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Poignancy and Mediated Wisdom of Experience: Narrative Impacts on Willingness to Accept Delayed Rewards

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Abstract

Research on the impact of eudaimonic narrative has begun to identify a variety of psychologically and socially important outcomes. In the present study, we conceptually and operationally distinguish three distinctive responses to eudaimonic narrative: moral elevation, being emotionally moved, and poignancy. We, following work by Hershfield and colleagues (Ersner-Hershfield, Mikels, Sullivan, & Carstensen, 2008), suggest that poignancy, or a combination of sadness and happiness in response to life or narrative events, represents a recognition and acceptance of life's transience and mixed joys and sorrows. Evocation of poignancy by eudaimonic narrative, then, should elicit responses associated with age, life experience, and maturity, which we refer to as "mediated wisdom of experience." We find that brief eudaimonic video clips, compared with similar non-eudaimonic clips, increase acceptance of delayed rewards (i.e., reduced delay discounting, which has been found to be associated with maturity and negatively associated with risky and unsafe behavior in prior research), indirectly via the impact of these clips on poignant responses. In contrast, being emotionally moved showed an indirect path leading to decreased acceptance of delayed rewards, whereas moral elevation had no mediating effect.

Keywords

narrative, emotion, delay discounting, eudaimonia, poignancy

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Research in media psychology has generally conceptualized entertainment in hedonic terms—as focused on enjoyment as a primary goal, and as motivated by the pursuit of pleasure (e.g., positive affect) and the diminishment of pain (e.g., negative affect, boredom; Raney, 2006; Zillmann, 2000). Although a great deal of entertainment content and viewer selection arguably conforms to the assumed role of hedonism, more recent research in the humanities and social sciences has increasingly converged with respect to acknowledging the importance of eudaimonic narratives—narratives that provoke exploration of life's meaning, but that may be emotionally or intellectually challenging—in the lives of many (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Oliver & Raney, 2011; Zillmann, 1998). Social scientists have begun to probe, however, the impact eudaimonic narratives may have on their readers and viewers. Kidd and Castano (2013), for example, recently demonstrated the short-term impact of reading literary short stories on measures of theory of mind—the capacity to empathetically understand the emotions and worldview of others, and Rieger and colleagues (2015) have shown that eudaimonic narratives can reduce avoidant and compensatory responses associated with mortality salience.

In the present study, we propose that the experience of eudaimonic narrative can stimulate an awareness of the fragility, finiteness, and preciousness of life that most often otherwise comes only through age and experience. In particular, we argue that portrayal of loss, tragedy, and disappointment as well as happier outcomes that occur over the life course characterizes much eudaimonic narrative. Portrayals of life's joys, regrets, and disappointments give rise to poignant emotions—the mixed joy and sadness arising from the recognition of life and love being precious, fragile, and transitory. This poignant recognition, we believe, is a perspective consistent with maturity, experience, and successful aging—and can be induced through the experience of eudaimonic narrative. We propose that the poignant emotions arising in response to a eudaimonic narrative can lead to outcomes associated with maturity, such as greater capacity to accept limitation, disappointment, and death (per findings by Rieger et al., 2015) and willingness to delay gratification, the dependent variable that is the focus of the present study. In so doing, we also distinguish poignancy from other responses to eudaimonic narrative, such as moral elevation. We refer to this argument in brief as mediated wisdom of experience.

This theoretical argument draws on research by psychologists examining life-span perspectives, notably Carstensen's socio-emotional selectivity theory or SST (Carstensen, 2006; Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999). We also draw on subsequent research regarding the implications of SST on awareness of limited time horizons (the SST terminology for awareness of the finiteness of life), poignant emotions, and personal priorities and decision making (e.g., Ersner-Hershfield, 2009).

Eudaimonic Versus Non-Eudaimonic Narrative

Our focus in this research is on mediated narratives or stories, in which a person or persons (protagonist or protagonists) are portrayed in sequences of events (beginning, middle, end), thereby engaging the attention and interest of the reader or viewer

(Busselle & Bilandzic, 2008; Green & Brock, 2000). Mediated narratives form the basis of entertainment offerings, with genres such as comedies, romance, action, dramas, and reality programming representing a staple of the media diets of many cinematic and televised audiences (see Nielsen, 2013, 2014). As viewers, we appear to be attracted to narratives that afford opportunities for laughter, amusement, thrills, and adventure. At the same, time, though, a growing body of research in entertainment psychology has begun to recognize a subset of narratives that appeal to viewers or readers not because of the pleasures or thrills they provide, but rather because of the feelings of meaning, insight, or appreciation they convey (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010). These types of more somber or reflective narratives are identified using a variety of terms such as *literary narratives* (Djikic & Oatley, 2014) or *meaningful media* (e.g., Hofer, 2013). However, many scholars have employed the term *eudaimonic* narratives to emphasize that although much media entertainment may provide pleasurable or *hedonic* experiences, they may also afford opportunities to enhance subjective well-being, fulfillment, or *eudaimonic* experiences (Oliver & Raney, 2011). In these instances, the term "eudaimonic" narratives (taken from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Trans. 1931) is employed broadly to refer to narratives that heighten well-being that arises not from base pleasures, but rather from the fulfillment that one has when perceiving insights regarding life purpose, life meanings, and the feelings of flourishing that accompany living a life that embodies virtue (see also Oliver & Bartsch, 2011). Narratives that address such questions, such as purpose in life, the human condition, and human virtues such as kindness, courage, and generosity, are ones that can generally be considered as "eudaimonic." As such, the subjective experience of consuming eudaimonic narratives is not one that focuses primarily on positive affect that is characteristic of enjoyment, but rather on feelings of appreciation that are focused on combinations of cognitive experiences (e.g., contemplativeness, reflection) that may be accompanied by mixed affect or by negative affect in some instances (see Wirth, Hofer, & Schramm, 2012).

