An Examination of Alcohol Use Disorder Among the Characters of Patricia Highsmith

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ABSTRACT

Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD) is a chronic disease with specific traits that connect to behavior, psychology, and physiology. This disease is especially prevalent among those within creative professions, which prompted further study into the effects of AUD on an alcoholic's creative work. An examination of the incorporation of AUD within a female alcoholic author's work, particularly through the lens of Patricia Highsmith's fictional characters, to cope with behaviors associated with AUD has yet to be accomplished, leading to this study's purpose. A content analysis was conducted utilizing four indicating behaviors of AUD–codependency, neuroticism, binge drinking, and alcoholic terminology usage–that served as coding categories for 30 short stories analyzed. Data analysis showed that AUD was noticeably projected onto the fictional characters of Patricia Highsmith, with a total of 270 indicators identified. Implicit indicators–codependency and neuroticism–were projected within general written situations, and explicit indicators–binge drinking and alcoholic terminology usage–were projected within written situations that naturally trigger alcoholic behavior. Thus, it was suggested that AUD was projected onto the fictional characters of Patricia Highsmith in varying ways so as to cope with her alcoholic tendencies.

Introduction

14.5 million people aged 12 and older have been diagnosed with alcohol use disorder (AUD) as of 2019 in the United States alone; this statistic can be further broken down by sex, with 9.0 million men and 5.5 million women classified as having AUD (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022). Within the millions of people affected by AUD exists a set of common symptoms that indicate this disorder. These symptoms can be categorized as physical, social, psychological, and hereditary, making AUD difficult to define. However, Flavin and Morse (1991) encapsulate these factors with the following definition:

> [AUD] is a primary, chronic disease with genetic, psychosocial, and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestations…It is characterized by continuous or periodic impaired control over drinking, preoccupation with the drug alcohol, use of alcohol despite adverse consequences, and distortions in thinking, mostly denial.

Considering the vastness of those affected by AUD and the severity of the symptoms described, the importance of research in the field of alcohol use cannot be understated.

Gap in the Research

Despite the existence of thousands of journal articles relating to alcohol use, there is considerably less investigation within the subtopic of female alcoholics. More studies are inquiring about the statistical differences between male and

female alcoholics and the correlation between gender roles and the manifestation of AUD, offering broad information on the topic of discussion (Mulia & Bensley, 2020; Oprea et al., 2022). The small number of studies that offer a more focused view of both female and male alcoholics, such as through the lens of employment as a creative, often fail to account for the disparities experienced solely by women in specific creative professions (Rawat et al., 2021; Thomas & Duke, 2007). Moreover, specific creative professions, namely authorship, and the alcoholic have been briefly and unsystematically analyzed through the writings of male alcoholics, leaving an absence of literature surrounding a systematic analysis of the effect of AUD on a female alcoholic's writings (Djos, 1995). Thus, the systematic evaluation, or content analysis, and examination of AUD within the writings of a specific female alcoholic author will be best achieved with the following guiding question: How are the traits of codependency, neuroticism, and excessive alcohol consumption projected onto the fictional characters of Patricia Highsmith to cope with her alcoholic tendencies? The results of this study are anticipated to bring further understanding to the relatively neglected field of alcohol use among women by evaluating the effects and circumstances surrounding AUD and an author's work.

Literature Review

AUD and Women

Within the increasing sum of literature regarding AUD and women, there exists a clear consensus that the female alcoholic and the male alcoholic are physically and socially differentiated. Though numerous factors create differences within individuals diagnosed with AUD, it would be out of the scope of this study to discuss all factors in detail. Nevertheless, sex is an important factor in both an alcoholic's physical experience, where women display higher rates of morbidity and mortality, and an alcoholic's psychosocial experience, where women encounter greater social stigma and differing circumstances relating to the development of AUD (Oprea et al., 2022). A study conducted by Mulia and Bensley (2020) elaborates on the physical experiences among alcoholic women, explaining that women are more susceptible to health issues related to AUD despite the tendency of women to consume less alcohol than men. Liver cirrhosis and acute alcohol intoxication are two examples of fatal conditions to which women hold the highest susceptibility (Mulia & Bensley, 2020). A similar study conducted by Guinle and Sinha (2020) investigates the psychosocial effects of alcohol use among women, contending that alcoholic women undergo differing social and behavioral issues as compared to their male counterparts. Regarding the onset of AUD, women are likely to endure specific stressors, such as childhood sexual abuse and violent victimization, which lead to a rapid and compulsive descent into AUD; after the development of AUD, alcoholic women reported greater stress-provoked sadness, anxiety, and body sensations compared to men (Guinle & Sinha, 2020). The physical and psychosocial experiences discussed typically require professional treatment to address.

