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Spiritual Media Experiences, Trait Transcendence, and Enjoyment of Popular Films

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ABSTRACT

Recent scholarship on media psychology acknowledges that media entertainment offers not only purely hedonistic enjoyment but also meaningful experiences. This study expands our understanding of media enjoyment by exploring the role of media entertainment in evoking spiritual emotions and beliefs, such as those related to connectedness, blessedness, and transcendence. Results from an online survey ($N = 220$) indicate that media entertainment elicits meaningful as well as spiritual emotions and increases the saliency of spiritual beliefs as related to self-actualization and spiritual experiences in everyday life. Furthermore, trait transcendence and eudaimonic media motivations add to the explanation of audiences' mediated spiritual experiences. Open-ended responses, analyzed by three coders, revealed that themes of transcendence and human connectedness are an integral part of viewers' entertainment experiences. This exploratory study provides the groundwork to investigate spiritual media experiences and advance understanding of audiences' appreciation for media entertainment. Implications for popular culture and mediated spirituality are discussed.

Media entertainment provides a rich platform for audiences to experience a range of positive emotions, such as elevation, inspiration, awe, compassion, and gratitude. However, the majority of existing scholarship on the psychology of popular culture focuses narrowly on the negative effects of content such as violence, stereotyping, propaganda, and sexual objectification. A casual perusal of entertainment fare reveals that spiritual themes such as the meaning of life, connectedness, compassion, love and experiences of the transcendent are central to several plot narratives. Box office successes such as *Avatar* (2009), *The Adjustment Bureau* (2011), *Tree of Life* (2011), and *Life of Pi* (2013) all demonstrate both audience and critical interest in spiritually themed storylines. Thus, as media psychologists, we argue that investigating the effects of such spiritual media content on viewers' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors is an important yet unexplored area of research.

Research on media and spirituality from a cognitive, psychological perspective is a relatively new endeavor. Of the limited literature that does exist, very few studies feature a media psychological approach, instead relying on ethnographic and critical rhetorical analyses. Existing research uses qualitative approaches to investigate representations of spiritual characters and plots in media's content (e.g., Clarke, 2005; Clark, 2002; Emons, Scheepers, & Wester, 2009) and explores specific positive emotions such as elevation (Oliver, Hartmann, & Woolley, 2012a) and hope (Prestin, 2013). Related topics such as meaningfulness and eudaimonia have been examined using media appreciation (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010, 2011; Oliver & Hartmann, 2010; Oliver & Raney, 2011), uses and gratification (Loomis, 2004), and terror-management theory (Hofer, 2013; Klimmt, 2011). Oliver and colleagues' research establishes an important distinction between hedonistic and eudaimonic media motivations; while some entertainment is sought out

for hedonistic pleasurable media enjoyment, other media content is picked up for eudaimonic truth-seeking media appreciation (Oliver & Raney, 2011). However, we think that this twofold distinction is not enough to capture the range of positive media experiences consumers describe. Consequently, the current investigation employs the perspective of media psychology to empirically examine a third dimension of media experiences that entails spiritual media experiences. Building on sparse existing literature, the current investigation explores that media entertainment engenders spiritual emotions and thoughts, including human connectedness, the sacred, and the transcendent.

This study contributes to the understanding of media experiences by examining the assumption that affective responses to viewers' impressions of their favorite movies can include spiritual emotions in addition to hedonic and eudaimonic emotions. Similarly, on a cognitive level, this study argues that media motivate spiritual contemplation, including thoughts regarding the meaningfulness of life and that which is transcendent. Survey measures are used to assess the individual's spiritual emotions and beliefs. Due to the exploratory nature of this project, content analysis of participants' responses to open-ended questions gave a comprehensive account of the expressions of their spiritual media experiences derived from movies. Overall, this article contributes to the field of media psychology by expanding the understanding of entertainment experiences beyond hedonic and meaningful media experiences to also include the spiritual aspects of media consumption. Arguably, employing mixed methods helps to gain greater insight into mediated spiritual experiences than would a single method.

Conceptualizing Spiritual Media Experiences

Spirituality is a multidimensional construct (Elkins, 1988; Elkins, Hedstrom, Hughes, Leaf, & Saunders, 1988; MacDonald & Friedman, 2002) that includes the search for meaning (e.g., MacDonald, 2000; Meezenbroek et al., 2013), the experience of that which is transcendent (e.g., Elkins et al., 1988; Saucier & Skrzypinska, 2006), "a deep sense of belonging, of wholeness, of connectedness" (Kelly, 1995, pp. 4–5), an awareness of the interconnectedness of things (e.g., Beck, 1986, cited in Emmons, 2006), subjective well-being, and paranormal beliefs (e.g., McDonald & Friedman, 2002), among others.

Arguments exist for comprehending spirituality from theistic or nontheistic viewpoints (Meezenbroek et al., 2013; Ramasubramanian, 2014). The theistic approach asserts spirituality relating to concepts of higher power "or force in the universe with which you form a personal relationship" (Ramasubramanian, p. 49). In contrast, nontheistic spirituality focuses on meaning in life, connectedness, transcendence, and "search for the sacred" (p. 48) but not bound to any religious institution or tradition (Emmons, 1999). Nontheistic spirituality is a rather private, informal, and emotionally oriented endeavor compared to theistic spirituality (Liu & Robertson, 2011). The current study encompasses mainly the nontheistic definition. Only for the open-ended answer coding we encompassed theistic conceptualizations of the transcendent as well, to broaden the coding.

Furthermore, building on the expressive-affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of spirituality (Ramasubramanian, 2014), this study examines the possible dimensions of this construct in relation to media experiences. On the affective level, spiritual emotions include feelings such as hope, gratitude, inspiration, awe, or empathy. On the cognitive level, spirituality is expressed as beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge related to the purpose in life, connectedness, virtue, and inner peace. On a behavioral dimension, spirituality is apparent from altruistic behavior and service to others for the social good (Ramasubramanian). These three dimensions reflect the three ways spirituality has been studied to date (Emmons, 2006): (1) as a personality trait (e.g., MacDonald, 2000; Piedmont, 1999), partially corresponding to the cognitive dimension; (2) as an emotion, relating to the affective dimension; and (3) as an expression of an individual's intentions and goals, representing an individual's motivations for establishing meaning for existence (Elkins et al., 1988; Emmons, 2006). The current study applies these ideas to spiritual media experiences by examining the spiritual emotions and beliefs elicited by media entertainment.