Research on the impact of mediated narratives in general has focused on outcomes such as beliefs about the social world (Gerbner, 1998; Shrum & Lee, 2012), positive and negative effects on stereotyping and stigmatization (Chung & Slater, 2013; Mastro, 2009; Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005), and entertainment-education impacts on pro-social outcomes (Singhal, Cody, Rogers, & Sabido, 2004). In contrast, research on eudaimonic narratives has focused largely on explaining why people are drawn to narratives (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Oliver & Raney, 2011). However, researchers have begun to examine distinctive impacts of exposure to eudaimonic narrative, including heightened motivations to be "better persons" or to help others (Oliver, Hartmann, & Woolley, 2012; see Algoe & Haidt, 2009), better ability to cope with awareness of one's mortality (Rieger et al., 2015), and greater ability to adapt to improved scores on assessments of theory of mind, suggesting an increased capacity for empathetic understanding (Kidd & Castano, 2013).

However, distinctive mechanisms for impacts of eudaimonic narratives are still not well understood. Eudaimonic and non-eudaimonic narratives share mechanisms and contingent conditions such as transportation (Green & Brock, 2000) and identification

with characters (Cohen, 2001) that have been extensively examined empirically. Djikic and Oatley (2014) suggest that mental simulation of the experiences of narrative characters could give rise to changes in the self, providing a cognitive explanation of how literary or eudaimonic narratives can influence the self-system. In the present research, we argue that eudaimonic narratives give rise to distinctive responses such as poignant emotions and moral elevation, which can have important impacts on the individual who experiences them.

In the following section, we discuss the relevance and possible impact of poignant emotional responses.

SST, Life Experience, and Poignancy

Appreciation of Life's Fragility: The SST Perspective

SST proposes that the salience of the finiteness of the life span, which SST calls awareness of limited time horizons, influences social goals, notably an increased emphasis on emotional goals and emotional regulation, and encourages "a greater appreciation of the fragility of life" (Carstensen et al., 1999, p. 169). Carstensen and colleagues have shown that this emphasis increases as a function of age, which they attribute to greater awareness of limited time (see Carstensen, 2006; Carstensen et al., 1999, for reviews). However, they also suggest that a variety of life events can temporarily increase such awareness of time horizons, such as the death of a friend, weddings, and graduations, for persons of any age.

Many, perhaps most, extended fictional narratives (e.g., novels, movies, television dramatic series, even short stories) provide a narrative arc that includes dramatic life events that drive the narrative plot. Experimental manipulations such as reminding people about life events such as graduation or seeing places for the last time can induce responses regarding passage of time (Ersner-Hershfield et al., 2008). It seems likely that the portrayals of people's lives and life events in narratives might make life span and time horizons more salient, at least briefly.

Narrative impact on salience of life span and time horizons is certainly of research interest. However, such effects are plausible for eudaimonic and non-eudaimonic narratives, as both may involve dramatic plotlines involving key moments in life history. Here, we are interested in understanding not just mechanisms for the impact of narratives overall, but in understanding how eudaimonic narratives may have distinctive impacts on a person's experience of themselves and the world. To examine this, we begin by discussing poignancy—the mixture of happiness and sadness evoked by contemplation of limited time horizons and life's fragility, and its implications for life perspective and responses to narrative.

Poignancy

The admixture of happiness and sadness, joy and sorrow, is typically referred to as *poignancy.* We find the term apt given its shared roots with a stabbing dagger or

poniard, a term highlighting the ability of such feelings to penetrate one's usual defenses against uncomfortable feelings and realities. We acknowledge debate in the psychological literature regarding how best to conceptualize mixed emotions (Larsen & McGraw, 2014; Larsen, McGraw, & Cacioppo, 2001; Russell & Carroll, 1999). We do not believe it is necessary to take a position as to whether poignancy is an emotion in its own right or, rather, represents the co-occurrence of both happy and sad feelings in response to a real or narrative experience. It seems to us that to argue that only classic discrete emotions can occur in response to an experience, rather than having several emotions arise that may in co-occurring give rise to a distinctive emotional color and hue, may be akin to insisting, like a kindergartner, on drawing human emotional experience only in primary colors. Dillard and Peck (2000) note that a message typically evokes multiple discrete emotions that arise concurrently, and Goodall, Slater, and Myers (2013), following Nabi (2003), demonstrate that feelings of anger and fear elicited by a given message lead to distinctive attitudinal outcomes. These studies, however, focus on distinctive effects of co-occurring discrete emotions, rather than effects of these emotions operating in combination, as is the case for poignancy.

Hershfield (also known as Ersner-Hershfield) claims that poignancy arises from the awareness of limited time horizons, the presence of endings, and reminders of the prospect of loss addressed in SST (Ersner-Hershfield, 2009). Hershfield points out that there are many possible sets of mixed emotional responses (e.g., attraction/repugnance, fear/anger, amusement/dislike). Hershfield argues that we can expect a mixture of happy and sad responses (his definition of poignancy) in response to change and loss, as there is sadness in contemplating the end of valued experiences and relationships, and happiness in appreciating their value. Therefore, poignancy is of particular importance in thinking about life-span issues and in understanding SST.