Although the development of AUD culminates in the need for specialized rehabilitation services, there is still perceptible neglect of physical and psychosocial information regarding female alcoholics within these services. To elaborate, these services tend to lack adequate and specialized treatment techniques for women, displaying the general misunderstanding of women with AUD (Alvanzo et al., 2014; Pinedo et al., 2020). By considering the physical and psychosocial distinction between alcoholic men and women and the absence of this information within rehabilitation services, the necessity of further female-oriented research on the topic of AUD is explicit.

AUD and the Female Creative

It has been shown that alcoholic women and men are differentiated within the realm of physical and psychosocial behavior, yet the specific effects of these behaviors on varying aspects of a female alcoholic's lifestyle are imperative to explore. Considering that occupational roles determine one's lifestyle, narrowed research regarding the effects of AUD on a woman's career is relevant for analysis. A set of researchers studying AUD and occupational participation

found that alcohol abuse affects a woman's ability to engage in normal occupational activities, namely socializing and maintaining responsibilities (Rawat et al., 2021). Bush and Lipari (2016) further link specific industries to AUD, finding that those involved in "accommodations and food services," "construction," and "arts" displayed the highest rates of past year substance abuse. The arts, specifically, maintains the stereotype of "the mad artist," as authors, painters, vocalists, etc., are presumed to have psychiatric disorders, namely depression and anxiety (Thomas & Duke, 2007). Further connecting artists to alcohol abuse, psychiatric disorders often co-occur with, contribute to, or result from AUD (Shivani et al., 2002). The discussed physical and psychosocial behavior exhibited with AUD can be easily examined within the works of an author, particularly due to the accessibility of their artistic medium. Dick (2014), Irwin (1987), and Djos (1995) explore alcoholism either within a novel or regarding the male novelist; the former unsystematically describes the focus of AUD within a novel written by Ernest Hemingway, while the latter two contemplate the significance of AUD surrounding F. Scott Fitzgerald's writing process. Though general information on the impact of AUD on an author's career is known through the lens of a male alcoholic, there is a complete absence of literature regarding the female lens of this same topic.

Impact of Lived Experiences on Creative Works

To justify an exploration into the effects of AUD on the writings of a female alcoholic, the relationship between lived experience and creative work must be established. This is because lived experiences of any significance or connotation can affect creative work, either intentionally or unintentionally (Hatavara et al., 2017). However, Yankov (2012) observes that traumatic experiences often have the most potent impact on creative work, specifically writings; discussed in the article is the term "narrative fetishism," which refers to the idea that one may have an inability to express trauma through oral communication, leading to the integration of trauma and writings. Numerous studies have similarly found writing to be a coping mechanism for those experiencing anxiety and depression in an attempt to overcome emotional inhibition or suppression (Harvard Health Publishing, 2021; Kasi et al., 2012). These conclusions are true for both amateur and professional writers who are enduring trauma. Thomas and Duke (2007) are some of the first researchers to explore how established authors inadvertently use this coping strategy to deal with mental illness, namely depression. Cognitive distortions, an indicator of depression, were quantified within the works of both depressed and non-depressed authors, where depressed writers displayed high rates of cognitive distortions (Thomas & Duke, 2007). Due to the status of AUD as a mental illness, it is reasonable to conclude that indicators associated with AUD are likely to be found within the writings of an alcoholic author attempting to cope.

