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MORAL SCHEMAS IN CRIME DRAMAS:

THE MATTER OF CONTEXT FOR THE ACTIVATION OF AN ANTIHERO SCHEMA AND
ITS IMPACT ON MORAL JUDGMENT MAKING

By

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certifies that the dissertation has been approved in accordance with university requirements.
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ABSTRACT

Recently, so called “antihero” TV shows such as *Dexter, Revenge,* or *The Walking Dead* seem to find great reception among audiences. Traditional crime dramas are enjoyed based on the moral approval of the protagonist and the empathetic feeling for the hero to win over the immoral, harm deserving villain. That formula, however, does not account for the immoral actions antiheroes perform, who despite their morally inappropriate actions are still greatly liked and identified with, and narratives featuring them are greatly enjoyed. Raney (2004) argued that viewers are cognitive misers and instead of morally scrutinizing the character’s actions before building a disposition towards them, they rely on narrative schemas. Through repeated exposure to a certain kind of narrative (i.e., traditional hero narrative or non-traditional antihero narrative), specific story schemas are formed that provide the viewer with a set of rules how to interpret the unfolding events and preformed attitudes about the protagonists, which consequently eliminate cognitively taxing scrutinizing of the characters actions, leaving cognitive energy to fully immerse into the story. Story schemas become specifically important for antihero narratives, where viewers encounter moral transgressions they would likely not approve when encountered in real life (e.g., Dexter murdering criminals). This dissertation project attempted to empirically investigate several related issues: (1) the existence of a specific hero and antihero narrative schema; and (2) how much the context—real-world vs. fictional—matters for the evaluation of morally complex characters (i.e., antiheroes) and their morally ambiguous actions. Two independent studies, with altogether three different treatments, were conducted employing reaction-time measurement to investigate these questions. Participants were exposed to either a hero or antihero narrative and then had to read an either fictional-framed or realistically framed antihero story. Results support the existence of two different narrative schemas that impact moral judgment making, supporting Raney’s (2004) proposition about the relevance of schemas for the processing of narratives. Additionally, results indicate that the context in which the moral evaluation is made (inside or outside the narrative context) affects the evaluation of an antihero, connecting the context with schema activation. Inside the narrative context (or more generally speaking “from a fictional perspective”) the antihero is evaluated more positively than outside the narrative context (from a realism perspective), based on the activated schema. Furthermore, the findings lead to the argument that the activation of a hero schema primes the viewer to evaluate protagonists and their actions based on the ethical principle of deontology (i.e., in a
rule-based manner). This is in comparison to the activation of an antihero schema that primes the viewer to evaluate protagonists and their actions from a consequentialist standpoint (i.e., in a deliberate manner). The findings of this dissertation are relevant for our understanding of how we process media narratives and specifically media characters that violate our moral standards. Furthermore, the results about the context-dependent approval of an antihero lead to the argument that we evaluate moral transgressions in fiction and reality differently. The conceptualization of a fictional moral lens and a real-world moral lens is introduced and discussed in relation to the limited-effects perspective of media. Lastly, assuming that antihero narratives appeal to a specific group of people, exposure over a long period of time could reinforce their way of moral judgment making (i.e., focusing on the consequences of a certain situation (consequentialism), rather than strictly following rules (deontology)), which could affect a persons’ ethical decision making in various fields. Several implications of the results as well as limitations are discussed.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

According to the affective disposition theory (ADT, Zillmann, 2000) three main components determine the enjoyment of crime dramas. First, viewers form an emotional attachment to the characters, with this attachment based on the moral judgment of the character’s behaviors. If the protagonist is behaving in a morally correct way, positive dispositions develop. If the acts are morally condemnable, the character will be disliked (Raney, 2002; Zillmann & Cantor, 1976; Zillmann, 2000). Second, viewers develop emotional expectations such that moral and liked characters should experience reward and success, and morally bad and disliked characters should experience punishment for their behaviors (Raney, 2006). Lastly, the outcome as a statement of justice (Raney & Bryant, 2002) is also morally evaluated; if the retribution meets the viewer’s notion of justice, enjoyment will be experienced. This basic formula has received great empirical support for traditional hero narratives across various genres and media outlets (e.g., Hoffner & Cantor, 1991; Klimmt, Schmid, Nosper, Hartman, & Vorderer, 2006; Oliver, 1993; Raney & Bryant, 2002; Weber, Tamborini, Lee, & Stipp, 2008). However, when this formula is applied to non-traditional narratives including morally complex characters, research has shown that the first component of this theoretical framework looks quite differently (e.g., Shafer & Raney, 2012; Raney & Janicke, 2013); that is, how dispositions are built towards heroes and antiheroes in dramas differs.

According to ADT, positive dispositions are built after the actions and motivations of the character are evaluated to be morally upright (Zillmann, 2000). Based on this formula, antiheroes should not receive strong positive dispositions and consequently enjoyment should suffer. The reason for this is that their actions are morally flawed, ambiguous, or complex (Raney & Janicke, 2013). However, as one can see from recent box office hits (The Dark Knight, highest grossing film in 2008; The Dark Knight Rises, second highest grossing film 2012; Movie Box Office, n.d.), as well as Emmy Award Winners for Outstanding Drama Series (Mad Man, Sopranos, Breaking Bad, 24; Primetime Emmy Awards, n.d.), antiheroes are liked and narratives featuring them are enjoyed a great deal. The question is, how?
Several studies (e.g., Janicke & Raney, 2011; Raney, Schmid, Niemann, & Ellensohn, 2009; Tsay & Krakowiak, 2011) have shown that the emotional engagement necessary for enjoyment of an antihero is derived through character identification, rather than moral approval and liking (Zillmann & Cantor, 1976). Character identification is the process by which we experience the narrative through the character’s eyes (Cohen, 2001). Why should we be more prone to identify with those characters rather than (just) feel for them? Konijn and Hoorn (2005) suggested, and Janicke and Raney (2012) demonstrated, that ambiguous characters (such as antihero characters) are perceived to be highly realistic, which positively contributes to identification with the characters. The authors reasoned that one explanation for the importance of perceived realism for antiheroes is their moral ambiguity, which may remind the viewer of their own moral complexity and therefore makes the antihero appear more real, in turn facilitating the identification process. As Krakowiak and Oliver (2012) pointed out, “because most people in the real-world are usually not purely good or bad, MAC’s (morally ambiguous character) may be more likely than good or bad characters to be perceived as realistic” (p. 119). Raney and Janicke (2013) argued that antiheroes, due to their moral complexity, offer multiple facets to which a viewer can relate. They compare antiheroes metaphorically to a golf ball that has multiple notches a viewer can grip, compared to a hero character who is more like a billiard ball, round and shiny, providing less “surface area” to grip for the viewer. With morally complex characters, different viewers may find various attributes differently attractive, which would explain the success of antihero narratives – *Dexter, Mad Men, The Closer* – among certain groups of the population, like self-identified Democrats (Experian Simmons, 2010), as Raney and Janicke (2013) outline.

The question remains: How can viewers identify with a character who constantly transgresses moral boundaries? Here, research suggests (e.g., Janicke & Raney, 2011, 2012; Krakowiak & Tsay, 2011; Shafer & Raney, 2012) that perceiving the character’s actions from a first-person perspective through the process of identification makes viewers more likely to morally disengage the immoral actions (Bandura, 1999; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996). That is, the viewer finds justifications for the immoral conduct in order to avoid cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) that would otherwise occur, as the antiheroes’ moral transgressions would run against one’s own moral standards. The results of these studies (e.g., Shafer & Raney, 2012) point out that in contrast to traditional hero narratives, the moral
Raney (2004) proposed that instead of forming a disposition only *after* the moral evaluation of the character’s actions, dispositions are built *before* any moral scrutinizing (that is, if moral evaluations matter for the disposition-formation process with morally complex characters at all). He argued that perceptions of characters are made rather quickly and, thus, dispositions towards media characters are based on narrative schemas that, if activated, provide the viewer with information about what to expect from the narrative and the roles the characters will have in the storyline (Mandler, 1984). Raney (2004) argued that schemas assist the viewer in quickly determining which character to like and which to dislike, without the need to scrutinize the character’s actions, as ADT predicts.

According to Mandler (1984), schemas are abstract knowledge structures of events, scenes, and stories consisting of a predictable pattern that individuals can rely on when encountering a narrative. They provide the individual with a set of rules and story grammar about how to comprehend and interpret a story. The more an encountered story is congruent with an existing story schema, the faster the story can be processed, inferences be built, and the more cognitive capacity is left for the processing of other information (e.g., becoming absorbed [Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009] in the story, anticipating with the characters’ hopes and fears [Zillmann, 2006]). Thus, it is thought that through repeated encounters with crime drama narratives, story schemas develop that help the viewer to quickly and effortlessly decide with which character to emotionally bond and which to despise. As soon as the viewer encounters a narrative that follows the structure of the existing schema, the viewer presumes that the protagonist is virtuous and, therefore, can be liked and hoped for, because this is what they have learned through repeated exposure to these narratives. For antihero narratives, where the protagonist is in fact not virtuous, however, the viewer learns that such character’s actions are typically justified in one way or another. As a result, moral amnesty can be given early on. It can be assumed that with repeated exposure to antihero narratives, the justification processes becomes part of the schema. Moral disengagement cues (Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010) in the narrative help to shape and subsequently trigger this schema. Raney and Janicke (2013) stated
that story schemas for antiheroes “necessarily include an understanding of how to interpret and a readiness to accept moral disengagement cues present in the narratives” (p.17). Thus, this dissertation project anticipates investigating the proposition that the existence of specific schemas is what determines how dispositions towards specifically antiheroes are formed, without an extensive elaboration on their moral actions.

**Problem Statement**

The question of underlying narrative schemas becomes specifically interesting for the understanding of dispositions formed toward antihero characters. As outlined, the disposition formation process varies for heroes and antiheroes (cf. Raney & Janicke, 2013), specifically with relevance to moral considerations. For antiheroes, morality seems to be less important for the disposition formation process; instead moral disengagement is relevant to derive enjoyment (e.g., Janicke & Raney, 2012; Krakowiak & Tsay, 2011). However, moral disengagement is a selective process (Bandura, 2002) demanding cognitive resources, which ultimately could lead to a decrease in enjoyment as fewer resources are available for the processes (like absorption into the narrative). Preliminary research lends support for this claim (Janicke & Podwalski, 2012). Assuming we are cognitive misers as Raney (2004) outlined, narrative schemas that include a readiness to accept moral disengagement cues from the narrative (Raney & Janicke, 2013) could facilitate information processing and leave cognitive energy for other activities, such as engagement into the story as discussed. Therefore, the theoretical concept of narrative schemas, specifically for the explanation of disposition formation towards heroes and antiheroes, could help us to better understand how information within crime dramas involving more or less moral ambivalent characters (heroes and antiheroes) is processed.

Human behavior is adaptive (White, 1959). Looking at the current dissertation project from a schema perspective takes respect to how viewers adapt to their media environment in a fast and efficient way, explaining how narratives featuring media characters that act against our moral standards can still be so greatly enjoyed. If information processing in crime dramas follows specific narratives schemas that are built over repeated exposure to various content, then the impact on real-world moral judgments from these schemas are important to be investigated. Results of a preliminary study regarding narrative schemas (Janicke, unpublished manuscript) that consequently informed this dissertation project indicated that the way viewers evaluate
media characters—via schemas or via thoughtful deliberations—is dependent on the context in which the evaluation is made. It seems that schemas are relevant for the information processing of crime drama characters during reception, whereas outside of the narrative context the moral evaluation of media characters is dependent on the actual moral complexity of that character, an attribute seemingly irrelevant for the evaluation of that character within the narrative. The notion of the context can be understood from both a methodological and theoretical standpoint. Methodologically, the context in which a moral judgment is made can either be during the reception or after the reception with specific reference to the narrative. The latter operationalization was applied for this dissertation project. Theoretically, the context is tightly connected to the activation of a specific antihero or hero schema, whereas a narrative context (i.e., specific references to the narrative during judgment making) activates a specific narrative schema, and a real-world context (i.e., moral evaluations of general media characters unrelated to the primed narrative) activates a real-world schema or no schema at all. From this context perspective, it can be reasoned that moral judgments generally differ between real and fictional worlds. Consequently, carry over effects from media onto people’s real-world moral judgments should be limited.

Using an information processing approach, the present study will try to fill an empirical and theoretical gap, by examining how morally complex media characters (i.e., antihero) and traditional hero characters are morally evaluated. Specifically, the thesis that antihero schemas may underlie this process will be investigated. Furthermore, the present study uses reaction time as a method to evaluate the automaticity with which antihero and hero characters and their actions are morally evaluated, adding to the existing methodological approaches used in ADT research. Most research studies in this area used traditional explicit paper pencil questionnaire procedures (Janicke & Raney, 2011, 2012; Tsay & Krakowiak, 2011; Krakowiak & Tsay, 2011, Shafer & Raney, 2012). With this method, only conscious/explicit moral judgments are assessed. This does not provide any clear insight into how effortful or automatic viewers may make such moral judgments. The present study will try to fill this gap and investigate the information processing of viewers moral evaluations of traditional hero and nontraditional antihero characters by assessing them in different contexts (a fictional vs. real-world moral context).

To summarize, this dissertation will explore the following propositions. First, narrative schemas are relevant for the construction of positive attitudes towards heroes and antiheroes in
popular TV crime dramas and differ between heroes and antiheroes. Second, moral evaluations of a character within a narrative context differ from moral evaluations made outside of a narrative context. And third, effects on a viewer’s real-world moral judgments from exposure to an antihero narrative are limited.

**Importance of the Study**

The line of research on narrative schemas and the moral evaluation of morally complex media characters carries several implications. For example, the cultivation of schemas through repeated exposure could be relevant to understand the reception and appeal of narratives featuring morally complex characters. In a study by Janicke and Podwalski (2012) that investigated the enjoyment of different antihero movies in Germany and the US, results indicated that American viewers had a greater tendency to morally disengage the immoral actions of a specifically violent protagonist than Germans. One of the explanations the authors provide is that Americans, due to their familiarity with media content involving violent moral transgressions, have built cognitive schemas that allow them to evaluate such moral transgressions in an effortless way, knowing that in doing so their enjoyment increases. In contrast, for Germans it seemed that the process of moral disengagement was cognitively taxing, and thus, less prominent, decreasing enjoyment for that movie. Hence, the media landscape in itself may likely be contributing to the development of narrative schemas, which in turn are likely to impact the selection and enjoyment of specific media content.

Furthermore, in terms of the appeal of antihero narratives, Tamborini (2013) provides some promising input. According to his MIME (Model of Intuitive Morality and Exemplars, for more elaboration this is added later) framework, people’s media selection is based on the salience of their moral domain system. People with a high sensitivity to issues of fairness, for example, are likely to seek out shows like *Nancy Grace* that deals with the justice system and the rights of criminal offense victims. For antiheroes, the question remains if there is a specific pattern in the violation and upholding of specific moral domains that other narratives cannot provide (as suggested by Tamborini, Grizzard, Eden and Lewis, 2011) that leads to a specific appeal for viewers.

Further implications about the effects of the exposure to morally complex media characters in narratives cannot be overlooked. If moral schemas develop over time, through
repeated exposure, and it can be shown that these schemas facilitate the acceptance of immoral actions for the greater good, the question can be raised, in which circumstances are these schemas recalled for real-world moral judgments? That is, can antihero moral schemas interfere with real-world moral judgments and make people more accepting of immoral actions from themselves, as well as of others? A study by Tamborini, Weber, Eden, Bowman and Grizzard (2010) showed that when the outcomes of a popular soap opera were perceived as righteous (including the evaluations of a clear moral hero and a clear immoral villain), moral judgment of unrelated moral issues (e.g., cheating) after eight weeks of exposure tended to follow social conventions. However, with antihero narratives following a more morally complex storyline with outcomes possibly still perceived as righteous on other moral grounds (given the various moral justifications for the immoral actions that lead to a righteous outcome), the question arises if Tamborini et al.’s (2010) findings would still hold true with such narratives. Or, on the other hand, do viewers become more critical of immoral actions in reality due to the exposure of moral transgressions from a beloved character? Do they become less critical? In case the context in which moral judgments are made affects evaluations in the way that only within-a-narrative-context moral transgression are evaluated as less critical, limited effects of the exposure to antihero narratives on real-world moral judgments can be assumed.

As this specific genre of crime drama seems to proliferate on today’s media landscape, it is important to look further into the processes underlying their appeal and to explore whether the possible effects for the viewer may or may not be different from watching traditional hero crime dramas. The present study attempts to address these questions.
Defining Antiheroes

In literary studies, morally complex characters, also known as “antiheroes” (terms that will be used interchangeably throughout the paper), have been defined as characters that include characteristics of both a hero and a villain (Lott, 1997). They may have noble goals, but the way they pursue them is rather ignoble or morally questionable (West, 2001). Some characteristics make them highly attractive and most of them have, on a macro-level, well-intended motivations and strive for positive outcomes. In a way, they show characteristics of a classic hero with good intentions; however, the means by which they try to reach these well-intended goals are morally questionable (Naremore, 1998). West (2001) describes them as not submitting to law or government, and one often sees them cheating, torturing, killing, being manipulative and violent. The actions of the antihero are morally questionable and model negative behavior (Buck, 1986), but at the same time the antihero also consequently upholds some form of moral code. There is not just one version of “the antihero,” but rather a variety of morally ambiguous characters who might take that title. Raney and Janicke (2013) describe different variations of antiheroes: “from the virtuous-but-flawed Andy Sipowitz (NYPD Blue) to the criminal-but-redeemable Michael Corleone (The Godfather trilogy), or from the by-any-means-necessary-protector Jack Bauer (24) to the murderous-but-justified Dexter Morgan (Dexter)” (p. 154). They argue that antiheroes are morally complex as their actions range on a continuum from good to bad, in contrast with clearly moral, heroes and clearly immoral, villains.

Besides the approach to define the antihero character from literary studies, researchers also tried to determine this type of character from the standpoint of moral foundation theory (cf. MFT; Haidt, 2001; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Haidt & Joseph, 2008). Haidt (2001) introduced five sets of universally existent moral foundations or intuitions in his social intuitionist model (SIM) that include: Harm and Care, dealing with compassion and considerations for the suffering of others; Fairness, the reciprocal altruism and feeling of justice; Authority, awe and respect for legitimate authorities; Loyalty, trust and cooperation with ones in-group; and Purity, living in a spiritually minded, pious way (Haidt & Joseph, 2008). Eden, Oliver, Tamborini, Woolley, and Limperos (2009) showed that traditional heroes and villains can be determined by specific
patterns of upholding certain moral domains identified in Haidt’s moral foundation theory. In a follow-up study by Tamborini, Grizzard, Eden, and Lewis (2011), the researchers showed that characters who uphold and violate a mix of moral domains could reasonably called antiheroes. Irrespective of the moral flaws of such characters, who range on a continuum of moral complexity (cf., Raney & Janicke, 2013), strong dispositions are built towards them and narratives featuring them are enjoyed. Raney and Janicke (2013) summarize: “morally complex characters clearly do wicked and dishonest things for (at times) corrupt reasons, but yet they still function as protagonists in many narratives” (p. 155).

Another way we can identify heroes and antiheroes is by the type of judgments that are typically used to evaluate the appropriateness of moral violations in moral dilemmas. According to moral philosophy, people’s responses towards moral situations can be categorized into those that can be described as following the ethical principle of deontology (e.g., Kant, 1785/1959) or utilitarianism (Mill, 1861/1998). Deontological responses are based on moral rules (with actions as the unit of analysis) and are usually given quickly. Utilitarian responses consider consequences as the frame of reference to determine if an action is moral or not; in such case, more time is needed to make a judgment. So, according to a deontological principle, killing a person is in and of itself bad and therefore not morally acceptable, even if the killing would save a lot more people. The latter condition, however, would be acceptable according to consequentialists (or utilitarianists). One main determinant of which process or principle is responsible for the judgment made is determined by the context. In rather simple and less personal moral dilemmas (e.g., trolley dilemma, cf. Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001; Greene, Nystrom, Engell, Darley, & Cohen, 2004), intuitive (or automatic) deontological processes typically determine a person’s response. In contrast, with more complex and ambiguous moral dilemmas (e.g., footbridge dilemma, cf. Green et al., 2004), deliberate, consequentialist processes may also be considered in the judgment (e.g., Bartels, 2008; Chushman, Young, & Hauser, 2006; Nichols & Mallon, 2006).

According to these ethical principles, it is reasonable to categorize antiheroes and their respective actions within a narrative as morally complex and, therefore, likely to elicit utilitarian, deliberate judgment processing. The antihero (usually) has an overall, noble goal but the means by which he tries to achieve that goal are questionable. This places viewers in a moral dilemma, which requires weighting the overall positive consequences against the immoral actions used to
achieve them. Therefore, the viewer has to decide to accept or reject the actions and, in turn, the antihero himself. If this is the case, then, longer response times to evaluate the antihero as moral would be expected. In contrast, for a hero narrative, no such moral dilemma is given: The hero’s actions are morally sound. Thus, fast, deontological-based judgments can be made about these characters. However, it will be argued that schemas can provide the viewer with a mental shortcut for the moral evaluations of the antihero, an evaluation that otherwise would require more cognitive demanding, utilitarian processing.

**Story Schemas**

As noted above, one goal of this dissertation is to explore possible differences in the schemas used to interpret and enjoy hero and antihero narratives. Fiske and Linville (1980) define the schema concept as “cognitive structures of organized prior knowledge, abstracted from experience with specific instances [that] guide the processing of new information and the retrieval of stored information” (p. 543). That is, when we encounter a stimulus in our environment, schemas help us to make sense of what that stimulus is and how to react to it, reducing an overload of processing stimuli we constantly encounter (Brewer, 1987; Fiske & Kinder, 1981; Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Schank & Abelson, 1977; Wyer & Gordon, 1984). In relation to the proposed relevance of schemas for the processing of narratives, specifically crime dramas, Mandler (1984) provides a useful approach. Mandler states: “From an early age people develop expectations about the overall form of traditional stories; they learn that these stories involve protagonists who have goals and who engage in attempts to achieve those goals and that goals and events cause other goals and events in predictable ways” (p. xi). These abstract knowledge schemas of events and stories provide the viewer with a mental shortcut of what to expect from a narrative that follows a schematic set of rules. If activated, the story schemas provide the individual with a predefined dictionary about how to interpret and understand the events of the story. Mandler (1984) demonstrated that the more these schemas are activated, the stronger (or more accessible) they become. That, in turn, affects the likelihood with which these schemas impact subsequent information processing (Higgins, 1996, 1999). Over time, often-activated schemas become chronically accessible (Higgins, 1996). Accessibility is the “ease with which a particular unit of information is activated or can be retrieved from memory” (Morewedge & Kahneman, 2010, p. 435). Once schemas are chronically accessible, our attention
is then guided selectively to specific stimuli (e.g., antihero narratives), which then, in turn, activates the schema again and strengthens the schema network (or its interrelations) once more (Higgins, Bargh, & Lombardi, 1985; Mandler, 1984). As a result, chronically accessible schemas are easily primed by the environment (Bargh & Pratto, 1986), eliciting fast (or automatically activated) responses (Bargh, 1989).

At this point, the conceptualizations of chronically accessible schemas and the research about chronically accessible attitudes (e.g., Fazio, 1990) demand a short clarification. What is the difference between attitudes and schemas? According to Pratkanis (1989), attitudes can be regarded as part of a specific knowledge structure, or schema. A schema can consist of a lot more than a single attitude, including technical knowledge, goals about the attitude object (e.g., goals of a protagonist in a story in terms of Manderl’s story schema concept), social meanings involved in the specific attitudinal domain, and personal experiences, among others. Pratkanis (1989) furthermore states that it is the evaluation of the attitude object that distinguishes an attitude from other cognitive structures like a schema. A schema does not particularly include an evaluation of a construct, whereas an attitude does (e.g. Fazio, 1989). Thus, a schema can be regarded as a much broader construct. A recent study by Shen (2004) about the effects of news framing and cognitive schemas on individual’s issue interpretations of particular political topics found that people’s particular schemas about stem cell research (activated by news frames) predicted their attitudes about that topic. Thus, one can regard an attitude as a more distinct and easier- to-operationalize element that can (but not necessarily has to) belong to a broader knowledge structure (i.e., a schema).

For the present dissertation project the following conceptualization will be used: the term narrative schemas will be used when referring to the overall narrative, which includes the plot structure, the amount of given justifications for the protagonist’s actions, as well as the protagonists themselves. Attitudes will be used in reference to the protagonists of the crime drama, and it involves the evaluation of these characters (positive or negative). Consequently, based on the viewer’s attitude towards the character, dispositions towards them are formed. With attitudes being part of a larger schema, attitudes towards the hero and antihero can be understood as being based within the overall narrative schema that includes the information that actions of the protagonist, even if immoral, are justified in some ways during the narrative. Accordingly, positive attitudes towards the antiheroes are derived from the overall antihero narrative schema.
that includes expectations about the protagonist’s motivations, moral actions, and story outcomes.

How can we understand the development of chronically accessible schemas for antihero narratives? Narvaez, Lapsley, Hagele, and Lasky (2006) showed that chronically accessible moral schemas vary between individuals (based on prior exposure) and consequently lead to different information processing. When schemas are formed based on the exposure to specific stimuli in the environment, it is reasonable to assume that, depending on the individual’s media diet (watching lots of traditional hero narratives versus lots of non-traditional antihero formats), viewers may develop different chronically accessible schemas that guide their perception and judgment when encountering a media content. The accessibility of a schema is determined by the frequency and recency with which it is activated (Higgins, Bargh, & Lombardy, 1985). Consequently, for instance, knowing that students between 18 and 24 years old watch 32.23 hours of TV during a week (using traditional TV or the computer, time-shifted TV, or video on the internet; Nielsen Cross-Platform Report, 2011), and the most watched prime time genre is general drama (Nielsen Television Audience Report, 2011), with “antihero” TV shows being among the most popular crime TV series, according to IMDB.com (n.d., with Breaking Bad and Dexter as the leading shows), one can conclude that related schemas for processing these narratives are activated frequently, and thus, are likely to impact judgments and evaluations of subsequent stimuli.

Differences between Hero and Antihero Schemas

Based on the definition of antiheroes according to the ethical principles of moral judgment making outlined earlier, heroes are likely to elicit deontological judgments, given that the hero does not create any moral dilemmas for the viewer (i.e., the hero is acting purely good and therefore can be evaluated as such). In contrast, antiheroes would seemingly fall into the utilitarian judgment category given their morally complex actions (including moral and immoral behaviors). Thus, different moral principles could be relevant for moral judgments about heroes and antiheroes. Additionally, it was outlined that antiheroes differ from heroes in their moral conduct, which makes hero narratives different from antihero narratives; and the process behind the disposition formation varies as well. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that schemas developed over repeated exposure for hero and antihero narratives differ.
For traditional hero narratives the process seems to be straight forward. The main determinant for protagonist liking comes through the character’s moral propriety. Although additional cues in the narrative help the viewer to form dispositions towards the characters (e.g., physical attractiveness, stereotypical depictions of occupations and others; cf. Hoffner & Cantor, 1991; Knobloch, 2003), the moral judgments of the protagonists behavior are the main predictor for protagonist liking, according to the affective disposition theory (ADT, Raney, 2002, 2005; Raney & Bryant, 2002). As stated earlier, Raney (2004) suggested that, instead of monitoring the character’s actions prior to forming a disposition, viewers rely on story schemas developed through repeated encounters with crime dramas to help viewers decide which characters to emotionally bond with and which to despise, in a quick and effortless way. As soon as the viewer encounters a narrative that follows the structure of the existing hero schema, the viewer already knows that the protagonist is virtuous and therefore can be liked and hoped for.

For antihero narratives, however, a positive narrative schema (or rather positive character attitude) cannot be built on the moral actions of the character. Rather, we base our judgment, and thus our acceptance of the antihero, on moral justifications the narrative provides us with. Research has shown that antihero narratives contain various moral disengagement cues (Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010), guiding the viewer to the positive consequences of the immoral actions and providing moral justifications for the characters immoral conduct (e.g., the action is justified because the protagonist has been morally wronged before).

In general, the process of moral disengagement, as defined by Bandura and his colleagues, describes various cognitive strategies we apply when our own, or our loved one’s moral conduct or moral thoughts violate our typical set of moral standards (Bandura, 1999, 2002, 2009; Bandura, et al., 1996). These real-world moral strategies help us to reduce the cognitive dissonance we would otherwise experience when we, or our loved ones, act in morally condemnable ways. For example, we may be willing to justify our best friends cheating behavior against his/her partner by reattributing the blame to the partner him/herself (e.g., “after acting like a jealous fury, it is her/his own fault to be cheated on”). Bandura (e.g., 1999, 2002) describes eight such moral disengagement strategies we tend to use to alleviate feelings of guilt when acting or approving immoral behavior.

Raney (2004, 2006) argued that we treat media characters similar to our friends in reality. Just like with our loved ones in the real-world, we want to keep liking media characters despite
their moral flaws and wrong doings, which is what we do with antihero characters. To do so, we justify their immoral actions through the process of moral disengagement, which has been found to positively impact our overall enjoyment of such narratives (e.g., Janicke & Raney, 2011, 2012; Krakowiak & Tsay, 2011; Raney et al., 2009; Tsay & Krakowiak, 2011). Why? Possibly because any forthcoming cognitive dissonance derived from identifying with a morally complex character is resolved through the process of moral disengagement, allowing the viewers to keep their identification with the character in a cognitively consistent manner (Janicke & Raney, 2012). For antihero narratives, it has been argued that “identification—which is reasonably related to the real-world partiality that we afford friends—may well be the mechanism through which moral disengagement occurs” (Raney, et al., 2009, p. 20). The more, it seems, we identify with the protagonists, the more we are willing to morally disengage their immoral actions (Janicke & Raney, 2012; Tsay & Krakowiak, 2011). And, the narrative seems to assist us in this justification processes with a variety of moral disengagement cues embedded in the storyline (Hartman & Vorderer, 2010; Hartman, 2013).

Raney and Janicke (2013) argue that these embedded disengagement cues allow the viewer to justify the antiheroes immoral actions and “look past the particular offences, embrace the pursuit of a greater good, cherish the protagonist, and enjoy the show” (p. 160). Over repeated exposure to narratives that follow a particular story script (including moral disengagement cues within the storyline), viewers may construct a narrative schema that provides them with a particular lens to look through, understanding that the antiheroe’s actions are generally justified, as indicated by the provided disengagement cues in the narrative. It seems that these cues direct the focus of the viewer toward the positive consequences of the protagonist’s actions, while disregarding the moral shortcomings. Shafer and Raney (2012) demonstrated that an antihero narrative with moral disengagement cues included made other moral judgment measures (vigilantism, moral judgment of the character) less important in the explanation of enjoyment, compared to an antihero narrative without moral disengagement cues. Following, as outlined, positive antihero schemas may be based on the moral disengagement cues the narrative provides, rendering moral considerations of the antihero less important for emotional side taking and enjoyment.

Some preliminary findings support the argument for the existence of different schemas for heroes and antiheroes. Janicke and Raney (2011), for example, investigated fans and non-fans
of the antihero crime drama TV series 24. They found that fan enjoyment increased the more the fans evaluated the main antihero character as unattractive and immoral (counter to ADT predictions). As expected, the fans greatly liked the protagonist. In contrast, for non-fans, enjoyment was predicted by increased ratings of attractiveness and morality along with high sympathy, which was in line with ADT predictions. Clearly, the results showed that enjoyment was derived differently for fans and non-fans. The authors argued that the differences may be due to existing schemas within the fan group that allowed them to like an otherwise unattractive and immoral protagonist.

