Consent Form

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 F: Screenshot of survey advert in r/Multifandom

r/Multifandom • 11d 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