Ersner-Hershfield, Mikels, Sullivan, and Carstensen (2008) provided experimental evidence of the association of poignancy with endings and change by asking undergraduates in the treatment condition to think of being in a favorite place for the last time (control participants were just asked to recall the favorite place), and by either reminding or not reminding graduating undergraduate students of the ending implied by graduation. In both cases, the treatment condition, unsurprisingly, increased poignant mixed emotion. In a similar study, asking participants to think about past and future increased self-reported sense of meaning in life (Waytz, Hershfield, & Tamir, 2015). Moreover, Adler and Hershfield (2012) provide in a longitudinal study of 47 patients undergoing psychotherapy evidence that poignancy arising in the course of psychotherapy predicted improvement in psychological well-being over time, independent of age or the independent effects of happiness or sadness. This finding suggests that poignancy is a psychologically adaptive response to change and stress.

The importance of mixed affect that is argued to signify poignancy has been noted in extant research in media psychology. For example, Oliver et al. (2012) demonstrated that feelings of elevation in response to meaningful movie experiences were associated with both mixed affect and with unique physiological indicators (e.g., lump in the throat, tears). Likewise, more recently, Bartsch, Kalch, and Oliver (2014) conceptualized the affective state elicited by moving entertainment as a latent variable

that included mixed affect as an indicator (along with feeling moved, moderate levels of arousal, and negative affect). However, while extant scholarship has employed the notion of mixed affect in conceptualizing and operationalizing audience responses to eudaimonic entertainment, it has typically been utilized as an indicator of the larger concept of "meaningful emotion" rather than as a unique affect in its own right and as a mediator of distinctive effects of eudaimonic narratives, as we do here.

Eudaimonic Narrative and Poignancy

We propose that eudaimonic narrative is experienced as meaningful because such narratives support readers and viewers in contemplating that which is normally avoided (Rieger et al., 2015): human mortality, loss, and the fragility of what human beings most deeply treasure. Eudaimonic narratives combine an acknowledgment of time, change, and the fact or possibility of loss with an emphasis on the preciousness of life—of love, of courage, of creative expression, of service. Therefore, eudaimonic narratives, as do other reminders of change, vulnerability, and loss, tend to evoke feelings of happiness as well as feelings of sadness (Oliver, Limperos, Tamul, & Woolley, 2009). The mixture may emphasize happiness with a tincture of sadness, the reverse, or a balance between the two. Conversely, the sadness associated with loss may make the value or preciousness of that which is valued all the more exquisite. In other words, because eudaimonic narratives typically emphasize human life's vulnerabilities, such narratives are likely to give rise to poignancy, with all of the potential that poignancy has for adaptivity to life stresses and a sense of meaning in life:

> **Hypothesis 1:** Eudaimonic narratives will elicit more poignant (mixed happy and sad) responses than comparison narratives.

Narrative, Poignancy, and Discounting of Future Rewards Relative to Immediate Rewards

In this study, we have a particular interest in a specific adaptive or maladaptive response: the discounting of future rewards relative to immediate rewards, often referred to as delay discounting (Kirby & Maraković, 1996). The concept of delay discounting begins with the assumption that a given cash payment is more desirable now than if it is promised later, and that some increase in the payment is needed to persuade someone to take the payment later. The larger the increase required, the greater the delay discounting. Delay discounting is typically assessed by testing the preference for smaller immediate versus larger delayed cash payments; the amount of the differential and the length of the delay varies across items in the measure. For our purposes, it can be useful to think of the opposite of delay discounting: the willingness to postpone immediate gratification for increased rewards later.

This willingness to accept delayed rewards interests us because it is typically related to having a more mature perspective on life and reduced impulsive behavior (Bickel & Marsch, 2001; Bickel, Odum, & Madden, 1999; Reynolds, 2006; Weller,

Cook, Avsar, & Cox, 2008). We are interested in how eudaimonic narrative may elicit poignant responses, which we suggest are associated with a sense of time's passage and life's vulnerability and preciousness, perspectives associated with increased personal maturity. Reduced discounting of future rewards is a more mature perspective (Steinberg et al., 2009). Therefore, if exposure to a eudaimonic narrative can directly or indirectly reduce such discounting, it would seem that eudaimonic narratives can increase maturity in perspective and decision making at least briefly.

So far as we are aware, no research has looked directly at the experience of poignancy and willingness to accept delayed rewards. However, prior research by Hershfield and colleagues does increase our optimism in this regard. They developed a measure that assessed the degree of similarity a respondent perceives between his or her present and future self. A variety of methods were used for increasing present and future self continuity, including aging of avatars (Hershfield et al., 2011). They found that greater continuity (i.e., similarity) between respondents' present and future self resulted in greater willingness to accept delayed rewards (Ersner-Hershfield, Garton, Ballard, Samanez-Larkin, & Knutson, 2009; Ersner-Hershfield, Wimmer, & Knutson, 2009). Conversely, lack of continuity with future self was associated with unethical behavior (Hershfield, Cohen, & Thompson, 2012).

We suspect that the experience of poignancy operates on willingness to accept delayed rewards in a manner parallel to the influence of continuity with future self. In the above studies, continuity with future self appears to be increased by experiences that affirm that time and change happens. As we have discussed above, the emotional response to such experiences is often poignant: sadness at loss, happiness at recollecting and appreciating what one values in life. In that sense, there appear to be parallels between continuity with future self and the eudaimonic narrative experience associated with poignancy: Life has loss as well as joy, what we value passes, and what we are and have now will not remain. If so, we can expect poignancy as a result of exposure to eudaimonic narratives to influence willingness to accept delayed rewards that are comparable to the effects of increasing present-future self continuity:

Hypothesis 2: Eudaimonic narratives will increase willingness to accept delayed rewards relative to non-eudaimonic comparison narratives.

Hypothesis 3: There will be a significant indirect (mediating) path from exposure to the eudaimonic narratives through poignant mixed emotion to increased willingness to accept delayed rewards.