Along the same lines, Shafer and Raney (2012) measured character liking and morality repeatedly over the course of a hero and an antihero feature film. They found that over time, liking (as well as morality ratings) for the hero and antihero increased. That is, the hero and the antihero were liked more and judged to be more moral over the course of the movies. However, some interesting differences remained. Whereas the hero was initially and over much of the narrative liked more than the antihero, by the end both characters were liked the same. And that was the case despite the antihero generally being evaluated as less moral than the hero. This finding again supports the notion that immoral actions by the antiheroes seem not to matter so much for liking. Underlying story schemas again may help to explain these findings. If an antihero schema includes the information that, in the end, the antihero only wants to do good and still upholds specific moral domains (cf. Tamborini et al., 2011), then this may allow the viewer to like an immorally acting character. In the end, viewers ultimately want to enjoy narratives (Raney, 2004) and they know, based on their countless experiences with entertainment fare, that a strong disposition towards the protagonist is crucial for that. For heroes, it is easy for viewers to justify their positive side-taking by considering the moral actions of the character. For antiheroes, it seems that moral disengagement provides the necessary tool to justify the liking of the character. Over repeated exposure to these narratives, then, schemas for heroes and antiheroes develop correspondingly, so that quick, positive judgments about these characters can be made.

Based on these findings, the goal of a preliminary study (from here on referred to as Study One) was to investigate how schemas may be relevant for the disposition formation towards hero and antihero characters and in which way the activation of these (possibly different) schemas impact moral judgments made about the characters and their actions. The
question remains how to measure such schemas. As was outlined above, schemas provide the viewer with a mental shortcut of how to evaluate a narrative. Frequent exposure to a narrative makes a schema stronger that means more accessible, according to Mandler (1984), which in turn affects the likelihood with which these schemas impact information processing. Based on this reasoning, one way to measure schemas would be accessibility (i.e., Bargh & Pratto, 1986)

**Typicality and facilitation effect.** One specific approach of how to measure the accessibility (and with that the existence) of (different) schemas is provided by Fransson and Ask (2010). Fransson and Ask (2010) claimed that schematic mental representations are likely the basis for automatic processing if the event that is to be judged meets the “prototype” of the represented moral schema, which they defined as a “schematic knowledge structure representing the central tendency of a category” (p. 69). The authors propose that through repeated exposure to an event, automatic processing is facilitated as the “increased familiarity with [that] event entails [the] automatization process” (p. 67). They claim that the basis for automatic processing is the “existence of mental representations” (p. 68), which is a concept derived from the well-established network theory of memory (cf. Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, & Dillman-Carpentier, 2009). According to the network model of memory, objects, events, people in general are represented in nodes within memory that are all interconnected according to their similarity. If one concept is activated sufficiently, then the state of that activation spreads forward to related concepts (i.e., nodes) within the network. Repeated activation strengthens the pathways between the connected nodes, making them more likely to be stimulated by future activation of other strongly connected nodes, thus enhancing the accessibility and therewith automaticity with which such concepts are affecting a response. As stated earlier, automatic responses result when a story or situation matches the existing prototype, leaving cognitive capacity for not-matching, new, and unusual stimuli. Consequently, a non-prototypical or schema-matching event requires more processing time in order for the individual to comprehend its structure. “The absence of a schema requires the comprehended to seek an organizing framework; whether ultimately successful or not, the situation involves more data –driven processing than when a schema is easily and rapidly activated” (Mandler, 1984, p. 106).

Fransson and Ask’s (2010) research concurs with Mandler’s (1984) theoretical proposition. They showed that situations or encounters that are highly similar to a “mean representation” of a category (i.e., a prototype) are processed in a more automatic way than
events that do not fit this schematic knowledge structure (typicality effect). Specifically, they found that participants evaluated events as moral or immoral faster when an immoral action (which they assumed to be stored as prototypes in memory as well) was perceived as typical (or similar to the prototype), rather than atypical. Typicality was measured with the frequency of the event occurring in reality (males and females are differently paid as a typical event vs. males and female are differently judged in court as an atypical event). If the event was new (atypical) and thus not matching an already existing schematic knowledge structure, longer reaction times for the moral evaluation of the events resulted, suggesting a more deliberate processing mechanism underlying the result. The authors also showed in a second study that an event (violation of a specific moral value) must fall into the same activated category in order for the response to be facilitated. The participant’s task was to evaluate as quickly as possible whether a presented event was immoral or not. The presented immoral events were based on a model by Biel, Fransson and Dahlstrand (1997) that discriminated eight real-life events based on a common moral value. Fransson and Ask (2010) found that a second event was evaluated faster when it fell into the same immoral category as the first presented event. When the second event fell into a different category than was initially activated, no facilitation effect was observed. This indicates the (possible) importance of specificity in the mental representations. These research findings lend empirical support for the outlined assumption that hero and antihero narratives may not share the same mental representation (or story schema).

It follows, if a hero (or antihero) representation does not match an antihero (or hero) schema that was previously activated (primed), then this should result in slower reaction times for moral judgment responses. In turn, a facilitation effect, as observed by Fransson and Ask (2010), should occur when a second antihero stimulus fits an activated antihero schema, resulting in faster responses, based on a match between the stimuli with the mental schema. Irrespective of the moral complexity of the event (the antihero’s actions), reactions should be fast and positive if a mental schema for that event already exists and the primed event itself is typical for that category.

In line with the proposed schema assumption, two conclusions can be drawn from the findings by Fransson and Ask (2010), as well as Mandler’s (1984) reasoning. First, the more an external stimulus (the antihero’s actions) fits an existing prototype or schematic mental representation (that is, the event is a typical one for the viewer), the faster and more automatic is
the response. Second, mental representations of moral events are highly specific. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that hero narratives and antihero narratives do not share the same mental representation.

**Dual-Process Theories of Information Processing**

From the schema accessibility approach by Fransson and Ask (2010) it can be expected that the activation of an antihero schema leads to subsequent fast evaluations of antiheroes when the antihero matches the activated schema. However, research in moral psychology demonstrated that depending on the moral complexity of actions, moral judgments about those events vary, both in their valence (acceptance and rejection) as well as their automaticity (e.g., Greene, et al., 2004). As Raney (2004) contended, the assumption about schemas is that they help to make judgments about media characters *quickly*. Consequently, the schema assumption of this project and its implications for accessibility and information processing are in contrast with findings in moral psychology, specifically research based on the dual-process model of moral judgment (Greene et al., 2001, Greene et al., 2004, Greene, Morelli, Lowenberg, Nystrom, & Cohen, 2008), that contends that the grade of moral complexity of the content about which the judgments are made impacts how quickly these judgments are accomplished (Nichols & Mallon, 2005).

Bargh and Chartrand (1999) stated that “most of a person’s everyday life is determined not by their conscious intentions and deliberate choices but by mental processes that are put into motion by features of the environment and that operate outside of conscious awareness and guidance” (p. 462). Dual-process models of human cognition and information processing assume that a situation is influenced simultaneously by conscious, controlled and non-conscious, automatic processes. Dual-process theories, which are based on dual-system models of information processing (Strack & Deutsch, 2004), are the underlying basis in the study of attention, memory and social perception, and social judgment, among others (cf. Bargh & Chartrand, 1999).

Several scholars (e.g., Kahneman & Frederick, 2002; Stanovich & West, 2000) describe the duality of the process model on the basis of two systems (System 1 and System 2) that differ according to the speed with which information is processed (slow vs. fast), the cognitive controllability of the information processing (conscious vs. unconscious), and the content that is
processed (complex vs. simple). System 1 includes processes that are “associative, implicit, intuitive, experiential, automatic and tacit” (Lapsley & Hill, 2008, p. 316), whereas System 2 includes “rule based, explicit, analytical ‘rational’, conscious and controlled” (p. 316) processes. System 2, therefore, requires attention and cognitive resources for operating, making it less contextually bound. As a result, System 2 can monitor and affect System 1 responses (Craigie, 2011).

Each system has its strength and weakness (Craigie, 2011). Whereas the strength of System 1 is that it is fast, it also is rather inflexible. System 2 processes, on the other hand, are reflective and can take multiple factors into account, but take longer to produce a response which can be hindering in situations where a fast response is required. Thus, as Craig argues (2011), “because of the strength and weaknesses of each system, competent decision making requires the integrated functioning of the two” (p. 59). That means, depending on the context (the object, situation or event) either system is (or both are) responsible for a reaction.

In terms of moral judgment making, Greene et al. (Greene, et al., 2001; Greene et al., 2004; Greene, 2007) combines the two information processing systems in her dual-process models of moral judgment, which predicts that the implicit, emotional system and the conscious, cognitive system jointly impact moral judgment making. The application of the dual-process model to moral judgments as done by Greene et al. (2001) is described by categorizing people’s responses into following the ethical principle of deontology and utilitarianism, with both systems following different norms about what determines right and wrong. As outlined earlier, utilitarian judgments are based on “maximizing benefits and minimizing costs for affected individuals by taking into account everybody’s interest” (Broeders, van den Bos, Müller, & Ham, 2011, p. 941). In contrast, deontological judgments are based on existing moral rules to determine if an action is bad or good, irrespective of the consequences. The dual-process model of moral judgment then links utilitarian judgments to controlled deliberation and cognitive (or cold) reasoning (System 2 processes) and deontological reasoning to intuitive judgments, which in turn are linked to automatic processing and emotionally (warm) reactions (System 1 responses; Cushman, Young, & Hauser, 2006; Greene et al., 2004; Greene et al., 2001). The described dual-process model of moral judgment has received quite some empirical support.

For example, in a study examining the trolley dilemma, most participants agreed that it is permissible to flip a switch to stop a trolley to save five people while killing one. In contrast,
when people were asked to decide if it is permissible to push a heavy stranger down a footbridge to stop a trolley that would otherwise kill five people standing in the trolley’s pathway (footbridge dilemma, Thomson, 1985), most people did not think it is permissible (Hauser, Cushman, Young, Jin, & Mikhail, 2007). The second case represents a deontological judgment, where killing a person is regarded as morally wrong independent of the consequences, whereas for the trolley dilemma (Foot, 1967) utilitarian (consequentialist) reasoning guided the response, where maximizing the number of lives saved matters rather than the number of lives killed.

Greene et al. (2004) argue that competing processes are engaged when judging an utilitarian dilemma (e.g. footbridge dilemma, or more complex dilemmas such as the crying baby dilemma, cf. Greene et al, 2004). The researchers showed in their fMRI (functional Magnet Resonance Imaging) study that, as predicted for competing response processes, the Anterior Cingulate Cortex (ACC) showed increased activity during judgment making of particularly complex personal dilemmas (such as the crying baby dilemma); this is a brain region known for detecting conflict (Botvinick, Braver, Barch, Carter, & Cohen, 2001). The authors reasoned that in such complex utilitarian dilemmas, the deontological response to not accept the action as permissible conflicts with an emotional response to save lives (consequentialist response), which is reflected in an increased activity in the ACC. Furthermore, for complex utilitarian dilemmas, activity in the DLPFC (Dorso Lateral Prefrontal Cortex) has been demonstrated (Greene et al., 2004; MacDonald, Cohen, Stenger, & Carter, 2000; Miller & Cohen, 2001); this region of the brain is known for its activity during conscious deliberation of things. Therefore, utilitarian and controlled/deliberate processing are linked together. Accordingly, deontological judgments have been associated with rather intuitive, emotional responses, whereas utilitarian (consequentialist) judgments are associated with rather deliberate cognitive processes (Greene, 2007).

In addition to this neurophysiological organization of moral processing, the dual-process model of moral judgment can also be understood from the division in moral psychology about how moral judgments are made: the division of the moral intuitionist approach by Haidt (2001), which is linked to fast, emotional and automatic System 1 (deontological) responses, and the moral reasoning approach by Kohlberg, which is linked to more deliberate (utilitarian) and cognitive System 2 processes (Lapsley & Hill, 2008).
Moral Intuitions

Haidt and Björklund (2008) define moral intuitions as “the sudden appearance in unconsciousness or at the fringe of consciousness, of an evaluative feeling (like-dislike, good-bad) […] without the conscious awareness of having gone through steps of search, weighing evidence, or inferring conclusion” (p.188). Haidt and his colleagues’ (Bjorklund, Haidt, & Murphy, 2000; Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993) conclusion is based on their observations that individuals are typically unable to give a moral reason for instantly made moral judgments about specific disgust-based moral dilemmas (e.g., the acceptance of two siblings being romantically engaged, although both agreed to it). They called that observation “moral dumbfounding,” which describes the phenomenon that moral decisions are not based on conscious moral reasoning but are rather automatic (and therefore fast) and intuitive in nature. According to their Social Intuitionist Model, moral reasoning (i.e., conscious moral deliberation about a given judgment situation), in contrast, is of less importance to moral judgments (Haidt & Björklund, 2008). Moral reasoning is often only relevant after the judgment was already made based on the intuition. Moral intuitions are the basis for any judgment, while controlled and deliberate reasoning may only occur in instances when the need is felt to adjust the initial judgment (e.g., social desirability). That, however, is rare according to Haidt and Björklund (2008) as high cognitive resources are needed when intuition and reasoning are conflicting (Paxton & Greene, 2010). The Social Intuitionist Model, in line with the dual-process models, thus, combines intuitionist and rationalist perspectives, although giving the instinctive gut reactions more importance in the moral judgment process.

Moral Reasoning

Whereas Haidt’s (2001) concept forms the intuitionist paradigm in the moral judgment framework, Kohlberg’s view of how moral judgments are made is the opposite: The rationalist paradigm. According to Kohlberg (1958/1994), moral judgments are based solely on conscious moral reasoning, involving deliberate and controlled cognitive processes. Kohlberg’s (1958) work focused on the way children make moral judgment of various moral dilemmas and how they justify their decisions. Lapsley and Narvaez (2005) summarize that Kohlberg’s cognitive developmental paradigm was a standard model in developmental and cognitive psychology over many years, but it could not keep up with development in the social sciences showing that a lot
of people’s social judgments and decision making are made automatically rather than by conscious reasoning (e.g., Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). Narvaez (2010), similar to Haidt (2001) and Greene et al. (2001) argued for an integrated view of both frameworks, stating that moral judgments are made including both rationalist and intuitionist systems. She summarized:

Both the rationalist and intuitionist paradigms provide incomplete views. Rationalism neglects implicit processes, narrowing morality to a small slice of human behavior. Intuitionism ignores the complexities of moral functioning that rely also on complex interplays between reasoning, intuition, and other factors. Viewing constructs as either/or is a human tendency, perhaps because it clarifies differences, but ultimately each perspective represents only a partial view. (Narvaez, 2010, p. 164)

The dual-processing model of moral judgment by Greene et al. (2001, Greene et al., 2004) takes respect to Narvaez’s (2010) claim and integrates fast System 1 (intuitive) and deliberate System 2 (reasoning) information processing in one model, explaining under which circumstances what kind moral judgments are made. In contrast to the Social Intuitionist Model (Haidt & Björklund, 2008; Haidt & Joseph, 2008), both parts of the system—the intuitionist responses and moral reasoning—are equally important, whereas it is the context that determines which system is likely to determine the response.

**The Model of Intuitive Morality and Exemplars (MIME)**

Recently, the Model of Intuitive Morality and Exemplars (MIME, Tamborini, 2011, 2013) has been introduces as one of the first holistic approaches applying the dual-process model logic to media messages. The MIME model by Tamborini (2011, 2013) is founded on Haidt’s Social Intuitionist Model and Moral Foundation Theory (MFT), and seeks to explain how media in short term is ultimately processed and responded to and how the appraisal patterns of various media content can influence media selection. It also explores in long term, how media can affect viewer’s moral foundations or the salience thereof, which in turn affects future media selection patterns (cf. Tamborini, 2011, 2013). Tamborini’s propositions are in line with Haidt’s (2001) assumptions that cultural emphases on certain moral domains (or modules) can affect the salience of specific moral intuitions, which consequently affects how moral judgments are made. Additionally, Tamborini (2011, 2013) claimed that the salience of a moral module is impacted by narratives, especially the presence of exemplars in media. According to Tamborini, Grizzard,
Lewis and Eden (2011), media exemplars are “individual events or entities that serve as examples of some larger category of events or entities [...] as they share features of the larger category of events/entities” (p.6). Moral judgments then are affected by exemplars in the way that “implicit social rules” are associated with these media exemplars (Tamborini, 2013, p. 48). Exemplars are furthermore bound to a specific moral module, which can increase an automatic appraisal process of a story exemplar that adheres to this salient module. So, a media character (for example Nicholas Styles, played by Denzel Washington in the movie Ricochet) is bound to a specific moral module (in this case Loyalty, as shown by Tamborini, Grizzard, Eden, & Lewis, 2011). If, in another media situation a similar character is encountered (for example, Indiana Jones) who also adheres to the specific domain, then this domain becomes more salient (cf. Tamborini, 2013, p. 57).

In turn, information processing is facilitated by and responses are consistent with the domain-adhering or domain-violating media exemplar (Tamborini, 2013). These ideas are congruent with Fransson and Ask’s (2010) conceptualization of automatic processing occurring when an event adheres to a mean representation of a category. However, with the MIME model’s basis in MFT, the role of the moral domains—rather than the development of schemas—is relevant for judgment making. According to MIME it is assumed that “stories in which characters equally adhere to some [moral] modules while violating others will require contemplation to judge” (Tamborini, 2011, p. 42). As described earlier, in line with the dual-processing models, these situations seem to directly apply to antihero characters. In a case where a media exemplar displays a mixed pattern of upholding moral domains (i.e., the antihero), the viewer could either engage in rationalization processes to judge the character or the viewer would rely on the strongest intuition that is salient in the situation portrayed (per Tamborini, 2011). In any case, as Tamborini (2011) sums up, judgment responses should be slower for such characters, as they cannot be intuitively made. According to the MIME, longer response times for moral judgment are predicted based on the incongruence between moral modules upheld by the character (which is similar to a mismatch between the stimuli and an existent prototype, as Fransson and Ask [2010] outlined).

Preliminary support for the prolonged reactions times for conflicting domain messages has been shown by Lewis, Tamborini, and Weber (2011). The researchers investigated how all-positive, all-negative, and morally conflicting endings of a narrative are processed and ultimately
enjoyed and appreciated. Results showed that narrative plot endings with morally conflicting messages took longer to be evaluated than morally pure positive endings. That is, participants took longer to judge their liking of an ending that presented a conflict situation where one (or more) moral domains were violated for the sake of adhering to others. Thus, the more moral domains conflict in a media message, the longer the appraisal process.

In terms of long-term effects, the MIME model predicts that repeated exposure to media exemplars that uphold or violate specific moral domains influences the salience of viewers’ moral domains and of their exemplars, which in turn impacts automatic appraisal (Tamborini, 2011). However, the model does not explain how long-term exposure to morally complex media characters, which violate and uphold various domains simultaneously, affects the appraisal process. According to Haidt’s (2001) MFT, moral intuitions can only be changed through emotional intuitive appeals, rather than controlled moral reasoning (Paxton & Greene, 2010). Therefore, the MIME model theoretically does not account for how, over time, even morally conflicting situations or acting characters (i.e., antiheroes) might come to be evaluated automatically, based on the developed narrative specific schemas and character specific attitudes. According to MFT, moral reasoning and deliberation are not likely to change an automatic appraisal because they only occur after a judgment was already made. Thus, according to the MIME, we should not see fast reaction times for moral judgments of antiheroes, because their conflicting moral domains should elicit rational thought processes rather than intuitive ones. This reasoning is in line with the predictions derived for heroes and antiheroes according to the dual-process model of moral judgment. However, this reasoning runs counter to the proposals by Raney (2004) regarding schema development and fast evaluations of media characters, irrespective of their moral portrayals.

How Deliberate Appraisals can become Automatic: An Argument for the Schema Approach

Despite potentially contrasting predictions drawn from the literature just reviewed, I argue that any initial processing differences between purely moral and morally conflicting media characters can be overcome by the development of the described narrative schemas that provide the viewer with a mental shortcut for their moral judgments.
Research has shown that automatic responses can be intentionally or unintentionally altered if necessary (Logan, 1989), and controlled processes can be influenced by automatic responses (Kihlstrom, 1999). That is, the two differently cognitively demanding information processing routes interact with each other, given specific circumstances. Bargh and Chartrand (1999), for example, stated that evaluations (good or bad) of a person, object or event can, through repeated and consistent experience, become integrated with the perceptual representation of the event or person. It follows that the perceptual representation then can be activated, without conscious deliberation when perceiving the object again. As a result, because the object (such as, an antihero) already carries an evaluative tag (bad, but good intentions), ones response to the object is activated automatically when the object is presented. I contend that Bargh and Chartrand (1999) lend additional support to the schema argument offered herein: That is, over repeated exposure, slower, more deliberate processes can become automatized. Therefore, even morally complex (antihero) characters, who, according to the dual-process models and the MIME, should require extended deliberation before a moral judgment can be made, can be evaluated automatically, saving cognitive energy that instead can be devoted towards the enjoyment of the narrative.

Furthermore, Kahneman and Frederick (2002) proposed that through frequent exposure, more complex System 2 process (controlled, deliberate responses) eventually become so proficient that they become a System 1 process. As a consequence of repeated exposure, the concept in question—for example, accepting the moral violation of a morally complex dilemma, like the footbridge dilemma—becomes chronically accessible (e.g., Bargh & Thein, 1985). As a result, automatic responses result rather than deliberate and controlled reasoning. Kahneman and Frederick (2002) argued that the underlying process of this shift in processing is the increased accessibility of the responses that are practiced (like chess moves) or repeatedly experienced.

Accordingly, in contrast to what has been reasoned earlier from a dual-process model perspective, it is reasonable to assume that repeated viewing of antihero narratives can lead to the characters actions being evaluated rather quickly despite their moral complexity. To be clear: The prerequisite for this happening is extensive exposure to similar patterns of (im)moral portrayals and the related exercise of making judgments about those morally complex actions. That is, repeatedly accepting the immoral actions of the antihero for the sake of a good outcome
and consequently enjoyment will lead to the development of a chronically accessible schema that will determine fast subsequent character evaluations.

In fact, the research by Fransson and Ask (2010) also lends support to the schema argument. As outlined earlier, the researchers found that conscious deliberation is likely to take place when the moral dilemma that is to be judged is rather unfamiliar. In contrast, automatic processing is likely when the event is recognized as a familiar moral transgression (facilitation effect). Following this logic, narrative schemas for antiheroes would theoretically contribute to fast processing of those characters (i.e., representatives of that schema), even though their moral actions are complex (which would otherwise require conscious deliberation, according to the dual-process model and the MIME).

**Attitude Accessibility**

As outlined earlier, narrative schemas are regarded as broad knowledge structures including specific evaluations of attitude objects, like the protagonists in a crime drama (Pratkanis, 1989). In the context of the present project the existence of an antihero and hero narrative schema is assumed, which, on a micro-level includes specific attitudes towards the protagonists. Up to this point, the discussion on the automaticity of moral judgments towards heroes and antiheroes evolved around the accessibility of schemas. However, in order to make specific predictions for the evaluation of the crime drama’s protagonists, it is necessary to understand how attitudes towards the protagonists become chronically accessible.

Attitudes, also defined as “a learned predisposition to respond in a consistency favorable or unfavorable manner with respect to a given object” (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975, p. 6) facilitate information processing. According to the Expectancy-Value-Approach by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), attitudes are determined by the strength of a specific belief about certain attributes of an object, and the evaluation (good or bad, like or dislike) of these attributes.

Attitude accessibility is measured by the time it takes to evaluate and attitude object on its presentation (Fazio, 1990). The faster the evaluation of the object is the more accessible the attitude from memory. The time it takes to respond to an attitude object (e.g., a hero or antihero character) is measured in milliseconds and referred to as response (or reaction) time with higher numbers indicating longer time to respond to a stimulus. Several of the previously cited studies applied this form of measurement to assess the automaticity with which certain concepts,
attitudes or schemas are represented in a mental network (Roskos-Ewoldsen, et al., 2009). Research suggests that oftentimes explicit (or self-report) measures are not reliable to capture implicitly held attitudes or cognitions (cf. Greenwald and Banaji, 1995). Greenwald and Banaji (1995) define implicit cognition as “traces of past experience [that] affect some performance, even though the influential earlier experience is not remembered in the usual sense—that is, it is unavailable to self-report or introspection.” (p. 5). The implicit attitude test (IAT; cf. Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998), for example, has been developed to assess a variety of implicit attitudes including racial and gender stereotypes that an explicit measure would not be able to effectively detect. Tamborini, Lewis, Prabhu, Grizzard, and Eden (2012) used the affect misattribution procedure (AMP; cf. Payne, Chen, Govorun, & Stewart, 2005) to assess affective responses towards moral stimuli. The present study measures attitudes towards media characters as well as schema-related knowledge concepts by capturing the time participants take to make a judgment about the morality of the media characters and their agreement or disagreement with several of their actions.

Protagonists of a crime drama can constitute an attitude object with specific attributes. For example, in the traditional hero case, the character is morally upright, fighting for justice, and (usually) attractive in a number of ways. Over repeated exposure to this portrayal, the viewer forms a specific belief about that hero character (e.g., protagonists in crime dramas are good, because they act morally righteous). In line with ADT (Zillmann, 2000), due to the moral propriety of the hero character, the evaluation of the protagonist is generally positive. Consequently, a strong positive attitude towards a hero character is typically formed. As a result, when encountering such a character, viewers can respond quickly with a strong, positive attitude: This conclusion is consistent with the dual-process model predictions described earlier. Fast and deontological responses can be developed, based on the simple rule that the hero always acts morally righteous and therefore can be liked.

When looking at an antihero as an attitude object, character attributes are slightly different from the hero attributes. Therefore, antihero-specific beliefs formed over repeated exposure should be different from hero-specific beliefs. When encountering an antihero the first time, viewers may experience attitudinal ambivalence in their evaluation of the protagonist’s attributes (Jonas, Broemer Diehl, 2000; Kaplan, 1972; Thompson, Zanna, & Griffin, 1995). The antihero may be lovable and seeking to accomplish a noble goal, which is likely to be evaluated
positively. At the same time, the protagonist breaks laws, tortures, and lies to accomplish these goals, behaviors which should be evaluated negatively. One could regard the type of ambivalence as an affective-cognitive inconsistency (cf. Jonas, Broemer, & Diehl, 2000), as the emotional side taking with the protagonist goes against the cognitive evaluation of his immoral actions. Regardless, in the end, the viewer generally holds a positive and negative evaluation of the antihero at the same time (i.e., attitudinal ambivalence).

Research on ambivalent attitudes has shown that ambivalence reduces the accessibility of attitudes (Jonas, Diehl, & Broemer, 1997) and makes them less stable over time (Conner & Sparks, 2002; Larsen, 2007). Consequently, information processing to form a final judgment about the attitude object is prolonged as people have to integrate the positive and negative evaluations before they can make a judgment (Cunningham, Raye, & Johnson, 2004; Van der Pligt, De Vries, Manstead, & Van Harreveld, 2000). The different attitude components compete against each other, which slows response time for any judgments made (Bargh, Chaiken, Govender, & Pratto, 1992). Again, this reasoning is in line with the dual-process models and the MIME.

However, as also indicated in research for ambivalent attitudes, it is the context that determines the final evaluation of the attitude object (Wilson & Hodges, 1992) and, therefore, the degree of ambivalence. For already-existing ambivalent attitudes, for example about capital punishment, some contexts may predominantly activate positive beliefs and other contexts negative beliefs, contributing to the ambivalence of the attitude (Wilson & Hodges, 1992). For antiheroes, however, the context stays the same for the overwhelmingly majority of narratives. As previously outlined, antihero narratives offer moral disengagement cues that provide the viewer with a general positive outlook. Consequently, the evaluations of the antihero, over repeated exposure, are predominantly based on the viewer’s positive (rather than negative) beliefs. To further explain, in the same way that hero crime dramas follow a consistent hero narrative schema with predictable storylines, plots, and character actions, antihero crime dramas consist of a similar format. As proposed, moral disengagement cues are typically one of the main attributes of these narrative structures. Thus, for both, the hero and antihero narrative the storyline follows a highly predictable pattern. Consequently, the context is stable for both of such narratives, making it likely that over repeated exposure, any initial attitudinal ambivalence decreases, and as such, attitude strength increases, leading to fast judgment making. The
argumentation that the moral disengagement cues in the context of antihero narratives decrease the viewer’s attitudinal ambivalence towards the antihero, thus, facilitating information processing, can additionally be supported by literature on models of persuasion.

Derived from another dual-process model, specifically the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) by Chaiken, Liberman, and Eagly (1989), individuals’ process incoming persuasive information based on two principles: the least effort principle and the sufficiency principle. According to the least effort principle, individuals try to save cognitive energy when they process messages and therefore rely on heuristics (e.g., “experts are usually right”) to come to a judgment. However, these rules of thumb need to provide sufficient confidence to the individual’s judgments, whereas each situation or subject of consideration has its own sufficiency threshold or desired level of confidence for one’s own judgment (Bohner, Moskowitz, & Chaiken, 1995). In case the heuristic cues are not sufficient to bring the individual to the desired level of confidence for their decision making, systematic processing (i.e., deliberate elaboration) of the message is added.

Based on the HSM, one could argue that due to the least effort principle (Bohner, et al., 1995) viewers see the moral disengagement cues provided in the antihero narrative as heuristic rules of thumb, helping them in their decision making to positively evaluate the antihero. It is reasonable to suppose that with these cues at hand, the viewer has sufficient confidence in their attitude without the need for additional systematic processing. One can assume that the desired level of confidence for an attitude towards a protagonist in a narrative may not be as high as for a real-world problem of, for example, abortion, given that the narrative situation provides no threatening consequences for the judgments made. In fact, the only consequence viewers may experience is a lack of enjoyment. As Raney (2004) outlined, viewers are willing to do a lot to derive enjoyment. For the sake of a pleasurable entertainment experience, it is likely that viewer’s use the given heuristic cues by the narrative to inform their attitudes towards the antihero. That saves them cognitive energy otherwise required for systematic processing, which then can be devoted to other narrative engagement processes, as outlined earlier.

As discussed before, context is very important for the direction in which the ambivalent attitude is guided (Wilson & Hodges, 1992). An antihero character in a narrative can be processed with less cognitive energy, based on the provided heuristics. However, if we encounter an “antihero” in the real-world—an individual toward which we have an ambivalent attitude—
likely, heuristic cues in the environment are not sufficient anymore to achieve the desired level of confidence for our judgment to keep or terminate the friendship. That is, moral judgments in the real-world are likely having a higher threshold for a desired level of confidence, due to possible consequences that may go in hand with the judgment. Thus, the evaluation of a person towards whom we have an ambivalent attitude in a real-world context is likely associated with systematic processing to achieve the desired threshold of confidence over one’s attitude. Similarly, even evaluating a fictional antihero outside of the narrative context may lead to a great level of ambivalence, given that the positive narrative context (i.e., moral disengagement cues) is missing. Consequently, a higher sufficiency threshold is required that can only be reached by systematic and prolonged elaboration of the character. With that being said, I contend that the discussed argumentation for the highly accessible attitudes towards antiheroes only applies when the character is encountered within the frame of the narrative context.

Approval of Immoral Actions

Newby-Clark, McGregor and Zanna (2002) demonstrated that cognitive discomfort only arises when ambivalent attitude components are simultaneously accessible. For the antihero narrative, this seems rarely, if ever, to be likely. Generally, it is the positive components of the antihero attitude that are reinforced by the narrative through moral disengagement cues. That is, the cues help to eliminate or to mask the (potentially) negative attitude components. This leaves viewers with a feeling of consistency in their attitude towards the antihero, leading to fast and automatic processing of information.

Additional research also highlights the importance of the context in which complex moral situations are encountered in influencing the direction of the moral judgment.

For example, Broeder and colleagues (2011) showed that for highly ambivalent utilitarian moral dilemmas, the accessibility of moral judgment rules at the time of responding impacts how the moral judgment is made. A highly ambivalent moral dilemma is, for example, the crying baby dilemma. It consists of a very personal conflict about smothering one’s own child to save oneself and a group of others from being killed by enemy soldiers. The researchers demonstrated that if the utilitarian response (i.e., accepting the moral violation to save oneself and the group) was framed in a way that the action would “save lives,” more people indicated being willing to approve of the immoral action. This is in contrast to when the course of action in that dilemma
was framed as exercising the rule of “do not kill.” Along the same lines, Bartels (2008) found that if people’s attention is geared towards breaking moral rules rather than the positive consequences of doing so, then individuals are reluctant to approve of an immoral action; in fact, people are more prone to disapprove of immoral actions and adhering to moral rules (deontological judgments) irrespective of the (positive) consequences. In contrast, if attention is instead drawn to the positive consequences of an action, participants are more likely to approve of immoral conduct. In fact, Paxton, Ungar, and Greene (2012) found that if participants were primed to deliberately think about complex problems (by using the Cognitive Reflection Task, cf. Frederick, 2005) they were more likely to accept the utilitarian-supporting actions in a morally complex dilemma. The authors argued that their moral reasoning was more accessible due to the priming provided by the framing. All of these findings emphasize the importance of the accessibility of moral-judgment rules at the time of decision making for a subsequent judgment. How does that play out in an antihero narrative?