Currently, the potential presence of traits associated with AUD within a female alcoholic author's writing has been considered, yet little research regarding how the presence of these traits is identified is known. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), an alcohol abuse rehabilitation program, invites members to recount their experiences with alcohol abuse, with many describing particular behavior that AUD incited (Palm, 2021; Strobbe & Kurtz, 2012). Many alcoholic authors who are unaffiliated with AA utilize this coping technique inadvertently by projecting common AUD traits onto fictional characters. For instance, Irwin (1987) explains how F. Scott Fitzgerald's characters mirrored alcoholic behavior and traits that Fitzgerald was known to have exhibited. Therefore, the presence of AUD within a female author's writing can be measured by quantifying indicators, such as alcoholic traits, that are present among the characters within a novel–much like the content analysis conducted in Thomas and Duke's (2007) study of depressed authors.

Indicators of AUD

For this study, the term "indicator" refers to a specific trait that confirms the existence and allows for the quantification of a specific phenomenon throughout the text being analyzed. Within the context of AUD, alcohol abuse can cause personality trait changes in adulthood, increasing extraversion and decreasing emotional stability (Hakulinen & Jokela, 2019). Due to these personality trait changes, four distinct indicator types enable a content analysis of AUD

among the fictional characters of female alcoholics. The first indicator is codependency, addictive behavior that is characterized as "differentiation of self, self-sacrifice, external locus of control, interpersonal conflict and control and emotional constraint" (Bacon et al., 2021). The purpose of this indicator is to identify AUD in relationships between characters, as codependency is an external trait. The second indicator of AUD is neuroticism, defined as the "trait disposition to experience negative [e]ffects, including anger, anxiety, self consciousness, irritability, emotional instability, and depression" and characterized by a lack of concrete thoughts and emotions (Lyvers et al., 2019; Widiger & Oltmanns, 2017). The basis of neuroticism is to identify AUD within the character itself, internally, rather than through relationships. The final and most obvious indicators of AUD, which quantify excessive alcohol consumption, are the blatant use of alcoholic terminology and binge drinking, the latter of which is defined as "consuming 5 or more drinks on an occasion for men or 4 or more drinks on an occasion for women" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). These indicators together allow for the identification of implicit and explicit alcoholic behaviors. Overall, the indicators listed provide a method of identifying the effects of AUD on a female alcoholic author's creative work, specifically through her fictional characters.

Potential Authors for Analysis

To analyze the presence of AUD within a female alcoholic author's creative work, a single female author will be chosen based on several factors, including the following: known alcoholic behavior, with no other substances abused; multiple novels or short stories; and at least two biographies written about the author. To clarify, an AUD diagnosis is not a factor due to the period from which many known female alcoholic authors originate, meaning that information on AUD would have been limited. Additionally, alcohol must be the only substance abused by the author to prevent accidental analysis of another substance use disorder. Further justifying these factors, the author must have written multiple novels or short stories so that there is an adequate amount of content for analysis, and the presence of at least two biographies–or autobiographies–assures that there is sufficient information to determine if the author exhibits characteristics of AUD.

Moreover, literature has identified several female alcoholic authors. Laing (2014) lists Anne Sexton, Jane Bowles, Jean Stafford, Marguerite Duras, Elizabeth Bishop, Patricia Highsmith, Dorothy Parker, Jean Rhys, Shirley Jackson, and Carson McCullers as known female alcoholics. Of this list, Patricia Highsmith is the only author that fully meets the criteria mentioned above. Most biographical sources detail Highsmith's dependence on alcohol and behavior associated with AUD (Dale, 2010; Mcdougall, 2022). Furthermore, Green (2021) describes the three biographies detailing Highsmith's occupation as a novelist, having written numerous novels and short stories. Since Patricia Highsmith has been proven to meet the criteria for analysis, this study will be utilizing her creative works for a content analysis pertaining to the presence of AUD in a female alcoholic author's writings.

Methods

The studies presented culminate into a single research question: How are the traits of codependency, neuroticism, and excessive alcohol consumption projected onto the fictional characters of Patricia Highsmith to cope with her alcoholic tendencies? With this study examining the presence of traits associated with AUD in the novels of Patricia Highsmith, an analysis both quantitative and qualitative in nature should be utilized within the methodology. This analysis further serves to test the hypothesis that AUD has a noticeable effect on the writings and characters of a female alcoholic author and that the effect is consistent throughout her writings.