Emotional Versus Instrumental Gains in SST

Research on SST has also examined another outcome, a focus on emotional rather than instrumental priorities, which SST theorists believe to be associated with limited time horizons and maturity (see Carstensen et al., 1999). An example of emotional over instrumental gains would be to place time with family over spending extra time at work, as the former presumably provides emotional support and the latter financial benefit. The logic for this argument is straightforward: When time is limited, the

return on instrumental gains is correspondingly limited, and the relative importance of emotional connection and satisfaction is greater. Carstensen and her colleagues have measured this preference by asking participants if they would prefer spending a dinner or having an extended phone call with a family member, someone they have met recently, or the author of a book on a topic that interests them. Since SST argues that limited time horizons increase priority to emotional gains, and we believe eudaimonic narrative should make limited time horizons more salient, it seems reasonable to suggest that eudaimonic narrative also tends to increase priority to emotional over instrumental gains. Similarly, if poignant responses arise in response to a heightened perception of what is precious and temporary in life, poignancy may provide an indirect path for such an effect:

Hypothesis 4: Eudaimonic narratives will elicit a preference for emotional versus instrumental gains relative to non-eudaimonic comparison narratives.
Hypothesis 5: There will be a significant indirect (mediating) path from exposure to the eudaimonic narratives through poignant mixed emotion to a preference for emotional over instrumental gains.

Accounting for Other Responses to Eudaimonic Narrative

Other distinctive responses to eudaimonic narrative should be taken into account when studying the impact of poignancy. In previous research, such responses were part of the concept of *meaningful affect* (Oliver et al., 2012). One such response is moral elevation. Moral elevation is other-praising emotion that refers to the affective response arising from viewing other people engaging in morally virtuous acts such as displaying kindness, generosity, or love (Algoe & Haidt, 2009). Some research suggests that elevation is a frequent audience response to meaningful entertainment, as many forms of entertainment prominently feature characters putting their lives at risk to save others (*Schindler's List*), demonstrating bravery in the face of overwhelming tragedy (*Life is Beautiful*), or showing uncommon acts of love or virtue (e.g., *Gandhi*; Oliver et al., 2012). Effects of moral elevation in response to narrative on values and decision making are potentially of interest in their own right. However, in the present context, moral elevation poses a potential confound in the study of poignancy: if a eudaimonic narrative elicits both poignant responses and moral elevation, we will need to distinguish between the effects of each.

Another potentially confounding response is akin to moral elevation: the perception that a given narrative is emotionally moving or touching. It is likely that a narrative that evokes a poignant response will be experienced as emotionally moving, so they are likely to be correlated. However, a sweetly sentimental or saccharine story may be emotionally moving, but not poignant. Therefore, distinguishing such responses should provide conceptual and empirical clarity.

Finally, poignancy is conceptualized here, following Ersner-Hershfield (2008), as a mixture of happy and sad response. Moral elevation has aspects presumably of

positive affect overall (though it may be accompanied by poignant responses such as tears or a lump in the throat). In each case, to more cleanly assess their impact, controlling for effects of a range of positive and negative discrete emotions overall is likely a sound strategy.

For the purposes of examining our hypotheses regarding poignancy, these all can be considered statistical control issues. However, from the broader perspective of understanding responses to eudaimonic narratives, the relationships among these variables, and how best to operationalize and analyze them, are important theoretical and methodological questions. In particular, examining moral elevation is of interest, as moral elevation is often to be expected after the experience of at least some types of eudaimonic narrative:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the relations between indicators of overall positive and negative affective responses, meaningful affective responses, and poignancy, and are they consistent with our arguments concerning moral elevation as separate from but related to both positive responses and poignancy? How best might we operationalize moral elevation?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): Does moral elevation also provide an indirect path to effects of eudaimonic narratives on acceptance of delayed rewards and on preference for emotional versus instrumental interactions? If so, what is the nature of this relationship?

Method

We conducted a between-subjects experiment using four brief eudaimonic video clips and four control clips of similar length and topic. Measured variables included delay discounting (conversely and more intuitively, as we will refer to it here, willingness to accept delayed rewards), poignant emotional responses, positive and negative emotional responses, and responses indicating meaningful affect (Oliver et al., 2012).

Participants

A total of 167 people participated via the Internet. The participants gained access to the experiment via MTurk and were compensated with US$0.75. Among this sample, nine participants gave an incorrect response on a response validity/attention check question and were excluded from our data analysis. The remaining 158 participants (90 women) were between 19 and 73 years old ($M = 37.18$; $SD = 12.65$).

Experimental Stimuli

Comparison of eudaimonic versus non-eudaimonic narratives experimentally poses a variety of challenges. The qualities that make a narrative eudaimonic seem to be intrinsic to plot and characterization, and we have not at least yet found a satisfactory way to experimentally manipulate this characteristic. Therefore, we have sought to

identify eudaimonic narratives that were brief enough to use in an experimental design using online resources, for which we could find similar narratives in length and topic that did not have the apparent eudaimonic qualities.

The selection of videos to represent eudaimonic considerations was based on the narrative qualities discussed in extant research (e.g., Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Oliver & Raney, 2011), namely, videos were selected that represented such qualities as human virtue, emotional contexts, human connection, and contemplative scenarios. Because we were interested in comparing eudaimonic narratives with non-eudaimonic content, our task was to select stimulus materials in such a way as to address the limitless number of confounds that undoubtedly exists between eudaimonic and non-eudaimonic examples. Consequently, we opted to employ selective stimulus sampling, with each eudaimonic video matched by a non-eudaimonic video that shared potentially relevant variables (e.g., context, ethnicity/gender/age of characters, video format). The resulting stimulus materials consisted of four eudaimonic narratives and four non-eudaimonic narratives that were each represented by a news story, an advertisement, a short narrative, and a movie trailer.