As outlined before, the frame of the portrayal in antihero narratives is generally geared towards the positive consequences resulting from the immoral actions (utilitarian frame). The actions are portrayed in a way that has a rather positive connotation. Moral disengagement cues throughout the narrative give the viewer the moral amnesty to evaluate the immoral actions from the antihero in a positive way. Nichols and Mallon (2006) pointed out that “even if an action is thought to violate a rule, it might also be regarded as acceptable, all things considered” (p. 534). Thus, if the focus is on the rule breaking, then it is likely that more negative judgments are made. But if the focus is on the overall positive consequences of the action (which is what is usually portrayed in antihero narratives), more positive judgments about the antihero’s actions and the antihero him/herself are likely.

In sum, based on these research findings it is reasonable to draw several conclusions. First, that narrative schemas, specifically a hero and antihero schema, exist. Second, for both narratives, over repeated exposure, positive (chronically accessible) attitudes towards the protagonists are formed. And third, these schemas lead to fast, and immorality accepting, moral judgments of the protagonists and their actions when evaluated within the narrative context.
CHAPTER 3

STUDY ONE

Hypotheses of Study One

As outlined earlier, the particular interest of investigation of this dissertation is how we align with media characters. ADT predicts that media characters and their behaviors generally are morally scrutinized before affective dispositions are built. In line with the moral judgment made about the characters, those evaluated morally acceptable are generally liked and those evaluated morally unacceptable are usually disliked. From this perspective, antiheroes should generally be disliked due to the various immoral actions they perform throughout the narrative. When regarding media characters as an attitude object, viewers should likely form an ambivalent attitude towards antihero characters: a positive emotional attitude towards the antihero as a lovable persona that seeks to accomplish noble goals, mixed with a negative attitude towards the antihero based on the way how the character tries to accomplish these noble goals (through deceit, torturing and law breaking). Consequently, we might expect that the antihero would be evaluated as positive and negative at the same time. Making this attitude judgment is also expected to take longer compared to evaluating a character the viewer has a strong positive or negative attitude towards.

However, I think that our alignment with media characters is based on narrative schemas and character attitudes. I contend that in contrast to morally scrutinize their actions, we apply readily available schemas to evaluate their actions. Based on these schemas that include a readily available positive attitude towards the protagonists, we can form positive dispositions towards them. As outlined, this logic is specifically interesting for antiheroes, as their actions (in contrast to the behaviors of a clear moral hero) are morally complex. As a consequence, ambivalent attitudes, which typically require longer processing times for moral judgments, are likely to result. However, based on the structure of these narratives (which include moral disengagement cues) and the viewers’ previously developed narrative schemas, fast judgments and positive attachments to the antihero can be expected.

To investigate these claims, participants viewed an episode of either a typical hero TV crime drama show (*Law and Order: SVU*), or a typical antihero TV crime drama show (*Dexter*). Subsequently, they were asked to respond (agree vs. disagree) to various statements regarding
the protagonist’s (im)moral behaviors and to evaluate several different but familiar media characters as good or bad, while reaction times were measured for each. The first set of hypotheses was specifically concerned with the evaluation of the character’s actions, with the underlying assumption that schemas are the basis for a response:

H1a: On average, no differences in response speed between moral judgments of the actions of a hero or an antihero from a previously watched crime drama series will be observed.

H1b: On average, no differences in the agreement with the moral judgments of the actions of a hero or an antihero will be observed.

Further, according to the network model of memory paradigm, as examined in Fransson and Ask’s (2010) study, the activation of one concept category increases the likelihood that an event of the same category will be processed faster than an event that does not fit in the previously activated category (i.e., facilitation effect). Thus, if an antihero and hero schema exist and are activated while viewing an episode, then reactions to subsequent, related stimuli (e.g., photos of other well-known heroes and antiheroes) should be facilitated. In contrast, if the subsequent stimulus is unrelated to the primed schema, then slower reaction times should result. For example, for a person who views a hero crime drama episode, a picture of an antihero character would be an atypical (or not matching) stimulus that requires more processing time for evaluation than a picture of another famous hero (Mandler, 1984) and vice versa. Based on these and the earlier outlined assumptions, Hypotheses 2 then predicted:

H2a: Individuals who are exposed to an antihero narrative will respond faster and more positive to other well-known antihero media characters than individuals exposed to a hero narrative.

H2b: Individuals who are exposed to a hero narrative will respond faster to other, well-known hero media characters than individuals exposed to an antihero narrative.
Study One Methodology

Sample

The study employed a between-subject, posttest-only design with two narrative conditions: *Law and Order: SVU* (hero) and *Dexter* (antihero). A total of 73 undergraduate students enrolled in communication courses at Florida State University participated in the study in exchange of extra or course credit. The majority of the sample was female (66%), White (63%), with an average age of 21 years. Research was conducted in the School of Communication research lab, with a maximum of eight participants per session. Each session lasted approximately 75 minutes. Participants were allocated randomly to a condition, resulting in 37 participants being in the antihero narrative condition and 36 participants in the hero narrative condition.

Procedure

Upon arrival, participants read and signed an IRB-approved informed consent form before watching the 50-minute, TV crime drama episode (Appendix A). After watching the episode, participants were given 20 practice prompts to make them familiar with the software (MediaLab/Direct RT) and the procedures employed to measure reaction time. The practice prompts consisted of 20 different pictures that were either positive (e.g. baby cats, flowers) or negative (e.g. tornado, shark) in tone. Participants had to evaluate the pictures accordingly by pressing the appropriate, labeled keyboard key (right shift “good,” left shift “bad”). The pictures were sampled from the International Affective Picture System (Lang, Bradley & Cuthbert, 2008) and have been pretested by Hofmann and Baumgarten (2010) to be morally irrelevant and purely positive and negative. As expected, 91% of the participants categorized the negative pictures correctly and 99% the positive pictures with a mean response time of 1443ms (SD = 843.61) for the negative pictures and 962ms (SD = 375.99) for the positive pictures. Following the practice prompts, participants responded to the dependent variables consisting of several statements asking if they agreed or disagreed with several statements regarding the protagonist’s behaviors (DV1), followed by an evaluation (good or bad) of other familiar media characters (DV2). Finally, they provided demographic information and responded to some Likert-type items that determined if the manipulation of conditions was successful. After completing the final task, participants were thanked, debriefed (Appendix B), and dismissed by the experimenter.
Stimulus material. As stimulus material for Study One, the television format was chosen because the serial format fits very well with the assumption that repeated exposure should lead to the creation of cognitive schemas of heroes and antiheroes. To select a hero and antihero show most watched by the population from which the sample was drawn, data from a comparable student sample in a previous, unrelated study were analyzed, revealing that Law and Order: SVU (DeClerque & Hayman, 2006) was the most watched, typical hero show and Dexter (Cerone & Cuesta, 2006) the most watched antihero show. For Dexter, the first episode of Season One (2006), “Dexter” was selected. To keep as much consistency in the episode selection as possible, for Law and Order: SVU, the second episode “Clock” of Season 8, also from 2006, was selected.

Dexter, Season 1, Episode 1 (2006) “Dexter” (54 minutes). Dexter is introduced in this episode as a caring psychopath who has learned over his childhood to channel his aggression for the good and to murder people who are murders themselves. He works as a blood-splatter expert in a homicide department. In this particular episode, he tries to find a murderer who drains his victims of blood, a technique Dexter is fascinated by. Dexter kills several criminals, including his girlfriend’s ex-husband who had abused her. The viewer is also introduced to Dexter’s girlfriend and her children who seem to like him a lot (IMDB.com.n.d.).

Law and Order: SVU, Season 8, Episode 2 (2006) “Clock” (43 minutes). Detective Elliot Stabler and his team look for a missing girl who appears to have a disease that makes her look like a child although she is already an adolescent (Turner Syndrome). It appears that the girl has run away from home to be intimate with her boyfriend. This, however, is interpreted as a pedophile act from the boyfriend’s side as the girl, although already 17, looks like 12 years old. At the end of the episode, Stabler is introduced to his new partner, Dani Beck (IMDB.com.n.d.). Overall, 32% of the participants of the sample had seen the show Dexter before (24% of the sample, the specific episode), and 75% have seen Law and Order: SVU before (14% of the sample had seen the specific episode before).

Dependent variables. The dependent variables consisted of response time assessments measured with the software MediaLab/Direct RT, version 2006.2 from Empirisoft Corporations. As outlined earlier, the underlying narrative schemas and attitudes towards the characters are assumed to be highly accessible, based on repeated exposure to hero and antihero narratives.
When a schema or attitude is highly accessible, fast and automatic responses follow, which is assessed by measuring the time participants need to respond to a target character or target item. The more an attitude (i.e., antihero attitude) has become part of the mental network, the more automatic (that is faster) should the response be. Longer response times, then, are an indicator for a more conscious response. It has to be noted for the present study, that there are no absolute values of response time that will be employed as a criteria for conscious or unconscious responses. Rather, the comparison of the priming conditions (hero vs. antihero TV show exposure) will serve as the judgment ground, how much of a deliberate or automatic response it was the participants were giving. Research has shown that chronically accessible attitudes can be primed to be temporarily even more accessible (Bargh & Pratto, 1986), which is relevant for the present study in order to investigate the proposed underlying schemas. Priming has been broadly defined as “a short-term impact of exposure to the media on subsequent judgments or behaviors” (Roskos-Ewoldsen, et al., 2009, p. 74). In measuring the time it takes participants to make a judgment about the presented stimuli, it is anticipated to better capture the latent construct of the underlying narrative schemas, and attitudes towards the characters, then when explicit measures were employed.

Response time, also known as response latencies (Arpan, Rhodes, & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2007), were produced by measuring the time that elapsed between the keyboard strike that starts the presentation of the dependent variables and the response. Responses were initiated by pressing either one of two keyboard keys labeled with stickers of the relevant answer choices (“good”/right shift; “bad”/left shift; “agree”/right Ctrl; “disagree”/left Ctrl). The direction of the response was coded in the way that positive answers (“good” and “agree”) will be coded as 1, and negative answers (“bad” and “disagree”) as -1 (e.g., Rhodes & Ewoldson, 2009). For each dependent variable, prompts were presented in random order as either a short sentence (DV1) or as a picture on the screen (DV2). For all variables, participants were asked to answer as quickly as possible, while maximizing accuracy (Fazio, Chen, McDonel, & Sherman, 1982).

**Character moral behavior evaluations (DV1).** The first dependent variable measured the participant’s response to seven prompts that were developed to evaluate the protagonist’s behavior. Table 2 (on p. 40) includes the text for all items, which required participants to agree or disagree. The statements were adapted from previous studies that dealt with the assessment of judgments of moral dilemmas (e.g., Nichols & Mallon, 2006; Paxton, Ungar & Greene, 2012;
Usoof-Throwfeek, Janoff-Bulman, & Tavernini, 2011), moral judgment of antihero character behavior (e.g., Raney et al., 2009), and moral disengagement (Bandura, 1999). Some of the statements directly pointed towards the narrative context (e.g., “The actions of the protagonist were morally right in this situation”), whereas others were constructed in more general terms (e.g., “The actions of the protagonist were morally right”). It was not intended to create a coherent scale with these items (although it might have been added to the validity of the results). Therefore, the response time was analyzed separately for each item between the conditions. Also, in retrospect, to exclusively measure the reaction time needed for the evaluation of the statements, the time participants needed for reading the statements should have been assessed and subtracted from the overall reaction time. However, no pretest on the average sentence reading response time was conducted. Thus, the average response time includes the reading of the statements. Nevertheless, because the statements were all relatively short and similar in length (ranging from 7 to 11 words) the confounding of the reading time with the evaluation time is not considered to be a serious problem here. However, this certainly adds to the limitations of Study One.

Character picture judgments (DV2). The second dependent variable measured participant’s judgment of familiar media characters. A pretest was conducted to evaluate the familiarity of different characters, as well as the perception of the character as a hero, antihero or villain. To that end, a Qualtrics survey was completed by 88 students (mean age 21.75, with 70% females) who rated 58 pictures of heroes, antiheroes, and villains used in previous studies (Eden, et al., 2011; Tamborini, et al., 2011) and from current shows available on Netflix, Hulu, broadcast, and cable TV (see Appendix C). The different character categories were determined by the participants’ response to how good, moral, and likable the character is (10-point likert scale), as well as into which category the character would best fit (hero, antihero or villain category).

From the 58 evaluated characters, 10 for each category were selected for Study One based on their familiarity and clear categorization into each protagonist category in the pretest. The selected antiheroes \((n = 10)\) were, on average, rated as significantly more immoral \((M = 4.63, SD = 1.74)\) than the hero characters \([(M = 8.61, SD = .615), t (36) = -13.442, p < .001, 95\% CI: -4.619 to -3.408, Cohen’s d = 2.87]\), and as more moral than villains \([(M = 1.57, SD = .555), t (36) = 9.890, p < .001, 95\% CI: 2.428 to 3.680, Cohen’s d = 1.81]\). Based on this clear moral
distinction between characters, participants in Study One evaluated 29 characters as “good” or “bad” by pressing the indicated keyboard key.  

A reliability analysis was conducted, reducing the character categories for the final analysis to five in the hero category (Cronbach’s α = .733), eight in the villain category (Cronbach’s α = .601), and two in the antihero category (Pearson’s r = .558, p < .001, n = 2). The antihero character Dexter was analyzed separately, as the reliability indices suggested that this character did not fit with the other selected antihero characters. Because Dexter was the main character of the TV show that some participants viewed, responses towards this character were still of interest, despite the poor fit with the other two antihero characters. It should be noted that, other than Dexter, all character pictures used in DV2 were unrelated to the previously watched episodes. Responses were averaged for DV2 based on the picture categories (hero, antihero, villain) to create a composite evaluation score representing the proportion of fast (or slow) and good or bad responses for the different character category pictures (cf., Rhodes, Roskos-Ewoldsen, Edison, & Bradford, 2008).

**Overall character morality evaluations.** In order to verify the presumed distinction between the hero and antihero conditions, participants rated the protagonist’s behavior in terms of the extent to which it violated or upheld the participant’s personal sense of morality along the moral domains of purity, inflicting harm, fairness, group loyalty, and respect for authority (Haidt & Joseph, 2008). This approach was previously used by Eden, Grizzard, and Lewis (2011). Responses were given on a 7-point, Likert-type scale anchored with 1 (completely violated) and 7 (completely upheld). Reliability of the scale was acceptable (α = .817).

### Table 1

**Means and Standard Deviations for the Evaluation of the Five Moral Domains Across Conditions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Purity M (SD)</th>
<th>Harm M (SD)</th>
<th>Fairness M (SD)</th>
<th>Loyalty M (SD)</th>
<th>Authority M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hero (n = 36)</td>
<td>5.14 (1.15)</td>
<td>5.03 (1.27)</td>
<td>4.72 (1.26)</td>
<td>5.08 (1.16)</td>
<td>5.39 (1.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antihero (n = 37)</td>
<td>3.19 (1.26)</td>
<td>2.46 (1.64)</td>
<td>4.78 (1.55)</td>
<td>4.16 (1.42)</td>
<td>4.14 (1.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As expected, a significant effect for condition was observed, $t(71) = 5.497$, $p < .001$, with the hero narrative receiving higher scores on the moral foundations ($M = 5.07, SD = .992$) than the antihero narrative ($M = 3.75, SD = 1.06$), indicating a successful condition manipulation. More specifically, when analyzing the moral domain items individually, across groups, it became apparent that the specific domains of purity and harm were lower for the antihero, compared to fairness, loyalty and authority (Table 1). Thus, as a side note, the study supports Tamborini et al.’s (2011) assumption that antiheroes can be characterized by their adherence to and violation of specific moral domains.

**Study One Results and Discussion**

**Data Cleaning**

Previous research has shown that response latencies are typically not normally distributed but rather positively skewed in the way that they are constrained at the fast end and widely spread at the slower range (Bargh & Chartrand, 2000; Fazio, 1990; Roskos-Ewoldsen, Yu, & Rhodes, 2004). This was the case for the present data, as indicated by the Shapiro-Wilk statistic. In order to account for the non-normality in the data, reaction times were transformed using the reciprocal (inverse) transformation (that is, $1$ divided by the reaction time), with an additional multiplication procedure ($x1000$) to make the resulting small numbers more easily interpretable (Rhodes & Ewoldson, 2009; Roskos-Ewoldsen, et al., 2004). The transformed reaction time then represents the “response per unit of time,” which Rhodes and Ewoldson (2009, p. 2362) described as the response speed, with higher numbers representing faster speeds. Second, an outlier analysis was conducted for each condition (Ratcliff, 1993). First, the transformed reaction times were standardized, and then outliers $>|3.0|$ were selected (Uleman, Hon, Roman, & Moskowitz, 1996) and treated as missing cases for the further analysis (Sechrist & Stangor, 2001). After this data cleaning, several of the items of the moral behavior measure (DV1) still showed some deviation from normality. As a result, non-parametric tests were used for the analysis. For the picture evaluations (DV2), one systematic fast outlier had to be deleted from the dataset, leaving an overall sample size of $N = 72$, with satisfactory normally distributed data.
Hypotheses Testing

Table 2 summarizes all mean reaction times (back transformed to milliseconds from the original reciprocal transformation of the reaction time data) for each dependent variable (i.e., each typicality event, and averaged scale responses of the character categories in DV2), across conditions.

Results and discussion of H1. With regard to the assumption that underlying narrative schemas determine the judgment of a crime drama character’s actions, irrespective of their moral conduct, Hypothesis 1 proposed no difference between conditions in the speed (H1a) or valence (H1b) at which judgments about the characters actions are made. Each of the seven statements was analyzed individually between conditions using the Mann-Whitney test, as the normality assumption (as outline above) was violated for these variables.

First, only the response speed for each item (transformed reaction times) was investigated between conditions, with higher numbers indicating a faster speed. The Mann-Whitney test revealed no significant difference in the speed with which the judgments were made on any of the seven statements between the conditions (see Table 3). In other words, participants rendered judgments on the morality of the protagonists’ behaviors at a similar speed. Thus, for response speed, Hypothesis 1a was supported.

Next, results from participants’ responses indicating agreement or disagreement with the items were analyzed, using Chi-Square tests, to check the frequency with which participants evaluated the actions of the characters positively. No significant differences in the frequency with which participants agreed to the items between conditions were found in six of the seven items (Table 4). A Chi-Square Test revealed a marginal significant effect between groups for item 6, $\chi^2(1) = 4.503, p = .059$ (exact, 2-sided), Cramer’s $V = .250$, indicating that participants in the hero group were more likely to agree to the statement (64%) than participants in the antihero group (39%). In other words, participants rated the hero and antihero as similarly moral on all items, although the difference between the percentage of people finding the heroes and antiheroes actions “acceptable” was marginally significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 1b was also primarily and fundamentally supported.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV1</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Hero ($n = 36$)</th>
<th>Antihero ($n = 36$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1) The actions of the protagonist were appropriate to the situation</td>
<td>3677.58 (.178)</td>
<td>3753.97 (.155)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2) All things considered, the actions of the protagonist were acceptable</td>
<td>4437.38 (.155)</td>
<td>3443.64 (.106)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3) The actions of the protagonist were morally right</td>
<td>3320.69 (.202)</td>
<td>3529.20 (.177)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4) The actions of the protagonist were good</td>
<td>2798.43 (.206)</td>
<td>2604.83 (.170)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5) The actions of the protagonist were morally right in this situation</td>
<td>3659.57 (.128)</td>
<td>3647.30 (.123)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6) The actions of the protagonist were acceptable</td>
<td>3392.25 (.231)</td>
<td>2711.66 (.198)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(7) The actions of the protagonist were justified</td>
<td>2809.22 (.204)</td>
<td>2427.19 (.179)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV2</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Hero ($n = 5$)</th>
<th>Antihero ($n = 8$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Antihero characters ($n = 2$)</td>
<td>1092.76 (.285)</td>
<td>1105.91 (.245)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dexter</td>
<td>1805.03 (.356)</td>
<td>1844.22 (.334)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hero characters ($n = 5$)</td>
<td>931.56 (.212)</td>
<td>932.44 (.209)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Villain characters ($n = 8$)</td>
<td>1066.14 (.203)</td>
<td>1020.33 (.171)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The mean reaction times are transformed back to milliseconds from the reciprocal transformation.

From these results it can be inferred that irrespective of the character’s actual moral conduct—whether morally pure or morally ambivalent—judgments about their actions were made equally quickly and, generally speaking, interpreted as equally moral. The findings support what Raney (2004) proposed earlier: Evaluations of media characters (both heroes and
antiheroes) are quick and schematic, not requiring contemplation of the character’s moral actions, as ADT predicts. In addition to the mostly positive evaluation of the protagonist’s actions, the argument about the preexisting positive attitudes towards antiheroes finds support. The actions of the antihero were regarded as similarly moral as the actions of the hero, despite their actual moral difference. It can be inferred that the moral disengagement cues in the narratives help to set the frame of mind that allowed for rather acceptable attitudes towards the antihero’s more or less immoral behaviors. These positive attitudes about the antihero were highly accessible, leading to fast and positive responses, as seen in the results of H1.

The results are in contrast to what one would expect from the literature on the dual-processing model, the MIME, or the presence of ambivalent attitudes, as outlined earlier. However, these theoretical accounts do not take into consideration repeated exposure to media narratives (and specifically crime dramas) that apparently leads to the formation of schemas which permit the saving of cognitive energy on subsequent encounters. Thus, when considering the activation of a narrative schema from previous exposure, the similar moral evaluations of the heroes and antiheroes actions make sense.

Also, the results indicate the importance of the context for the moral evaluation. As outlined earlier, for ambivalent attitudes it is the context that determines the finale evaluation of the attitude object (Wilson & Hodges, 1992). For antihero narratives, a consistent context is given that includes justifications for the antiheroes’ immoral actions. Consequently, the positive evaluation of the attitude object—the antihero—comes into focus, leading to the overall positive evaluation of his actions. In fact, when investigating the percentages of agreement for each item (see Table 4), the importance of the context for the final judgment becomes apparent. As the reader may recall, Item 6 (protagonists actions were acceptable) was the only one that trended towards a significant difference between conditions. However, with Item 2, the participants evaluated how “acceptable” they found those same actions, only with an added emphasis on the narrative context: “All things considered, the actions of the protagonist were acceptable.” But Item 2 revealed no significant differences between the conditions with nearly half (47%) of the viewers of the antihero condition agreeing. Thus, it seems that the more the viewer responded with the narrative in mind, the more the viewers of the antihero narrative agreed that the actions of the antihero were appropriate and morally right. In contrast, the more general (or less context-specific) a statement was, the less respondents thought the antihero’s actions were acceptable.
This leads me to suggest that there is a difference in the evaluation of the antihero’s actions depending on how much the respondent is referred back to the specific narrative context by the item wording. The narrative context can be understood as a conditional situation in which the actions of the protagonist are evaluated.

Killing *in a narrative context*, which depicts the conditions under which the killing happens as justified through moral disengagement cues, can be evaluated very differently than judging killing in general. More precisely: Killing a human being in general is regarded as immoral. However, killing a criminal under some conditions can be regarded as morally justified (i.e., death penalty). Thus, as the data points out, respondent’s acceptance of the antihero’s actions seems to be dependent on the references made to the narrative context, with greater acceptance for statements that refer to the narrative context (represented by Items 1, 2, and 5 in Table 4).

Nichols and Mallon (2006) suggested that “even if an action is thought to violate a [moral] rule, it might also be regarded as acceptable, *all things considered*” (p. 534). Their study showed that judgments about moral actions are dependent on the focus the story provides. For the present study it seemed that, in fact, drawing attention to the narrative context influenced the judgments. The antihero protagonist Dexter’s actions were presented in a positive light within the narrative, with a stress on the beneficial consequences (punishing criminals) that result from his immoral actions (torturing and killing the criminals). Additionally, moral disengagement cues in the narrative (e.g., it is OK to kill people who deserve it) arguably triggered a pre-existing antihero schema, which includes greater acceptance of such justified moral rule breaking. Therefore, when asked to evaluate the actions from a narrative standpoint, the respondents did so with more positive evaluations. The narrative frame, which includes justification cues, allows the viewer to more readily accept the antihero’s actions for the sake of enjoyment, as Raney (2004) argued. Outside-the-narrative-context judgments (represented by Items 3, 4 and 6 in Table 4) seem to be made from a different—perhaps real-world—moral standpoint. Thus, Dexter’s’ actions were evaluated as what they are: unacceptable.
Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations for the Response Speed for Each DV1 Statement Across Conditions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Hero condition</th>
<th>Antihero condition</th>
<th>Mann-Whitney U-test (effect size abs(r))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n = 34)</td>
<td>(n = 35)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response speed</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) The actions</td>
<td>.366 (.178)</td>
<td>.334 (.155)</td>
<td>U = 585.00, z = -.710, r = .12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the protagonist were appropriate to the situation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) All things considered, the actions</td>
<td>.345 (.155)</td>
<td>.327 (.106)</td>
<td>U = 610.00, z = -.428, r = .07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the protagonist were acceptable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) The actions</td>
<td>.404 (.202)</td>
<td>.379 (.177)</td>
<td>U = 590.00, z = -.460, r = .07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the protagonist were morally right</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) The actions</td>
<td>.439 (.206)</td>
<td>.444 (.170)</td>
<td>U = 592.00, z = -.437, r = .07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the protagonist were good</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) The actions</td>
<td>.323 (.128)</td>
<td>.333 (.123)</td>
<td>U = 570.00, z = -.690, r = .12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the protagonist were morally right in this situation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) The actions</td>
<td>.401 (.231)</td>
<td>.447 (.198)</td>
<td>U = 531.00, z = -1.318, r = .22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the protagonist were acceptable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) The actions</td>
<td>.451 (.203)</td>
<td>.494 (.179)</td>
<td>U = 552.00, z = -1.081, r = .18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of the protagonist were justified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The response speed are the transformed reaction times, with higher values indicating faster responses. All items are not significant at $p > .05$, using the exact two-tailed approximation.
Table 4

*Means and Standard Deviations for the Percentage of Agreement for Each DVI Statement Across Conditions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1) The actions of the protagonist were appropriate to the situation</th>
<th>Hero condition</th>
<th>Antihero condition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$n = 34$</td>
<td>$n = 35$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response valence % agreement ($n$)</td>
<td><strong>61% (22)</strong></td>
<td><strong>56% (20)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) All things considered, the actions of the protagonist were acceptable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>64% (23)</strong></td>
<td><strong>47% (17)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) The actions of the protagonist were morally right</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>53% (19)</strong></td>
<td><strong>36% (13)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) The actions of the protagonist were good</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>39% (14)</strong></td>
<td><strong>33% (12)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) The actions of the protagonist were morally right in this situation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>67% (24)</strong></td>
<td><strong>56% (20)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) *The actions of the protagonist were acceptable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>64% (23)</strong></td>
<td><strong>39% (14)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7) The actions of the protagonist were justified</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>78% (28)</strong></td>
<td><strong>69% (25)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* * was marginally significant at $p = .059.$

Previous research supports this line of reasoning. For example, in the studies reported in Raney, et al. (2009) and Janicke and Raney (2011), participants rated how much they accepted the protagonists (hero vs. antihero) actions “in this situation.” As in the current study, the researchers did not find differences between the moral judgment of heroes and antiheroes when the narrative context was emphasized. One can infer that when moral disengagement cues are implied (or triggered) in an item, or when the frame of reference is directed toward the narrative, similar moral evaluations of hero and antihero actions will be found despite the actual moral
differences that exist. This is likely due to the story-specific schema that is activated when such a frame of reference is invoked, allowing for a quick and positive moral response towards antihero actions, regardless of variation in the moral propriety of those actions.

On the other hand, when participants are asked to evaluate media characters or their actions outside of the primed narrative context, the narrative schemas (unsurprisingly) play a less important role. The evaluation of familiar media characters required in the testing of Hypothesis 2 was unrelated to the narrative context experienced by the respondents in the study. That is, except for a photo of Dexter, all media character photos were unrelated to the previously viewed episodes in all conditions. Thus, the investigation of Hypothesis 2 presents a situation where the narrative context is not in focus for nor raised to the attention of the respondent when making the evaluation of the character photo. As such, the familiar media characters were evaluated “outside” the narrative context.

**Results and discussion of H2.** Hypotheses 2a and b predicted significant differences between the conditions on the speed with which participants evaluated the other media characters (heroes and antiheroes), as well as the direction of those evaluations. For the dependent variable, the combined score of the valence of the response (good vs. bad) and the response speed (transformed reaction time) was used for each character category. This combined measure is an interaction of the accessibility (response speed) with the valence of the response, which has previously been referred to as *valenced attitude accessibility* (Rhodes & Ewoldson, 2009). To calculate that value, the response speed was multiplied by the valence of the response (with a 1 for “good” evaluations and -1 for “bad” evaluations). This way, larger and positive numbers indicate more accessible positive character evaluations and negative numbers indicate more accessible negative character evaluations. To analyze Hypotheses set 2, a one-way MANOVA was conducted for condition (hero vs. antihero) on the dependent variables that included the transformed and valenced reaction times for the grouped antihero characters (n = 2) with Dexter as a separate variable, as well as the heroes (n = 5).

Correlations among the dependent variables for each condition ranged between .125 and .667. Because the Box’s Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices was significant (Box’s $M = 20.643, p < .05$), the Hotelling’s $T^2$ statistic was used, which has been shown to be robust against that violation (Hakstian, Roed, & Lind, 1979). Hotelling’s $T^2$ statistic revealed no significant effect of condition on any of the character valenced responses, $T = .043, F (3, 68) = .981, p >$
.05, partial $\eta^2 = .041$. That means, no significant group differences for the evaluation of the familiar media characters could be found. Thus, Hypotheses 2a and b were not supported. On average, there were no significant differences in the valenced attitude responses between conditions for the antihero characters ($M_{\text{hero}} = .845$, $SD = .495$; $M_{\text{antihero}} = .824$, $SD = .576$), as well as for the Dexter character ($M_{\text{hero}} = .172$, $SD = .817$; $M_{\text{dexter}} = -.072$, $SD = .804$).

The results from Hypotheses 2a and b indicate no facilitation effect, as proposed. It was assumed, according to Fransson and Ask (2010) that, if a hero and antihero schema exists, events (media characters in this case) that correspond to the primed schema would be processed quickly. In contrast, if an event does not fit into the activated schema, responses should be slower. Thus, familiar heroes should be evaluated quickly by those in the hero condition; the same for familiar antiheroes and those in the antihero group. But, neither for response speed nor for the valence of the judgments for the antihero characters were significant differences between conditions found. That means, even though the antihero characters, including (and specifically) Dexter, fell into the same activated antihero schema, responses were not faster and not more positive than for participants with an activated hero schema.

Because groups did not differ in their response towards the familiar media characters, both groups were combined for a follow-up analysis to investigate the response time differences, as apparent in the descriptive values (see Table 1), within conditions and across character categories (antihero characters vs. hero characters). A dependent $t$ test was employed with the transformed reaction times (response speed) as dependent variable for each character category. On average and without regard to condition, participants responded faster to hero characters ($M = 1.113$, $SD = .208$) than to antihero characters ($M = .990$, $SD = .265$), $t (71) = -4.864$, $p < .001$, Cohen’s $d = .59$ (corrected for dependence between means, cf. Morris and DeShon’s, 2002). The same result was found when just comparing the Dexter character ($M = .735$, $SD = .343$) to the hero characters, $t (71) = -10.264$, $p < .001$, Cohen’s $d = 1.30$. No difference between conditions was found with regard to a facilitation effect for the primed schema and the corresponding characters. But when combining the groups, the antiheroes (including Dexter) were evaluated more slowly. Rather than an activated schema influencing response times, it appears that the more morally complex the character, the more time was needed to make a moral judgment about him/her. In fact, the mean difference between the speed for the antihero character group and the highly complex Dexter character was also significant, $t (71) = -7.754$, $p < .001$, Cohen’s $d = .94$, 

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possibly indicating a direct relationship between moral complexity and response speed. Of course, one could argue that heroes were evaluated faster because participants knew them better on average. However, even when comparing response speeds within the antihero viewing condition only \((n = 36)\), where the participants knew the character Dexter very well (because they had just viewed an entire episode about him), the response speed for the hero category \((M = 1.112, SD = .208)\) was still significantly faster than for the Dexter character \((M = .724, SD = .334)\), \(t(35) = -7.115, p < .001\), Cohen’s \(d = 1.25\).