Spiritual Emotions and Media Entertainment

This study accesses existing research on affective spiritual experiences to conceptualize and operationalize “spiritual emotions” as one dimension of spiritual media experiences that includes sacred or transcendental emotions. According to Emmons (2006), sacred emotions arise from individuals’ applying “spiritual significance” to “seemingly secular aspects of their lives” (e.g., family, career, events) (p. 71). This conceptualization of sacred emotions aligns with Maslow (1976), who argued for finding peak experiences—which Maslow asserts satisfy higher order spiritual values—in the everyday life. Similarly, Elkins (1988) described specific poignant daily moments, as sacred or spiritual, including awe, gratitude, or humility. Thus, emotions are sacred or transcendental when an individual tags those emotions with spiritual significance. Emmons (2006) summarized several sacred emotions (in the future referred to as spiritual emotions): gratitude, previously established as relating to other measures of spirituality (e.g., spiritual transcendence, intrinsic religiosity; Emmons, 2006), reverence, wonder, forgiveness, mindfulness, and humility, love, hope, and awe.

Eudaimonic Media Experiences

Although there are no prior empirical studies investigating spiritual emotions elicited from media, some existing research distinguishes between hedonic and eudaimonic media experiences (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010, 2011; Oliver & Raney, 2011). These conceptualizations of media experiences originate with Aristotle’s understanding of hedonic happiness related to pleasure and eudaimonic happiness related to self-realization and development (Oliver & Raney). Thus, media can elicit hedonic experiences in the form of enjoyment (including experiences of pleasure, fun and amusement; Oliver & Bartsch, 2011; Vorderer, Klimmt, & Ritterfeld, 2004) and eudaimonic experiences in the form of appreciation or meaningfulness. Researchers operationalize eudaimonic media experiences in several ways. Oliver and Bartsch (2010) defined it from the perspective of media appreciation in the context of consumption of movies as moving, meaningful, thought provoking, and enduring. Oliver et al. (2012a) measured elevation as a form of meaningful affect using items such as: touched, moved, emotional, meaningful, compassionate, inspired, and tender. Wirth, Hofer, and Schramm (2012) defined eudaimonic media experiences as a multidimensional concept that includes purpose in life, autonomy, personal growth, relatedness, and activation of central values. None of the models on eudaimonic media experiences have accounted for spiritual experiences yet.

However unrelated to media experiences, Wong (2011) categorizes happiness into hedonic and eudaimonic happiness, just as defined and explored with media experience before (i.e., Oliver & Raney, 2011), and into chaironic happiness, which refers specifically to a sense of gratitude, awe, the transcendent and connectedness with a higher power. It is reasonable to assume that this threefold conceptualization of happiness can similarly be applied to media experiences. That is, media can elicit hedonic fun experiences and eudaimonic or meaningful experiences as already empirically tested, as well as transcendental or chaironic experiences, following Wong’s (2011) designation, as so far unexplored. Figure 1 represents a schematization of hedonic, eudaimonic, and chaironic happiness and emotions. Consequently, we expect to see chaironic media experiences as described as spiritual media experiences to differ from eudaimonic media experiences including meaningful media experiences, which in turn can be expected to be different from hedonic media experiences including fun and pleasure. It was hypothesized:

H1a: Spiritual emotions and meaningful emotions will constitute two separate factors.

H1b: Fun emotions will constitute a single unrelated factor of spiritual and meaningful emotions.

Spiritual Beliefs and Media Entertainment

In addition to emotions, and in assessing spiritual experiences on a cognitive level, spiritual beliefs can relate to beliefs of purpose in life, connectedness, or the transcendent (Ramasubramanian, 2014).

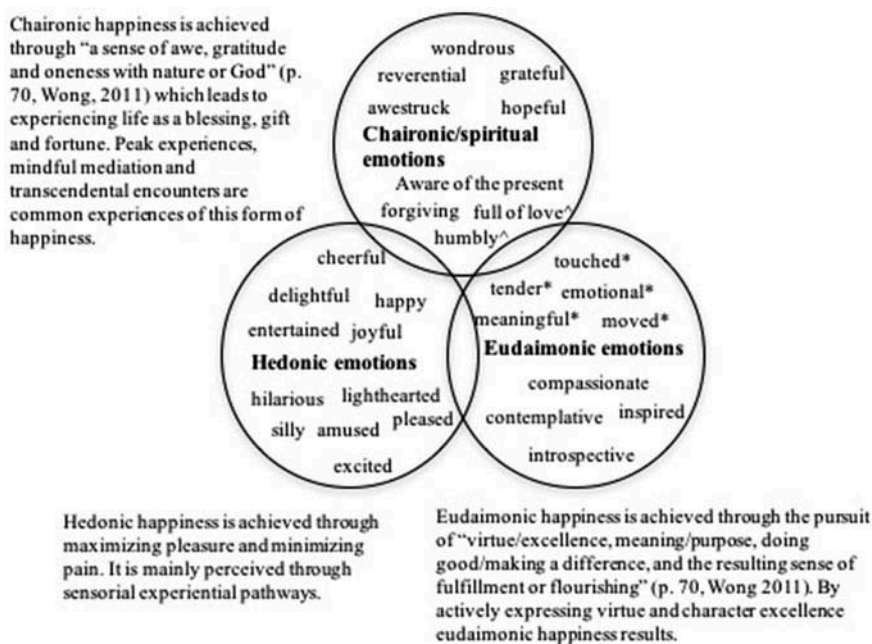


Figure 1. Schematized representation of the relationship between the three different theoretical categories of emotions (chaironic/spiritual, hedonic, eudaimonic) and associated happiness definitions as introduced by Wong (2011) as applied to media. As measured in this study, the associated spiritual emotions are based on Emmons (2006), eudaimonic emotions are based on Oliver and Raney (2011), and hedonic emotions based on Oliver et al. (2012a) and Oliver and Raney (2011) and the researchers of this study. *Note:* *Eudaimonic emotions as measured by Oliver et al. (2012a) but not used in the current study. ^ Emotions that were eliminated from the scale construction due to cross-loadings in the current study.