Content Analysis

A commonly used methodology among researchers quantifying and analyzing written works is known as content analysis. For reference, content analysis is defined as "a systematic reading of a body of communication that exists in a given context and is produced, read, heard, viewed, interpreted, and understood by others" (McKibben et al., 2022). Stemler (2015) affirms that practically any work can be examined through content analysis, from linguistic to photographic, yet a literary content analysis will be the focus of this study. To further narrow the methodology, content analysis can be grouped into the categories of quantitative and qualitative. A quantitative content analysis seeks to evaluate terms found within a text to address a specific hypothesis or theory, while a qualitative content analysis seeks to survey and describe a specific theme, often psychological, through some quantification of indicator terms (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2008). Considering the fact that this study is attempting to examine and describe the alcoholic tendencies presented in the fictional characters of Patricia Highsmith, a qualitative content analysis would be the most appropriate method of analysis to answer the guiding question. Moreover, qualitative content analysis can be further broken down into three subsections: conventional, directed, or summative. A conventional content analysis is preferred when studying a phenomenon without preconceived coding indicators; a directed content analysis is preferred when studying a phenomenon with preconceived coding indicators; and a summative content analysis is preferred when studying the conceptual use of terms within a certain work of literature (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Since this study utilizes predetermined indicators–codependency, neuroticism, binge drinking, and blatant terminology associated with AUD–to analyze the impact of AUD on writing, a directed content analysis is preferred.

As for the process of a directed qualitative content analysis, counseling researchers have recounted specific instructions for the adequate use of this methodology. These instructions are outlined in four main steps: "unitizing data for analysis," "sampling units," "recording categories," and "reducing units into categories" (McKibben et al., 2022). First, "unitizing data for analysis" refers to the identification of the type of medium to be studied; "sampling units" refers to the process of choosing what specific writings, for example, will be used for analysis; "recording categories" refers to the creation of indicators of a certain theme; and "reducing units into categories" refers to the actual content analysis, where the researcher is combing through the sampling units using coding indicators. These established guidelines will be utilized within this study to perform an objective content analysis. Further, the study by Thomas and Duke (2007) will be used as an example of these guidelines applied.

Tools for Proper Analysis

Following the guiding studies described above, it is necessary to identify the type of media to be studied, specific examples to be studied within said media, and the indicators of AUD that facilitate analysis. To begin, the type of media has already been specified as literature written by the female alcoholic author Patricia Highsmith. As a result of her many published works, this study will analyze the characters presented in solely short stories due to a limited time frame, limited funds, and needed accessibility. Thus, *The Selected Stories of Patricia Highsmith*, which contains 64 short stories ranging from 2 to 20 pages in length, will be the sampling unit for this study. Furthermore, the indicators of AUD–codependency, neuroticism, binge drinking, and alcoholic terminology–previously defined will aid in the analysis of the selected short stories.

Regarding the additional supplies needed to conduct this analysis, annotation tabs and a coding book are needed. Annotation tabs of four different colors–blue, yellow, pink, and purple–will be used to note any indicators found within each short story, with blue representing codependency, yellow representing neuroticism, pink representing binge drinking, and purple representing alcoholic terminology. Furthermore, any indicators noted with these tabs will be documented in a coding book. In an effort to maintain an objective analysis, the coding book will contain a definition and example of each indicator of AUD for reference during the research process, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Coding Book Reference Definitions and Examples

Indicator	Definition	Example
Codependency	"Differentiation of self, self-sacrifice, external locus of control, interpersonal conflict and control and emotional constraint." (Bacon et al., 2021)	Caregiving to detriment of own wellness, manipulation of others, controlling external environment
Neuroticism	"A trait disposition to experience negative [e]ffects, including anger, anxiety, self consciousness, irritability, emotional instability, and depression." (Lyvers et al., 2019; Widiger & Oltmanns, 2017)	Breaking glass in rage, intruding thoughts of fear, feeling insecure of body, fluctuating from happiness to sadness in one moment, lack of self-care
Binge Drinking	"Consuming 5 or more drinks on an occasion for men or 4 or more drinks on an occasion for women." (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022)	Female character consuming 4 bottles of beer in one sitting, male character consuming 7.5 ounces of vodka on one occasion
Alcoholic Terminology	"Any character using terms relating to alcohol or AUD."	Alcohol, alcoholism, alcoholic beverages (vodka, martini, whiskey, etc.)