These results strongly indicate that viewers did not evaluate the photos of the characters from a narrative moral perspective, that an activated schema was not guiding the evaluations. In fact, responses to the follow-up analysis of the photos are in line with dual-processing models of moral judgment (Greene et al., 2001; Greene et al., 2004), the MIME (Tamborini, 2013), and the scholarship of attitudinal ambivalence (unlike the H1 findings). According to the dual-process model, responses towards moral issues are based on the context of the situation. As outlined earlier, the more morally complex a dilemma, the longer it takes to make a judgment. In contrast, with dilemmas that are less complex, rather quick, deontological judgments are made. Applying this to Study One, it seems that heroes were evaluated following the deontological moral principle, and antiheroes through the utilitarian principle. As a reminder, deontological moral judgments are based on upholding moral rules and are given quickly, whereas utilitarian judgments are based on the consequences of the (im)moral action and responses need more time. As the follow-up analysis for Hypotheses 2 revealed, the hero characters overall were evaluated as good significantly faster, than the antihero characters, possibly indicating an automatic (deontological) processing for the hero characters and a deliberate (utilitarian) processing of the antihero characters.

Along the same lines, the MIME predicts longer evaluations of media exemplars that seem to violate some moral domains while upholding others. The results seem to support this prediction.

Moreover, the direction of the responses can also be explained by the dual-processing model. Whereas overall antiheroes were rated as good in 87% of all cases and heroes in 97% of all cases, the antihero Dexter was rated as positive only slightly greater than chance (53% in all cases; 61% in the hero condition). This result is consistent with Greene et al.’s (2004) findings that, in more difficult moral dilemmas, people not only take more time to respond but responses
are also fairly evenly split between accepting or rejecting the immoral action. Dexter, seems to represent such a difficult moral situation, where judgments can go either way: Respondents seem to regard Dexter as equally good and bad. In contrast, for the other two antihero characters, a more clear positive evaluation resulted, though participants needed more time to render this judgment given their moral complexity (as opposed to the hero characters).

In fact, one could argue that the long reaction times for the antihero characters (excluding Dexter), in addition to the mostly positive evaluations, indicate the process of moral disengagement. It has been argued (Janicke & Raney, 2011) that moral disengagement is a process that can be measured only indirectly. Thus, longer reaction times for morally complex media characters coupled with positive evaluations (specifically for the antihero category) are strong indicators that moral disengagement underlies the response. However, in contrast to the judgments made under H1, participants actually had to supply their own, or remember prior disengagement cues, in order to respond positively to the photos of the familiar characters, as the characters were presented without a specific narrative context (i.e., with no reference to a narrative).

This reasoning follows well the argument outlined earlier about the context dependency for ambivalent attitudes (Jonas, Diehl, & Broemer, 1997). It was assumed that viewers rely on the moral disengagement cues the narrative provides as heuristics directing them to a positive evaluation, responding in a fast and efficient way towards the media characters. However, without the narrative context given, as was the case for the familiar media characters presented for evaluation in Hypotheses 2, the viewer lacked the contextual cues guiding their responses, leading to systematic and thus to slower evaluations. Further, for members of the antihero condition, activation of an antihero narrative schema was apparently not sufficient to overcome this lack of contextual cues. Also, as argued under the heuristic-systematic-processing model (Bohner, et al., 1995) the desired level of confidence for an attitude towards a protagonist may be higher when evaluated under the real-world context, thus, requiring systematic processing. The viewer may think back and remember a positive experience with the antihero Jack Sparrow from Pirates of the Caribbean, for example, but also realize that from a moral standpoint, this character should be evaluated as bad; however, that would violate their initial positive feeling towards the character (affective-cognitive inconsistency). Consequently, they morally disengage, reminding themselves that the antihero’s actions were somehow justified within the narrative
context. This cognitive “remembering” process (or systematic processing) requires time, which then may explain why the antihero characters were evaluated positively, though more slowly.

With this reasoning at hand, it seems that the operationalization of the familiar media characters (DV2) was not adequate to detect a possible difference between a hero and an antihero schema. Given the procedures used, the evaluations of the morality of the characters were necessarily conducted outside the narrative context (i.e., several minutes after viewing and with no reference to a narrative), requiring an evaluation based on other, perhaps real-world moral, criteria. Alternatively, one could argue that the prime of a single narrative was not strong enough to elicit a schema that would ultimately affect the responses in the predicted way. However, research has shown that priming effects on subsequent judgments last up to 15-20 minutes (Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2009), which is well in line with the assessment of the dependent variables in the present study (DV2 was assessed about five minutes after the prime). In contrast, it seems more likely that the context—that is the lack of a narrative frame for the familiar media character pictures—is what might explain the results of familiar character photos.

The descriptive differences in the evaluations of Dexter also lend support to this argument. Viewers who were not primed with Dexter (i.e., those in the hero viewing condition) tended to evaluate this character as relatively positive (61%); for viewers who had been primed with the character, evaluations seemed to follow what the participants experienced earlier while viewing the episode: a character who acts in a highly immoral way (51% said the actions were good). None of the narrative-specific moral disengagement cues were provided in the evaluation of the Dexter picture in DV2. Consequently, the viewer evaluated the Dexter character (as presented in a picture not from the viewed episode) from a real-world moral perspective, giving (naturally) rather negative responses. This differed from their evaluations of items (in DV1) that did mention the narrative context: 56% said the actions of Dexter were morally right in this situation, and 69% said his actions were justified. Thus, without the contextual cue of the narrative provided, participant’s responses tend to follow a more absolute or unconditional evaluation of his character. Without any backstory or conditional (narrative) context, the character himself is evaluated rather negatively. The respondent cannot retrieve a response based on his/her narrative schema, which is not salient for information retrieval, without the trigger of the narrative context. It is the narrative context that provides a reference for the respondent to withdraw the necessary information about actions of the antihero from the narrative schema.
Without that context, the characters actions, and therefore the antihero himself, are evaluated from a standpoint of moral absoluteness—or a real-world schema—rather than a narrative schema.

**Conclusion of Study One**

The purpose of Study One was to explore how media characters, specifically heroes and antiheroes and their actions in crime dramas, are morally assessed (on the continuum of good and bad) and judgments about them are made (fast or slow). In general, the existence of specific cognitive schemas for the evaluation of crime dramas containing hero and antihero characters was investigated.

The results of Study One indicated that a protagonist’s actions that were previously seen during an episode of *Law and Order: SVU* (hero condition) or *Dexter* (antihero condition) were evaluated with similar speed and acceptance. These results support the previously outlined assumption that narrative schemas provide the viewer with a positive attitude towards the antihero and his actions, leading to responses that are similar to the evaluation of a hero character and his moral actions. Without the reliance on a cognitive schema about the general acceptance of otherwise immoral actions of a crime drama character like Dexter, evaluations of the antihero’s actions might have been expected to be more negative compared to the hero character, as well as slower, due to the character’s moral complexity. Interestingly, the greatest agreement with the antihero’s actions was found in those items that pointed out the specific narrative context. Thus, it was discussed that responses seem to be based on the narrative schema, which is highlighted when there is a reference to the narrative in the situation of judgment making. However, the relevance of the narrative context for the schema-based judgment making was only an interpretation of the results. A second study, therefore, was conducted to examine this claim in an experimental fashion.

Furthermore, Study One investigated the specificity of the narrative schemas for traditional hero and antihero narratives. It was assumed that viewers of the hero episode would evaluate other familiar hero characters faster than familiar antihero (hero) characters, because the latter would be different from their previously activated schema. A similar pattern was assumed for viewers of the antihero narrative. This presumption was based on the typicality and facilitation effect identified by Fransson and Ask (2010). However, the data did not provide
support for this prediction. It was discussed that this may, again, be due to the context in which the evaluation took place. Photos of familiar hero and antihero characters were presented without any references to a narrative context. Consequently, no schema knowledge could be retrieved for the evaluation of these characters, and the judgments made (good vs. bad) were likely based on a real-world assessment. Thus, the question still remains, in which way do hero and antihero schemas differ from each other? Study Two anticipated further investigating this question, taking into account the possible confounding variable of the different contexts in which the moral judgment is made.

Limitations of Study One

Study One was the first, to the best knowledge of the author, that investigated the theoretical claim that schemas play a major role in how viewers form judgments towards drama characters. The data of Study One lend strong support for the existence of such schemas. However, several methodological problems must be addressed in the second study of this dissertation project.

First, with the reaction time analysis of the present study, more data need to be collected to increase statistical power. Most effect sizes of the analyses were very small, and a post hoc power analysis resulted in an achieved power of .68 for the between-subject design. Due to the power limitation, it was expected to see insignificant results. To make more valid conclusions, a larger sample size is imperative.

Second, because only one kind of stimulus material was used, it is hard to make generalizations for all hero and antihero crime dramas. Thus, to make more generalizable conclusions, several other hero and antihero shows should be tested. Specifically, according to the pretest, Dexter matched well into an antihero category. However, according to the data reduction procedures in Study One, he did not seem to fit well. Results indicated that Dexter represented the highest level of moral complexity ($M = 4.86, SD = 1.44$, as assessed on a 10 point Likert-type scale, with 1 (clearly immoral) and 10 (clearly moral)). This may have made him less of a “schema typical” antihero representation. Tamborini (2013) in his MIME framework described the relevance of exemplars as a representative category for a “larger category of entities or events” (p. 48). He states that the accessibility of exemplars depends on the frequency and recency with which they were activated (availability heuristic, Tversky &
Kahneman, 1974), which is in line with the attitude argument outlined earlier. Additionally, Tamborini (2013) claims that the exemplar’s accessibility is also dependent on its representativeness, which “denotes the extent to which an exemplar is considered to be a member of a class of object” (p. 48); (i.e., the extent to which it is representative or prototypical of that class). Thus, in line with the argument that antiheroes greatly vary in their moral complexity, Dexter may not have been very representative for the antihero category. That was indicated in the measurement issues of the antihero category scale, the results of the valence of the responses in H1B, and the significant longer response speed in DV2 for Dexter, compared to the other antihero characters. Additional antihero narratives should be used in Study Two to come to more generalizable conclusions about the relevance of narrative schemas for the moral judgment of media characters.

Also, so far it was only inferred that the results of Hypotheses 1 and 2 were based on the different evaluative contexts of the characters morality. No clear manipulation to test this assumption has been made. Thus, Study Two anticipates a clearer operationalization for how the narrative context matters for moral evaluations of media characters.

Additionally, due to the context argument made, DV2 (familiar character pictures) was not operationalized to measure the existence of the distinct narrative schemas for heroes and antiheroes. Thus, although Study One strongly supports the assumption that underlying schemas are relevant for how viewers evaluate media characters, the question still remains in which way these schemas differ for heroes and antiheroes. Therefore, Study Two seeks to empirically explore this issue.

Lastly, valid conclusions are based on the validity and reliability of the instruments used. The dependent variable one of Study One consisted of seven statements drawn from various earlier studies and thus did not consist of a single instrument to measure the perception of the morality of the character’s actions. Thus, a general instrument to assess the viewer’s evaluation of the characters moral actions is warranted to increase statistical-conclusion validity. Second, the reliability of the assessment of the other antihero characters also lacked validity. Due to the small number of participants, even in the pretest, no explanatory factor analysis for the character pictures could be conducted. Still the different character categories differed significantly from each other in their moral perception (see pretest results in the Method section in Study One). For the reliability assessment of Study One, it would have been useful to include another “mixed”
category for the characters evaluation, as the pure assessment of the antiheroes as good or bad already implies underlying information processing (as outlined, a positive evaluation of an antihero may imply that moral disengagement processes are likely to underlie that judgment). Thus, no direct assessment of the characters along a reliable continuum can be made with this kind of assessment. Study Two will take respect to this problem and adopt a third, “mixed” category for the characters evaluation.
CHAPTER 4

GOALS AND GENERAL METHODS OF STUDY TWO

The goal of Study Two was to address several of the methodological limitations of Study One (i.e., increase power, stimulus material, validity of measurements) and to further investigate three major issues concerning how we make moral judgments about media characters.

First, Study One provided evidence of the relevance of narrative moral schemas for the judgment of media characters. The findings supported Raney’s (2004) assumption that narrative schemas help the viewer to quickly evaluate the main characters of a story, leading to fast and effortless emotional side-taking with the characters. Study One also demonstrated the importance of the context in which moral judgments were made, whereas judgments within the narrative context seemed to specifically trigger these schematic processes. Unfortunately, Study One did not include an appropriate assessment for the investigation of the proposed schema differences between heroes and antiheroes within these contexts. Because the familiar media characters in Study One (DV2) were evaluated outside of the narrative context, response time findings were called into question, as they were in contrast to the predicted facilitation effect.

Thus, the first research goal of Study Two was to investigate the claim for the different moral schemas of heroes and antiheroes again, by employing the facilitation paradigm as outlined by Fransson and Ask (2010) as in Study One. However, this time controls were put into place to ensure that the evaluations took place within the narrative context.

Additionally, the focus of Study One was on the cognitive evaluation of the moral appropriateness of the heroes and antiheroes actions. According to ADT, characters whose actions are morally approved are also liked or identified with (Zillmann, 2000). That is, the (cognitive) moral evaluation of the characters’ actions also involves an emotional judgment. This emotional component was not assessed in Study One. Based on the outlined hero and antihero schemas and the respective attitudes towards the protagonists, not only should the protagonists’ actions be evaluated quickly and positively, irrespective of their morality, but also the responses to like or dislike the characters should be made quickly. The underlying assumption is that the emotional bonding is part of the character attitude. Along with the moral evaluation of the characters comes the emotional evaluation. An antihero schema not only tells the viewer that they (in general) can approve even immoral actions of the character (based on the stories’ moral
disengagement cues) but also that they can form positive dispositions towards the characters. As outlined earlier, narrative schema include a specific positive attitude towards the protagonist (whether hero or antihero). An attitude was defined as (1) a specific belief about an attitude object (for example, a belief about the (im)moral actions of an antihero) and (2) the evaluation of the attributes of the attitude object (that is, the liking or disliking of the character) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Consequently, not only the beliefs about the immoral actions of the antihero should be approved by the viewer, but the antihero himself in general should also be liked. Study Two, therefore, assessed the liking of the protagonists, in addition to the moral evaluation of the characters within the narrative context.

Second, the results of Study One demonstrated that the evaluations of antiheroes were dependent on the context in which the characters were evaluated. It was proposed that the context impacts whether moral judgments of media characters are processed through a narrative-schema perspective or a real-world moral perspective. As shown in Study One, when protagonists’ actions were evaluated from within the narrative context, no difference between the moral judgment of a moral hero’s actions and a morally complex antihero’s actions was found, despite their actual differences in moral behavior. However, when other familiar media characters were evaluated outside of the narrative context, significant differences in the speed and valence of the response emerged. Consequently, the second research goal of Study Two was to further explore the nature of inside/outside-the-narrative moral judgments.

To address these research goals, Study Two employed two treatments. Treatment 1 was similar to Study One: exposure to an antihero or hero crime drama. Treatment 2 was an antihero story in textual form. For the purpose of clarity, the results of these two treatments will be discussed in two separate chapters.

**Hypotheses of Study Two**

First, as it was outlined above, the procedures used in Study One could not precisely measure the different proposed schemas, as the evaluation of the media characters outside of the narrative context potentially confounded the results. Therefore, for Study Two (Treatment 1), viewers evaluated target events of “typical” antihero moral transgressions and typical hero (moral) behaviors—mirroring Fransson and Ask’s (2010) typicality and facilitation effect assessment framework. Fransson and Ask (2010) categorized typical immoral events by the
frequency of their occurrence in reality (e.g., employers paying males and females differently), and atypical events by their rare occurrence in reality (e.g., judges give men lighter sentences than women). The researchers found that typical events were classified as immoral more quickly, than atypical events. They also found that a second event is evaluated faster when it was preceded by an event that falls into the same category as the second (facilitation effect). For Study Two, items describing typical hero and typical antihero events were created. Hero events were completely moral in nature (i.e., “The main character in a crime drama legally protects society”), while antihero events were morally complex (i.e., “The main character in a crime drama illegally protects society”). Based on Fransson and Ask’s findings, it can be expected that, if two different schemas exist for the reception of hero and antihero narratives, then viewers of a hero narrative should agree less often and take longer to evaluate typical antihero events, as they are not typical for the primed hero category. In contrast, viewers of an antihero narrative will make faster judgments of typical antihero events. If differences between conditions in the response speed and agreement of the typical antihero events can be found, it can be assumed that different schemas for both characters exist and have been activated. Consequently, the first hypotheses predict:

H1a: Reaction times for the evaluation of typical antihero events will be faster for individuals exposed to an antihero narrative when compared to individuals exposed to a hero narrative.

H1b: Individuals exposed to an antihero narrative will show more acceptance for the typical antihero actions than individuals exposed to a hero narrative.

Second, to investigate the proposed difference between moral evaluations within the narrative context and outside the narrative context, characters that were part of the episode were chosen, presented in two different contexts, and evaluated in terms of their morality (moral vs. immoral). The characters were chosen based upon the morality of the actions they displayed in the episodes: the protagonists (purely moral hero or morally complex antihero), the purely immoral villain characters, and (for the antihero episode only) a purely moral (non-protagonist) hero character. For each character (three from the antihero episode, two from the hero episode), three screenshots were taken of the characters during the episode, representing the within-context manipulation. Additionally, three profile/casting pictures of the same characters unrelated to the
previously viewed episode were selected, representing the outside-the-narrative-context manipulation. Participants evaluated how moral or immoral they perceived each character, as well as how much they liked each character, on both the inside and outside narrative context photos. Appendix D contains the pictures used.

It was expected that viewers who watched an antihero narrative would take longer to evaluate an antihero who is presented outside of the narrative frame than inside the narrative frame. As outlined earlier, according to the dual-process model and with respect to attitudinal ambivalence towards antihero characters, a moral evaluation of such characters (who are not completely morally black-and-white) takes deliberation. A pure moral hero character, in contrast, can be evaluated as good very quickly. Antiheroes can also be evaluated quickly if the evaluation takes place within the context of a specific narrative schema. The key, though is that the cognitive facilitation provided by the schema seems only to emerge when the narrative context is salient. In Study One, the antihero character from the stimulus material was evaluated more slowly than a familiar hero character that was not shown; thus, no facilitation effect was observed. But the antihero photos evaluated offered no reference to the narrative context. In contrast, when comparing the reaction times to the items about the general conduct of the characters in the stimulus materials, no differences emerged between the groups who watched the hero or antihero narrative. Thus, it seems that moral evaluations of antihero characters are only facilitated by rendering judgments through the narrative schema when the narrative context is made salient at the time of the evaluation. On the other hand, evaluations of a clear moral hero or a clear immoral villain character should not be dependent upon context, as they do not represent a moral conflict. Their morality can be determined quickly (the hero is good, the villain bad), irrespective of the salience of the context. Thus, no reaction time differences between the contexts for the hero and villain character are expected for either viewing condition.

However, comparing the reaction times for the evaluation of the antihero character to the hero and villain character (only) outside the narrative context, reaction time differences can be expected. These predictions are based on the findings in Study One, where greater reaction times for the evaluation of several familiar antihero (as compared to hero) characters (presented in pictures) were observed. This held true regardless of whether the respondents were primed with a hero or antihero episode. Thus, for the context prediction it was hypothesized:
H2a: Reaction times for the moral evaluation of the antihero character will be faster when subsequently presented inside the narrative context, compared to the same character subsequently presented outside the narrative context, for individuals who were exposed to the antihero narrative.

H2b: No reaction time differences for the moral evaluation of the hero and villain character will be expected between contexts, for individuals who were exposed to the antihero or hero narrative.

Second, for the between-character variation hypotheses (in the antihero condition), it was predicted:

H2c: When evaluated outside of the narrative context, the antihero character will be evaluated slower than the hero character.

H2d: When evaluated outside of the narrative context, the antihero character will be evaluated slower than the villain character.

Figure 1 summarizes Hypotheses 2 graphically.

Figure 1. Summary of Hypotheses 2a-d for the antihero condition.
Furthermore, for those in the antihero condition, the activated antihero schema should carry with it a positive attitude towards the antihero, as outlined above. Consequently, the antihero should be evaluated as more moral than immoral, independent of the context in which the antihero is evaluated.

H3: Regardless of narrative context, responses should be more moral than immoral (>50% moral) towards the antihero character, for individuals who were exposed to the antihero narrative.

Similarly, antiheroes should be emotionally evaluated along the same pattern; viewers of the antihero episode should make quick liking judgments about the antihero character when evaluated inside the narrative context. It may take them longer, however, to come to the same conclusion outside the narrative context. Assuming that positive attitudes towards the antihero are embedded in the narrative schema, and therefore activated when the context of evaluation is within the narrative, it was predicted:

H4a: Reaction times for the liking evaluation of the antihero character will be faster when subsequently presented inside the narrative context compared to the same character subsequently presented outside the narrative context, for individuals who were exposed to the antihero narrative.

H4b: Regardless of the narrative context, the antihero character will be more liked than disliked by individuals who are exposed to the antihero narrative.

Additionally, a research question was posed to assess possible effects of the prime of an antihero episode (Treatment 1) on viewers’ moral disengagement in reality. As outlined before, with respect to the proposed difference in people’s moral judgments based on the context in which the judgment is made, limited effects on moral judgments based on an antihero prime should be seen. In antihero narratives, moral disengagement is a reoccurring narrative device that, over time, could possibly lead viewers to become more lenient towards seemingly justified moral violations in reality. However, if moral disengagement is only a feature of the narrative schema that facilitates enjoyment, then no effect on the viewer’s real-world perception of morality should be seen. To explore this claim, the following research question was posed:
RQ1: How are a pre- and post-measure of an individuals’ tendency to morally disengage in reality impacted by watching an antihero TV show?

Lastly, to enhance the construct validity of effect (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002), another operationalization to test for the effects of the different contexts during moral judgment making was anticipated (Treatment 2). Specifically, participants read and consequently evaluated one of two versions of a pre-tested antihero story (Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012). The story was framed to be either fictional or reality based. After reading the story, participants were asked to evaluate the protagonist according to his morality, while reaction time was measured. Based on the different context frames (the real-world and a fictional frame), differences in response times for the moral evaluation of the story antihero were expected across conditions. Because it was assumed that evaluation of the morality of a fictional character would be based on a narrative schema, judgments should be made quickly. In contrast, for a real-world moral evaluation, where moral rules and consequences are scrutinized before a moral judgment is made (i.e., dual-processing), the judgments should take longer. Similar to the second set of hypotheses in Treatment 1, it was predicted that with Treatment 2:

H5a: Individuals exposed to the reality-based antihero story will take longer (slower reaction time) to morally evaluate the antihero than participants in the fictional condition.

H5b: Individuals exposed to the fictional-based antihero story will be more likely to evaluate the antihero positively than individuals exposed to the reality-based story.

**General Methods of Study Two**

**Design and Sample**

Study Two employed a mixed, between- and within-subject, pretest-multiple-posttest design, with two treatments for each participant (see Table 5 for more detail). One between-subject variable (Treatment 1) was a television narrative condition, where participants were either exposed to an episode of *Revenge* (antihero condition) or *Cold Case* (hero condition). The second between-subject variable (Treatment 2) was the textual narrative condition, where participants read an antihero story that was either framed to be true (realism-based story) or fictional (fictional-based story). Also, a control group was employed for Treatment 2. The two
treatments were analyzed individually and thus did not constitute a within-subject design factor. The within-subject variables were the pre- and post-test of moral disengagement, as well as the evaluation of the characters from the narrative between contexts (in Treatment 1 only). Multiple reaction time post-tests were applied after each treatment and analyzed for between-group differences. Also, multiple interval scaled questions were employed.

Participants were recruited from undergraduate communication classes at Florida State University. Participants were offered research credit for their participation as discussed with the class instructor. Additional research credit was offered to those participants that could bring a friend, possibly a male, to participate in the study as well to increase participation rate. Because the majority of communication students are female, this strategy was aimed at balancing the gender ratio of the study.

To determine the optimal sample size for this quasi-experimental study, a prospective power analysis was performed using G*power software 3.1.2 (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009). Although a previous study by Lewis, Tamborini and Weber (2011) found a strong effect size of Cohen’s $d = .85$ for their between-subject design (which assessed reaction time differences of different moral story endings), a medium effect size of Cohen’s $d = .50$ was determined for the present study. Though the effect size for the character evaluations outside the narrative context in Study One (DV2) were large (ranging from .59 to >1), the non-significant, within-context evaluations (DV1) showed rather small effect sizes $\text{abs}(r)$ for the Mann-Whitney’s U-test (ranging from .1 to .2). Thus, the more conservative, medium effect size for the present study was used for the prospective power analysis. Consequently, for a two independent group, mean difference analysis (power level of .95), 105 participants per condition (210 total) were needed, with $\alpha$ set at .05 (noncentrality parameter $\delta=3.623$, critical $t (208) = 1.97$). Due to expected outliers that were likely to be found in the reaction-time measurement, an additional 15% of participants were recruited to anticipate possible exclusions from the analysis (up to 15% of data cutoffs can be reasonable, depending on the distribution, cf. Ratcliff, 1993). Altogether, it was planned to recruit 241 participants for Study Two.
Table 5  
Experimental Design and Procedure Overview for Study Two

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<tr>
<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Time 2</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>IV</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Justice</td>
<td>Treatment 1: Narrative (A or B)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moral Disengagement Tendency (1)</td>
<td>Treatment 2: Story (C or D)</td>
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<td>Demographics and prior exposure to stimulus material</td>
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<td><strong>DV (RT)</strong></td>
<td><strong>DV (RT)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>RT assessment of typical hero and typical antihero action evaluations (DV1)</td>
<td>RT assessment of in-context and out-of the narrative context character evaluations (DV2)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>RT assessment of moral evaluations of the story character (DV3) (Treatment 2)</td>
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<td><strong>DV (Likert scales)</strong></td>
<td><strong>DV (Likert scales)</strong></td>
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<td>Moral disengagement tendency (2), manipulation checks</td>
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Demographics

Data from 295 participants were collected, with 128 in the hero condition, 130 in the antihero condition, and 37 in the Treatment 2 control group (18 in the fictional story condition and 19 in the realism condition). Due to technical problems with the MediaLab software, data for one key variable were missing from 14 participants, leaving 122 Treatment 1 reaction-time data for the antihero and hero conditions. Due to the same software problem, Treatment 2 data were only recorded for 131 in the realism condition, and 121 in the fictional condition. Also, 46 subjects (16%) did not reproduce the same data-matching code in the second part of the study. Ultimately, a total of 249 pretest survey results could be matched with the participants participating in the laboratory part of the study. The majority of participants was female (68%) with a mean age of 20 (min 17, max 28, $SD = 1.63$). In terms of ethnicity, 71% were White, 20% Hispanic, and 8% Black.
Procedure

One week before laboratory data collection, participants were sent a link to a Qualtrics online survey, which included the IRB approved consent form (Appendix A), items requesting demographic information, the first assessment of the moral disengagement tendency measure, and a social justice measure. Participants were also asked about their prior exposure to the Treatment 1 stimulus material and how often in general they watch shows from the crime drama genre. Upon completing the questionnaire, a link was provided for them to sign up for the laboratory part of the study, to take place in a computer lab with a maximum of 12 participants at one time. The data were collected over a period of three weeks. The first online survey took no more than 10 minutes to complete.

When arriving for the laboratory experiment, participants were asked to sign in and were seated in front of a computer with further instructions guiding them through the experiment. Participants had to input an individual code they provided at the first online survey, in order to match their data for the analyses. Participants were randomly allocated to one of four conditions (see Table 6). All participants first completed Treatment 1 (i.e., watching either the hero or antihero television narrative) and completed the associated tasks and questions. After completing several distractor items about their media habits, they then either read the realism-framed or fictional-framed story (Treatment 2), and responded to the associated reaction time tasks and questions.

Admittedly, this design potentially introduces carry-over effects that can result from completing Treatment 1 before Treatment 2. In order to account for such an effect, a control group was employed. The control group solely completed Treatment 2. The control condition was separately conducted in the third week of data collection and framed under another study name (Newspaper Study). Overall, 19 and 18 participants, respectively, per condition were collected for the control group (i.e. realism and fictional frame).

Before participants watched one of the Treatment 1 episodes or read one of the Treatment 2 stories (in case of the control group), they responded to several practice prompts adopted from Hofmann and Baumert (2010) to make them familiar with the software employed to measure reaction time (MediaLab/DirectRT, Version 10) and the key presses they had to perform. After exposure to the narrative, participants evaluated the morality and emotional disposition of the characters they saw and read about. More specifically, after exposure to the hero or antihero
narrative, participants first morally evaluated events describing typical hero and typical antihero actions (DV1). Secondly, they morally evaluated different characters (antihero, hero, and villain) they just saw in the episode and evaluated whether they liked or disliked them (DV2, 36 prompts). After finishing the reaction time assessments, participants responded to several Likert-type scales, assessing again their tendency to morally disengage in reality (7 items) (and other items not reported in this project). Numerous items were employed to check for the success of the manipulation of each treatment condition.

Before completing Treatment 2, participants responded to several filler items regarding their media habits. These filler items intended to distract the participant from the morality measurement in the study, ideally leaving them less biased for the completion of Treatment 2. After reading the reality-based or fictional-framed story, participants evaluated (by measuring reaction time) how morally acceptable they regarded the antihero they read about (DV3, 17 items). Finally, participants responded to Likert-type items that assessed the success of the manipulation. After completing this task, participants were thanked, debriefed (Appendix B) and dismissed. The laboratory part of the study took 75 minutes on average (approx. 15 minutes for the control group). Appendix E summarizes the complete testing battery for Study Two.

For the sake of clarity, the specific measures used, results, and discussion of Study Two, Treatments 1 and 2 have been separated in the following two chapters.

Table 6
Possible Combinations of Conditions for Each Participant, by Stimulus Material and Controlled for Order Effects by Random Allocation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment 1</th>
<th>Treatment 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hero episode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Antihero episode</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* R stands for random allocation to conditions.
Discussion Plan for Study Two

In an attempt to make sense of the complex findings that will follow from Study Two, results will be examined on three different levels of analysis, following the research goals of this dissertation. First, on a micro-level of analysis, the existence of the specific schemas for the moral and emotional evaluation of a hero and antihero character in crime dramas will be discussed. This speaks specifically to the first research goal of Study Two. Second, on a meso-level of analysis, the narrative schemas are examined in relation to the context in which moral judgments are made: inside-the-narrative-context or outside-the-narrative-context. This is consistent with the second research goal of Study Two investigating the importance of the narrative context when evaluating media characters as narrative schema responses. Third, on a macro-level of analysis, results will be placed in relation to a more theoretical conceptualization of how moral judgments generally are made in fictional/narrative or realistic situations; that is through a narrative moral lens and a real-world moral lens. Treatment 1 deals with issues on the micro and meso-levels; so this material will primarily be addressed in Chapter V. Treatment 2 specifically deals with macro-level conceptualizations, which will be discussed in Chapter VI. Finally, in Chapter VII, results from the micro-level of analysis will be reintroduced and discussed from the standpoint of moral philosophy to paint a greater picture of how media (and crime dramas in specific) may affect different thinking styles. Figure 2 summarizes the levels of analyses, schematically. The different levels of analyses and underlying concepts are discussed in great detail in the following chapters.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macro-level</th>
<th>Fictional moral lens</th>
<th>Real-world moral lens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meso-level</td>
<td>Inside the narrative context</td>
<td>Outside the narrative context</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Micro-level</td>
<td>Narrative schemas</td>
<td>Real-world schemas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Antihero schema</td>
<td>Hero schema</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“grey” (morally ambivalent) evaluation</td>
<td>“black-and-white” (morally absolute) evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral philosophy standpoint</td>
<td>Consequentialist thinking</td>
<td>Deontological thinking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Schematic outline of the different levels of analysis for the presented results.
CHAPTER 5

STUDY TWO, TREATMENT 1

Methods

Stimulus Material: Television Narrative

In order to come to more generalizable conclusions than found in Study One about the existence of and reliance upon schemas for the judgment of protagonists in crime dramas, several different stimulus materials were used. Specifically, Study Two (Treatment 1) employed a different television crime drama for each condition than in Study One.