For the news story, the eudaimonic narrative featured a middle-school football team that banded together to let a disabled classmate score a touchdown (201 seconds), whereas the non-eudaimonic narrative feature the effects of a drought on hampering a high-school football team's ability to play (178 seconds). The eudaimonic advertisement was for Google, and focused on a father's record of his daughter's childhood (91 seconds); the non-eudaimonic advertisement was also for Google (91 seconds), though it focused only on the advantages of its search engine. The eudaimonic narrative (182 seconds) was an Asian-produced commercial message that focused on a man who helps an impoverished little boy, only to be saved in a health crisis 30 years later by the boy who became a surgeon. The non-eudaimonic narrative (254 seconds) featured the perils and pains of procrastination, also produced in Asia. The eudaimonic movie trailer (107 seconds) used user-generated home videos to show the common connections of love, hope, and fear among people throughout the world; the non-eudaimonic movie trailer (134 seconds) featured a cross-word puzzle conference. Although the eudaimonic videos were generally slightly shorter than the non-eudaimonic videos, we reasoned that this difference in length would represent a more conservative test of our hypotheses.

Measured Variables

Consistent with the suggestion of O'Keefe (2003), a measure of meaningful affect in response to the narrative is used to assess eudaimonia (as a manipulation validity check) and also to serve as a mediator—for we theorize that the nature of the personal response to eudaimonic narratives mediates the impact of these narratives on outcomes such as willingness to accept delayed rewards. We do the same for poignancy, but do not regard that measure as a manipulation check, as it has not been previously established as an indicator of responses to eudaimonic narratives.

Meaningful affect, being emotionally moved, and being inspired/elevated. We initially used items employed in previous research to assess whether audience members for a

narrative considered the experience a personally meaningful or eudaimonic one, for the purpose of the manipulation check. These items were based on prior research examining meaningful affect in response to media (e.g., Oliver et al., 2012; Oliver & Raney, 2011), and included the items *emotional, moved, touched, tender, compassionate, meaningful, inspired*, and *introspective* ($M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.81$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$).

We then, per RQ1, looked more closely at the factor analyses and conducted confirmatory factor analysis, looking at the meaningful affect items in combination with the positive and negative affect items (see below) and poignancy. While the pattern matrix, using Direct Oblimin, was consistent with how these items have been used in prior research, the structure matrix was more complex. A confirmatory factor analysis of the structure as used in prior research showed unsatisfactory fit, unless error terms between several indicators of meaningful affect ("inspired" and "meaningful") were correlated with positive affect, and an indicator of positive affect ("joyful") was correlated with meaningful affect; such cross-loadings made the model inherently difficult to interpret.

We considered the pattern found and realized that the data were pointing us to a promising conceptual distinction. These responses, which in prior research (Oliver et al., 2012; Oliver & Raney, 2011) had been combined, could be conceptualized as being of two kinds: being emotionally touched and moved ("touched," "moved," "emotional," "tender," "compassionate") and being elevated ("inspired," "meaningful"); the indicator "introspective" was dropped because its error correlated with items from being moved and touched, being elevated, and positive affect. Likewise, overall positive emotional responses produced a cleaner model when the terms *joyful* and *excited* were removed. Joy has an obvious relation to inspiration as well as overall positive responses, and the same double-loading was found for excitement. When this was rerun accordingly (and a few error terms within the "emotionally moved" construct correlated, between items such as "touched" and "moved" that seemed particularly strongly linked), the measurement model proved a very good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 36.68$, $df = 35$, n.s.; goodness-of-fit index [GFI] = .964, comparative fit index [CFI] = .999, root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .017).

Therefore, our conceptualization and operationalization of meaningful affective responses was adapted accordingly, as having two dimensions. We constructed a measure of being emotionally moved (*touched, moved, emotional, compassionate, tender*, with "touched" and "moved" having the highest loadings); Cronbach's alpha was .95, $M = 3.87$, $SD = 1.96$. We also constructed a measure for the second dimension, elevation (*inspired, meaningful*), with a Cronbach's alpha of .83, $M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.92$. Conceptually, we interpret this as suggesting that meaningful affect involves both an elevating sense of inspiration and meaning, and a variety of sympathetic emotional responses such as being moved and feeling tender and compassionate, and will look at these separately in testing hypotheses.

Poignancy. We followed Ersner-Hershfield et al. (2008) in defining poignancy as the presence of both happy and sad emotional responses (his work suggested that the co-occurrence of happiness and sadness was more predictive of outcomes of interest than

other combinations of positively and negatively valenced emotions). Following Ersner-Hershfield's practice, we computed poignancy as the minimum of responses to the extent to which the person felt happy and the extent to which he or she felt sad viewing the videos (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). In other words, the score on poignancy was the lowest of the respondent's rating of feeling happy or of feeling sad while watching the video: If happy was 6 and sad was 2, the poignancy score was 2. If they were both 2, the poignancy score was 2. If happy was 5 and sad was 4, the poignancy score was 4. If sad was 5 and happy 4, the poignancy score was also 4.

Positive and negative emotional responses to the video. Because it seemed likely that any effects of poignancy and meaningful affect might be confounded with the positive valence associated with the criteria used for these concepts, and to control for differences in valence of response to the treatment versus comparison videos, we created an index of other positively valenced emotions respondents reported feeling while watching the video (*cheerful, happy, upbeat*, 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). The Cronbach's alpha was .91, $M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.75$. As noted above, we dropped the term *joyful* because of its shared relation to elevation. The questionnaire further included items on negative emotional responses to the video (in addition to *sad*, these items were *angry, disgusted, gloomy, scared, depressed*, and *melancholy*). The items again went with the 7-point scale ranging from 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$, $M = 1.56$, $SD = 0.89$).