Procedure

Beginning with the sampling units, a total of 30 short stories from the total sample of 64 stories were analyzed to allow adequate time for each story. These 30 stories were chosen through random assignment to prevent bias, where each story was assigned a number 1 through 64, and a random number generator selected the 30 to be used. After each story was chosen, they were read in numerical order beginning with the smallest-numbered story and ending with the largest.

While reading, each short story was allotted 25 minutes of analysis based on typical reading speed. This analysis included physically reading the story, noting any indicators with annotation tabs, and transferring these notes to the coding book. "Transferring these notes" refers to the process of adding the number of indicators tabbed and typing them into a Google Sheet under each short story. This process was repeated three times a day for around two weeks to complete the analysis of Patricia Highsmith's short stories in a systematic and timely manner.

Delimitations

To properly form conclusions based on findings from this study, it is necessary to understand the delimitations presented within this methodology. The major delimitation made within this study pertains to the use of a comparison group consisting of a non-alcoholic female author. Though this comparison group and an analysis of her tendency to

use language associated with AUD would be pertinent to understanding the significance of Patricia Highsmith's results, conducting a second analysis of the same length would not be feasible within the scope of this study. This is simply due to both time and material constraints from the use of a singular researcher.

Results

Categorizing the total data collected using the definitions and examples provided in Table 1, Table 2 was created using a basic spreadsheet program. Each indicator is separated into a column while each short story is separated into a row. To increase comprehension of the table, an additional column and row are present to display the total indicators found for each short story, indicator type, and overall.

Regarding specifics of the results, a total of 270 indicators were found across the 30 short stories written by Patricia Highsmith, with 83 (31%) representing codependency, 110 (41%) representing neuroticism, 20 (7%) representing binge drinking, and 57 (21%) representing alcoholic terminology. Furthermore, each collection of short stories displayed a differing number of indicators. No short stories showed an absolute lack of total indicators collected.

Table 2. Indicators Identified for Randomly Selected Short Stories of Patricia Highsmith

Title	Codependency	Neuroticism	Binge Drinking	Terminology	Total
The Animal Lover's Book of Beastly Murder	32	39	3	11	85
"Chorus Girl's Absolutely Final Performance"	4	4	0	0	8
"Djemal's Revenge"	8	7	1	3	19
"There I Was, Stuck with Bubsy"	8	6	0	2	16
"In the Dead of Truffle Season"	4	6	0	1	11
"The Day of Reckoning"	1	4	2	4	11
"Eddie and the Monkey Rivalries"	4	8	0	1	13
"Harry: A Ferret"	3	4	0	0	7
Little Tales of Misogyny	17	15	3	3	38
"The Hand"	1	4	0	0	5
"Oona, the Jolly Cave Woman"	3	2	0	0	5
"The Coquette"	3	2	0	0	5

Title	Codependency	Neuroticism	Binge Drinking	Terminology	Total
"The Invalid, or, the Bedridden"	2	1	0	0	3
"The Middle-Class Housewife"	2	0	0	0	2
"The Perfect Little Lady"	4	1	0	0	5
"The Silent Mother-in-Law"	1	1	2	0	4
"The Perfectionist"	1	4	1	3	9
Slowly, Slowly in the Wind	17	15	1	3	36
"The Man Who Wrote Books in His Head"	1	2	0	0	3
"Woodrow Wilson's Necktie"	2	3	0	0	5
"One for the Islands"	2	4	0	0	6
"A Curious Suicide"	4	3	1	3	11
"Broken Glass"	8	3	0	0	11
The Black House	12	23	12	37	84
"Something the Cat Dragged In"	4	2	1	5	12
"The Terrors of Basket-Weaving"	2	6	3	7	18
"I Despise Your Life"	2	7	3	11	23
"Blow It"	0	3	1	6	10
"The Kite"	1	3	1	2	7
"The Black House"	3	2	3	6	14
Mermaids on the Golf Course	5	18	1	3	27
"Where the Action Is"	1	3	0	0	4
"The Stuff of	0	5	1	1	7

Title	Codependency	Neuroticism	Binge Drinking	Terminology	Total
Madness"					
"Not in This Life, Maybe the Next"	2	4	0	0	6
"I Am Not As Efficient As Other People"	2	6	0	2	10
Total	83	110	20	57	270

Note. Under the title column, any works italicized are collections of short stories, while works in quotations are the actual short stories. The information besides those in italics displays the total indicators collected in each section of the short stories above.