Thus far, no study has considered the effects of entertainment on spiritual beliefs. A related study by Oliver, Krakowiak, and Tsay (2012b) found that film clips that elicited a heightened elevation also predicted beliefs of a general kindness toward people in the world, which Oliver et al. (2012b) referred to as the "kind-world syndrome." Thus, the assumption that specific media content could affect beliefs of spirituality seems reasonable. In fact, Marmor-Lavie, Stout, and Lee (2009) investigated the prevalence of spirituality in advertisements and claimed that in today's world, companies such as Nike and Starbucks attempt to market meaningfulness instead of just a product. Likewise, movies often include spiritually inspired storylines (e.g., *Avatar*, *Life of Pi*). Therefore, a reasonable assumption is that entertaining films can engender audiences' sense of the sacred, connectedness, and the transcendent or higher power of life. These thoughts then find expression in agreement with statements of spiritual beliefs. Expectedly, when people experience spiritual emotions from watching favorite movies, these audiences are more likely to consider thinking about spirituality. Conversely, when a person experiences mainly fun affect from a favorite movie, that individual is less likely to think about spirituality; thus be in less agreement with statements of spiritual belief. Therefore, the proposed hypothesis is:

- H2: Mediated spiritual emotions rather than mediated hedonic or eudaimonic emotions significantly and positively relate to mediated spiritual beliefs.

Trait Transcendence and Media Entertainment

For understanding the experiences arising from exposure to media, it is necessary to consider audiences' traits. Oliver and Raney (2011) found that meaningfulness and fun affect, derived from favorite entertaining movies are predictable according to differences in individuals' traits:

differences in hedonic and eudaimonic motivations. Motivations from eudaimonic media are defined as “truth-seeking life’s poignancies and vulnerabilities” (Oliver & Raney, p. 1001). Oliver and Raney showed that individuals with high levels of this trait experienced greater meaningful affect from favorite movies than fun affect. Conversely, those individuals with high levels of hedonic media motivations (i.e., motivations for pleasure-seeking from media) also experienced more light-hearted fun from favorite movies. Thus, hedonic media motivations will predict fun affect but not meaningful or spiritual emotions. In turn, eudaimonic media motivations will predict meaningful emotions but not hedonic emotions or spiritual emotions. Additionally, we would expect trait transcendence (Elkins et al., 1988) as a personality variable specific to the transcendent (i.e. sacred) aspect of spirituality, to explain variance of spiritual emotions, but less so hedonic or meaningful emotions. Trait transcendence is an experientially-based belief about the greater power in life (Elkins et al.). Thus, the arising hypotheses are:

H3a: Trait transcendence but not eudaimonic or hedonic media motivations significantly and positively predict mediated spiritual emotions.

H3b: Eudaimonic media motivations but not trait transcendence and hedonic media motivations predict meaningful affect.

H3c: Hedonic but not eudaimonic media motivations or trait transcendence will predict fun affect.

In addition to spiritual emotions, another assumption is that trait transcendence but less so eudaimonic and hedonic media motivations predict the degree to which viewers agree with statements of spiritual beliefs when recalling a favorite film. The logical bases for these relationships are the previous hypotheses regarding spiritual emotions and the logic expands the predictability of hedonic and eudaimonic media motivations’ effects on cognition (i.e., beliefs) from media experiences. The consequent hypotheses are:

H4a: Trait transcendence positively predicts spiritual beliefs.

H4b: Hedonic media motivations do not predict spiritual beliefs.

H4c: Eudaimonic media motivations do not predict spiritual beliefs.

Lastly, due to the exploratory nature of this research, we were interested in participants’ thoughts regarding their impressions from their favorite movies. Specifically, we explore the notion that recalling a favorite movie triggers related spiritual thoughts, such as purpose in life, relationship with God, connectedness, and transcendence, among others. This research extends the study of Oliver and Hartmann (2010) on perceptions of meaningfulness as experienced from film by investigating other concepts (i.e., transcendence) as related to spirituality. To that end, three coders analyzed the content of answers to an open-ended question to investigate the research question:

RQ: What kinds of spiritual experiences, if any, are elicited when individuals recall a favorite movie?

Method

This study employs both quantitative (Likert- type scales) and qualitative methods (content analysis of thought listing) to gain a detailed insight into the dimension of spiritual media experiences.

Sample

Two hundred and twenty people participated in a posttest only online survey in exchange for nominal extra credit for a college-level class (66% females, 71% White, 12% Hispanic, 11% Black, 4% Asian, 2 % Other; $M_{age} = 24.96$, $SD = 9.92$). Data collected in undergraduate classes over the

course of two semesters increased participation. Participants were given approximately two weeks to complete the questionnaire. In an effort to increase the diversity of the sample, students were encouraged to send the survey to another friend or family member, making up 12% of the sample (50% females, 89% White, $M_{\text{age}} = 48.96$, $SD = 8.725$)

Procedure

After participants read and signed the Institutional Review Board approved consent form, the survey assessed participant's trait transcendence, eudaimonic and hedonic media motivations, and demographics. They also responded to queries and open-ended questions requesting identification of a favorite movie, the genres of that favorite movie, several emotions elicited by that movie upon a first viewing, and elaboration of the overall impression from the movie. Three independent coders categorized participants' impressions according to transcendence, human connectedness, and meaningfulness. Finally, participants responded to several items related to statements of spiritual beliefs the favorite movie may have elicited.

Measures

Spiritual, meaningful, and fun emotions. Participants indicated the degree to which they experienced each listed emotion while watching the favorite movie. Assessment of all items used a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*), with higher values expressing more intense emotions experienced. Measurement of the extent of experiencing spiritual emotions arising from watching a favorite movie adopted nine emotions previously identified as sacred by Emmons (2006). Four more adopted items used meaningful emotions previously identified by Oliver and Raney (2011). Fun emotions were measured by 11 items, partly adopted from previous studies (Oliver et al., 2012a; Oliver & Raney, 2011) and partly original items added for this research. Table 2 summarizes all emotions after confirmatory factor analyses.