For Treatment 1, a more “typical” antihero narrative compared to the one from Study One was used, especially with regard to the protagonist upholding specific moral domains (cf. Tamborini et al., 2011). The selection of the stimulus material was based on a general character observation of the series by the researcher. To validate this selection, participants in Treatment 1 evaluated the lead character on the five moral domains, ensuring that the selected antihero character upheld the categories of harm and fairness, as suggested by Tamborini et al. (2011) as typical of an antihero.

For Treatment 1, the drama *Revenge* (Kelley & Noyce, 2011) was selected as the antihero narrative. *Revenge* is based on a female protagonist, Emily Thorne, who is moving to the Hamptons in order to seek revenge on those people who wrongfully framed her father for a horrible crime when she was a little girl, leaving him in prison and separated from him for life. Emily slowly destroys everything around the woman (Victoria Greyson) whom her father loved but who betrayed him by framing him for a crime he did not commit. The drama uses flashbacks to explain the background of the story and shows Emily Thorne, the antihero, committing various crimes. At the same time, she is also portrayed as a caring female who despite her revenge seeking still has loving emotions for those who were not part of the plot against her father (e.g., a boy she always played with as a child when at the Hamptons).

As per the pretest results from Study One, Emily Thorne was a highly liked character \( (M = 8.73, SD = 1.34, \text{measured on a 10-point Likert-type scale}) \) and was evaluated as rather morally complex \( (M = 5.64, SD = 2.58) \), scoring just above the midpoint of the scale, ranging from 1 (*not at all moral*) to 10 (*very moral*). Although these data are only based on a small sample size \( (n = \)
11), it gives a preliminary insight into the perception of this character, as a typical antihero, and thus a great selection for the present study. Also, 19% of the Study One sample indicated having seen at least one episode of *Revenge*, suggesting that the target sample of the study (i.e., undergraduate students) were somewhat familiar with this show.

For the Treatment 1 hero condition, the narrative *Cold Case* (Stiehm & Pellington, 2003) was selected. *Cold Case* is a crime drama set around a female detective, Lilly Rush, who is a homicide detective who specialized in so called “cold cases,” cases that are not being actively pursued but also have not be closed. Each episode deals with a reopening of a murder case, oftentimes dating several centuries back. This crime drama uses flashbacks as a tool, as well, to recapture the happenings, making it easier for the viewer to follow the plot.

Both selected crime dramas are comparable in featuring a young, blonde, female protagonist; they both rely on flashbacks as a tool for the audience to better follow the plot; and the overall plots deal with reinstating justice for a criminal act or wrongdoing. Certainly, differences in the plot structure still remain between the narratives. One such difference would be, for example, that the crimes committed in *Cold Case* were not directly related to the inspector Lilly Rush, as opposed to the crimes in *Revenge* that were related to Emily Thorne. Thus, the personal attachment of the protagonist to the crime differs. But since the study at hand is following a quasi-experimental design, creating the strongest treatment strength possible is very important to increase construct validity (cf., Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Therefore, the cost of the different plotlines with regard to the personal closeness of the criminal case for the protagonist is less than the gain from the stronger treatments in each condition. Also, both dramas are equal in their arousal and suspense level, showing more implied than overt violence.

Both dramas were and are successful shows. The pilot episode of *Revenge* (aired on September 21, 2011) won the 10:00 p.m. time-slot against traditional crime dramas of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and *Law and Order: SVU* (TV by the Numbers, 2011). The first season of *Revenge*, broadcast on ABC, attracted 8.72 million viewers (TV by the Numbers, 2012). Similarly, the first season of *Cold Case*, broadcast on CBS, averaged 14.37 million viewers, and scored among the 20 most-watched TV programs in 2003-2004 (rank #17) (Television blog, 2010.) For each condition in Treatment 1, the first episode from the first season was selected. From the usable sample (*N* = 249), 70 (28%) indicated having seen *Cold Case*
before, and 61 (25%) to having seen Revenge before. Thus, the general pre-exposure to the stimulus material for both conditions was relatively equal across groups.

Revenge (“Pilot”, 2003, 42 minutes). In this episode, Emily Thorne is introduced as a new renter of a beach house in the Hamptons. In several flashbacks, the backstory is outlined, showing Emily, once known as Amanda Clarke, as a young girl whose life is destroyed when her father (David Clarke) is wrongfully accused of working with terrorists, killing hundreds of people. She rents the house she once visited every summer with her father, seeking revenge on Victoria Grayson and her affiliates, who were responsible for destroying her life. Emily finds out that Lydia, her father’s old secretary, who also accused him of being part of the terrorist plot, had an affair with Victoria’s husband, Conrad. By nonlethally poisoning Conrad’s soup while being romantic with Lydia at a hotel, Emily manages to have Victoria find out about her husband’s infidelity and her best friend’s betrayal. Victoria then banishes Lydia from the Hamptons, crossing one person off of Emily’s revenge list. Emily, furthermore, purposefully tries to impress Victoria’s son, Daniel. In a flash forward, we see Daniel and Emily at their own engagement party, until somebody is found dead at the beach. Emily is slowly destroying everything Victoria loves, starting with her best friend Lydia, her husband, and acquaintances. The episode ends with the phrase: “Because when everything you love has been stolen from you, someone has to pay” (TV fanatic, n.d.).

Cold Case (“Look again”, 2003, 42 minutes). In this episode, Lilly Rush is introduced as a homicide detective in Philadelphia who investigates unresolved crimes (cold cases). A housekeeper from a wealthy family approaches her in front of the police department, telling her about an unresolved case of a girl named Jill, who was beaten to death at a tennis court in 1976. Because the maid was too afraid to lose her job at the time, she only talked about her witnessing now, 16 years later, as she has terminal cancer and wants the killer brought to justice before she dies. The inspector reopens the case, revealing that two brothers were the prime suspects of the case but never convicted due to the elite, social power of their wealthy family. Everyone is reluctant to reopen the dark past, but Lilly Rush is determined to solve the case. While all evidence points towards one of the brothers, Eric, who is an alcoholic, working only periodically, it is the other brother Todd, a successful lawyer, who murdered Jill, because she was making out with his brother on the murder night back in 1976. Lilly Rush is able to bring justice to this so
long-unsolved case and thus helps the maid to find peace in her last days on earth (TV.com, n.d.).

**Independent Variables**

Several independent variables were assessed one week before participants partook in the main part of the study. The variables included measurements of social justice and the tendency to morally disengage in reality, as well as demographic information and familiarity with several crime dramas. All assessments were made on a 10 point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 10 (*strongly agree*).

**Social justice.** To measure individual attitudes towards social justice, a 16-item scale previously used by Raney and Bryant (2002) and Raney (2005) measuring vigilantism was employed. Vigilantism is a term generally used to refer to the attitude that civilians or unofficial law enforcement agents should be allowed to punish criminals by themselves (Raney & Bryant, 2002). A sample item is “If a private citizen has an opportunity to enact justice on a criminal before law enforcement agents arrive, he/she should have the right to do so.” Raney and Bryant (2002) report a Cronbach’s $\alpha = .88$ for a condensed version of the scale (10 items). The reliability from the present sample ($N = 248$) was $\alpha = .942$, including all 16 items.

**Moral disengagement tendency.** Several items from a scale, previously introduced by Shafer and Raney (2010), were used in order to measure the tendency to morally disengage in reality. The complete Moral Disengagement Tendency (MDT) scale consists of 48 items, including eight subscales that tap into each of the proposed moral disengagement mechanisms as outlined by Bandura (1999). Shafer and Raney (2010) found a factor structure of subscales relating to law-breaking, stealing and lying, war and crime, and criminals. In the current study, only the stealing and lying subscale was used. A sample item is: “Lying to a professor about being sick really isn’t a big deal because it doesn’t hurt anyone.” The six items were sufficiently reliable as indicated by Cronbach’s $\alpha = .722$ ($N = 248$).

**Moral disengagement tendency time 2.** To assess a possible change in one’s attitude to morally disengage in reality, the same lying and stealing subscale from Shafer and Raney’s (2010) moral disengagement tendency instrument (seven items) was employed a second time, after the hero and antihero narrative prime of Treatment 1. Assessments were made again on a
10-point, Likert-type scale. Although ones’ moral disengagement tendency is a relatively stable personality trait, research on the effects of attitude accessibility for subsequent judgment making has shown that increasing one’s accessibility of a particular attitude object (e.g., antihero) can influence the judgment process (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Brewer, Graf, and Willnat (2003), for example, showed that framing an issue towards a foreign nation in news impacted viewers’ attitudes toward that nation in a pre-test/post-test comparison. Thus, it is reasonable to examine at the effect of an antihero (or hero) narrative on attitudes regarding individuals’ tendency to morally disengage in reality. As in the pre-exposure measurement, the moral disengagement lying subscale resulted in acceptable reliabilities for both conditions: antihero condition: $\alpha = .740$; hero condition: $\alpha = .796$.

**Currently watching an antihero show.** In order to assess the prevalence of participants currently watching an antihero show, they were asked to name their favorite TV show at the moment. The researcher then coded those shows as representing an antihero crime drama or not based on a screening of the content of the shows and the definition of antiheroes as outlined in Chapter II. A total of ($n = 75/287$) 26% of the sample indicated watching an antihero show at the moment. Fourteen antihero shows were coded including: *The Walking Dead* (watched by 23 participants), *Breaking Bad* (11), *Game of Thrones* (10), *Dexter* (9), *Revenge* (6), *Mad Men* (5), *House of Cards* (3), *It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia* (2), *Sons of Anarchy* (1), *Once Upon a Time* (1), *Nakita* (1), *Boardwalk Empire* (1), *Family Guy* (1), and *Leverage* (1).

**Dependent Variables**

The dependent variables consisted of three reaction-time measurements: two for Treatment 1 (DV1, DV2) and one for Treatment 2 (DV3). In addition, several Likert-scale type variables were used to measure moral judgments. The reaction-time measures were assessed using the software MediaLab/Direct RT, version 2010 from Empirisoft Corporations. For all variables, participants were instructed to answer as quickly as possible while maintaining accuracy (e.g., Fazio, Chen, McDonel, & Sherman, 1982). The dependent measure was the time that elapsed between the first keyboard strike that produced the target on the screen and the response from the participant. Responses were initiated by specifically assigned keyboard keys labeled with stickers for the relevant answer choices ("agree"/right shift; “disagree”/left shift; “moral”/right Ctrl; “immoral”/left Ctrl; “like”/enter; “dislike”/CapsLock). Along the same lines
as Study One, positive answers were coded as 1 and negative answers as -1 (e.g., Rhodes & Ewoldsen, 2009). The reaction-time data, as well as the valence of the responses, were averaged for the typical hero and typical antihero events (DV1); for the morally complex, moral, and immoral character evaluations inside and outside the narrative context (DV2); and for the moral evaluation of the antihero character in Treatment 2 (DV3).

**Typicality evaluations (DV1).** The typicality evaluation variable assessed participant’s responses to several hero and antihero actions/events typically found in crime dramas. Overall, 44 items were initially created; 21 items tapping into typical antihero actions and 23 in typical hero actions. An example item for a typical antihero behavior is “The main character in a crime drama is ruthless towards criminals.” An example item for a typical hero behavior is “The main character in a crime drama is securing criminals.” Participants had to evaluate if they regard those actions as “moral” or “immoral” by pressing the appropriate keyboard key. A pretest was conducted in order to test the reliability of the scale, which resulted in 20 items that were employed in the main study.

**Pretest for the typicality evaluations.** Prior to Study Two, the typicality events were pretested. Following Fransson and Ask’s (2010) operationalization of moral judgments of typical and atypical immoral events, participants evaluated how moral they perceive each described action on a 7-point, Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (very immoral) to 10 (very moral). It was expected that the items would form two factors: one describing typical antihero actions, and one typical hero actions.

The items were constructed in the way that for the typical antihero behaviors, an immoral action word (e.g., “torturing”) was combined with a rationalization for the behaviors (e.g., “torturing criminals”). This is in line with typical antihero dramas in which a justification for the antiheroes’ immoral actions is provided by the narrative. For the typical hero list, the immoral verbs were replaced by a moral action word (e.g., “capturing criminals”), differentiating the tested behaviors merely by one word holding everything else constant. Additional typical hero like actions were also included (e.g., “The main character in a crime drama is sacrificing his own life to bring justice”). Appendix F summarizes the 44 constructed typicality items.

**Results of the pretest.** A Qualtrics survey was completed by undergraduate students from various communication classes in the School in exchange for extra credit. After data cleaning for
uncompleted surveys and the exclusion of two extreme outliers that affected the normal distribution of the data, 251 valid response sets were obtained with a mean age of 22 years (ranging from 18-54), and 74% female respondents. The data were normally distributed with a mean of 4.93, \(SD = .499\), \(N = 251\), skewness .038, kurtosis .033, Shapiro-Wilk (251) = .997, \(p = .936\). An exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring (PAF) was conducted to analyze the coherence of the typicality items for the hero and antihero actions as performed oftentimes in crime drama.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis: KMO = .852, which is very good. Bartlett’s test of sphericity, approx. \(\chi^2 (946) = 4783,903\), \(p < .001\), indicated that correlations between items were sufficiently large for PAF. After inspecting the anti-image matrix, as well as the correlation matrix, 16 items were deleted that were below the .05 threshold of the diagonal loading in the anti-image matrix. After that, the KMO statistic still yielded a good sampling adequacy with a value of .777 (Hutcheson & Sofroniou, 1999). Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was also still significant (approx. \(\chi^2 (378) = 1832,658\), \(p < .001\)) indicating that the correlations between variables overall were significantly different from zero. Because of one case with five missing values, the principal axis factoring analysis included 250 cases.

An initial analysis was run (without rotation) to obtain eigenvalues for each factor in the data. The initial solution had eight eigenvalues over Kaiser’s creation of 1, in combination explaining 43% of variance. The scree plot showed an inflexion after 4 factors. Given the theoretical underpinning to construct two scales one for a typical hero and one for typical antihero actions and the given scree plot result, four factors were initially retained before rotation, explaining 34% of the variance. Because the additional four factors only added another 9% of variance, it was determined that they could legitimately be disregarded. In the initial analysis, the four factor solution was rotated, orthogonally as well as obliquely.

Comparing the orthogonal and oblique simple rotation, all but one item loaded on the same factors. Also, factors seemed not to be highly correlated, with the highest correlation between Factor 4 and 1 being \(r = .312\). Thus, the result of the orthogonal, uncorrelated factor structure was relied upon.

According to Stevens (2002), a factor loading greater than .364 for a sample size of 200 can be interpreted as significant. Thus, factor loadings of greater than 0.4 were considered as...
meaningfully loading on one factor, whereas items that loaded below this threshold were not regarded as sufficient to be retained in the factor. An investigation of the content of the items loading over 0.4 on each factor clearly revealed that the content of items loading on Factor 1 could be attributed to violating behaviors of antiheroes, whereas items of Factor 2 clearly described law-abiding behaviors, thus, tapping into hero behaviors. Items loading on the other two factors, however, were not very clearly distributable to a specific content area. Therefore, in accordance with the preliminary idea to establish two underlying factors, a final varimax rotated principal axis factoring analysis was conducted with the extraction of two factors (Table 7). After deletion of items that did not load over the .04 threshold on either factor, the final solution showed that both factors together explained 23% of variance. Table 7 shows the factor loadings after rotation. The items that clustered on the same factor suggest that Factor 1 (12 items) represents typical antihero actions, or rather immoral actions \( (M = 3.55, SD = .777) \), and Factor 2 (8 items) typical hero, or moral actions \( (M = 5.99, SD = .643) \). The factors did not correlate highly \( (r = .199) \), thus indicating measurement of different concepts (divergent validity).

For DV1, the reliabilities for the antihero typicality items were strong, with \( \alpha = .802 \) for the antihero items \( (n = 12) \) in the antihero condition, and \( \alpha = .717 \) for the antihero items in the hero condition. Items that the pretest summarized to tap into the typical hero actions \( (n = 8) \), however, did not show any internal consistency. This is because there was almost no variance in the eight items, especially within the hero group. Cronbach’s \( \alpha \) in the antihero group for the typical hero items was \( .254 \), and thus regarded as inconsistent. The scale was not able to measure the intended construct, or any construct for that matter, consistently. For the hero condition, no reliability could be determined due to a negative covariance among items, resulting from general positive (moral) response to the items (ranging between 99 and 100% for each item). Thus, only the antihero typicality items were summarized to form a scale for further analyses of the hypotheses.
Table 7

Factor Loadings for Typical Antihero and Hero Action Items as Conducted in Crime Dramas
Using Principle Axis Factoring and Varimax Rotation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The main character in a crime drama…</th>
<th>Typical Antihero Actions</th>
<th>Typical Hero Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Kills murderers</td>
<td>.491</td>
<td>-.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Tortures criminals</td>
<td>.474</td>
<td>-.122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Violates the law to protect the good</td>
<td>.441</td>
<td>.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Gets around laws</td>
<td>.524</td>
<td>-.056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Illegally protects society</td>
<td>.424</td>
<td>.129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Cheats for the sake of doing good</td>
<td>.459</td>
<td>.138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Is dishonest to achieve his goals</td>
<td>.437</td>
<td>-.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Violently protects the weak</td>
<td>.560</td>
<td>.122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Uses violence as means to an end</td>
<td>.606</td>
<td>.018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Kills the bad guys</td>
<td>.478</td>
<td>.063</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Seeks revenge on the bad guys</td>
<td>.575</td>
<td>.055</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Blackmails to save lives</td>
<td>.590</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Follows the laws</td>
<td>-.134</td>
<td>.459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Legally protects society</td>
<td>-.098</td>
<td>.555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Peacefully protects the weak</td>
<td>-.097</td>
<td>.537</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Puts herself at risk to ensure justice</td>
<td>.175</td>
<td>.432</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Acts courageously against wrongdoers</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Seeks justice for the victim</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>.490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. Captures the criminals</td>
<td>.189</td>
<td>.439</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. Goes out of her way to save lives</td>
<td>.068</td>
<td>.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eigenvalue</td>
<td>4.814</td>
<td>3.242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion of Variance</td>
<td>17.194</td>
<td>11.578</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In and out of context character evaluations (DV2). For the inside the narrative context evaluation, morally diverse characters from different scenes in the episodes were selected. For
the antihero condition, three screenshots of the antihero (Emily), three screenshots of the hero character (Jake), and three screenshots of the villainous character (Victoria) were taken from the episode. For the hero condition, three different shots of the hero (Lilly), and three screen shots of the villain (Todd) were taken from the episode (Appendix D). Participants were asked to rate as quickly as possible, while maintaining accuracy, how morally acceptable each presented character was and how much they liked each character, by pressing the appropriate key on the keyboard.

For the outside the narrative context evaluation, the same actors were presented; however, this time, pictures from Google Images and other websites were used to provide the outside the specific narrative context. In these pictures, the actor still appeared to be the fictional character but not in the setting of the viewed episode. Again, participants rated the perceived morality and liking of the actor/character. The in-context evaluation and outside-of-context evaluation block were randomized between participants. Also, within each block, the order of the disposition and morality evaluations were randomized so that some viewers evaluated the disposition of each character first, while others evaluated the morality first. Finally, the nine or six, respectively, morally different media characters were presented in random order. Table 8 summarizes schematically the randomization process of DV2.

Table 8

Randomization Procedure for Dependent Variable Two of Treatment 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Randomized order of DV 2</th>
<th>Inside the narrative context R</th>
<th>Moral evaluation</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>(3 antihero), 3 hero, 3 villain in narrative context pictures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outside the narrative context R</td>
<td>Moral evaluation</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>(3 antihero), 3 hero, 3 villain outside narrative context pictures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. R stands for randomized presentation. Participants concluded all evaluations, just in different, randomized orders.
Table 9  
*Reliabilities for DV2 per Condition*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Antihero Moral</th>
<th>Hero Moral</th>
<th>Antihero Liking</th>
<th>Hero Liking</th>
<th>Villain Moral</th>
<th>Villain Liking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cronbach’s α</td>
<td>Cronbach’s α</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inside-the-narrative-context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antihero Moral</td>
<td>.918</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero Moral</td>
<td>.922</td>
<td>.871</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villain moral</td>
<td>.588</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antihero Liking</td>
<td>.929</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero Liking</td>
<td>.685</td>
<td>.972</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villain Liking</td>
<td>.750</td>
<td>.786</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outside-the-narrative-context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antihero Moral</td>
<td>.931</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero Moral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$r_{pic2&amp;3} = .338, p &lt; .001^$</td>
<td>.947</td>
<td>.804</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villain Moral</td>
<td>.722</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antihero Liking</td>
<td>.930</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero Liking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$r_{pic2&amp;3} = .338, p &lt; .001^$</td>
<td>.977</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villain Liking</td>
<td>.648</td>
<td>.835</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* *No variability and a negative average covariance among items resulted. 99% of all responses were negative (immoral) towards all villain pictures. Thus, only one picture was used for the analysis.*

*^No internal consistency was found for the hero outside pictures, but a significant correlation between Pictures 2 and 3. Thus, a composite score for Picture 2 and 3 was calculated.*

For DV2, reliability was acceptable for most of the rated pictures. The villain inside the narrative context moral evaluations did not yield reliability due to a negative covariance among items (see Table 9); 99% of the items were rated consequently as immoral in the hero condition. Even in the antihero condition, the reliability was not very high ($\alpha = .588$). In order to analyze the villain pictures across the hero and antihero group, one screenshot out of the three was randomly selected (Screenshot/Picture 2) and used for the analyses. Also, unacceptable internal
consistency was found in the antihero condition for the hero-outside pictures for both ratings: liking and morality. A correlation analysis indicated a strong correlation for the second and the third hero picture for the antihero group, with the composite score being consequently used for further analysis.

**Manipulation Checks**

To verify the presumed moral difference between the hero and antihero conditions, several of the morality measures were checked. First, after the reaction time task, participants were asked to evaluate each character on a 10-point, Likert-type scale, on how moral they perceived the character, with 1 (*not moral at all*) to 10 (*completely moral*).

Additionally, participants were asked how much the protagonist of the narrative (the antihero Emily in the antihero condition and the hero Lilly in the hero condition) was “good and bad at the same time”, assessed with a Likert-type scale ranging from -3 (*never good or bad*), to +3 (*always good and bad at the same time*) (recoded from 1-7 for the analysis), as adopted from Thompson et al. (1995). This mixed moral evaluation was intended to assess the potential ambivalent attitude viewers might have had towards the antihero. Furthermore, as with Study One, participants were asked to rate the protagonist’s behavior for both treatments along the five moral domains identified in moral foundation theory (Haidt & Joseph, 2008). Responses were given on a 7-point, Likert-type scale anchored with 1 (*completely violated the domain*) and 7 (*completely upheld the domain*). This assessment helped to further identify typical antiheroes according to their pattern of upholding and violating moral intuitions. The reliability for the moral foundation assessment of the main character in Treatment 1 was acceptable for the antihero condition, $\alpha = .816$. For the hero condition, reliability analysis suggested deleting Item 2 (violation of harm domain) to increase alpha, resulting in an overall reliability of $\alpha = .672$, leaving four items for the hero condition. Reliability for the antihero condition after deleting the harm item to make it comparable to the hero condition was $\alpha = .771$.

Finally, at the very end of the study, participants were asked to guess what the study was about. Hypothesis guessing was coded by the researcher, with guesses that included the words morality (moral, immoral), good and bad, antihero and values coded as a hit.

For Treatment 1, in order to test for significant differences between the character perceptions in the conditions, an independent $t$ test was conducted with the moral evaluation of the protagonist in each condition as dependent variable. As expected, a significant effect for
condition was observed, \( t (237) = -11.936, p < .001, \) Cohen’s \( d = 1.53, \) with the protagonist in the hero condition receiving higher moral approbation scores \( (M = 7.74, SD = 2.12) \) than her counterpart in the antihero condition \( (M = 4.78, SD = 1.72) \). The same test was conducted for the mixed-moral evaluation. Again, as expected, the \( t \) test revealed a significant difference between the hero and antihero evaluation: \( t (236.75) = 3.116, p < .05, \) Cohen’s \( d = .41, \) with the hero receiving significantly less morally mixed evaluations \( (M = 4.04, SD = 1.42) \) compared to the antihero \( (M = 4.64, SD = 1.53) \). Levene’s test indicated unequal variances \( (F = 5.15, p < .05) \); so, degrees of freedom were adjusted from 237.

Responses along the five moral domains also resulted in significant differences between conditions. As per the reliability analysis, one item was dropped for the comparative analysis. On average, participants rated the hero significantly higher on the (four) moral domains \( (M = 5.52, SD = .793) \) than participants who rated the antihero \( (M = 4.00, SD = 1.14) \), \( t (216.02) = -11.96, p < .001, \) Cohen’s \( d = 1.54. \) The degrees of freedom were adjusted from 273 due to unequal variances, as indicated by the Levene’s test \( (F = 16.687, p < .001) \). According to the means for each moral domain (Table 10), the hero was rated higher than the antihero on all five domains. The fairness domain was the highest for the antihero Emily in Revenge, which is in line with the plot.

Table 10

\[
\begin{array}{cccccc}
\text{Purity} & \text{Harm} & \text{Fairness} & \text{Loyalty} & \text{Authority} \\
M (SD) & M (SD) & M (SD) & M (SD) & M (SD) \\
\hline
\text{Hero (n=126)} & 5.33 (1.15) & 5.40 (1.39) & 5.93 (1.99) & 5.38 (1.15) & 5.45 (1.19) \\
\text{Antihero (n=125)} & 3.43 (1.41) & 3.57 (1.65) & 4.52 (1.45) & 4.26 (1.56) & 3.80 (1.52) \\
\end{array}
\]

As indicated by all these measures, it can be inferred that the stimulus manipulation was successful. The hero Lilly in Cold Case was perceived as more moral than the antihero Emily in Revenge, as indicated by multiple manipulation check measures.
Finally, altogether, 56% of the sample \((n = 286\) from the 295 gave an answer) seemed to have guessed some part of the studies’ purpose. However, hypothesis guessing was not a significant covariate for either of the dependent variables as tested under the hypotheses or for the moral character evaluations under the manipulation checks. Therefore, hypothesis guessing was not thought to jeopardize the results.

**Results**

**Data Cleaning for Treatment 1**

Before analyzing any of the reaction time (RT) responses, the data were cleaned for non-normality and outliers (Bargh & Chartrand, 2000; Fazio, 1990; Ratcliff, 1993). As with the procedure in Study One, reaction times were transformed using the inverse transformation to account for the non-normality in the data. Again, an additional multiplication procedure was adopted \((1000 \times (1/RT))\) to make the transformed results more easily interpretable, as suggested by Rhodes and Ewoldsen (2009). The resulting transformed reaction time is, then, the response speed, with higher numbers representing faster reactions.

First, anticipation responses were analyzed for each variable. For the typicality evaluations (DV1) anticipation responses were set to be under 1 second, anticipating the time to read the item and respond. For each item, responses under that threshold were deleted for further analysis; this resulted in deleting five cases. For the photo evaluations of in and out of context (DV2), the threshold was set under 400ms in accordance with Greenwald, Nosek and Banaji (2003). These authors found that excluding latencies under this threshold in the implicit association test (IAT) increased the validity of the measurement. In the current study, for DV2, three pictures of the same characters were presented. Because of the randomization process, it is possible that the same character was presented one after the other, thus making short responses likely. As research has shown (i.e., Bertelson, 1963), RT is decreased when a stimulus is repeated. Thus, instead of regarding anticipation responses below the recommended threshold by Fazio (1990) of 500ms, the lower level threshold was set to 400ms for this study as recommended by Greenwald et al. (2003). Also, the three character photos for in and out of context evaluations were very similar in nature. That is, for example in the antihero condition, the inside-the-narrative-context antihero (Emily) pictures were screenshots from three different scenes of the episode. Thus, for each character evaluation (consisting of three pictures) the
pictures were very similar in nature, which might have led to similar reaction time responses within each picture category. Therefore, the outlier analysis was conducted by investigating the mean for each picture category (hero, antihero villain) for each task (liking or morality), thus, eliminating systematic outliers, that reflected an anticipation response (i.e., <400ms) across at least one picture category. Altogether, for DV2, 10 cases showed such anticipation responses, indicating a participant was likely just clicking through the items rather than giving a considered response. Consequently, these cases were deleted, as well as two cases that responded on average over 5000ms for at least one picture category, which might indicate a deliberate response as argued by Fazio (1990).

After the data were cleaned for anticipation responses, the RT data for DV1 and DV2 were transformed using the inverse transformation as indicated (cf., Rhodes & Roskos-Ewoldson, 2009; Roskos-Ewoldsen, Yu, & Rhodes, 2004). After transforming the DVs, another outlier analysis was conducted.

For the typicality evaluations (DV1), the transformed RTs were standardized and single cases were substituted as user missing, whereas the complete subject was deleted for the analysis when it appeared more than once as an outlier >|3.0| for each variable (cf. Uleman et al., 1996). Overall, for DV1, eight additional cases were deleted from the analysis and 18 were registered as user missing (amounting to 9% of data cutoff), leaving 236 cases in the analysis of DV1, with 115 in the antihero and 121 in the hero condition.

For the context-based photo evaluations (DV2), five cases exceeded the threshold of three standard deviations and turned out to be systematically high or low in their responses. These cases were consequently excluded from further analysis (amounting to 12% of data cutoff), leaving 227 cases overall in the analysis of DV2, with 111 in hero condition and 116 in antihero condition.

Prior to the transformation, data for the dependent variables were positively skewed (skewness for DV1 was 5.29 in the hero condition, though not skewed in the antihero condition .772; for DV2, skewness ranged from 1.41 to 5.26). The Shapiro-Wilk statistic of non-normality revealed that none of the dependent variables were normally distributed; an inspection of the individual histograms and Q-Q plots indicated the same.

After the transformation and outlier exclusions for DV1, the distribution of the data in both conditions were normal, as indicated by the histograms and Shapiro-Wilk statistics (hero
condition: Shapiro-Wilk (121) = .990, \( p = .542 \); antihero condition: Shapiro-Wilk (116) = .991, \( p = .691 \). Similarly, for DV2, the post-transformation data were normally distributed, as indicated by the Shapiro-Wilk statistics and the graphical representations of the data (see Table 11). This was the case in both conditions across all picture categories.

Table 11

*Shapiro-Wilk Tests for the Response Speed Across All Picture Categories for the Antihero and Hero Condition*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Antihero</th>
<th>Hero</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inside the narrative context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral evaluation: Antihero</td>
<td>.985 116 .214</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral evaluation: Hero</td>
<td>.996 116 .984</td>
<td>.992 111 .790</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral evaluation: Villain</td>
<td>.986 116 .278</td>
<td>.990 111 .610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking evaluation: Antihero</td>
<td>.991 116 .694</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking evaluation: Hero</td>
<td>.988 116 .396</td>
<td>.988 111 .426</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking evaluation: Villain</td>
<td>.982 116 .132</td>
<td>.992 111 .745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outside the narrative context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral evaluation: Antihero</td>
<td>.990 116 .583</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral evaluation: Hero</td>
<td>.992 116 .729</td>
<td>.993 111 .872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral evaluation: Villain</td>
<td>.983 116 .158</td>
<td>.983 111 .167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking evaluation: Antihero</td>
<td>.992 116 .719</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking evaluation: Villain</td>
<td>.988 116 .431</td>
<td>.989 111 .510</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to the independent variables used with Treatment 1, for the moral disengagement scale, normality for the independent pretest was violated at time 1 (Shapiro-Wilk (241) = .983, \( p < .05 \)); the same was true for vigilantism (Shapiro-Wilk (241) = .980, \( p < .05 \)). However, skewness of the distribution was well under the problematic threshold of +2.
Based on the large sample and normally shaped histograms, an approximate normal distribution can be assumed. Robust tests were considered for the analyses.