Table 3 depicts the measures of central tendency and standard deviation for each indicator type as well as for the total number of indicators per short story. The purpose of this table is to act as a more succinct version of Table 2, showing the typical mean, median, mode, and standard deviation for each indicator both separately and collectively. Thus, there is a column for each statistical measurement and a row for each indicator type.

The mean for each indicator type was calculated at a low of 1 and a high of 9, the median was calculated at a low of 0 and a high of 8, the mode was calculated at a low of 0 and a high of 5, and the standard deviation was calculated at a low of 1.0 and a high of 5.2. All measures excluding standard deviation were rounded to the nearest whole number due to the inability to have a fraction of an indicator.

Table 3. Measures of Central Tendency and Standard Deviation for Data Collected by Indicator Type

Indicator Type	Measures of Central Tendency			Standard Deviation
	Mean	**Median**	**Mode**	
Codependency ($n = 30$)	3	2	2	2.1
Neuroticism ($n = 30$)	4	4	4	2.0
Binge Drinking ($n = 30$)	1	0	0	1.0
Terminology ($n = 30$)	2	1	0	2.7
Total ($n = 30$)	9	8	5	5.2

Note. All measures of central tendency were rounded to the nearest whole number besides those that are displayed as zero.

Figure 1 was created using data from the general results in Table 2 and the measures of central tendency in Table 3 to graphically represent the typical amount of indicators found within a single short story. The horizontal axis displays the number of indicators per short story in increments of 5, while the vertical axis displays the percentage of short stories that contain a specified number of indicators. Most short stories contained an average of around 9 indicators, as shown by the clustered distribution of the graph. However, the graph is positively skewed, indicating several outliers in the total number of indicators.
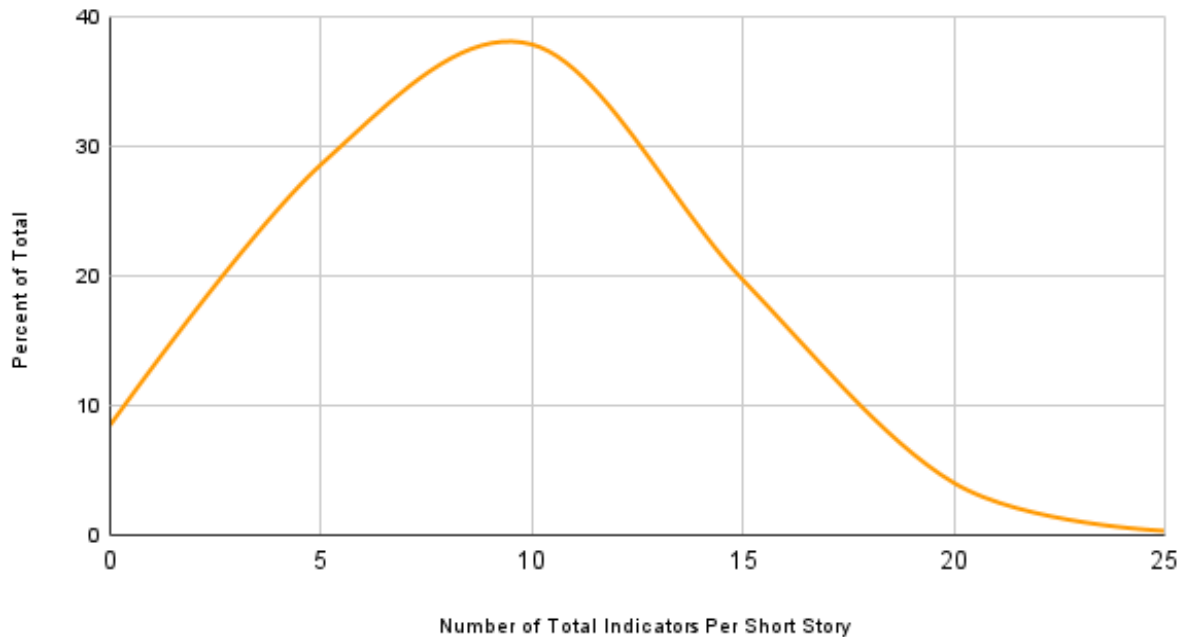

Figure 1. Distribution of Total Amount of Indicators Found Within Each Short Story

No other distribution graphs were created for individual indicators due to small measures of central tendency. However, Table 3 adequately shows the distributive relationship of each indicator without graphical representation, especially due to the listing of standard deviation.