Spiritual Beliefs

The basis for examining if people's favorite films caused consideration of specific spiritual beliefs comprised 14 items constructed from the Spirituality in Advertising Framework (SAF) of Marmor-Lavie et al. (2009). The framework conceptualized characteristics of spiritual consumers and assessed spiritual messages in mass communication. Sixteen developed core ideas constituted the concept of spirituality, including the big picture, letting go, unity of all mankind, transformation, and self-actualization (see Marmor-Lavie et al. for a full description of these core ideas). A sample item is: "Life and the real truth are beyond instant gratifications." Assessment of all items used a scale ranging from 1 (*Film made me not think about that*) to 7 (*Film made me think about that*).

All spiritual belief items were analyzed using principal axis factoring with oblique rotation (promax, $\kappa = 4$). According to the scree plot, two factors were extracted, which in combination explained 47% of the variance. Table 1 shows the factor loadings and reliabilities of the two factors after rotation. The items that clustered within the same factor suggest that Factor 1 represent a scale measuring spiritual self-actualization with a specific emphasis on reaching one's highest potential (10 items) and Factor 2 represents spiritual experiences in everyday life (4 items). These two component categories align with the core ideas and definitions of spirituality of Marmor-Lavie et al. (2009). The component, spiritual self-actualization, assumes that self-actualization is the highest need humans seek to satisfy after fulfilling basic human needs (Maslow, 1976). Spiritual self-actualization, then, includes utilizing all of one's positive potential and can include aspects such as helping others, meaningfulness, and authenticity (Marmor-Lavie et al.). The component, spirituality in everyday life, assumes that people derive meaning and spirituality from everyday life and express that spirituality daily, through thoughts, emotions and behavior: For example, through meaningful interactions with others or showing appreciation for someone or something. Both scales appear strongly and significantly related ($r = .643$, $p < .001$).

Table 1. Principal axis factoring analysis with promax rotation for the spiritual beliefs.

While watching this movie I thought...	Factor 1	Factor 2
	Self-actualization	Spiritual experiences in everyday life
It is important to constantly live in the present	.743	-.172
Suffering is an opportunity to develop	.683	.023
Transformation in a proactive manner is key to fulfillment and happiness	.679	-.001
Opening up to new situations helps to understand oneself better	.640	-.119
All human beings are connected with each other	.605	.098
Finding meaning in suffering is essential in order to survive, feel relieved and fulfilled	.585	.206
There is a bigger picture to every life's situation	.546	.217
When you think positively towards future actions and you believe in yourself, positive things will happen to you	.539	.086
Life and the real truth are beyond instant gratifications	.526	.167
Asking "why" things happen in life helps to find meaning in life	.501	.187
Spiritual experiences are truly a never ending journey	-.062	.926
Spirituality is something we can experience in everyday life	-.138	.877
Interacting with others in everyday life is important for spiritual growth	.104	.652
In order to improve concentration, focus and balance in life, ritualistic practice are an effective tool	.181	.433
Eigenvalues	6.249	1.306
% of variance	40.99	6.07
alpha	.884	.814
M/SD	4.77/1.27	3.71/1.59

Table 2. Summary of principal axis factoring analysis ($N = 199$) after varimax rotation for hedonic and spiritual emotions.

While watching this movie I felt...	Factor 1	Factor 2
	Hedonic emotions	Spiritual and meaningful emotions
Delightful	.891	.180
Joyful	.872	.225
Cheerful	.872	.054
Happy	.850	.110
Hilarious	.819	-.221
Lighthearted	.763	.174
Silly	.730	-.196
Amused	.672	-.050
Excited	.648	.247
Pleased	.488	.304
Entertained	.428	.110
*Compassionate	.113	.774
*Inspired	.048	.770
Hopeful	.199	.739
*Contemplative	-.214	.727
*Introspective	-.110	.710
Reverential	.061	.681
Grateful	.207	.659
Wondrous	.179	.641
Awestruck	.015	.593
Forgiving	.271	.575
Aware of the present	-.129	.497
Eigenvalues	8.321	5.337
% of variance	27.58	25.82
alpha	.925	.896
M/SD	4.99/1.31	4.66/1.23

Note. *indicates items originally measured as meaningful media experiences by Oliver and Raney (2011). Two items, "humbly" and "full of love," that cross loaded ($\geq .32$) were eliminated from the scale construction.

Trait Transcendence

Assessment of people's "experientially based belief that there is a transcendent dimension to life" (Elkins et al., 1988, p. 10) as a specific component of spiritual media experiences, used the transcendence dimension subscale (10 items) of the Spiritual Orientation Inventory (SOI) by Elkins et al. ($\alpha = .95$, $M = 4.36$ $SD = 1.41$). A sample item is "There is a transcendent, spiritual dimension to life." A 7-point Likert scale measured all items, with higher scores representing stronger experientially based beliefs of the transcendent dimension.

Eudaimonic and Hedonic Media Motivations

Assessing eudaimonic and hedonic media motivations used the scales of Oliver and Raney (2011) to determine individuals' preferences for meaningful or pleasurable entertainment. Each scale consists of six items with a scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*very much*). Scale items included: "I like movies that challenge my way of seeing the world" for eudaimonic motivation ($\alpha = .89$, $M = 5.32$ $SD = 1.05$) and: "It is important to me that I have fun when watching movies," for hedonic motivation ($\alpha = .85$, $M = 5.51$ $SD = .995$).

Thought Listing Task

To investigate the different experiences individuals derive from watching a favorite movie, after responding to the spiritual and fun emotions, the questionnaire sought responses to an open-ended question: "How else did the movie make you feel? Give a short description of the impression the movie had on you." Three coders (including one of the researchers) categorized the complete data set ($N=220$) of open-ended responses. The two coders received training for the categories through clear delineation of appropriate categories (see Appendix) and practice with hypothetical answers. The categories were derivatives of definitions of spirituality outlined earlier, specifically with transcendence referring to the theistic and non-theistic definition of spirituality by Ramasubramanian (2014) as well as Elkins et al. (1988), connectedness as defined by Meezenbroeck et al. (2013), and meaningfulness as defined by Oliver and Bartsch (2010, 2011), Oliver and Hartmann (2010), and Oliver and Raney (2011). All coding occurred independently among the three coders.