**Order effects analyses for Treatment 1 (DV2).** As indicated in the design in Chapter IV, to control for order effects, participants randomly evaluated either (1) all of the inside the narrative pictures first, or (2) all of the outside the narrative pictures first. Regardless of which context was first evaluated, the participants also randomly evaluated either the morality of the characters first followed by their liking of the character or vice versa. However, once the morality-liking was randomized with the first set of pictures, the same morality-liking order was used with the second set of pictures. Thus, it was not a complete counterbalanced design (as the second evaluation was not again randomized, but followed the pattern of the first randomization). Thus, potential order effects could still be present in this design.

To test for order effects, for each mean evaluation of the characters (response speed and response direction for liking and morality), an independent *t* test was conducted, with condition as the independent variable, to investigate reaction time and response direction differences, depending on the order in which the participants completed the evaluation. The results show that, for both conditions, the response speeds for nearly all liking and morality evaluations were significantly different depending on the order (see Table 12 for the inside context, and Table 13 for the outside context). Responses seem to indicate a clear practice/testing effect in that participants respond faster the second time they evaluated a character. Consequently, the groups could not be combined. As a result, only the first liking and morality evaluations were chosen for the hypotheses analyses that examined reaction time in DV2. On the other hand, for the direction of the response, no difference in the order was observed for either condition for the liking and the moral evaluation, independent of the context in which the characters were evaluated. Thus, for the hypotheses regarding the direction of the response, groups with different orders were combined for the analyses.
Table 12
Dependent T Test Results, Means, and Standard Deviations for the Response Speed Across all Picture Categories for each Order Presented for Each Group, when Evaluated Inside the Narrative Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside the narrative context</th>
<th>Antihero</th>
<th>Hero</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>t1 (n = 58), t2 (n = 58)</td>
<td>t1 (n = 53), t2 (n = 58)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( M_{t1}(SD) )</td>
<td>( t ) test</td>
<td>( M_{t1}(SD) )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( M_{t2}(SD) )</td>
<td>( t ) test</td>
<td>( M_{t2}(SD) )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antihero</td>
<td>1.11 (.361)</td>
<td>( t ) (114)= -2.90, ( p &lt; .05 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.31 (.370)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero</td>
<td>1.21 (.307)</td>
<td>( t ) (114)= -3.05, ( p &lt; .05 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.39 (.318)</td>
<td>( t ) (109)= -2.88, ( p &lt; .05 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villain</td>
<td>1.02 (.267)</td>
<td>( t ) (101)= -3.93, ( p &lt; .001 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.27 (.388)</td>
<td>( t ) (109)= -2.92, ( p &lt; .05 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antihero</td>
<td>1.29 (.344)</td>
<td>( t ) (114)= 1.74, ( p = .08 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.42 (.423)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero</td>
<td>1.21 (.266)</td>
<td>( t ) (114)= 4.68, ( p &lt; .001 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.46 (.323)</td>
<td>( t ) (109)= 4.07, ( p &lt; .001 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villain</td>
<td>1.08 (.256)</td>
<td>( t ) (114)= 5.52, ( p &lt; .001 )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.37 (.301)</td>
<td>( t ) (109)= 4.43, ( p &lt; .001 )</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \( t1 \) and \( t2 \) stands for the order in which the evaluation was made in. \(^\wedge\text{adjusted for non-equal variances assumed. Reaction times are averaged across the moral and immoral response sets.} \)
Table 13
Dependent T Tests Results, Means, and Standard Deviations for the Response Speed Across all Picture Categories for each Order Presented for Each Group, when Evaluated Outside the Narrative Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outside the narrative context</th>
<th>Antihero</th>
<th>Hero</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>t1 (n = 58), t2 (n = 58)</td>
<td>t1 (n = 53), t2 (n = 58)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morality evaluation</th>
<th>t1(M(SD))</th>
<th>t test</th>
<th>t2(M(SD))</th>
<th>t test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antihero</td>
<td>1.11 (.364)</td>
<td>t (114) = -3.86, p &lt;.001</td>
<td>1.37 (.377)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero</td>
<td>1.20 (.261)</td>
<td>t (114) = -4.24, p &lt;.001</td>
<td>1.29 (.309)</td>
<td>t (109) = -5.63, p &lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villain</td>
<td>1.19 (.252)</td>
<td>t (114) = -4.64, p &lt;.001</td>
<td>1.00 (.342)</td>
<td>t (109) = -6.68, p &lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Liking evaluation</th>
<th>t1(M(SD))</th>
<th>t test</th>
<th>t2(M(SD))</th>
<th>t test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antihero</td>
<td>1.27 (.308)</td>
<td>t (114) = 2.19, p &lt;.05</td>
<td>1.40 (.334)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero</td>
<td>1.27 (.257)</td>
<td>t (114) = 3.97, p &lt;.01</td>
<td>1.37 (.378)</td>
<td>t (109) = 3.05, p &lt;.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villain</td>
<td>1.23 (.284)</td>
<td>t (114) = 3.34, p &lt;.01</td>
<td>1.07 (.347)</td>
<td>t (109) = 4.91, p &lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* t1 and t2 stands for the order in which the evaluation was made in. *adjusted for non-equal variances assumed. Reaction times are averaged across the moral and immoral response sets.
Hypotheses Testing for Treatment 1

Table 14 and 15 summarize all mean reaction times (back-transformed in milliseconds from the reciprocal transformation of the reaction time data) for both dependent variables across conditions. For the discussion of the results, however, the transformed response speed will be reported, with higher values indicating faster speed.

Table 14
*Back-transformed Reaction Times for DV1 of Treatment 1 Across Conditions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV1</th>
<th>Antihero</th>
<th>Hero</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>M (SD)</em></td>
<td><em>M (SD)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antihero Typicality</td>
<td>3686.26 (1073.18)</td>
<td>4395.82 (3746.96)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>n = 115</em></td>
<td><em>n = 121</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first hypotheses examined the effects of exposure to a hero or antihero narrative on the moral judgment of typical actions by protagonists in crime dramas. In line with Fransson and Ask’s (2010) research, if two different schemas for hero and antihero narratives exist, then it was expected that viewers primed with a hero narrative should be less accepting (H1b) and take longer (H1a) to evaluate typical antihero actions, as they do not match with a primed hero schema. In contrast, viewers of an antihero narrative were expected to make faster (H1a) and more positive judgments (H1b) about typical antihero events, as they do not match with the activated schema. Hypothesis 1a was analyzed with an independent sample *t* test with the transformed reaction times for the 12 typical antihero actions as the dependent variable and narrative condition (hero vs. antihero) as the independent variable. The *t* test revealed no significant difference between conditions for response speed *t* (234) = .606, *p* >.05. Participants primed with the antihero narrative responded with the same speed towards the typical antihero action items (*M* = .349, *SD* = .088), as participants primed with the hero narrative (*M* = .342, *SD* = .093). Thus, Hypothesis 1a was not supported.
Table 15

*Back-transformed Reaction Times for DV2 of Treatment 1 Across Conditions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV2</th>
<th>Antihero</th>
<th>Hero</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td>M (SD)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside the narrative context</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral evaluation: Antihero</td>
<td>1212.67 (592.47)</td>
<td>984.79 (524.08)</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral evaluation: Hero</td>
<td>1059.60 (345.19)</td>
<td>846.16 (337.18)</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral evaluation: Villain (picture 2)</td>
<td>838.93 (329.56)</td>
<td>788.16 (308.16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking evaluation: Antihero</td>
<td>817.17 (228.93)</td>
<td>1026.02 (519.45)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking evaluation: Hero</td>
<td>1059.60 (345.19)</td>
<td>846.16 (337.18)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking evaluation: Villain</td>
<td>788.16 (308.16)</td>
<td>688.45 (364.98)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside the narrative context</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral evaluation: Antihero</td>
<td>1173.75 (471.42)</td>
<td>931.88 (322.05)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral evaluation: Hero (picture 2 &amp; 3)</td>
<td>961.66 (287.41)</td>
<td>1380.25 (916.56)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral evaluation: Villain</td>
<td>838.93 (329.56)</td>
<td>817.17 (228.93)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking evaluation: Antihero</td>
<td>793.14 (220.41)</td>
<td>762.95 (305.96)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking evaluation: Hero (picture 2 &amp; 3)</td>
<td>793.14 (220.41)</td>
<td>869.17 (379.80)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking evaluation: Villain</td>
<td>793.14 (220.41)</td>
<td>757.88 (492.92)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the analyses of Hypothesis 1b, responses to the 12 antihero items were averaged based on condition to create a composite moral evaluation score. This composite score represents a proportion of moral/immoral responses for the typicality items per condition. Responses were coded as -1 for immoral and +1 for moral. Thus, a higher negative number represents a strong immoral response to the items. A high positive number represents a strong moral response to the items. A value close to zero represents no tendency towards more moral or more immoral responses. Overall, participants in the hero group evaluated the antihero items as significantly more immoral ($M = -0.502, SD = 0.415$) than participants in the antihero condition ($M = -0.351, SD = 0.519$) $t (234) = 2.46, p < .05$, Cohen’s $d = .321$. Thus, the results confirmed Hypothesis 1b: Responses of individuals exposed to the antihero narrative were more positive for the typical
antihero action than for individuals exposed to the hero narrative. In contrast, responses of individuals exposed to a hero narrative were more negative/immoral towards the presented antihero actions than responses of individuals exposed to the antihero narrative.

Furthermore, analysis of the rating data showed that on average, across all 12 typicality items, participants in the antihero condition rated the antihero action items as immoral in 67% of all cases, compared to the hero group who rated the antihero action times as immoral in 75% of all cases (see Table 16).

Table 16

*Percentage and Chi-Square Results of the Immoral Evaluations of Antihero Typicality Items Across Conditions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The main character in a crime drama…</th>
<th>Antihero Immoral %</th>
<th>Hero Immoral %</th>
<th>Chi-square test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kills murderers</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>$\chi^2(1) = 11.08, p = .001$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tortures criminals</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violates the law to protect the good</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>$\chi^2(1) = 3.66, p = .056$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gets around laws</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegally protects society</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheats for the sake of doing good</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>$\chi^2(1) = 2.76, p = .09$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is dishonest to achieve his goals</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violently protects the weak</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses violence as means to an end</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>$\chi^2(1) = 4.93, p = .026$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kills the bad guys</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>$\chi^2(1) = 4.01, p = .045$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeks revenge on the bad guys</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackmails to save lives</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second set of hypotheses investigated the proposed differences between moral evaluations within the narrative context and outside the narrative context, by assessing the moral evaluation of various characters relevant for the presented episodes. It was expected that for viewers who saw the antihero narrative, pictures of the antihero (the main character of the episode) would take longer to be evaluated when presented outside of the narrative frame, compared to inside the narrative frame (H2a). No such difference was expected for the hero or villain character between contexts, regardless of condition (H2b). Comparing the individual characters for the antihero condition, the antihero was expected to be evaluated slower than the hero (H2c) or the villain (H2d) character when evaluated outside the narrative context due to the character’s moral complexity.

Because respondents evaluated only two different characters (the hero and the villain of the episode) in the hero condition, but three different characters (the antihero, hero, and villain of the episode) in the antihero condition, two independent repeated-measure ANOVAS were conducted: a 2x2 repeated measure ANOVA for the hero condition, with the narrative context (inside vs. outside the narrative context), character evaluation (hero, villain) as the within-subject factors, and response speed of the moral character evaluation as the dependent variable, and a 2x3 repeated measure ANOVA for the antihero condition, with the narrative context (inside vs. outside the narrative context), character evaluation (antihero, hero, villain) as the within-subject factors, and response speed of the moral character evaluation as the dependent variable. In accordance with the hypotheses, multiple simple contrasts between the immoral and moral characters were investigated (H2b), as well as interaction contrasts between all characters and the context (H2a, H2c and H2d). Table 17 summarizes the descriptive response speeds for each character across contexts and conditions.

First, Mauchly’s test of sphericity was not violated for the antihero condition ($\chi^2_{\text{character}} (2) = 3.05, p > .05; \chi^2_{\text{context\_character}} (2) = 3.707, p > .05$). As there were only two levels per factor in the hero condition, sphericity was not an issue in that condition. As indicated earlier, due to a significant order effect in the response time for the morality and liking evaluations, sample size was reduced from 116 to 58 in the antihero condition and 111 to 53 in the hero condition.

For the antihero condition, both the main effect of character and the interaction between character and context were significant, indicating that the morality ratings were different for some character pictures in relation to the context in which they were evaluated ($F_{\text{character}} (2,114) =$
Context as the main effect, however, was not significant ($F_{context}(1, 57) = 2.73, p > .05$; partial $\eta^2 = .046, r = .21$). Specifically, with regard to Hypothesis 2a, the difference in the speed of the moral evaluation for the antihero character inside and outside the narrative context was of interest. Of course, this analysis was limited to those who viewed the antihero narrative. A Bonferroni corrected pairwise comparison revealed no significant difference between the moral evaluation of the antihero inside the context and outside the context, $t(57) = .001, p > .05$, Cohen’s $d = .00$, corrected for dependence between means (see Table 17).

Table 17

Response Speed for the Moral Evaluation of All Characters as Evaluated by the Antihero and Hero Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Moral evaluation</th>
<th>Antihero $M (SD) (n = 58)$</th>
<th>Hero $M (SD) (n = 53)$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inside the context evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antihero</td>
<td>1.11 (.362)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero</td>
<td>1.21 (.307)</td>
<td>1.39 (.387)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villain</td>
<td>1.03 (.267)</td>
<td>1.17 (.468)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside the context evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antihero</td>
<td>1.11 (.365)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hero</td>
<td>1.20 (.261)</td>
<td>1.29 (.309)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villain</td>
<td>1.19 (.252)</td>
<td>1.00 (.343)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, the interaction effect of context and character did not result from the difference in the evaluation of the antihero character inside and outside the context. Instead, differences in the evaluation of the villain character appears to have driven the observed effect (Figure 3). Consequently, Hypothesis 2a was not supported. Participants in the antihero condition rated the morality of the antihero equally fast, regardless of whether the character was pictured in a scene from the previously viewed episode (i.e. inside the narrative) or not (i.e. outside the narrative).
Hypothesis 2b predicted no difference in the speed of the evaluation between the hero and the villain character for both contexts and conditions. For the antihero condition, there was a significant difference between the hero and villain character depending on the context, as indicated by the simple contrast analysis: $F(1, 57) = 9.789$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .147$, $r = .38$. Inside the context, the hero was evaluated faster than the villain as indicated by the Bonferoni corrected pairwise comparisons ($t(57) = 4.018$, $p < .001$ Cohen’s $d = .51$, corrected for dependence between means). Outside the context, no such difference was found between the hero and villain characters ($t(57) = .294$, $p > .05$). Thus, for the antihero condition, H2b was partially supported (Figure 3).

For the hero condition (analyzed with a 2x2 repeated measure ANOVA), both main effects—context ($F(1, 52) = 6.344$, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .109$, $r = .33$) and character ($F(1, 52) = 35.58$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .406$, $r = .64$)—were significant. No significant interaction was found ($F(1, 52) = .846$, $p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .016$, $r = .13$). As indicated by the means plot for both contexts (Figure 4), the hero was evaluated significantly faster than the villain (inside: $t(52)$

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure3}
\caption{Response speed results as investigated under Hypotheses 2a-2d for the antihero condition.}
\end{figure}
= 3.36, $p < .05$. Cohen’s $d = .46$; outside: $t(52) = 5.808, p < .001$. Cohen’s $d = .79$, corrected for dependence between means). Thus, for the hero condition, H2b was not supported. 12

![Figure 4](image_url)

**Figure 4.** Response speed results as investigated under Hypothesis 2b for the hero condition.

For Hypothesis 2c and 2d, the significant interaction of character and context was of interest for the antihero condition, specifically the outside-of-context evaluation for all characters. For the main effect of character, simple contrasts showed that, independent of context, the antihero character was evaluated significantly slower compared to the hero (moral) character ($F(1, 57) = 6.04, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .10, r = .32$), but not for the villain (immoral) character ($F(1, 57) = .000, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .00, r = .00$). The simple contrast for the interaction of context and character indicated a significantly different evaluation of the antihero character compared to the villain character between contexts ($F(1, 57) = 6.81, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .107, r = .33$). However, the antihero and villain pictures inside and outside the narrative turned out to not be significantly different, when analyzed under the Bonferroni corrected criteria (inside: $t(57) = 1.56, p > .05$, Cohen’s $d = .20$; outside: $t(57) = -1.82, p = .07$, Cohen’s $d = .24$). Thus, no statistical difference in response speed between the antihero and the villain inside or outside the narrative context can be assumed.
In sum, as expected, outside-the-narrative context, the antihero was evaluated significantly slower than the hero, supporting H2c. However, H2d was not supported; the means trended in the hypothesized direction that outside-the-narrative context the antihero is evaluated slower than the villain character, but the trend did not reach the required (conservative) level of significance.\textsuperscript{13}

Hypothesis 3 predicted moral responses toward the antihero pictures, regardless of context. As with H2a, this analysis was only conducted with data from the antihero condition. Moral-immoral responses for the antihero character inside- and outside-the-narrative context (three pictures each) were averaged, resulting in a composite score indicating the proportion of moral (positive) and immoral (negative) evaluations of the antihero. Because no order effect was observed for this task, all data were combined ($n_{\text{antihero}} = 116$). Again, immoral responses were coded as -1 and moral ones as 1. As a result, negative values indicate an overall immoral evaluation of the character, and positive values indicate a positive evaluation of the character. A paired sample $t$ test with the moral evaluation response for the antihero character inside and outside the narrative context was conducted. No significant difference was found between the context evaluations ($t (115) = .713, p >.05$ Cohen’s $d = .07$); inside: $M = .017, SD = .928$), outside: $M = -.012, SD = .941$). That is, in both narrative contexts, the antihero was just as likely to be evaluated as moral as immoral (i.e., 50% immoral evaluations across all antihero pictures and contexts). Consequently, H3 was not supported, as the evaluation pattern for the antihero is better characterized as ambivalent, rather than positive.\textsuperscript{14}

Hypotheses set 4 proposed a similar set of relationships between the liking evaluation speeds of the antihero as was predicted for morality in Hypotheses set 2. Specifically, it was predicted that viewers of the antihero narrative would respond faster to liking the antihero when evaluated inside the narrative context compared to outside the narrative context (H4a). Also, regardless of the narrative context, antihero characters were expected to be more liked than disliked by individuals in the antihero condition (H4b).

To analyze H4a, the combined score for the direction (liking or disliking) and speed (transformed reaction time) of the response was used. This combined measure has been referred to as the \textit{valenced attitude accessibility} (Rhodes & Ewoldson, 2009). To compute this score, the response speed was multiplied by the valence of the response, with 1 for a “like” response and -1 for a “dislike” response. This way, higher and positive numbers indicated faster liking responses.
for the antihero character, and negative numbers indicated faster disliking responses. Any values close to zero represent neutral evaluations. Also, due to the observed order effect, sample size was reduced to 58 in the antihero condition.

The dependent t test with the valenced response speed for the antihero character inside and outside the narrative was not significant: \( t(57) = 1.15, p > .05, \) Cohen’s \( d = .15 \) (corrected for dependence between means). On average, similar fast and positive responses were given to the antihero characters inside the narrative context (\( M = .763, SD = 1.21 \)), and outside-the-narrative context (\( M = .659, SD = 1.20 \)). Two separate dependent t tests for the speed and response direction alone showed that the response speed was not significantly different between contexts (\( t(57) = .335, p > .05 \) (\( M_{\text{Speed inside}} = 1.42, SD = .423; M_{\text{Speed outside}} = 1.40, SD = .334 \)). However, the direction of the response was significantly different (\( t(115) = 2.81, p < .05, \) Cohen’s \( d = .26, \) corrected for dependence between means; \( M_{\text{Liking inside}} = .597, SD = .751; M_{\text{Liking outside}} = .500, SD = .815 \)). The antihero was liked significantly more inside the context than outside the context, but the speed of this response was similar in both contexts. Thus, H4a was not supported.

To analyze Hypothesis 4b, a Chi-square goodness-of-fit test for the antihero character pictures was conducted to compare the proportion of like and dislike responses toward the antihero Emily by participants from the antihero condition. Across inside- and outside-the-narrative context, the antihero was significantly liked more than disliked, as indicated by the Chi-square goodness-of-fit test for each of the antihero pictures (Table 18). H4b was, therefore, supported. Across contexts, the antihero was more liked than disliked, though a weak trend (see McNemar statistic for each character picture in Table 18) showed that the character was liked slightly more often inside the narrative context than outside, which perhaps mirrors the results of H4a.
Table 18

Chi-Square Goodness-of-Fit Results for the Antihero Character Pictures Across Contexts and McNemar Statistics for Each Antihero Character Picture Between Contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antihero picture 1, Inside</th>
<th>Frequency (%)</th>
<th>Chi-square goodness-of-fit (n = 116)</th>
<th>McNemar statistic (exact, two-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>$\chi^2 (1) = 49.79, p &lt; .001$</td>
<td>$p = .004$, $r = -.20$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antihero picture 1, Outside</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>$\chi^2 (1) = 29.00, p &lt; .001$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antihero picture 2, Inside</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>$\chi^2 (1) = 29.00, p &lt; .001$</td>
<td>ns, $r = -.02$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antihero picture 2, Outside</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>$\chi^2 (1) = 27.03, p &lt; .001$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antihero picture 3, Inside</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>$\chi^2 (1) = 47.21, p &lt; .001$</td>
<td>$p = .065$, $r = -.14$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antihero picture 3, Outside</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>$\chi^2 (1) = 31.03, p &lt; .001$</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Lastly, the research question inquired about the impact of viewing an antihero show on the tendency to morally disengage in reality, as measured through a pre-posttest comparison. A dependent t test for the antihero condition with the moral disengagement lying subscale at Time 1 (the pretest) and Time 2 as dependent variables was conducted to investigate RQ1. No significant difference was found between the two time points for the antihero condition ($t (105) = -1.84, p > .05$, Cohen’s $d = .17$ ($M_{t1} = 3.33, SD = 1.13$; $M_{t2} = 3.49, SD = 1.14$). Thus, no effect of the antihero episode was found on the tendency to morally disengage (specifically with respect to lying) in reality after being primed by an antihero or hero narrative. Though not included in RQ1, no difference in the hero condition was found either ($t (102) = -1.44, p > .05$, Cohen’s $d = .14$; $M_{t1} = 3.38, SD = 1.07$; $M_{t2} = 3.48, SD = 1.12$).

Discussion and Follow-up Analysis for Treatment 1

As noted in the previous chapter, Treatment 1 primarily examined the role of schemas on two levels. First, on the micro-level of analysis, the relevance of specific narrative schemas for the evaluation of hero and antiheroes are discussed. Second, the relevance of the context (inside- and outside the narrative context) for the evaluation of heroes and antiheroes are discussed, which can be understood as a meso-level analysis.
On the Micro-Level: Hero and Antihero Narrative Schema

The results of Hypotheses 1 can be interpreted from a micro-level perspective by specifically exploring the makeup of the hero and antihero schemas that were hypothesized to underlie the responses towards protagonist’s actions. Specifically, the goal of Hypotheses 1 was to investigate the difference between a hero and an antihero narrative schema and their influence on moral and emotional evaluations of hero and antihero characters. It was predicted that hero and antihero narrative schemas differ and that this difference can be assessed by applying the typicality and facilitation framework by Fransson and Ask (2010). According to Fransson and Ask (2010), typical moral events are evaluated faster than atypical events. Furthermore, the evaluation of a second event is facilitated when the preceding event matches the same category of events. Applying this typicality and facilitation frameworks to this study: Faster and more positive responses for typical antihero actions were predicted from participants primed with an antihero narrative as compared to participants primed with a hero narrative. Results in line with this prediction would consequently support the existence of a specific hero and antihero narrative schema.

For Hypotheses 1, after exposure to a television narrative, no significant differences were found between the conditions (hero vs. antihero) in the response speed towards other antihero actions typically portrayed in crime dramas (H1a). Thus, the primed and activated antihero schema seemed not to facilitate the evaluation of actions similar to those portrayed in the antihero episode participants just saw. However, a significant difference in the direction of the response was found, as expected in H1b. Participants primed with the antihero narrative judged the antihero’s actions as less immoral (or more moral) compared to participants primed with the hero narrative. Thus, although there was no difference in the speed with which each group gave the response, the direction of the response speaks for a strong priming effect from the antihero narrative. In fact, it is reasonable to conclude from the H1b findings that two different schemas were activated by watching either the traditional hero or the antihero show.

One interpretation of these results is that the hero group was primed to evaluate immoral actions from the hero-narrative standpoint (or based on the hero schema) that includes a rule-based (deontological), black-and-white moral categorization of things. Naturally, the hero group evaluated all antihero actions as highly immoral. The antihero group, on the other hand, was primed with moral complexity. The evaluative schema primed by their viewing included a less
harsh categorization of immoral actions of crime drama characters, perhaps based on the positive consequences that result from the immoral actions (consequentialism) in the narrative. As an example, a significantly greater number of the participants from the hero condition (compared to the antihero condition) indicated that a crime drama character who “kills the bad guys” is immoral.

With the results at hand, the evidence for the existence of different moral schemas that are activated when watching an antihero and a hero narrative grows stronger. The question remains: In which way do these schemas differ? As outlined earlier, antihero narratives provide the viewer with several moral disengagement cues that makes it easy for the audience to accept otherwise immoral actions. Given the H1b results, it is reasonable to assume that a schema for moral disengagement is activated, which results in participants responding less harshly towards general immoral actions portrayed in a crime drama context. In contrast, hero narratives naturally do not contain moral disengagement cues, since the hero always follows accepted moral standards. Consequently, a hero schema would be different from the antihero schema in that it does not contain a readiness to accept immoral actions due to the increased salience of moral disengagement. Hence, participants in the hero condition showed significantly less acceptance of a typical antihero’s actions.

Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the activated narrative schemas for the hero and antihero, respectively, affect moral judgments differently. In fact, when examining the previously unreported frequencies of the responses toward typical hero items, it appears that participants from the antihero condition evaluated even moral actions as less moral (see Table 19).

The pattern that is emerging from the antihero group indicates a priming effect of moral complexity or ambivalence. That is, the antihero schema likely not only consists of a tendency to accept moral disengagement cues, but also of a tendency to evaluate moral issues from a more morally complex standpoint. That means, even moral events are not evaluated from a black-and-white (or moral-immoral) perspective but rather from a perspective that leads to more “grey” responses. This “grey” is particularly evident in the higher immoral evaluations of the typical hero actions by the antihero group (Table 19).
Table 19  
*Percentage and Chi-Square Tests of Immoral Evaluations of the Typical Hero Actions per Condition*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Antihero Immoral evaluation</th>
<th>Hero Immoral evaluation</th>
<th>Chi-square test</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The main character in a crime drama…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows the laws</td>
<td>5% ($n = 112$)</td>
<td>1% ($n = 117$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legally protects society</td>
<td>5% ($n = 112$)</td>
<td>1% ($n = 121$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peacefully protects the weak</td>
<td>6% ($n = 114$)</td>
<td>2% ($n = 120$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puts herself at risk to ensure justice</td>
<td>11% ($n = 115$)</td>
<td>1% ($n = 120$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts courageously against wrongdoers</td>
<td>3% ($n = 115$)</td>
<td>1% ($n = 119$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeks justice for the victim</td>
<td>8% ($n = 114$)</td>
<td>0% ($n = 118$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captures the criminals</td>
<td>7% ($n = 115$)</td>
<td>2% ($n = 120$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goes out of her way to save lives</td>
<td>3% ($n = 115$)</td>
<td>0% ($n = 120$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The effects of the morally complex antihero schema on response speed.** To further explore this emerging pattern, I conducted a follow-up analysis. The priming effect of moral complexity (or ambivalence) for the antihero group, and thus, the effect of the activated antihero schema, became even more evident when I examined the response speed for the typical hero action items in both conditions. Comparing the averaged response speed for the hero action items across conditions, participants in the hero condition responded significantly faster to those items ($M = .391, SD = .104$) than participants in the antihero condition ($M = .360, SD = .091$), $t (234) = -2.359, p < .05$, Cohen’s $d = .32$. This suggests that the schema for morally complex media characters leads to longer responses for even highly *unambiguous* moral actions. It seems that a primed morally complex (antihero) schema leads to moral judgments made with deliberation,
irrespective of the moral complexity of the evaluated situation. Table 20 includes all mean response speeds per condition and independent t test results Bonferroni corrected for the typical hero items. When investigating all eight hero items individually—as the reliability indicated no coherence between items—for five of the eight items a descriptive mean difference can be observed in the direction of faster responses for the hero condition. For three items, the differences were, at a minimum, marginally significant (Bonferroni corrected alpha = .05/8=.006). The results of longer responses times for the hero action items by the antihero primed group are in line with the more immoral responses to the typical hero actions by that group (Table 19).

The results from Hypotheses 1b in Treatment 1 of Study Two, together with the follow-up analyses, provide strong evidence for an antihero schema that is different from a hero schema, in terms of moral evaluation. Responses following the priming of antihero schema can be described to be more ambivalent when obviously moral situations are evaluated and more accepting when morally complex (immoral) actions are evaluated. Additionally, prolonged response times for obviously moral situations seem to follow from the activation of an antihero schema. But, still, the question remains why no differences in the response speeds for the antihero actions were observed between the hero and antihero group (H1a).

**Response speed and narrative schemas.** As a reminder, participants evaluated whether the presented typical hero and antihero events were moral or immoral, while response speed was measured. It was expected that the typical antihero events would be morally evaluated faster by the antihero group compared to the hero group, as those events directly matched with the activated antihero schema (H1a). However, no differences between groups for the typical antihero events were found. As a reminder, the same basic result was found in Study One. In Study One, no reaction time differences were found for the evaluation of the actions of the characters in each condition. Furthermore, in the antihero condition in Treatment 1 in Study Two no significant differences were found \( t(114) = 1.306, p > .05, \) Cohen’s \( d = .13, \) corrected for dependence between means) between response speeds for the typical antihero actions \( (M = .349, SD = .088) \) and typical hero actions \( (M = .360, SD = .091) \). This means that viewers of the antihero narrative made judgments about morally complex and morally unambiguous items with a similar speed.
Table 20
*Means and Standard Deviations of Response Speed for the Hero Action Items Across Conditions and Associated Independent T Tests for each Item*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Antihero M (SD)</th>
<th>Hero M (SD)</th>
<th>Independent t test (p = bonferroni corrected alpha = .006)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The main character in a crime drama...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follows the laws</td>
<td>.442 (.186)</td>
<td>.486 (.226)</td>
<td>$t(222.171)^* = -1.609, p &gt; .006$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legally protects society</td>
<td>.407 (.196)</td>
<td>.392 (.187)</td>
<td>$t(231) = .619, p &gt; .006$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peacefully protects the weak</td>
<td>.354 (.138)</td>
<td>.351 (.146)</td>
<td>$t(232) = .174, p &gt; .006$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puts herself at risk to ensure justice</td>
<td>.257 (.104)</td>
<td>.306 (.119)</td>
<td>$t(233) = -3.314, p &lt; .006$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts courageously against wrongdoers</td>
<td>.332 (.156)</td>
<td>.335 (.131)</td>
<td>$t(223.05)^* = -.202, p &gt; .006$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeks justice for the victim</td>
<td>.324 (.142)</td>
<td>.404 (.156)</td>
<td>$t(230) = -4.068, p &lt; .006$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Captures the criminals</td>
<td>.413 (.193)</td>
<td>.464 (.181)</td>
<td>$t(233) = -2.111, p = .036$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goes out of her way to save lives</td>
<td>.351 (.141)</td>
<td>.378 (.154)</td>
<td>$t(233) = -1.377, p &gt; .006$</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* ^df were corrected due to inequality of variances. Because the hero items did not hold together in a way to support constructing a scale, independent t tests were performed for each item.