Appreciation and enjoyment. Connecting to prior research in the field (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010), we asked participants how they evaluated the film clip regarding *appreciation* (*meaningful, moving, thought provoking*) and *enjoyment* (*fun, entertaining, a good time*, 1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*). For appreciation, the Cronbach's alpha was .90, $M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.82$; for enjoyment, the Cronbach's alpha was .94, $M = 4.43$, $SD = 1.82$.

Willingness to accept delayed rewards. This variable is normally referred to (reversed) as delay discounting, or the requirement for greater rewards to accept a delay. We are interested in the willingness to accept delayed rewards, and have coded the direction of the variable accordingly. Kirby and Maraković (1996) used 21 forced choice items, systematically varying how many days a small payoff would be delayed and how much more would be received if the participant would be willing to wait. Many of the items had highly skewed response patterns because the delay was relatively long and the additional payoff very small, or conversely the delay was short and payoff for the delay relatively very large. To reduce the length of the measure, we eliminated the 10 items with the greatest skew as reported in the early study (Kirby & Maraković, 1996). The 11 items included in our study were scored 1 if the immediate award was chosen and 2 if the delayed reward option was chosen, and an average score was constructed (Cronbach's $\alpha = .95$; $M = 1.32$, $SD = 0.37$).

Emotional versus instrumental need preference. We used two items previously used by Carstensen et al. (1999) in which participants were asked to choose with whom they

would most want to spend some time talking on the phone/have dinner. Three options were provided: a close family member (the clearly emotionally relevant choice), a person they had recently met and had much in common with, and the author of a book on a topic that interested them (the clearly instrumental choice). Only 10% to 15% of the participants selected the instrumental choice. Both items were recoded as dichotomous measures: the family member (scored 1) versus other choices (scored 0). The scores for both variables were averaged, resulting in a mean of 0.52 ($SD = 0.43$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .67$).

Results

Manipulation Check

The high eudaimonic videos elicited higher scores of meaningful affect ($M = 5.24$, $SD = 1.22$) than the low eudaimonic videos, $M = 2.50$, $SD = 1.13$, $F(1, 150) = 228.85$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .60$. They further yielded more feelings of appreciation ($M = 5.90$, $SD = 1.10$) than the low eudaimonic videos, $M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.52$, $F(1, 150) = 133.91$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .47$. Both effects were large in size and provide support for our manipulation.

Our two conditions (low vs. high eudaimonic videos) were realized by including videos from four different genres (news story, advertisement, short narrative, movie trailer). We did not expect that the effects of our eudaimonia manipulation would differ between the four genres. In line with this assumption, ANOVAs with eudaimonia and genre as predictors showed no significant interaction effects for meaningful affect or appreciation, Fs(3, 150) < 2.2, $p > .18$. Moreover, the effects for accepting delayed rewards, poignancy, and emotionally moved did not differ significantly, Fs(3, 150) < 2.4, $p > .07$. The ANOVA with elevation as the dependent variable yielded a significant interaction, $F(3, 150) = 3.2$, $p = .024$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$; however, for all genres the elevation scores were significantly and substantially larger in the high versus the low eudaimonia condition (all ps < .001, for the simple main effects).

Main Analyses

Measurement issues related to overall positive responses, meaningful affect, and poignancy (RQ1). Our decision to distinguish meaningful affective responses into being emotionally moved and being elevated is explained above. Poignancy is unrelated to positive affect and to several of the items used to operationalize meaningful affective responses, such as feeling inspired. Poignancy has a modest but statistically significant correlation ($.2 < r < .25$) with items used to operationalize the emotionally moved dimension of meaningful affect such as being moved, touched, tender, and compassionate. These modest correlations suggesting that these responses are related to poignancy yet are conceptually distinct. Conceptual clarity for being emotionally moved and for poignancy is preserved when each is used to control for the other.

Response differences in poignancy between high and low eudaimonic videos. Poignancy scores were rather low in all conditions (as one might expect given the use of minima

to create the variable), but participants in the high-eudemonia condition reported more poignancy ($M = 1.56$, $SD = 0.98$) than participants in the low-eudemonia condition, $M = 1.29$, $SD = 0.68$, $F(1, 150) = 4.72$, $p = .031$, $\eta_p^2 = .031$, consistent with Hypothesis 1.

Other response differences between high and low eudaimonic videos. Additional main effects for the video condition were obtained for positive affect and enjoyment. The eudaimonic videos were accompanied by more positive affect ($M = 4.71$, $SD = 1.46$) and enjoyment ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.53$) than the control videos, $M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.84$, $F(1, 150) = 26.30$, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = .149$, and $M = 4.21$, $SD = 2.05$, $F(1, 150) = 5.60$, $p = .019$, $\eta_p^2 = .036$. Therefore, positive affect and enjoyment were used as statistical controls in subsequent analyses.

Effects of eudaimonic narratives on outcome measures. The video treatment had no main effect on willingness to accept delayed rewards when tested in an analysis of variance (Hypothesis 2). However, consistent with Hypothesis 3 and addressing RQ2, an analysis of mediation effects (PROCESS; Hayes, 2013) yielded significant indirect effects of the treatment on willingness to accept delayed rewards via poignancy and being emotionally moved (Figure 1), controlling for overall positive emotion, negative emotion, and enjoyment.