Results

Favorite Movies

The 220 participants named 168 different film titles, and 72% of the sample indicated the favorite movie fit three genres or more. The most named genres ($>20\%$) were comedies (54%) and dramas (48%), romance (40%), action (34%), suspense (21%), and sad-tear jerkers (21%). The most frequently named favorite films were *Titanic*, (2.7%), *Remember the Titans* (2.3%), *Pulp Fiction* and *Mean Girls* (1.8%), *Sound of Music*, *Notebook*, *The Great Gatsby*, *Life of Pi*, *Harry Potter*, *Good Will Hunting*, *Forrest Gump*, *Bridesmaids*, and *Anchorman* (1.4%).

Hypothesis 1: Factor Analyses of Spiritual, Meaningful, and Fun Emotions

The first hypotheses predict that spiritual emotions and meaningful emotions will constitute two separate factors (H1a), which in turn are different from hedonic fun emotions (H1b).

To that end, the factor structure of all the emotions (24 items) experienced from the participants favorite movie was analyzed using EFA with principal axis factoring and orthogonal rotation (varimax). As indicated by the scree plot, three components were extracted that in combination explained 57% of the variance. However, the factor loadings of the items of the third factor only cross-loaded on the second factor. Thus, we extracted two final factors that together explained 53% of variance. Table 2 shows the factor loadings after rotation. The subsequent scale construction

deleted two items that cross loaded ($\geq .32$ Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) on the other factor. The items that exclusively clustered on Factor 1 represented hedonic emotions (11 items) and Factor 2 consisted of the spiritual and meaningful emotions. Consequently, H1a was unsupported: Spiritual emotions were not different than meaningful emotions in our sample.

To analyze H1b, we investigated the correlation between the fun emotion factor and the spiritual and meaningful emotion factor. Both factors did not strongly correlate ($r = .151$, $p = .025$) supporting the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: Relationship between Spiritual Emotions and Spiritual Beliefs

The second hypothesis predicts that spiritual emotions, but not meaningful and fun emotions, as experienced from a favorite movie relates to spiritual beliefs. Since multiple studies showed differences according to gender for media experiences (Oliver, 2000), we controlled for this variable in the analyses. Because our previous factor analysis resulted in one factor, including spiritual and meaningful emotions, our analysis only investigated the correlation among the factors of spiritual/meaningful emotions, hedonic emotions, and spiritual beliefs. As a reminder, spiritual beliefs resulted in two components measuring spiritual self-actualization and spiritual experiences in everyday life. The analysis reveals a strong positive relationship between spiritual/meaningful emotions and beliefs of spiritual self-actualization ($r = .602$, $p < .001$) and spiritual/meaningful emotions and beliefs of spiritual experiences in everyday life ($r = .565$, $p < .001$), but not between hedonic emotions and spiritual self-actualization ($r = -.021$, $p = .757$) or beliefs of spiritual experiences in everyday life ($r = -.013$, $p = .846$), supporting Hypothesis 2. As responses to entertaining media, these results indicate that spiritual beliefs about reaching one's highest potential (self-actualization), and spirituality as experienced in everyday life, relate to specific emotions that seem not to encompass much hedonically oriented, emotional fun.

Hypothesis 3: Trait Transcendence, Media Motivations, and Spiritual Emotions

Again, as a response to the results of hypothesis one, spiritual emotions and meaningful emotions fell into one category. Thus, two multiple regression analyses, with spiritual/meaningful emotions or hedonic emotions as dependent variables (Table 3), examined which trait variables (transcendence, eudaimonic, and hedonic media motivations) predict spiritual/meaningful emotions and hedonic emotions according to Hypotheses 3. First, participant's gender was entered as a control variable in the first block (Oliver, 2000), followed by hedonic motivations in the second block, eudaimonic motivations in the third, and trait transcendence in the fourth block. As expected as part of H3a and H3b, hedonic motivations did not predict spiritual/meaningful emotions. In contrast, eudaimonic motivations (unexpectedly) and trait transcendence did significantly predict spiritual/meaningful emotions, together explaining 12% of variance ($\text{adj. } R^2 = .103$). Since spiritual and meaningful emotions were combined in one factor it becomes apparent that trait transcendence and eudaimonic media motivations together predict spiritual/meaningful emotions. Entering trait transcendence after eudaimonic motivations results in an additional significant explanation of 2% of variance. Therefore, people with high eudaimonic media motivations that also have strong beliefs for the transcendent, experienced more spiritual/meaningful emotions from favorite films, than people with high levels of hedonic media motivations. Eudaimonic motivations and trait transcendence did not strongly correlate ($r = .173$, $p = .010$). Consequently, H3a and H3b were partially supported.

Next, we did not predict eudaimonic motivations or trait transcendence to effectively predict hedonic emotions (H3c): Our model supports this prediction. However, to further support our null hypotheses an analysis of equivalence testing, according to Weber and Popova (2012) was conducted. To determine Δ (the maximum no-effect; see Levine, Weber, Park, & Hullett, 2008), we relied on the effect size related to media correlations as suggested by Weber and Popova since Oliver and Raney (2011) did not report effect sizes for the relationship between media motivations and media experiences as would have been relevant for our hypotheses. Using a balanced strategy for the maximum no-effect we determined the minimal substantial

Table 3. Results of the hierarchical multiple regressions analyzes for Hypothesis 3 and multivariate regression for Hypothesis 4.