These findings are in contrast to the hero condition where a significant difference in speed of the response between the hero and the antihero action items was observed, with participants in the hero condition taking longer to evaluate the antihero action items than the hero ones. I argue that these hero-condition results are consistent with what we would expect from different schemas. For the hero condition, the morally complex typical antihero items did not match their activated hero schema; as a result, longer response times are required for judgments as predicted under the facilitation paradigm by Fransson and Ask (2010). In contrast, for the typical hero items—which match the activated hero schema—a facilitation effect was observed.
The slower evaluations of the antihero items by the hero-schema primed respondents are also in line with the dual-processing model (cf. Greene et al., 2001; Greene et al., 2004). According to the dual-process framework, the more morally complex a situation is, the longer the response time. In fact, based on this reasoning, one would expect faster responses for the hero items, from both the hero and the antihero groups. However, for those who viewed the antihero narrative this was not the case. The activated schema seems to have affected the response speeds in the antihero condition independent of the complexity of the evaluated item. That is, the activated antihero schema appears to have slowed the evaluation of all typical crime drama actions (antihero condition: $M_{\text{hero}} = .360$, $SD = .091$, $M_{\text{antihero}} = .349$, $SD = .088$; hero condition: $M_{\text{hero}} = .391$, $SD = .104$, $M_{\text{antihero}} = .342$, $SD = .093$). Since no differences were observed for the response speed for the hero and antihero action items in the antihero condition, it seems that the antihero schema primed the respondents to evaluate even clear hero actions a little bit longer (compared to the hero conditions’ response to the same items).

One interpretation of these findings is that the antihero schema primed deliberate thinking, such that all morally relevant items—either morally complex or morally unambiguous ones—were given extra thought. Evidence of this is found in the similar, relatively longer response times for both the hero and antihero typicality items within the antihero condition (H1a).

Viewed from this perspective, the lack of predicted typicality/facilitation effect for the antihero action items by the antihero condition (H1a) is actually then in line with predictions from the dual-processing model. In general, independent of the prime, morally complex actions take longer to evaluate, as predicted by dual-process models (cf. Greene et al., 2001; Greene et al., 2004). It seems that the activated antihero schema affected the moral acceptability of the typical events, as well as the speed of the response, though not in the expected direction. The antihero schema seemingly primed moral deliberation independent of the moral acceptability of the action, as evidenced by the same (longer) reactions towards the hero and antihero typicality items in the antihero group. Still, the complexity of the items under evaluation cannot be disregarded when examining reaction time differences. In fact, the study by Fransson and Ask (2010) only dealt with clearly moral and clearly immoral actions. Thus, for the clearly moral items, the predicted typicality/facilitation effect was observed in the hero condition, as indicated by faster responses to the hero action items compared to the antihero action items. In contrast, for
the antihero condition, no typicality/facilitation effect was observed, as morally complex situations, in accordance with the dual-processing model and the MIME, need more time to be evaluated. Nevertheless, counter to the predictions of the dual-processing model and the MIME, morally unambiguous events were evaluated with the same (longer) response speed by participants in the antihero condition. This clearly points toward a strong schema priming and activation effect in the antihero condition. A similar pattern was not seen in the hero condition.

**Extent of the schema effect.** Given that the antihero prime significantly affected the responses toward other morally relevant actions typically found in crime dramas, I must ask how big is this effect? One might argue that the variance explained in the less harsh moral judgments of the antihero actions in the antihero group was not based on the priming and schema activation, but can instead be explained by personality traits of the participants. For example, participants high in tendency to morally disengage or in vigilantism might be more prone to regard immoral actions performed by a protagonist as more moral. To examine this alternate explanation another follow-up analysis was performed. When hierarchically regressing the viewing condition, followed by the moral disengagement tendency and vigilantism as assessed in the pretest, on the averaged responses towards the antihero action items, the condition remained a significant predictor in the model: $F(3,194) = 14.618, p < .001$, contributing to explained a significant amount of variance as indicated by the significant $F$ Change statistic $(1,196) = 5.166, p < .05$. Thus, the priming of the hero and antihero narrative significantly explains variance in the direction of the response towards the antihero action items ($\beta = -.185, t = -2.845, p < .05$, condition dummy coded with $0 =$ antihero, $1 =$ hero condition). To be fair, so did the tendency to morally disengage in reality ($\beta = .309, t = 4.543, p < .001$) and vigilantism ($\beta = .175, t = 2.569, p < .05$). All three predictors together explained 18% of variance (adjusted $R^2 = .17$), with moral disengagement tendency explaining the most variance ($R^2 = .12$), with condition and vigilantism explaining an additional 3% each. Thus, the personality variables do contribute to the observed effect. However, though somewhat small, the effects of the primed schema on the outcome cannot be disregarded.

**On the Meso-Level: The Importance of the Context for the Narrative Schema Activation**

The goal of Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 was to investigate the difference between moral evaluations of media characters depending on the context in which these moral evaluations were
made. Whereas the results of the different narrative schemas for hero and antihero narratives were discussed from a micro-level, the following discussion will add another level of analysis to the discussion.

From a micro-level perspective, hero and antihero narrative schemas can be described in terms of their differences. The discussion of Hypotheses 1 elaborated on these. On a meso-level of analysis, narrative schemas can be distinguished from real-world schemas by their activated contexts: the inside-the-narrative-context and outside-the-narrative-context. This meso-level of analysis is discussed in more detail below.

As a reminder, it was discussed in the results of Study One that narrative schemas (naturally) are only activated in the context of the narrative. Narrative schemas are relevant during narrative reception. They provide the viewer with mental shortcuts about the storyline, expected rules of conduct for the characters, and attitudes about the characters in the plot while one is viewing the narrative. Consequently, when trying to assess the exact attributes of a narrative schema after the narrative reception, the respondent must be referred back to the narrative context in order for the researcher to measure the relevant attributes of the specific narrative schemas. To not make specific references back to the narrative context seems to have implications for the attitude and other responses measured. That is, the validity of what is actually measured becomes questionable.

The results of Study One seemed to emphasize the relevance of the reference to the narrative context for schema responses. First, the actions of the antihero were judged to be more acceptable by the viewers when the item specifically referred back to the narrative context, compared to evaluations of the antihero’s behaviors more generally. Secondly, when photos of other familiar antihero characters were evaluated as good or bad, responses were not faster by participants primed with the antihero episode. It was expected that faster evaluations of other familiar antihero characters would be observed for participants primed with an antihero schema, as the antiheroes are congruent with the activated schema (facilitation effect, Fransson & Ask, 2010). In fact, even the antihero Dexter, who was the same antihero that the participants watched in the episode, was not evaluated faster by those participants as the others who viewed a hero narrative. These results were attributed to the lack of a reference to the narrative context provided when the participants evaluated the character. That is, the Dexter photo was not taken from the episode viewed and was not sufficient to activate the narrative antihero schema, thereby
not eliciting the expected facilitation effect. I concluded that responses influenced by a narrative schema are bound to an activation of, or reference to, the actual narrative context of the schema. From a micro level of analysis, it could also be argued that the failure to find a facilitation effect for the Dexter picture in the antihero group in Study One, is due to the moral complexity of the activated antihero schema that generally seems to lead to slower evaluations of moral or immoral actions or characters (see previous discussion). Both explanations, from a micro-and meso-level of analysis, are likely. Because the Dexter picture, in Study One was not previously tested to constitute an outside-of-the-narrative-context character, both explanations seem to be valid at that time.

Based on the results of Study One, it was concluded that moral evaluations of an antihero and his actions are more positive and accepted when made from a narrative schema standpoint and not from a real-world one. That is, an antihero is evaluated with greater latitude of moral acceptance based on a narrative schema that includes moral disengagement and the readiness to accept the moral disengagement cues provided in the narrative. Without direct reference to a narrative context, one judging the morality of an action has to base his/her evaluation on another perspective (likely, a real-world one). If this is the case, judgments are more absolute. In Study One, this meant that several of the antihero’s actions were evaluated without the narrative context and situational circumstances in mind, resulting in rather negative evaluations for those actions. Actions described in a way that directed the participants back to the narrative context were less negative.

In Study Two, these context-relevant effects were explained further. For example, with H1, all typical hero and antihero action items specifically referenced the context of a crime drama. Thus, results were discussed in reference to the specific hero and antihero narrative schema. Hypotheses 2, specifically investigated the importance of context for moral evaluations of media characters. Hypotheses 2 was built on the findings of Study One detailed above that indicated a difference in the way a media character was evaluated depending on whether the narrative context was made salient in the judgment making or not.

For ease of interpretation and to clarify the discussion of Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4, evaluations made inside the narrative context refer to evaluations made based on a narrative schema. Evaluations made outside the narrative context refer to evaluations that are made based on (presumably) real-world schemas. The following discussion will concentrate on the narrative
schemas, rather than real-world ones; but, in general, moral evaluations from a real-world schema are presumed to be more harsh and less considerate of the situation (relative to those made through a narrative schema). These differences in response between inside the narrative context and outside the context evaluations should be most (and perhaps only) apparent in response to moral transgressions. Within the antihero narrative context, the activated schema provides the respondent with a mental shortcut to accept immoral actions based on the acceptance of moral disengagement cues provided by the narrative, as well as the overall knowledge that the antihero’s actions generally serve the greater good and therefore can be justified. When this narrative context is not provided, responses are likely to follow general real-world moral standards and norms that dictate an absolute evaluation of the moral transgression: immoral actions are bad. For truly moral actions, like those of a hero character, no such difference between the contexts should be seen since those narratives reflect the real world. Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 concerned the investigation of these different contexts through evaluations of characters seen in the shows watched in Treatment 1 of Study Two: the antihero protagonist, the hero, and the villain.

The matter of context for the liking and moral antihero evaluation. Hypothesis 2a predicted that moral evaluations of the antihero (assessed with reaction-time responses towards photos of the antihero) when evaluated inside the narrative context (screenshots of the character in scenes from the previously viewed episode) would be made faster than those made outside the narrative context (character photos not from the episode). This prediction is based on the assumption that moral judgments of morally complex situations (or in this case, characters) differ depending on the context in which these evaluations are made. The narrative context should facilitate faster evaluations of moral violations made by the fictional protagonist, based on the activation of a narrative schema that provides the viewer with implicit rules that justify such immoral actions in the context of a narrative. On the other hand, the same actions and the character performing such actions should be evaluated more slowly when evaluated outside the narrative context, where no narrative schema facilitates responses. In the real-world moral evaluations simply carry more weight; moral judgments are more consequential for one self and one’s social image, therefore likely increasing deliberation and response time. In this study, the difference in the evaluations between the contexts should become noticeable when dealing with characters that portray good morals and moral transgressions (i.e., moral ambivalence), as is the
case with the antihero (H2a). For the hero and villain characters, judgments should follow a simple categorization: the hero is good and clearly moral, and the villain is bad and clearly immoral. This judgment can be made irrespective of the context. Consequently (as predicted in H2b), no context differences were expected for the speed with which the hero and the villain were morally evaluated, regardless of viewing condition; again, differences were expected with the antihero (H2a).

Unexpectedly, results of H2a indicated no reaction time differences for the moral evaluation of the antihero inside or outside the narrative context; therefore, it was not supported. H2b, on the other hand, was supported. As expected, for the hero character the response time was not significantly different between contexts in either viewing condition. Similarly, for the villain character, no differences in response time were observed between contexts in the hero condition. Surprisingly, though, in the antihero condition, the villain was evaluated significantly faster outside the narrative context than inside.

In sum, the results of Hypothesis 2 indicate that context (at least as manipulated through the setting in which the photos were made) does not influence the moral evaluation of the antihero character. This was the case for the speed with which responses were given. This was also the case for the morality judgments (H3). As indicated by the results of Hypothesis 3, participants evaluated the antihero as morally ambivalent: Emily (the antihero) was evaluated as moral and immoral by 50% of the sample across contexts. This result is consistent with the findings from Study One, where the antihero Dexter was evaluated as good in 51% of all cases. One might argue that the findings of Hypothesis 3 could simply be due to an insufficient operationalization of the two contexts with the selected character pictures. Indeed, no pretest or follow-up tests were conducted to confirm that the selected pictures were correctly perceived as in-context and out-of-context by the participants. However, context-specific differences were observed with the emotional responses (H4a) toward the antihero, where Emily (the antihero) was liked more when evaluated inside the context than outside the context. Thus, the context manipulation was successful as evidenced by the emotional response towards the character (though not the moral responses). Also, the response-time differences between contexts for the moral evaluation of the villain in the antihero condition argue for a successful manipulation of different contexts. The villain’s morality was judged more slowly when pictures of the character within the narrative were judged, compared to pictures outside of the narrative. Therefore, one
can infer that the character pictures presented inside and outside the narrative context were indeed perceived differently by the participant, supporting a successful operationalization of the differing contexts.

Consequently, the results lead to the conclusion that, for the antihero, references towards the narrative context seem to not impact moral responses to the character, as response times were not facilitated by the context for the moral evaluation of that character. Why?

First, it is possible that the activation of the context-bound antihero schema (and narrative schema in general) influences the evaluation of the character in both contexts. The accessibility of the antihero attitude\textsuperscript{15} is high based on the recent prime and, thus, evaluations of the attitude object (the antihero, in this case) are fast and independent of the context. However, in line with the unexpected findings of the different emotional evaluation of the antihero between contexts (H4a), the question remains, why did no differences emerge in the moral evaluation of the antihero inside and outside the narrative context? One explanation may be the operationalization of the photo evaluations (DV2), which had participants simply indicate how moral or immoral the presented characters were with the appropriate keystrokes. It is reasonable to assume that when asked to evaluate the morality of media characters seen in the episode, a participant evaluated them accordingly: The hero is evaluated as moral, the antihero as morally complex, and the villain as immoral (Figure 5 and Figure 6). This pattern supports previous findings by Eden, Grizzard, and Lewis (2011).

The question then is whether the viewer during (or in this case, after) the reception process is really concerned with the overall morality of the depicted protagonists, or rather with how their (im)moral actions influenced enjoyment (Raney, 2004). For instance, when evaluating the antihero, did the participants respond to and rate morality in isolation or in relation to how her (im)morality led to enjoyment? In other words, it is possible that morality was judged through an “enjoyment bias.” The operationalization used in the study to evaluate if the different characters are moral or immoral does not tap into the latter concern.

Liking of the character does seem to be more directly tied to the narrative context and the experienced enjoyment. As seen in the results of Hypotheses 4, the antihero was generally more liked than disliked (H4b) and even more so, when evaluated inside the narrative context (H4a). Thus, the antihero schema includes an overall positive emotional attitude towards the antihero (H4).
Figure 5. Averaged morality responses for all three characters as evaluated by the antihero condition.

Figure 6. Averaged morality responses for the two characters as evaluated by the hero condition.
It also seems to include a readiness to morally disengage and accept immoral actions from the antihero. When participants were asked about the morality of typical antihero actions (as examined under H1), they responded with greater acceptance than those primed with the hero narrative and activated schema. However, when it comes to a pre-formed attitude about the overall morality of the antihero, the schema may not include that expectation, presumably because such an attitude would not be beneficial for the viewer. The antihero schema already provides viewers with all they need to alleviate cognitive dissonance: the readiness to accept immoral actions performed by the antihero and to generally like him/her. Whether the antihero is moral or immoral, irrespective of his/her actions, becomes a moot question within the antihero schema. Consequently, it follows that we might not find any differences in the moral evaluations of the antihero between contexts. The antihero is presumably evaluated outside the narrative context independent of the context in which he/she is presented in. The antihero schema does not provide a pre-formed attitude towards the morality of the antihero for the viewer. However, a pre-formed attitude to accept the immorality of the antihero within the narrative and to like the antihero, is likely to exist. Thus, it can be assumed that a different operationalization to measure and evaluate the acceptability of the moral actions of the characters might uncover the relevance of the different contexts for the moral evaluation of the antihero character. At this time, I am not able to suggest such an alternative approach, but its likelihood to elicit different result still theoretically exists. Assuming so, similar to the findings for the heightened emotional response inside the narrative context (H4) for the antihero, more acceptable moral evaluations for the antihero might be expected inside the narrative context, based on the accessible antihero schema.

In sum, from a meso-level perspective, the results of Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 in Treatment 1 support the argument for the importance of the context in which moral or emotional evaluations of a media character are made for the response. That is, the findings demonstrate the specificity of the antihero schema, in relation to the context, in more detail: During the reception process (in this case measured after, by referring the viewer back to the narrative), it seems that the overall morality of the antihero is of little concern for the viewer and might not be part of the pre-formed attitude toward him/her. However, an overall positive emotional attitude toward the antihero and a readiness to accept immoral actions performed by the antihero seems to be part of a pre-formed attitude and therefore the antihero schema. The differentiation of the responses made inside- and outside-the-narrative-context furthermore helps to distinguish narrative
schemas from real-world schemas, specifically when it comes to moral transgressions, whereas more lenience towards moral transgressions and emotional side taking (i.e., liking, H4) can be expected from a narrative context perspective (i.e., the narrative schema).
CHAPTER 6

STUDY TWO, TREATMENT 2

Treatment 2 investigated the importance of the context for the moral evaluation of an antihero in a narrative in more detail. Instead of the audiovisual narrative used in Treatment 1 in Study Two, a textual antihero narrative (Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012) was used with the respondents evaluating the antihero of the story on various moral and non-morally related measures. The antihero story was presented in the form of a newspaper article and manipulated to appear as either a true or fictional story. All participants concluded Treatment 2 after Treatment 1. A control group that completed Treatment 2 only was also employed. As a reminder, it was predicted that when participants read the fictional antihero story, moral evaluations of the antihero would be faster (H5a) and more moral (H5b) than when they read the true, realistically framed story.

Methods

Stimulus Material: Textual Narrative

For the second treatment of the study, an antihero story by Krakowiak and Oliver (2012) was used. The story “The Suspect” is 2,199 words in length. The story was introduced either as a reality-based story of a successful police officer who collected his experiences as a detective in a book and reads one of his most impressive cases to an audience, or as a fictional story about a new blockbuster movie that is soon to be released (see Appendix G for the frame for each condition and the complete story). The content of the story was identical in both conditions. Each frame was individually constructed for the study to appear like a newspaper release, increasing ecological validity of the stimulus material. Both story frames are 105 words long, keeping the length of frame and the article that participants read exactly the same.

The Suspect. The story is written from the first-person perspective of an experienced police detective, James, who finds himself in a situation where he could engage in self-justice and let a suspect die but decides otherwise. The story begins with James stealing drugs on his return from a gruesome autopsy of a little girl who was brutally tortured and killed. He is in charge of interrogating the prime suspect, who is a long-standing drug addict, who James fears
the police cannot convict due to lack of evidence. Full of disgust and rage by this crime, James roughs up the suspect during interrogation. Shortly after, the suspect falls ill. James has to decide whether he will save the suspect by pushing the emergency alarm or not. At the end of the story, colleagues tell James that the suspect was innocent and that the true murderer had confessed. James is relieved that he did not let an innocent die by not pushing the alarm.

The story was specifically constructed to represent a morally complex character, as James does both good and bad things. He saves the life of a suspect, but at the same time roughs him up during interrogation and steals drugs for himself from the crime scene. Krakowiak and Oliver (2012) demonstrated that the story was significantly different in terms of the moral perception of the antihero were compared to a hero and a villain manipulation of the same story.

**Dependent Variable**

**Moral evaluation of the story antihero in Treatment 2 (DV3).** To assess the accessibility of the participants’ moral perception of the antihero in Treatment 2, 10 moral judgment descriptors were presented for the participant to agree or disagree with. Participants were instructed to respond to the statements: “The actions of the character were good; moral; acceptable; responsible; honest; fair; helpful; tactful; just; human.” Several of these adjectives were adopted from Biel, Fransson, and Dahlstrand (1997) who collected a list of 55 morally related words associated with often-encountered immoral experiences. Additionally, seven morally irrelevant items were employed to ensure that a possible treatment effect is only related to morally relevant but not to morally irrelevant evaluations (Appendix E).

For Treatment 2, the reliability analysis for the morally relevant descriptors showed an internal consistency of $\alpha = .640$ ($n = 10$). A separate group reliability analysis for the realism-framed and fictionally-framed story condition showed that the reliability for the realism condition was rather low, $\alpha = .562$, but for the fictional condition it was acceptable, $\alpha = .713$ (control fiction $\alpha = .481$; control realism $\alpha = .690$). A correlation analysis per condition showed that four items (moral, good, acceptable and responsible) built a significantly correlating cluster for both conditions. The reliability analysis with these four items confirmed this consistency for both groups (realism: $\alpha = .719$; fictional: $\alpha = .722$; control realism: $\alpha = .644$; control fiction: $\alpha = .875$). Consequently, the four morally relevant items were combined to a single scale measuring
the moral evaluation of the character for each condition. Reliability for the morally irrelevant items \((n=7)\) was acceptable \(\alpha = .773\) (realism condition: \(\alpha = .760\); fictional condition: \(\alpha = .777\)).

**Manipulation Checks**

To determine if the story manipulation for Treatment 2 was successful, participants were asked to rate the truthfulness (“this was a true story”) and fictionality of the story (“this was a fictional story”) on a 7-point, Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Participants also rated the character in accordance to the five moral domains outlined in moral foundation theory (Haidt, 2001) to investigate the difference in the moral perception of the character presented in the story between conditions. For Treatment 2, the reliability analysis suggested deleting a harm-related item (Item 2: inflicting harm) for both the realism and fictional condition, resulting in Cronbach’s \(\alpha = .684\) for the realism condition and \(\alpha = .790\) for the fictional condition. For the control condition, the analysis suggested deleting the same problematic item, yielding subsequently reliable measures (control fiction: \(\alpha = .713\); control realism: \(\alpha = .703\)).

Additionally, to control for the compliance of the participants to completely read the story, they were asked two content questions after the newspaper article was presented (“What job does the main character James have?” and “What crime was the suspect of the story accused of?”). Correct and incorrect answers were coded with 1 and 0 respectively and used as a covariate in the analyses.

**Manipulation check results for Treatment 2.** For Treatment 2, participants were asked to indicate how much they thought the story was a true or a fictional story using a 7-point, Likert-type scale. Two independent \(t\) tests with the truthfulness or fictionality of the story in each condition were conducted. A significant effect for condition was observed for both dependent variables: “This was a fictional story”: \(t(246) = -11.05, p < .001\), Cohen’s \(d = 1.53\); “This was a true story”: \(t(246) = 11.64, p < .001\), Cohen’s \(d = 1.48\). The realism-framed story was perceived as significantly less fictional \((M = 2.82, SD = 1.35)\) than the fictional story \((M = 4.81, SD = 1.24)\) and significantly more true \((M = 5.35, SD = 1.24)\) than the fictional-framed story \((M = 3.55, SD = 1.19)\). The same mean differences were found for the control conditions, with higher means for the evaluation of the story as fiction in the fictional \((M = 4.50, SD = 1.25)\) than in the realism framed condition \((M = 3.53, SD = 1.34)\), and higher truthfulness of the story from participants in
the realism condition ($M = 5.24, SD = 1.20$) compared to the fictional condition ($M = 3.83, SD = 1.15$). Due to the low sample size in the control groups ($n = 35$), no statistical test was conducted. Nevertheless, in sum, the manipulation of the antihero story as realistic or fictional was regarded as successful.\textsuperscript{16}

Furthermore, the antihero character in both versions of the story was evaluated on the five moral domains, similar to the characters in Treatment 1. As anticipated, no significant differences between conditions on the perception of the character was found: $t (246) = 1.16, p > .05$ (only four items were used in this analysis, in accordance with reliability results). Participants in the realism condition judged the described character similar on the moral domains ($M = 4.21, SD = .919$) to participants in the fictional condition ($M = 4.07, SD = .992$). The means for each moral domain showed a descriptive pattern towards slightly lower ratings for all five domains for the character in the fictional condition (Table 21). However, statistically, as expected, no differences were found on how moral the antihero was evaluated according to the five moral domains between the realism and fictional conditions.

Table 21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Means and Standard Deviations for the Evaluation of the Five Moral Domains Across Conditions for Treatment 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realism ($n = 130$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiction ($n = 118$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Fiction ($n = 18$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Realism ($n = 17$)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results

Data Cleaning for Treatment 2

First, anticipation responses under the threshold of 400ms (Greenwald, Nosek, & Banaji, 2003) were replaced with user missing (For a reminder of the rationale for this choice and others related to the response times data cleaning, please see chapter 5). For Treatment 2, short adjectives were presented for evaluation (ranging between four and 11 letters), making it reasonable to apply this threshold.

Second, the response speed data for Treatment 2 were transformed with the inverse transformation, followed by another outlier analysis. After the transformation and standardization of scores, cases scoring once over the >|3.0| threshold were substituted with user missing; those more than once were completely deleted for further analysis. Altogether, data from three subjects were deleted for the analysis of Treatment 2 (including the control group), and 20 cases were substituted as user missing. This resulted in 250 people in the analysis for Treatment 2 (amounting to 3% of data cutoff), with 130 in the realism and 120 in the fictional condition. Also 35 participants were in the control condition for Treatment 2, with 17 in the realism condition and 18 in the fictional condition.

Before the transformation, skewness of Treatment 2 data was not very high, with the maximum of 1.65 in the fictional condition; still the data were not normally distributed as per the visual inspection of the data. Data of the control conditions for Treatment 2 were not skewed and normally distributed. After the transformation and outlier determination, the data were still non-normally distributed as indicated by the significant Shapiro-Wilk's statistic (realism condition: Shapiro-Wilk (130) = .967, p < .05; fictional condition: Shapiro-Wilk (120) = .973, p < .05. However, the data were not skewed anymore (skewness for realism condition: .680 (SD = .212); fictional condition: .432 (SD = 221)), and relatively normally distributed as indicated by the graphic representations. Consequently, non-parametric tests were considered, even though the F test is robust against deviations in normality (Glass, Peckham, & Sanders, 1972). For the control group, data were normally distributed before the transformation (control fiction: Shapiro-Wilk (18) = .978, p >.05; control realism: Shapiro-Wilk (17) = .921, p >.05). Thus, for the analysis, the untransformed data were used.
Hypotheses Testing for Treatment 2

Table 22 summarizes the mean reaction times (back-transformed in milliseconds from the reciprocal transformation of the reaction time data) for Treatment 2 across conditions. The transformed response speed was used for the discussion of the results.

Table 22

*Back-transformed Reaction Times for Treatment 2 Across Conditions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Realism Story (n = 130)</th>
<th>Fictional Story (n = 120)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morally relevant items (n = 4)</td>
<td>1405.94 (667.03)</td>
<td>1482.46 (583.56)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morally irrelevant items (n = 7)</td>
<td>1492.509 (490.02)</td>
<td>1488.35 (531.78)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypotheses set 5 concerned Treatment 2 of the experiment. Participants read either a fictional or realistically framed antihero story and then evaluated the character on several moral and immoral adjectives, during which response times were assessed. It was predicted that individuals exposed to the realism-based antihero story would take longer to evaluate the morality of the antihero character than participants who read the fictional story (H5a). Additionally, it was expected that the antihero character would be evaluated more positively by the group who read the fictional version of the story compared to those reading the realistically framed story (H5b). These hypotheses were based on the assumption that only within a narrative context will responses be drawn from the appropriate narrative schema (i.e., the antihero schema in this case).

To control for the participants who did not answer the content questions correctly (n = 107/236, implying that they did not read the entire story), an analysis of covariance was conducted with the speed of the moral judgment of the story character as dependent variable, story condition (realistic vs. fictional) as independent variable, and a dummy coded reading variable as covariate (0 = not read, 1 = read). The covariate was independent of condition as indicated by a non-significant association; Cramer’s V = .071, approx. sig = .527. Also, the assumption of homogeneity of regressions slopes was met by a non-significant interaction of
condition * covariate \((F(1, 246) = .608, p > .05)\). The covariance analysis showed a marginally significant effect for the covariate \((F(1, 247) = 2.926, p = .08, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .012)\), and a not significant effect for condition after controlling for the covariate \((F(1, 247) = 1.356, p > .05, \text{partial eta } \eta^2 = .005)\). Thus, participants who read the realistically framed story did not evaluate the protagonist of the story faster \((M = .923, SD = .343, n = 64, \text{controlling for the covariate})\) than participants who read the fictional story \((M = .923, SD = .367, n = 67, \text{controlling for the covariate})\). Consequently, H5a was not supported.\(^{17}\) As indicated earlier, Treatment 2 was not normally distributed. A Mann-Whitney-U test was, therefore, also conducted, supporting the results from the analysis of covariance. That is, no effect was observed for the independent variable after controlling for the fact that participants had faithfully read or had not read the story \((U = 2132.0, z = -.055, \text{asympt. (2-tailed)} = .956)\).

To analyze Hypothesis 5b, a composite score of agreement and disagreement responses over the four moral items was built, with more negative numbers representing an average disagreement rating of the moral adjectives and a positive number representing an overall agreement rating for the moral adjectives describing the protagonist. Another analysis of covariance was conducted with the composite valence scale of the moral adjectives as dependent variable, condition as independent variable, and reading the story or not as covariate (dummy coded). Again the assumption of homogeneity of regressions slopes was met by a non-significant interaction of condition * covariate \((F(1, 246) = 2.308, p > .05)\). There was no significant effect of the covariate \((F(1, 247) = 2.44, p > .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .010)\), and again, condition was also not a significant predictor when controlling for the covariate \((F(1, 247) = .074, p > .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .000)\). Responses were not significantly more moral by participants who read the fictional story \((M = .440, SD = .704)\) compared to participants who read the realistically framed story \((M = .422, SD = .649)\), after controlling for the covariate (although the means pointed into the predicted direction). Therefore, H5b was also not supported. As the means indicate, all responses were more positive (more agreement) than negative (disagreement), indicating an overall moral (good, acceptable, responsible) evaluation of the described protagonist (Table 23).\(^{18}\) When inspecting the individual frequencies for each item, including the morally irrelevant ones, a significant difference between conditions in the evaluation of the media character as attractive became evident, as indicated by a Chi-square test, \(\chi^2(1) = 9.412, p \text{ (exact, 2 tailed)} < .05\). Based on the
odds ratio, the odds of participants in the fictional condition evaluating the character as attractive was 1.8 times higher than those in the realistically framed condition.

Table 23

*Percentage of Agreement Toward the Morally Relevant and Morally Irrelevant Items Across Treatment 2 and the Control Conditions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Realism (Frequency (%))</th>
<th>Fiction (Frequency (%))</th>
<th>Control realism (Frequency (%))</th>
<th>Control fiction (Frequency (%))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency agreement</td>
<td>(n = 130)</td>
<td>(n = 120)</td>
<td>(n = 17)</td>
<td>(n = 18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morally relevant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morally irrelevant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>43*</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careing</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loving</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathetic</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likable</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* * represents a significant difference between conditions as indicated by the Chi-square test.

Discussion and Follow-up Analysis for Treatment 2

First, the results of Hypotheses 5 for Treatment 2 are interpreted from the meso-level of analysis, that is on the importance of the context for the activation of a narrative or real-world schema. Specifically, Hypotheses 5 for Treatment 2 investigated the potential difference in moral
evaluations of an antihero between a narrative (fictional) and real-world (realism) context. Against the predictions, no significant differences in the time participants needed to evaluate the morality of the antihero between contexts was observed (H5a). Moreover, the antihero in the fictional context was not evaluated as more moral, good, and acceptable than the same character in the realism context (H5b). The hypotheses were based on the assumption that narrative schemas, activated within a fictional context, provide the respondent with a mental shortcut to approve of fictional characters that are acting in immoral ways, and doing so can be done relatively quickly, compared to the evaluation of the same character and the same actions outside the narrative context (i.e., presumably based on a real-world schema). Outside the narrative context, accepting the immoral actions of someone who conducts such actions is more consequential for one’s self-image and one’s standing in society. Accordingly, a more thorough evaluation of such a person in a realistic context should result, leading to longer response times and possibly lower levels of acceptance of the actions. Although the initial results indicate no differences in the moral evaluation of an antihero between contexts, they cannot be regarded as final. It is possible that the results may have been affected by Treatment 1.