These variables were run in a single model for the several reasons. Conceptually, as noted earlier, there is potential overlap between meaningful affective responses (being emotionally moved and elevated/inspired) and poignancy; it is necessary to run them together in the same model in order to control for this overlap and identify unique results. Positive emotional responses and enjoyment were controlled because the videos differed by condition on these variables, to avoid confounding the desired comparison (eudaimonia). It was also conceptually important, in examining RQ2, to control for positive emotional responses and poignancy in assessing meaningful affective responses. By controlling for these two variables, we can better assess the construct of interest apart from simply feeling good on one hand, and the experience of poignant feelings on the other. We also, as described, used both the dimensions of being emotionally moved and being elevated/inspired in the model, so they could control for one another. Finally, the measure of negative emotional responses was also included as a control, as otherwise indirect effects of poignancy might be attributed to incorporating to some extent the presence of negative affect in the model.

Supporting Hypothesis 3, the eudaimonic videos elicited higher poignancy (as reported above) that was *positively* related to a preference for the delayed option, indirect effect coefficient = .027, $SE = .016$, 95% confidence interval, CI [0.0034, 0.067]. The eudaimonic videos also resulted in participants being more emotionally moved and more elevated/inspired. Being more emotionally moved was *negatively* related to a preference for the delayed option, indirect effect coefficient = −.19, $SE = .09$, 95% CI [−0.369, −0.125]. The inspiration/elevation dimension did not provide an indirect path for eudaimonic videos to influence acceptance of delayed rewards, indirect effect coefficient = −.06, $SE = .055$, 95% CI [−0.187, 0.043].

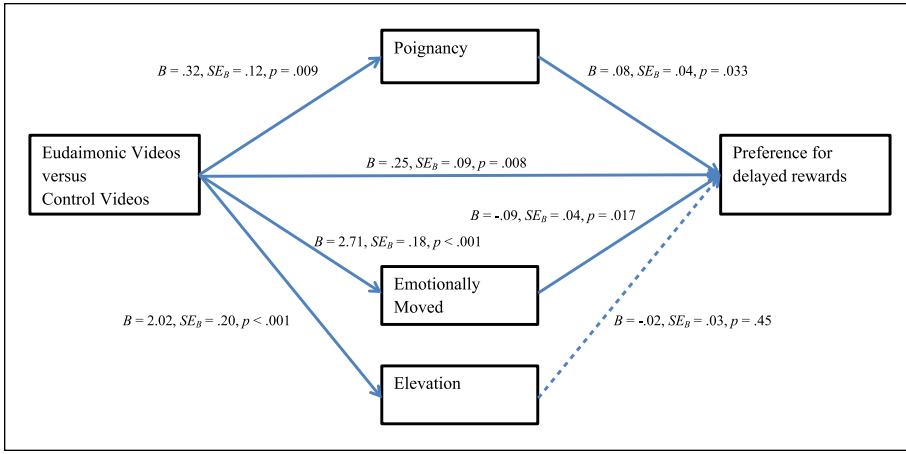

Figure 1. Results of the bootstrapping procedure.
Note. Path coefficients in the model when overall positive emotion, negative emotion, and enjoyment are controlled.

The net direct effect (treatment effect controlled for both mediation pathways and covariates) was significant as well, indicating that the eudaimonic video clips led to a higher preference for the delayed option, direct effect coefficient = .235, SE = .09, p = .01, 95% CI [0.056, 0.415]. The main effect of eudaimonic videos on acceptance of delayed rewards in this path analysis (including control for positive, negative, elevated, moving, poignant, and enjoyable response, unlike the previously reported ANOVA) was consistent with Hypothesis 2, suggesting mixed support for that prediction.

We recognize the possible concern that the dimensions of being emotionally moved and being elevated are to some extent collinear and might result in peculiar or distorted findings. We also ran them together in the PROCESS model, in the more conventional composite measure of meaningful affective responses, and found essentially the same results. Eudaimonic videos had a positive indirect effect on willingness to accept delayed rewards through poignancy, indirect effect coefficient = .03, SE = .016, 95% CI [0.005, 0.067], and a negative one through meaningful affect, indirect effect coefficient = −.24, SE = .06, 95% CI [−0.34, −0.12], again with positive and negative affect and enjoyment controlled. The overall negative effect through the composite meaningful affect measure is to be expected given that the majority of items in that measure belong to the emotionally moved dimension, not the inspired/elevated component that had no significant indirect effect.

There was no evidence for effects on the measure of emotional versus instrumental gains (Carstensen et al., 1999); Hypotheses 4 and 5 were not supported.

Discussion

These results indicate that the high eudaimonic videos triggered two opposing processes. On the one hand, the eudaimonic videos elicited stronger feelings of poignancy

that in turn contributed to a stronger preference for delayed rewards, as predicted given our argument, following the work of Hershfield and colleagues, that poignancy is related to perception of limited time horizons, leading to an increased willingness to postpone immediate gratification for more modestly greater future reward. Moreover, with the various intervening responses controlled, the net effect of the eudaimonic videos was to increase willingness to accept the delayed rewards (i.e., to reduce delay discounting, to use the more familiar but less intuitive term).

On the other hand, the eudaimonic videos elicited a sense of being emotionally moved (measured by items such as feeling touched or moved) and moral elevation (which we are operationally defining here as being inspired and finding the narrative meaningful). Being emotionally moved was in turn related to a lower preference for the delayed option. It appears to us that the experience of being emotionally moved has a euphoric quality above and beyond the simple positively valenced emotions such as being happy or cheerful while watching the video. It may be that when one controls for moral elevation and poignancy, what remains is only the sentimental component of being moved or touched. Being elevated, unlike being emotionally moved, did not reduce preference for the delayed reward. This difference provides evidence for the value of discriminating between being emotionally moved on one hand and being elevated on the other, advancing the conceptual work on affective responses related to meaningfulness in prior work (e.g., Oliver et al., 2012; Oliver & Raney, 2011).