Discussion

The results mentioned previously hold significance in the discussion of female alcoholic authors and the potential effect of AUD on their creative work. To best communicate this significance, the alcoholic traits of codependency, neuroticism, and excessive alcohol consumption projected onto the fictional characters of Patricia Highsmith will be assessed through the use of three sub-themes: indicator presence, indicator nuance, and authorial application.

Indicator Presence

The data shown in Table 2, Table 3, and Figure 1 undoubtedly confirm the predicted general impact of AUD on Patricia Highsmith's writing, however large. As discussed previously regarding Table 2, a total of 270 indicators were coded using the definitions and examples provided in Table 1, 83 of which represent codependency, 110 of which represent neuroticism, 20 of which represent binge drinking, and 57 of which represent alcoholic terminology used by characters across the 30 short stories. Moreover, the mean of total indicators is 9, the median is 8, and the mode is 5,

as displayed in Table 3. This indicates a somewhat consistent amount of indicators throughout each short story, meaning that AUD has been noticeably projected onto characters within.

Though these measurements are consistent, Figure 1 does show some unanticipated discrepancies in the measures of central tendency since the graph is positively skewed. This essentially indicates that a majority of short stories contained a total number of indicators less than the mean (< 9), while a minority of short stories contained a total number of indicators significantly more than the mean (>9). There are several reasons for this positive skew, the most obvious of which is illustrated by the varying total of indicators for each collection of short stories. *The Animal Lover's Book of Beastly Murder* contains 85 indicators, *Little Tales of Misogyny* contains 38 indicators, *Slowly, Slowly in the Wind* contains 36 indicators, *The Black House* contains 84 indicators, and *Mermaids on the Golf Course* contains 27 indicators. A potential explanation for the varying indicator totals is the fact that each collection has short stories of differing lengths. For example, *Little Tales of Misogyny* contains stories no longer than 4 pages, while *The Black House* contains stories no shorter than 12 pages. The number of indicators may correlate with the length of the short story. Furthermore, a second, more complex explanation relates to the tone of a collection. To explain, a collection of a more serious or violent tone, such as *The Animal Lover's Book of Beastly Murder*, may better enable an author's AUD projection as compared to more light-hearted collections, such as *Mermaids on the Golf Course*. Nonetheless, these unanticipated discrepancies in indicator totals, whether due to story length or story tone, do not negate the overarching presence of AUD among the works of Patricia Highsmith.

Indicator Nuance

The overarching presence established by Table 2, Table 3, and Figure 1 can be interpreted further through nuances between individual indicators. Codependency and neuroticism, which will be referred to as "implicit indicators," are the most frequent indicators found, comprising 71% of the total in Table 2. Ambiguity and broad application of the indicators' definitions are likely leading reasons. Referring to Table 1, each implicit indicator is defined by numerous behaviors, and these behaviors can be applied to numerous situations. For instance, codependency's "interpersonal conflict" can be applied to a trivial marital argument as well as physical violence between others; another example relates to neuroticism's "emotional instability," which can be applied to any range of emotions. This ambiguity enables Patricia Highsmith's broader incorporation of AUD into each short story. Additionally, research confirms the relationship between AUD and varying mental disorders, meaning that the projection of codependency and neuroticism–two common indicators of anxiety and depressive disorders–may not be solely influenced by AUD (Shivani et al., 2002). Thus, ambiguity surrounding the implicit indicator's applicability, whether with the situation or disorder, allows for increased projection onto characters.