Dependent measures	Spiritual emotions			Hedonic emotions			Spiritual beliefs 1			Spiritual beliefs 2		
	ΔR^2	F	β	ΔR^2	F	β	t	B	$\text{par.}\eta^2$	t	B	$\text{par.}\eta^2$
Step1	.000	.075		.016	3.549 [^]							
Gender			.019			.127 [^]						
Step2	.006	.661		.205	30.80**							
Gender			.012			.088						
Hedonic motivations			.076			.455**						
Step 3	.096	8.18**		.001	20.57**							
Gender			.035			.086						
Hedonic motivations			-.022			.465**						
Eudaimonic motivations			.325**			-.035						
Step 4	.017	7.29**		.017	16.93**							
Gender			.038			.088	2.31	.392*	.053	.690	.147	.002
Hedonic motivations			-.043			.445**	.230	.020	.000	1.85	.199	.016
Eudaimonic motivations			.308**			-.052	4.57	.370**	.089	2.48	.252*	.028
Trait Transcendence			.136*			.135*	1.89	.111 [^]	.016	5.17	.378**	.111

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$, [^] $p = .06$. $N = 220$. Spiritual beliefs 1: Beliefs of spiritual self-actualization. Spiritual beliefs 2: Beliefs of spiritual experiences in everyday life. Adj. $R^2_{\text{SpiritualEmotions}} = .103$; adj. $R^2_{\text{HedonicEmotions}} = .225$; adj. $R^2_{\text{Beliefs1}} = .126$; adj. $R^2_{\text{Beliefs2}} = .130$

effect for media effects ($\Delta = .19$, 50th percentile; Weber & Popova, 2012, p. 198; Table 3) with the formula: $\Delta = \sqrt{\frac{r^2}{2}} = \sqrt{.19^2/2} = .13$. For hypotheses 3, the nonsignificant relationship between hedonic media motivations and spiritual/meaningful emotions (H3b) in the model was not supported by the equivalence test ($r(218) = .11$, $p = .385$ (two-tailed)), and neither was the nonsignificant relationship between eudaimonic media motivations and mediated fun emotions ($r(218) = .11$, $p = .381$ (two-tailed)), or between trait transcendence and mediated fun emotions ($r(218) = .18$, $p = .779$ (two-tailed)). Consequently, it cannot be stated with statistical significance that there is absolute no relationship between hedonic media motivations and spiritual/meaningful emotions or between trait transcendence and eudaimonic media motivations and fun emotions (H3c). However, it can be shown that the correlation between hedonic media motivations and spiritual emotions ($r = .11$, $p = .100$) was significantly smaller than the correlation between eudaimonic media motivations ($r = .335$, $p < .001$), and spiritual/meaningful emotions: $z(220) = -2.514$, $p = .012$. No significant difference in the size of the correlations was found between hedonic media motivations and spiritual/meaningful emotions and trait transcendence and spiritual/meaningful emotions ($r = .191$, $p < .05$, $z(220) = -.086$, $p = .039$). Also, the correlation between hedonic media motivations and fun emotions ($r = .46$, $p < .001$) was significantly larger than the correlations between eudaimonic media motivations ($r = .11$, $p = .102$) or trait transcendence ($r = .18$, $p = .007$) and fun emotions ($z(220)_{\text{eudxfun}} = 4.04$, $p < .001$; $z(220)_{\text{transxfun}} = 3.29$, $p < .001$).

Hypothesis 4: Trait Transcendence, Media Motivations, and Spiritual Beliefs

Lastly, Hypothesis 4 predicts that trait transcendence, but not eudaimonic and hedonic media motivations, predict spiritual beliefs. Since the spiritual belief scales strongly correlated, we conducted a multivariate multiple regression analysis with the two spiritual beliefs as dependent variable and eudaimonic media motivations, trait transcendence and hedonic media motivations as predictors. Similar to the analysis for H3, the analysis for H4 includes gender (Oliver, 2000) and reveals that gender ($T = .029$, $F(2,214) = 3.148$, $p = .045$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$) was a significant predictor for beliefs of spiritual self-actualization, and females ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.16$) reported greater beliefs of spiritual self-actualization than males ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.43$). As expected trait transcendence ($T = .139$, $F(2,214) = 14.893$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .12$) predicted significantly beliefs of spiritual self-actualization and beliefs of spiritual experiences in everyday life (marginally significantly for trait transcendence and beliefs of spiritual self-actualization), supporting H4a. Additionally, in contrast to H4c, eudaimonic media motivations ($T = .098$, $F(2,214) =$

10.530, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .09$) predicted spiritual beliefs. Lastly (H4b), even though the regression analysis revealed no significant prediction of hedonic media motivations on spiritual self-actualization beliefs and spiritual experiences in everyday life (H4b; $T = .031$, $F(2,214) = 3.323$, $p = .04$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$), the null effect was only supported for the latter relationship ($r = -.01$, $df = 218$, $\delta = .13$, $p = .034$ (two-tailed)). The equivalence test for hedonic media motivations and spiritual self-actualization beliefs was not significant ($r = .14$, $df = 218$, $\delta = .13$, $p = .561$ (two-tailed)). Thus, only for hedonic media motivations and beliefs about spiritual experiences in everyday life was the null hypothesis under H4b sufficiently statistically supported.

RQ: Analysis of Thoughts Regarding Favorite Films

To investigate the research question involving participants' spiritual media experiences, the open-ended responses from participants' elaboration on their favorite film impressions were analyzed. To account for low prevalence of observations for several categories, calculations used Cohen's kappa and Byrt, Bishop, and Carlin's (1993) prevalence and bias adjusted kappa (PABAK) for inter-coder reliability. Cohen's kappa, computed for each pair of coders and averaged among the three coders (Light, 1971) indicated substantial inter-coder reliability (.61-.80) and almost perfect (.81-1.0) agreement (Landis & Koch, 1977) among all categories (Table 4). Overall, meaningfulness has been coded to be present in the respondent's answers in 58% of all cases. Meaningfulness included impressions of participants' favorite films, such as "pensive (*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*)," "nostalgic (*The Godfather*)," and "reflective (*Good Will Hunting*)," with descriptions such as:

- *Memento*—"This movie made me feel very curious about human nature and what motivates us to move forward with life as well as how we perceive reality."
- *Pursuit of Happiness*—"Made me really appreciate all the things in my life. It was inspiration to live my life to the fullest."
- *The Bucket List*—"Made me feel like there was a deeper meaning to life."