It seems there is an intriguing inherent tension between being emotionally moved and poignant responses to the narrative, despite the modest positive correlational relationship between them. Being emotionally moved probably feels better; poignancy is bittersweet. Poignancy seems to have an impact on decision making that is reflective of greater maturity. This effect does not seem to be readily explainable as being due to more negative mood, as the finding held up with negative emotional responses incorporated as a control in the model.

Being emotionally moved, once the poignant element is removed, may be left as a sentimental or saccharine response. It may be that such a sentimental response leads to moral licensing—the sense that one can forgo "doing the right thing" because of vicarious virtuous acts (e.g., Sachdeva, Iliev, & Medin, 2009). In other words, because one has such sweet, good feelings, one may infer that one has done some good things and can therefore can justify indulgence or reward. In this case, the indulgence or reward would be taking the immediate payoff at a modest sacrifice to future good.

Our findings seem to suggest that being emotionally moved may cancel out the effects of poignancy on acceptance of delayed rewards in response to eudaimonic narrative. We hesitate about generalizing from our findings in this study, however, in that regard. The constraint of selecting very short videos came at a sacrifice of narrative complexity and character development. There was relatively little opportunity to develop the more nuanced emotional response characteristic of poignancy, as suggested by our low mean scores for poignancy. The videos were in fact generally upbeat and uplifting, though with some content that would tend to evoke sadness. It may well be that for narratives higher in poignancy, the overall effects would be dominated by poignancy rather than being emotionally moved or elevated. We intend to examine this

possibility in future research. We believe that the distinction we make here between being emotionally moved, elevation, and poignancy as responses to eudaimonic narrative, and their distinct impacts, has the potential to substantially advance theoretical understanding of how eudaimonic narratives are experienced, and the likely sequelae of that experience.

It would also be of interest to test the extent to which resonance (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980) or personal relevance (Petty, Cacioppo, & Goldman, 1981) of the eudaimonic narrative might strengthen effects. A narrative focusing on loss of a family member might be particularly powerful for someone who has had that experience in the not-too-distant past; a lost romance is likely to be especially poignant for one who has recently been struggling with romantic disappointments.

This study also represents a first effort to explore a conceptualization and operationalization of being emotionally moved and elevated as meaningful affective responses apart from overall positive affect and poignancy. We would suggest, based on our examination of these data, some modification of the meaningful affect measure to better capture the elevation dimension. Only two terms were used as indicators: feeling inspired and that the experience was meaningful. Additional terms, such as "uplifted" and "elevated," might strengthen the ability of the measure to capture variance associated with the construct of elevation. If poignancy is controlled along with overall positive affect, and the additional items added, then the measures, it seems to us, would become an increasingly strong operationalization of the construct of meaningful affect, with its dimensions of being emotionally moved and being elevated.

Another limitation is the inability to directly manipulate eudaimonia, a challenge we share with others who have compared eudaimonic and non-eudaimonic narratives (e.g., Kidd & Castano, 2013). The development of viable manipulations would substantially strengthen research in this domain. While we took care to find comparable videos in each condition, used several videos in each condition, and statistically controlled for response differences we did find, this approach to operationalizing eudaimonia inevitably raises the possibility of differences associated with the videos other than eudaimonic qualities affecting outcomes. However, use of four narrative videos from different genres (entertainment, news, and advertising) increases confidence in the robustness of these findings. Moreover, these videos were very short, and eudaimonic movies and books are typically long and immersive; the fact that we were able to find support for key predictions in these very brief stimuli is encouraging.

The findings also suggest that poignancy provides a partial but incomplete explanation of the effects of eudaimonic narrative on acceptance of delayed rewards. Recall that in the full model, there was a significant direct effect of the eudaimonic narrative on such acceptance after controlling for positive and negative affect, enjoyment, being emotionally moved and elevated, and poignancy. Therefore, future studies would be well served by examining mediating processes suggested by our arguments and by SST but not examined here. In particular, Hershfield and colleagues' work on present/future self continuity, and its relationship with decision making, comes to mind. This could readily be tested by measuring present/future self continuity in response to eudaimonic narratives, which we hope in due course to examine. This variable

provides an indicator of an impact of eudaimonic narratives on the perception of limited time horizons consistent with SST.

We did not obtain significant results for the emotional versus instrumental gains outcome variable used in some SST studies (see Carstensen, 2006, for a review). In retrospect, this is unsurprising, as few respondents in either condition selected the instrumental choice. Moreover, the instrumental choice was the author of a book—in the context of studies of eudaimonic narrative, choosing the author of a narrative may hardly be considered as necessarily meeting instrumental rather than emotional needs. Future research might explore alternative measures of this outcome.

This study makes an additional contribution to the growing literature suggesting that eudaimonic narratives can have a profound impact on their audiences, from strengthening theory of mind (Fong, Mullin, & Mar, 2013; Kidd & Castano, 2013) to helping audiences confront thoughts of death without resorting to non-constructive coping behaviors (Rieger et al., 2015). These findings begin to open a window on some of the complexities of response to eudaimonic narrative, including being moved emotionally, inspiration and elevation, being cheered or saddened, and poignancy. More importantly, our results provide initial evidence suggesting that eudaimonic narratives, by giving rise to poignant emotion, can influence recipients in the direction of more mature forms of decision making. This finding provides encouraging initial support regarding our proposal regarding the mediated wisdom of experience via poignant responses. Whether this theoretical argument survives further tests, including examining other outcomes and using other narrative stimuli, remains subject to the wisdom of empirical experience yet to come.

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