Moreover, binge drinking and alcoholic terminology usage, which will be referred to as "explicit indicators," are the least frequent indicators found, comprising 29% of the total in Table 2. The explicit indicators lack ambiguity, and an author can only apply them in specific contexts. For instance, binge drinking would likely be projected onto a character when a depressive episode is being written; further, alcoholic terminology would likely be utilized when a character is written within social situations. It would be illogical to assume that an alcoholic author would incorporate explicit alcoholic acts within every situation written. Additionally, these explicit indicators of AUD cannot be attributed to other disorders, meaning that the likelihood of these behaviors being projected onto a character is less than implicit indicators. Therefore, a lack of ambiguity surrounding the explicit indicator's applicability contributes to decreased projection, while the abundance of ambiguity surrounding the implicit indicator's applicability contributes to increased projection, which was not taken into consideration in the original hypothesis stated.

Authorial Application

While answering the guiding research question, it has been shown that AUD was projected onto the characters of alcoholic author Patricia Highsmith, yet each aspect of AUD was unequally projected due to differing indicator applicability. This proven and varying presence of codependency, neuroticism, binge drinking, and alcoholic terminology among characters suggests Patricia Highsmith's use of projection as a coping mechanism for AUD. Studies by Yankov (2012) and Harvard Health Publishing (2021) support this general finding; the former reveals the tendency for traumatic experiences to influence written work and the latter confirms writing as a common coping mechanism for its projective value. As this further relates to Patricia Highsmith individually, her attempt at coping with AUD began by projecting codependency and neuroticism onto the vast majority of written situations both between characters and within a single character. In addition, she was able to cope with specific behaviors associated with AUD–binge drinking and alcoholic terminology usage–in written situations that would naturally trigger that behavior, such as depressive episodes or social situations where alcohol may be present. Although it cannot be proven by this study that Patricia Highsmith deliberately coped through writing, the data collection coupled with the context of existing literature allows for the overarching conclusion that Patricia Highsmith projected AUD onto her characters in varying fashions to confront her behavior.

Conclusion

This study has filled gaps in the literature mentioned initially by answering the guiding research question regarding indicator projection as a coping mechanism. When answering this using data collected, a single main point emerged: Patricia Highsmith projected implicit indicators–codependency and neuroticism–as a reaction to writing general relationships and internal monologue, while explicit indicators–binge drinking and alcoholic terminology usage–were projected as a reaction to specific written situations that may trigger alcohol consumption.

Implications

With the findings of this study come implications for the field of AUD, most notably regarding female-oriented rehabilitation services. Several studies pertaining to female disparities within rehabilitation services acknowledge that recovery programs are often ineffective for female alcoholics due to inadequate treatment techniques (Alvanzo et al., 2014; Pinedo et al., 2020). Confirming the tendency for female alcoholic authors to project experienced alcoholic behavior onto their work as a coping mechanism provides insight as to what coping strategies would be effective in female-oriented rehabilitation services. Encouraging women to write their experiences in recovery through fictional means could provide needed support for the overall recovery process and potentially decrease relapse rates as a result. Moreover, by evaluating the effects and circumstances surrounding AUD and a female author's work, a more general implication is evident: further understanding has been brought to the relatively neglected field of female alcoholics.

Limitations

Several limitations have become apparent throughout the completion of this study. The most significant limitation regards the use of a single researcher. Not only did this inhibit efficiency when analyzing, but it also allowed for the integration of bias within the collection of data. In other words, a single researcher was left to determine whether or not an instance represented a specific indicator by using some level of personal experience. Nevertheless, this bias was mitigated through the use of a coding book displaying particular definitions and examples of each indicator.

Additionally, other limitations include the use of a single female alcoholic author to extrapolate data to a larger population as well as the lack of a comparison group consisting of a female non-alcoholic author. All these limitations presented, however, stem from limited time and resources when conducting this study.

Future Research

The limitations discussed previously provide ample opportunity for future research. Relating most specifically to this study, an expanded exploration into the effect of AUD on female alcoholic authors' writings using multiple female authors for analysis, both alcoholic and non-alcoholic, would further solidify the conclusions suggested in data analysis. Future researchers could similarly study the effects of AUD on a specific genre of female writing. Existing literature also suggests the effect of other substance use disorders upon creative works, meaning that further research could be conducted to understand the projection of varying substance use disorders on a female author's writings. These suggestions are but a few of the directions that future researchers may take in generating data regarding female alcoholics.

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