Human connectedness was present in 22% of all cases and expressed, for example, by impressions such as:

- *Life of Pi*—"It made me appreciate life and my family and how every minute we spend together should be full of laughter and less fighting."
- *Anchorman*—"I just enjoyed the communal nature in which I always watched the video, with a large group of friends."
- *The Man Who Would Be King*—"The importance and power of friendship and loyalty."

Transcendence was represented in 20% of all cases and specifically concerned experiences with the higher power:

- *Ben Hur*—"I feel like I caught a glimpse of who God is."

Table 4. Inter-coder-reliabilities for the responses to open ended questions in each content category.

	Coder 1 and Coder 2	Coder 1 and Coder 3	Coder 2 and Coder 3	Coder 1, 2 and 3
	κ (PABAK)	κ (PABAK)	κ (PABAK)	Averaged κ
Transcendence	.668 (.863)	.690 (.881)	.690 (.881)	.682
Connectedness	.793 (.918)	.806 (.927)	.827 (.936)	.808
Meaningfulness	.692 (.745)	.726 (.772)	.726 (.772)	.715

Note. κ = Cohens Kappa. PABAK was calculated as $2 \cdot P_o - 1$ according to Byrt et al. (1993) with P_o = proportion of observed agreement.

- *The Day the Earth Stood Still*—“The insignificance of man in the universe brought focus to man’s everyday activities.”
- *Shawshank Redemption*—“Karma exists! What goes around comes around!!”

Discussion

This research is an exploratory effort to identify the spiritual media experiences that entertainment media (film, specifically) can elicit, thereby adding to the largely understudied scholarship on mediated spirituality within the media psychology tradition. Theoretically, we relied on the introduced concept of chaironic happiness by Wong (2011), who argued the latter to be another distinct concept from eudaimonic and hedonic happiness. We argued that in addition to eudaimonic and hedonic media experiences, people also experience chaironic happiness, that is, spiritual media experiences including feelings of wonder, reverence, and thus, experiences of the transcendent. The findings suggest that while personally chosen favorite movies can be enjoyable from pleasurable and hedonic aspects, these films also gain appreciation from rich spiritual content. While we relied on meaningful emotions as they have been measured before (Oliver et al., 2012) we used several spiritual emotions as defined by Emmons (2006), who argued that emotions are sacred or transcendent when one prescribes spiritual significance to them (i.e., reverence, wonder, and awe).

Our analysis showed that meaningful and spiritual experiences as measured in our sample are inseparable. The data suggest that mediated experiences of awe, compassion, reverence, and inspiration (i.e., meaningful *and* spiritual experiences) form a single mediated emotion factor. In fact, when analyzing the literature on spirituality, it becomes apparent that beyond transcendent experiences, experiences of the sacred, and connectedness, spirituality also includes finding purpose and meaningfulness in life (see Emmons, 2006; Ramasubramanian, 2014). As outlined earlier, it is to be noted that spirituality is a multidimensional concept. We argue that other subcomponents, such as interconnectedness, compassionate love, empathy, optimism, courage, and peace (Emmons, 2006; Meezenbroeck et al., 2013; Ramasubramanian, 2014; Sprecher & Fehr, 2005), may likely also be relevant emotional spiritual experiences. Our open-ended analysis provides some further insight into the aspect of connectedness as a part of spirituality, for example. Due to the lack of literature on mediated spirituality, we confined our open-ended analysis to the three categories of transcendence, meaningfulness, and connectedness that have been associated most often with spirituality in the literature. Future research is necessary to expand on the emotions we can capture with a mediated spiritual emotion scale. Regardless, assessing spiritual emotions in addition to meaningful emotions expands on previous research, making a more comprehensive assessment of individual’s entertainment experiences possible.

Furthermore, we expected mediated spiritual/meaningful experiences not to be related to fun experiences, following previous findings related to the independence of eudaimonic and hedonic experiences (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010, 2011). Theoretically we would expect some form of correlation between these factors since transcendent experiences, as described by Elkins et al. (1988), are joyful and happy experiences. However, as indicated by the factor analysis and the correlational effect size, discriminant validity of the two factors was established.

Additionally, the findings of the current study show that spiritual/meaningful emotions significantly relate to spiritual beliefs. That is, the more frequently participants indicated that a favorite film caused positive spiritual/meaningful emotions, such as hope, gratitude or compassion, the stronger the agreement with spiritual beliefs, such as the importance of living in the present (see Table 1 for a complete list of items). Or, the more the film triggered spiritual beliefs, the greater the feeling of spiritual/meaningful emotions. Thus, the present study indicates that media can elicit experiences that are meaningful *as well as* spiritual, cognitively *and* affectively.

Specifically, our study expands on the idea of the prevailing dual media motivation and media experience approach as thus far conceptualized in the media psychology scholarship (i.e., Oliver & Raney, 2011; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010, 2011). Our data show a potential overlap of meaningful media

experiences with spiritual experiences. It is important for future research to further examine the ways in which chaironic happiness might be distinct from or similar to meaningfulness and eudaimonic happiness. Expanding the concept of eudaimonic media experience and motivations (Oliver & Bartsch, 2011; Oliver & Raney) by including transcendental media motivations and experiences may be fruitful in order to capture people's media selections and experiences even more comprehensively, especially when dealing with media offers that are rich in spiritual content.

Given the cross-sectional nature of this study, one of the limitations is the extent to which we can conclude that spiritual/meaningful media experiences lead to selective exposure. However, the analysis of specific personality traits revealed that the higher the level of trait transcendence and motivations for truth-seeking in media (eudaimonic media motivations), the more significant are cognitive (beliefs) and affective (emotions) spiritual/meaningful media experiences. Thus, a logical assumption is that certain groups of people with certain personality traits are more likely to seek out not only meaningful oriented entertainment but spiritually oriented media content as well. Future research warrants further exploration of other personality traits related to spirituality. Such research would aid our understanding of people's motivations and dispositions to consume spiritually inclined media content, thus, expanding the research tradition of media selection processes.

Generally speaking, motivations to seek out hedonic media content were not significantly unrelated to spiritual emotions and beliefs, and similarly, trait transcendence and eudaimonic media motivations were not statistically significantly unrelated to fun emotions (Table 3). Spiritual experiences, whether meaningful or transcendental, are generally positive in nature. Thus, it is reasonable to expect some overlap between motivations to watch a movie that makes one more reflective (eudaimonic media motivation, see Oliver & Raney, 2011) and feelings of pleasure and excitement from that experience (fun emotions); or between a person's preference for movies that are "happy and positive" (hedonic media motivation item) and experiences of inspiration and love (spiritual/meaningful emotions). Human emotions are complex. Specifically in relation to spiritual experiences they have often been labeled as "indescribable." Thus, these insignificant null findings point out the complexity of experiences we try to capture in media effects research.

Limitations and Future Directions

With the exploratory nature of the project, several limitations are inevitable and should be noted. First, we followed an inductive approach by applying existing media and non-media related spirituality frameworks to the study of media experiences in an effort to demonstrate that media can, in fact, elicit spiritual experiences as previously defined. Consequently, the spiritual and meaningful emotions items were merely exploratory, with the purpose of investigating Wong's (2011) conceptualization of chaironic happiness as applied to media in the form of spiritual experiences. With the pre-conceptualized spiritual and meaningful emotions at hand, our study could not show the relative difference between eudaimonic and spiritual experiences. Thus, future work with a broader framework to capture spiritual and meaningful emotions is necessary to draw conclusions about the relationship between eudaimonic and spiritual media experiences.

Similarly, our spiritual belief measure was also only an attempt to capture the variety of people's beliefs about spirituality. The fact that people's favorite film experiences are related to their beliefs about spirituality argues for the relevance to also explore the cognitive dimension of mediated spirituality in more detail.

Second, Ramasubramanian (2014) distinguished spiritual affect as self-directed, other-directed, or both. Hope and courage, for example, are self-oriented spiritual emotions; whereas compassion and gratitude are other-oriented. Meezenbroeck et al. (2012) also distinguished between self-oriented spiritual experiences and other-oriented spiritual experiences and introduced a third dimension that describes spiritual experiences related to connectedness with the transcendent. A categorization of spiritual emotions into these three clusters—self-oriented, other-oriented, and transcendent oriented spiritual experiences—may be another vantage point from which to further explore spiritual media experiences. Such a categorization

would provide further grounds to explore effects of spiritual media fare on topics such as self-development, relationships with others (e.g., random acts of kindness, compassionate lifestyle, donations), and openness to transcendent experiences (e.g., meditation, church/temple visits).

Third, to generalize the findings of this study, it would be important to expand the scope of the sample to populations other than solely students to determine the broader application of the findings, because subtle displays of spiritual emotions in media may be perceptions gained later in life (see also Hofer, Alemand, & Martin, 2014; Oliver & Raney, 2011). On the other hand, one could argue that the millennial generation is specifically prone to the seeking of meaning and spirituality. For example, data from the Pew Research Center suggests that the millennial generation is the fastest growing in labeling themselves as spiritual but not religious (Pew Research Center, n.d.). Thus, it is possible that a student population is indeed showing large effects with regards to spiritual media experiences. However, only a sample with a broader age range can illuminate this point.

Fourth, we were unable to control for carry-over effects in our open-ended answers from the previous closed-ended scales, thus, decreasing the validity of our recalled spiritual film impressions. However, arguably the expression of an individual's subjective spiritual experience (including emotions and thoughts) regarding favorite films, as found in this study, provides a valuable basis for future research of spiritual media experiences and the possible impacts on spiritual behaviors, such as random acts of kindness, pro-social behaviors, or meditation (Ramasubramanian, 2014). For example, experiencing other-oriented emotions as a response to entertaining narratives may lead to reduction of attitudinal and behavioral prejudice through experiencing connectedness to others and connectedness to the transcendent. Shade, Kim, Young, and Oliver (2012) showed that elevation leads to positive attitudes towards stigmatized groups featured in a narrative and pro-social behavioral intentions towards those groups. Other studies demonstrated that elevation—an emotion that has been previously regarded as transcendental emotion (see Algoe & Haidt, 2009) but has so far been only brought about in the context with eudaimonic media experiences—leads to altruistic behavior (e.g., Oliver et al., 2012; Schnall, Roper, & Fessler, 2010). Such findings provide a promising basis to further explore the relationship between entertaining media and spirituality.

Overall, the findings of the current study contribute to the media psychology and psychology of popular culture literature by expanding the scope of audiences' entertainment experiences to include spiritual experiences. The study introduces the concept of spirituality as a third form of happiness as derived from media to explain entertainment experiences more comprehensively than accomplished thus far.

In conclusion, integrating spiritual media experiences as a concept in media psychology assists 1) researching elements of the text that can promote spiritual experiences directed toward the self, others, and the transcendent; 2) understanding viewers' characteristics that allow these experiences to occur or even facilitate them; and 3) investigating behavioral spiritual effects directed towards self-development and pro-social behavior. Media's different outlets, for example, film and social media, are not only part of everyday life but also provide a platform to experience and share spiritual emotions and thoughts which can inspire engagement in pro-social actions. Identifying the concept of spirituality in media psychology reveals the potential media has to transcend individuals and affect a broader society.

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Appendix

Coding categories	Description
Transcendence	Reverence, feeling inspired, inspirational, closer to God, elevated, divine/divinity, experience of awe, experience of something transcendent (not God, just a greater power), experience the power of something larger than oneself, we are not completely in control of everything in life, insignificance of oneself, faith, awareness, hopeful, motivated
Connectedness	Appreciation of how we as humans are all connected with each other, sympathy, understanding of human connectedness, appreciation for time spent with one's family, realization of importance of relationships/friendships, compassion, wonder, caring for one another, family values, sacredness
Meaningfulness	Experiencing meaning of life, living a fulfilled life, understanding the human condition /my life, (NOT connectedness), being/feeling moved, introspective, contemplative, pensive, the importance of life, ones purpose in life, thought provoking, reflective, feeling touched, appreciating life/nature, grateful for life, thankful, appreciative, live life to the fullest, fortunate, made me realize something about my life, learned what's important in life