As outlined earlier, two control conditions (realism and fictional story) in which participants’ only task was to complete Treatment 2 were employed to control for exhaustion or carryover effects of the moral evaluations from Treatment 1. Consequently, both Hypotheses (H5a and H5b) were reanalyzed employing an analysis of covariance with the reading variable as covariate, and condition (realism, fictional, control fiction and control realism) as fixed factor on the reaction time of the four morally relevant items. Results show a marginally significant effect of the covariate, $F (1, 280) = 2.959, p = .086$, partial $\eta^2 = .01$. No significant effect of condition after controlling for the covariate was found ($F (3, 280) = 1.103, p > .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .012$), indicating that the response times did not differ between the two control conditions and the non-control conditions. However, the control groups were small, with only 17 in the realism and 18 in the fictional control conditions. Thus, the mean differences may not have been powerful enough to become significant due to lack of participants. As indicated by the descriptives, in fact, differences between both control conditions and the non-control conditions were evident (Table 23). The control conditions had slower reaction times, which may be a result of practice (or the lack thereof), as participants in the non-control conditions already responded to various reaction time trials for Treatment 1, thus, possibly improving their general response speed.
Importantly for the understanding of possible carry over effects from the evaluation of Treatment 1, however, is the pattern of the response in the control and non-control conditions. As indicated by the descriptives, whereas in the non-control conditions responses were faster in the realism condition than in the fictional condition, in the control conditions this pattern was reversed (see Table 24). For the direction of the response, another analysis of covariance was conducted and, again, neither the covariate nor the predictor became significant. However, the descriptive means for the direction of the response appear very different across conditions (Table 23), especially between the control fiction and non-control fiction group. The control fiction group had many fewer positive moral response towards the items compared to the non-control fictional group. Furthermore, the pattern of response (as originally predicted)—more moral responses in the fictional than the realism group—is reversed for the control conditions (see Table 24, second column). In sum, because the control condition had so few participants, an adequate comparison of the control versus the non-control conditions to investigate possible carry over effects may only be speculative at this point. Additional data collection for the control conditions is needed to draw more substantiated conclusions of the results of Hypotheses 5.

Table 24

Response Speed and Response Direction Across the Averaged Morally Relevant Items Across all Conditions in Treatment 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Response speed</th>
<th>Response direction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>$M$ (SD)</td>
<td>$M$ (SD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realism ($n = 130$)</td>
<td>.993 (.418)</td>
<td>.388 (.674)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Realism ($n = 17$)</td>
<td>.853 (.336)</td>
<td>.588 (.565)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fiction ($n = 120$)</td>
<td>.934 (.382)</td>
<td>.412 (.669)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Fiction ($n = 18$)</td>
<td>.903 (.394)</td>
<td>.194 (.842)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. For the response direction, the greater the positive number, the more overall moral was the assessment.*
A Follow-up Analysis

As noted above, Treatment 2 was employed in this study to test for possible differences in how individuals morally evaluate media characters, depending on the frame or context in which this evaluation is made. As outlined, neither of the hypotheses was supported: The realistically framed antihero was not evaluated more slowly than the fictionally framed antihero (H5a), and no differences were observed between conditions in the moral evaluation of the character (H5b). In truth, and as detailed above, these results may not be free from carry over effects from Treatment 1. Even though a control condition was employed to test for such effects, the results remain inconclusive due to the small number of participants in the control conditions. Therefore, to seek more clarity, a follow-up analysis was conducted to further investigate possible differences in response speeds for the moral evaluation of the story character for each condition (realism vs. fiction) between the antihero and hero condition from Treatment 1. If there were carry-over effects from Treatment 1, then we would expect differences between responses from participants who were in the antihero, and hero conditions within the realism and fiction conditions of Treatment 2. This is because the activated schema for the hero and antihero from Treatment 1 should affect the subsequent moral evaluations of the story antihero in Treatment 2. Specifically, reading the fictional antihero story should elicit antihero schema congruent responses from the group that was primed with the antihero narrative in Treatment 1. That means evaluations should be more positive toward the fictionally framed antihero compared to the realistically framed antihero, since the fictionally framed antihero is congruent with the narrative antihero schema that was activated in Treatment 1.

On the other hand, the carry-over effect from the hero primed group in Treatment 1 should become evident through more overall negative evaluations of both the fictional and realistically framed antihero in Treatment 2. This is because the activated hero schema from Treatment 1 is inconsistent with the protagonist in Treatment 2, regardless of the story framing.

Analyses of covariance analyses were conducted with the reading variable as covariate and condition (realism vs. fictional condition) as a fixed factor on the reaction-time responses and direction of responses for the morally relevant items as dependent variables within the hero or antihero conditions from Treatment 1. The analyses revealed differences in the response speed among participants from the hero condition (the covariate was not significant): \( t (123) = 2.023, p < .05, \text{partial} \, \eta^2 = .03, B = .152 \). When isolating participants from the Treatment 1 hero
condition, those morally evaluating the antihero character James from a realistic frame did so faster ($M = 1.05, SD = .455$) than participants who evaluated the character from a fictional frame ($M = .902, SD = .374$). This is actually in contrast to the H5a prediction. No similar pattern was observed between the two framing conditions within the Treatment 1 antihero condition: after controlling for the significant covariate, $F_{\text{covariate}} (1,122) = 4.43, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .035$, $t (123) = -.470, p > .05$. $M_{\text{realism}} = .933, SD = .373$; $M_{\text{fiction}} = .967, SD = .391$.

When analyzing the direction of the responses (agreement or disagreement with the moral adjectives describing the antihero) with the participants who were in the Treatment 1 antihero condition, marginally significant differences between the realism and fictional condition resulted (the covariate was not significant). Participants from the Treatment 1 antihero condition characterized the Treatment 2 antihero was more moral when encountering him in the fictional narrative ($M = .500, SD = .629$) than those who were in the realism condition ($M = .295, SD = .679$): $t (123) = -1.719, p = .088, B = -.202$. This difference was marginally significant on an $\alpha$ level of .10. Participants from the hero condition did not differ significantly in their agreement to the moral adjectives when exposed to the fictional narrative ($M = .328, SD = .700$) than those exposed to the realism condition ($M = .484, SD = .660$): $t (123) = 1.28, p = .201$.

A re-inspection of the results of Treatment 2 in light of the results from Treatment 1. Summarizing the findings of the follow-up analysis, a carry-over effect from the completion of Treatment 1 may be present in Treatment 2. Differences in the moral evaluations of the antihero between the fictional and realism condition in Treatment 2 were observed, within the responses from participants in the hero and antihero conditions from Treatment 1. In fact, it seems like a priming effect from the previously watched antihero episode is prevalent, affecting the results of Treatment 2. For participants from the Treatment 1 antihero group, the H5 analyses (between the realism and fictional story) indicate the same pattern of results as seen in H2a and H4b of Treatment 1. Specifically, no response time differences were observed between the realism and fictionally framed moral antihero evaluations emerged (H5a) in the same way that no response time differences were found between the outside the narrative context (or realistic) and inside the narrative context (or functionality) in Treatment 1. However, James, the antihero of the story in Treatment 2, was evaluated as more positive by participants who read the fictionally framed story (conceptually equivalent to the inside the narrative context) than those who read the realism-based version, when both had seen the antihero episode in Treatment 1 (Table 24).
This result is similar to the greater liking response towards the antihero Emily in Treatment 1 when presented inside the narrative context (H4b). Although the analysis for H2a and H4b in Treatment 1 is based on a within-group comparison rather than a between-group comparison within the antihero condition—in Treatment 2—the same pattern emerges. Within a fictional narrative context, the antihero was evaluated more positively than outside the narrative context (i.e., the realism condition).

Admittedly, the items for H5 were morally oriented while the item analyzed for H4b examined the emotional response of liking. However, the items used for H5b tapped into the emotional perception of the character. Therefore, I argue that the comparison is defensible. In fact, the results may actually shed light on the results of H3 of Treatment 1 earlier, where no difference was observed between the contexts in the moral evaluation of the antihero. Assuming a carry-over effect, the various morality related items in H5, allowed for more nuanced responses, illuminating differences between the contexts. As was argued earlier for the non-significant results of H3, viewers may be less concerned with the assessment of the morality of an antihero within a drama, and more with how (im)moral actions might be accepted for the sake of enjoyment. The reanalyzed results of H5, for only the antihero group, support this argument (again, assuming a carry-over effect). It seems the immoral action of the antihero in Treatment 2 was more readily accepted when evaluated within a fictionally rather than a realistically, framed story for people with an activated antihero schema (Table 25).

For the hero group, no differences between contexts (fiction vs. realism) in response direction appeared. However, differences in the moral evaluation of the Treatment 2 were observed. It seems that the priming from the hero episode viewed before Treatment 2 impacted their moral judgment, resulting in faster evaluations in a realistic context and slower ones in a fictional one. This result is likely due to an incongruence between their primed hero schema from Treatment 1 and the required antihero evaluation in Treatment 2. It seemed that the previously activated hero schema was not congruent with the newly presented antihero context, which slowed their reaction speed when evaluating the antihero’s morality. This is in line with Fransson and Ask (2010) and Mandler (1984), who argued that slower evaluations result in situations of low congruency between the stimulus and the activated schema (typicality effect). However, when a person is evaluated in a realistic context, participants primed with a hero schema can make quick judgments, as the morality of the prime is in line with real-world moral
judgments. Taken together, these findings support the importance of the two different contexts that impact moral judgment making: the inside the narrative and outside the narrative context. The context within which the antihero was evaluated seemingly impacted the assessment of the character (assuming a carry-over effect from Treatment 1). More positive responses were made towards such a character within a narrative context when primed with a similar narrative (see H4b, liking response and the follow-up analysis of H5).

Furthermore in Treatment 2, the antihero story did not provide any moral disengagement cue for James acting immorally, which is different from the antihero episode the participants saw before (where moral disengagement cues were provided throughout the episode). Even without the moral disengagement cues in place, though, the antihero was evaluated as more positive inside the narrative context than outside when the reader has been previously primed with an antihero narrative. This again supports the existence of a distinct antihero narrative schema that provides the viewer with a set of rules for how to evaluate morally complex media characters within a fictional context (assuming a carry-over effect from Treatment 1).

More evidence in support of the importance of the different contexts for judgment making can be inferred from the Treatment 2 results of the single-item attractiveness ratings of the story antihero, inside (fictional condition) and outside (realism condition) the narrative context within both the Treatment 1 hero and antihero primed group (Table 25). James, the Treatment 2 antihero character, was not physically described in the story (Appendix G). However, within the narrative context (i.e., fictional frame), the character was clearly judged to be more attractive than outside the narrative context (i.e., realism frame). Consequently, viewers must have inferred that, inside the narrative, the main character “must” be attractive. This supports Raney’s (2004) argument that character impressions are formed based on preexisting schemas; it also supports the claim that these schemas are only activated within a fictional context. Outside the narrative context, in the current case, when the antihero is assumed to be a real person, no such character schema regarding presumed attractiveness comes into play.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Morally relevant</th>
<th>Antihero (n = 125)</th>
<th>Hero (n = 125)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Realism</td>
<td>Fiction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agreement (%)</td>
<td>Agreement (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morally relevant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>88% ^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>74 ^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morally irrelevant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractive</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>44 ^</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kind</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sensitive</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loving</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathetic</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likable</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^ p < .10 as indicated by a Chi-square test (exact sig., 1-sided).

Refining the hero and antihero schema on the micro-level: moral engagement versus disengagement. Summarizing the results of the follow-up analysis of Treatment 2 for the specification of the different hero and antihero schemas, it seems that for the participants who were primed with the antihero in Treatment 1, their judgment of another antihero in a fictional scenario (in Treatment 2) was impacted. Inside the narrative context (fictional story) the Treatment 2 antihero was evaluated as more moral (marginally significantly) than outside the narrative context (realism story) and as more attractive (marginally significantly) by participants primed with the antihero from Treatment 1. It seems that the activated antihero schema, then, includes moral evaluations and evaluations of appearance. This is in line with the model of
mixed emotions introduced by Ramasubramanian and Sanders (2008), which they argue to be a fruitful extension to ADT capturing character evaluations that include morality, competence, and physical attractiveness. Also, Konijn and Hoorn (2005) argue in their PEfiC model that fictional characters are encoded by their attractiveness, morality, and realism.

This seems to be in contrast to the hero primed group in which only the attractiveness evaluation seemed to be relevant for the fictional character evaluation (as no differences in the morality ratings were found between contexts). For the group that was primed with the hero schema from Treatment 1, the moral evaluation of the Treatment 2 character did not significantly differ between the fictional and realism context, even though the descriptives point in the direction one would expect: the moral evaluation is higher when evaluated outside than inside the narrative context. The antihero’s behaviors do not match with their activated hero schema, thus, decreasing the speed of their moral evaluation within a fictional context. It seems that with the hero prime, morality is not of relevance when evaluating within a fictional setting, but appearance is. In contrast, for the antihero-primed group, morality seems to matter. Thus, for the reception of antihero narratives it seems that a moral engagement rather than disengagement process results from the priming of the moral transgressions that impact subsequent moral evaluations. That is, because of the immoralities enacted by the antihero, the viewers antihero schema is activated, and with that, moral considerations. Simply put, only when a moral quandary is established do we think about morality. In case of antihero narratives, we engage in morality, which shows itself in the mentioned differences in the moral evaluation between the fictional and realism frame of Treatment 2. This reasoning is further supported by the more morally complex or ambivalent judgments made by the antihero primed group in Treatment 1.

For the reception of a hero narrative, morality may play a less important role for the character judgment, based on a schema that assumes that morality and justice will be upheld: the hero will win out over the villain by following moral rules and principles. Physical characteristics and possibly more emotional characteristics of the character (caring, likability) become more relevant for the evaluation of traditional hero characters, resulting in a disengagement from (or ignoring of) the morality portrayed in the narrative, simply because it is of less relevance. Less relevance here means that, for the hero condition, simple deontological rules about what is right and wrong are primed, leading to quick judgments without deliberation.
Moral judgments are based on clear rules of what is right and wrong, making other features (like the physical characteristics of the protagonist) more relevant for the evaluation.

In contrast, for an antihero, the focus of a moral evaluation lies in the consequences of the character’s conduct, with immoral actions dependent upon positive outcomes. As a result, morality is more consequential for such narratives, making the moral evaluation of the antihero character more relevant for the character encoding.

A Macro-Level of Interpretation of the Results of Treatment 2: The Moral Lens

The results of the follow-up analysis of Treatment 2 can also be interpreted from a macro-level of analysis. As discussed above, the results of the follow-up analysis of Treatment 2 are in line with the results of Treatment 1. Within the narrative context, the antihero is evaluated as more positive: his actions are deemed more moral, and he is liked more than outside the narrative context. The follow-up analysis of Treatment 2 additionally indicated that when primed with an antihero schema, inside the narrative context, the antihero is evaluated as more moral, good, acceptable and responsible and as more attractive (marginally significantly).

It was discussed earlier (in Chapter V) that the salience of the narrative context during judgment making is what activates the narrative schema, leading to responses that are specific for that activated schema. As outlined, the antihero schema consists of a general acceptance of immoral actions as performed by the antihero and a general positive attitude towards him, which is seen in greater liking responses and attractiveness ratings. The antihero schema also seems to trigger ambivalent attitudes when it comes to the evaluation of moral situations (especially in relation to response speed). In contrast, a hero schema seems to consist of fast and absolute moral rule-based evaluations of moral actions, and an increased relevance for physical characteristics.

Treatment 2 operationalized the salience of the context by theoretically equating the inside of the narrative context and the fictional condition, as well as the outside of the narrative context and the realism condition. In truth, this operationalization takes the discussion of the importance of the context for the moral judgment to a higher level of abstraction. With the implementation of the fictional and realistic framed condition (with the exact same antihero story) in Treatment 2, it was assumed that readers of that story would interpret the antihero character differently from a fictional as compared to a real-world viewpoint.
Raney introduced a similar framework concerning distinct moral lenses in a presentation to the International Society for the Empirical Study of Literature and Media in 2010. He proposed that we put on a different moral lens when evaluating fictional, as compared to real-world, moral events. He referred to examples from sport where it is perfectly fine to steal and fight for the ball of the opponent, as long as it is within the set rules of the game. However, when one child tries to steal a ball from another child on the street, this certainly is regarded as immoral and unacceptable. We can regard the moral actions portrayed in narratives similarly. Within the context of a narrative, killing criminals (as Dexter does) or seeking revenge on ones wrongdoers (as Emily in Revenge does) can be seen as acceptable. However, when one has to evaluate these same actions without the context of the narrative, they are likely to be regarded as unacceptable, because they are evaluated through a real-world moral lens. The real-world moral lens is free of the conditional rules that, for example, a football game provides for the viewer. Consequently, immoral events are evaluated differently when evaluated through a real-world moral lens.

Thus, on a macro-level of analysis (see Figure 2 in Chapter IV) one can interpret the results of the follow-up analysis of Treatment 2 in such way that respondents primed with the antihero narrative from Treatment 1 evaluated the antihero character in the Treatment 2 fictional condition with their fictional moral lens on, leading to greater moral acceptance and attractiveness ratings of the character than when evaluated through a real-world moral lens (i.e. the realism condition).

A manuscript is currently in preparation by Raney and me to outline the conceptualization of the different moral lenses in more detail. For the current dissertation, the conceptualization of the different moral lenses adds a macro-level perspective to the presented framework that points out the importance of the context and the activation of specific narrative schemas for the evaluation of morally complex characters and their actions.
CHAPTER 7
SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This dissertation explored the relevance of specific narrative schemas for heroes and antiheroes that inform our acceptance of these characters and their actions in crime dramas. Furthermore, the relevance of context was explored for the moral evaluation of hero and antihero characters and how the differentiation between evaluations made within a narrative context and outside a narrative context affects viewer’s real-world moral standards.

The findings provided strong support for the existence of two different narrative schemas that can be distinguished by their acceptance for morally ambiguous actions within the narrative context (micro-level of analysis). The study also underscores the importance of the context in which we morally evaluate situations or characters (meso-level of analysis). Furthermore, the current study suggests that viewers evaluate moral transgressions in fiction through a different moral lens than in the real-world, arguing for limited effects from media narratives on viewers real-world moral standards (macro-level of analysis). Figure 2 in Chapter IV summarized the different levels of analyses schematically.

From a Micro-Level Perspective: The Hero and Antihero Schema

The results of both studies strongly support the prediction for the existence of two different moral schemas that impact the speed at which viewer’s judge morally complex and morally clear actions, as well as the moral acceptability of those actions. The results are completely in line with the schema perspective offered by Mandler (1984), which assumes that story schemas include information about the development of the story, the characters, and their goals, serving as a set of rules for how to interpret the events in the story. Antihero narratives activate a moral disengagement-laden schema that leads participants to evaluate morally complex and morally clear situations with an “extra grain” of moral ambivalence. This moral ambivalence not only becomes evident in the way viewers accept immoral or moral hero and antihero events, but also how quickly they make those judgments. Overall, with an antihero schema activated, responses become more deliberate, independent of the level of moral complexity of the event that is evaluated. In contrast, hero narratives activate a schema characterized by moral certainty that leads viewers to evaluate morally complex events
consistently as immoral and morally clear events consistently as moral. This schema of moral certainty can also be seen in the speed at which these judgments are made: clear moral actions are evaluated faster than morally complex ones. Although these findings can only be generalized for the evaluation of actions of protagonists in a crime drama, it leads to the question whether the same pattern of responses would also be found when morally pure or complex actions were presented in a real-world frame. In this study, participants evaluated how moral or immoral they regard actions like “cheating for the sake of doing good” that a main character in a crime drama conducts. How much would responses differ, if at all, when the moral-judgment frame shifts from fiction to reality, be it a company, a political circumstance, a relationship, or law enforcement? As in crime dramas, moral situations in reality do not exist in a vacuum. Crime drama narratives provide a frame in which moral situations occur; the real-world also frames a setting for moral actions that we encounter. The question arises if similar priming effects from an antihero narrative can be found on judgments of morally ambiguous actions placed in real-life contexts.

From a Meso-Level Perspective: The Impact of Context for the Activation of the Narrative Schemas

Results of Study One and Study Two indicated that the context under which media characters are evaluated affects judgment making. Specifically, in Study One participants who had previously viewed an antihero television episode judged morally questionable actions to be more acceptable when those actions were described as explicitly taking place in a narrative. In Study Two, an antihero was more liked by viewers when the character was portrayed inside rather than outside the narrative context. Further, after viewing an antihero episode and reading an antihero narrative, participants evaluated the second antihero as more moral, acceptable, good and responsible (marginally significantly) when portrayed in a fictional context. These differences in the evaluation of an antihero between contexts further indicates the activation of a specific narrative schema, as opposed to a general priming effect for moral judgment where responses should be similar in both contexts. Generally speaking, a positive attitude towards a morally complex crime drama character can be assumed to be part of the activated antihero narrative schema, which can be observed when viewers evaluate characters within a narrative context.
The findings of the context relevance for judgment making, contribute to our theoretical understanding of how moral evaluations are made. That is, based on the context (inside the narrative context/fiction versus outside the narrative context/realism), morally complex characters are liked differently and perceived to be moral differently. The results lead to the assumption that from a narrative perspective, moral transgressions are more likely to be excused and emotional bonds are stronger within a narrative than outside the narrative context. This, of course, makes sense. Why would we like an antihero outside of his/her narrative? Even though the findings follow a simple logic, the result that respondents indeed make different judgments depending on how a character is presented (inside or outside the narrative context) is an important, and thus far unreported, result. This provides direct evidence that respondents differentiate between fiction and the real-world in their moral judgments.

At the same time, these findings have implications for the methodological approaches used to understand how we process media characters and form dispositions towards them. That is, only when we point the respondent towards the narrative do we elicit a response that seems to be as closely related to the information processing happening during media reception. There are several benefits of and problems with using continuous-response measurements and post-viewing measurement that are outlined hereafter. It remains the choice of the researcher which method to choose. However, this project points out that the context in which moral judgments of media character is made greatly affects the response.

A Problem of Measurement during and after the Reception

Basically, all of the moral and emotional measures used in this dissertation require the participants to retrospectively recall what they felt and thought about the characters during the reception process. Some researchers argue that any form of narrative evaluation after the reception is not valid to measure the dynamic processes prevalent during media reception (e.g., preferring continuous response measures, Biocca, David, & West, 1994; West & Biocca, 1996). Others argue that disturbing participants while watching a show and assessing their dispositions towards the characters (or other measures) online could affect their normal viewing behavior and, thus, likewise distorts responses (Fredrickson & Kahneman, 1993; Majer, Maurer, Reinemann, & Faas, 2007; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977). The findings here indicate the influence of the narrative context for the evaluation of an antihero and show the importance of the
operationalization of the assessment of character dispositions. To understand the processes behind a viewer’s perceptions of a morally complex character, the way we inquire about these processes—either activating a narrative frame or a real-world frame—also seems to be of great importance.

As Raney (2004) argued, characters’ actions are interpreted in line with the valance of the disposition that was formed early on, without the need for the ongoing task of scrutinizing moral actions. That is, if a character is liked early on, his/her actions are seen as permissible without much moral evaluation of his/her actions. That would mean, for Treatment 1 of Study Two, Emily’s actions were excused through the moral disengagement cues provided (and the activated antihero schema), making a moral scrutinizing of her behaviors rather unnecessary. However, even though she was liked (as indicated by the results) it took longer for the participants to morally evaluate her (and the other antihero characters) than the hero characters. Thus, the proposed facilitation responses from the narrative schemas, as argued by Raney (2004), seem not to find support in this study.

Lewis and his colleagues (2011) already challenged Raney’s proposition, claiming that for morally complex media characters “audiences process and respond thoughtfully more often than Raney (2004) previously suggested” (p.22). However, my results (Treatment 1 in Study Two) pointed out that the clearly immoral villain character and the antihero were evaluated with similar speed (both morally and emotionally). In fact, in Lewis et al. (2011) all negative and mixed-positive narrative endings were evaluated with similar speed. Consequently, moral complexity cannot be the only reason for the longer response time results in Study One and Two, as the villain, with no obvious contradicting moral attributes, was not evaluated faster than the antihero. How can we understand this? Are antihero characters really more cognitive demanding, leading to slower response times when they are evaluated, due to the greater thought processes involved? What about the relevance of the underlying schemas as argued in this paper?

One important aspect one has to consider when drawing conclusions based on response time measurements and underlying information processing of the viewer is the difference between audience processing and the audience response. As it was outlined earlier, there are arguments for and against online assessments (e.g., continuous response measurement) and pros and cons for post-exposure assessments. The results of the present study indicate that from a response standpoint, when evaluated from a within-narrative context, more positive responses
for an antihero are likely, thus, indicating that some form of biased processing is evident when triggered by a specific schema. In fact, one could argue that the stronger positive response for within the narrative context has to be bound to a schema, as a simple priming effect should result in the same response across contexts. Indeed this evaluation does require more time than the evaluation of a hero character. However, it is a response towards the characters after having already processed the characters during the reception.

Raney’s (2004) argument is that dispositions towards media characters are oftentimes formed prior to morally evaluating the characters’ behaviors and motivations. And instead of morally scrutinizing the actions and motivations of a character, viewers are likely to interpret their actions in line with their already established disposition. The study at hand is still unable to predict how fast judgments are made about antiheroes at the beginning of a narrative. In fact, the study only assesses characters after reception, where moral scrutinizing is likely to occur. Further, as outlined in Chapter II of this project, it was hypothesized that antiheroes, due to their moral complexity, lead viewers to think more about their own morality which can lead to a reevaluation, or reaffirmation of their moral standards. When investigated from a narrative context, it seems that the morally complex narrative may indeed lead to a reevaluation of morally complex actions as evidenced in Treatment 1 of Study Two (H1). However, outside the narrative context, moral standards, or in this case the tendency to violate moral standards (i.e., moral disengagement tendency) seems to be reaffirmed, as the results of the research question showed. That is, no generalization from the activated antihero schema to one’s own moral action tendencies in the real-world (i.e. outside the narrative context) was found.

Overall, the results of the present study have to be interpreted from an effects standpoint rather than a processing standpoint. Indeed, it seems, an antihero leads the viewer to more deliberate processing, after the fact. However, it still remains unclear how a schema affects the judgment of characters made after the first exposure to the character and how many moral evaluations are necessary to form a consistent disposition towards a character. Thus, future studies would need to determine how pre-exposure schemas for media characters predict the disposition formation at different points in time throughout the narrative: after introducing the character and with increasing amount of the characters’ moral actions displayed. The more consistency there is between a prior schema and the disposition formation without the observation of a characters’ (im)moral actions, the more could that be attributed to Raney’s
presumption that, in fact, viewers form dispositions even before morally scrutinizing the character’s actions.

At this point, it can clearly be stated that, after the fact, antiheroes take longer to be evaluated than non-complex hero characters, but not longer than villains. The moral complexity of the character, though, does not distract the viewer from forming a positive disposition towards the character.

**From a Macro-Level Perspective: The Moral Lens and its Impact on Moral Evaluations in Fiction and Reality**

As discussed earlier, the results of the evaluation of the antihero between contexts can also be understood from the theoretical conceptualization of moral lenses we apply when making moral judgments: a fictional and a real-world moral lens, as introduced by Raney (2010). Specifically, a fictionally and real-world framed version of the same textual narrative was used to investigate how an antihero is morally evaluated in both contexts. The follow-up analysis demonstrated that readers who had been primed with an antihero television narrative evaluated the second fictional antihero as more moral and attractive compared to those who read the realism-framed version. It was inferred that the antihero was evaluated through a fictional moral lens that makes a morally complex character appear less immoral than when evaluated through a real-world moral lens. This is because, from a narrative standpoint, accepting (and even rooting for) a media character who acts immorally is facilitated by the moral disengagement laden narrative schemas that provide us with the knowledge that for all the immoral actions performed, some form of justification and/or reasoning will be given. Further, the acceptance of immoral actions within a narrative context is not as consequential for our moral selves as those same judgments might be if made in a real-world context.

The theoretical concept of different moral lenses that we may apply to narratives and real-world moral events has implications for the limited-effects perspective in media effects research. At the beginning of the 20th century, the scholarly consensus on the effects of media on society followed the hypodermic needle or magic bullet metaphor (mass society theory), assuming that media have a strong, direct, and immediate effect on all individuals in the same way. However, after Orson Wells broadcast of *War of the Worlds* in 1938, researchers realized that the media's effects are limited. Paul Lazarsfeld and Carl Hovland, the pioneers of the limited-
effects perspective, and among the first that implemented improved research methods in their research showed that mass medias effects on society are modest and not the same for everybody (Lazarsfeld, 1941; Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). They argued that media primarily reinforce already existing social values, rather than change attitudes or initiate social change. Theories that are now summarized under the limited effects theories acknowledge that media effects are limited by personality and social factors and highlight the importance of the social group for the formation of public opinion (e.g., Two-Step-Flow theory Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) and with that media’s indirect effect on the public.

If we indeed apply different moral lenses for narratives and real-world events, we would expect that the effects of media on our thoughts and behaviors would be limited. As research on the effects of violent entertaining media on aggression has shown (cf. Klimmt, in press), the effects are present, but small, due to a variety of influential factors including the environment, personality, content, exposure etc. Certainly, effects of violent media as explained by social cognitive theory (cf., Bandura, 2009) and as outlined under the General Aggression Model (GAM, Bushman & Anderson, 2002) cannot be disregard; however, from the perspective of the different moral lenses, one could explain how media might only have a limited, indirect effect on aggressiveness through a limited, direct effect on one’s moral makeup. In fact, the results of this dissertation (especially, the research question in Study Two) support this limited-effects perspective based on the different moral lenses just outlined. When participants were asked to indicate their tendency to morally disengage in reality before and after watching either a hero or antihero narrative, no differences in tendency were observed. I argue that their tendency to morally disengage \textit{in reality} is a reflection of their real-world moral lens, not a fictional one. The latter is only activated when evaluating the morality of a fictional antihero character, which could explain why the primed narrative schema did not impact the perceptions of one’s own behaviors in reality.

Another recent study on moral emotions in video games by Grizzard, Tamborini, Lewis, and Wang (2012) also lends support for the limited-effects perspective, as tied to the proposed different moral lenses. The researchers demonstrated that whereas repeated gameplay of an immoral character decreased the player’s feelings of guilt across two different games, this desensitization effect of the moral emotion of guilt did not generalize to a real-world guilt inducing scenario. Again, this may be the case because we apply a different moral lens when
evaluating immoral actions within a fictional/narrative context such as a video game, as compared to a real-world scenario.

**Considering the Hero and Antihero Schema from a Moral Philosophy Standpoint**

The outlined discussion summarized (1) on a macro-level, how possibly different moral lenses explain differences in judgments of moral transgressions when enacted within a fictional or realistic setting; (2) on a meso-level, how moral judgments differ when evaluated within a narrative context or outside the narrative context; and, (3) on a micro-level, how a hero narrative schema is different from an antihero narrative schema. So far, the hero and antihero narrative schema have been described in terms of their individual impact on moral evaluations of media characters and their actions. In the following, the hero and antihero schema will be elaborated from a standpoint of moral philosophy. That is, the way respondents evaluate different media characters and their actions in relation to their activated schema seems to reflect the moral approaches of utilitarianism and deontology.

As a reminder, Fiske and Taylor (1991) described schemas as knowledge concepts of a particular stimuli or concept, including attributes of the concept and “the relationship among the attributes” (p. 139). How do a hero and antihero schema differ based on this definition? For an antihero schema, the *knowledge concept* can be described as a morally complex or morally ambivalent situation (e.g., “violating the law to protect the good”), and the *attributes* of this knowledge concept can be described as actions of moral principle. The relationship among these attributes, in the case of the typical antihero actions, is contradictory. “Violating the law” is an immoral premise that is associated with “protecting the good,” a moral premise. Thus, the relationship between these two attributes of the knowledge concept for actions performed by antihero characters are in opposition to each other; they create a moral dilemma. In contrast, for the hero schema, the knowledge concept can be described as obviously moral. The attributes of this knowledge concept, in contrast, involve two coherent moral premises: “The main character in a crime drama is legally protecting society.”

As outlined earlier, the schemas then differ in the moral judgment responses they evoke within narrative consumers. For example, when an antihero schema is activated, typical antihero actions are more morally accepted compared to when a hero schema is activated. Conversely, when a hero schema is activated, typical hero actions—including two coherent moral attributes
of the obviously moral knowledge concept—are evaluated faster, and more moral, compared to when an antihero schema is activated.

When evaluating the different schemas on this level of analysis, an obvious overlap becomes apparent with the dual-process model of moral judgment that categorizes people’s responses into those that follow the ethical principle of deontology or utilitarianism (cf. Greene et al., 2001; Greene et al., 2004). The antihero schema corresponds with consequentialist structures, where the relationships among moral premises are oftentimes contradictory (e.g., Greene, 2004). For the hero narrative schema, the relationships among the attributes of the knowledge concept are in line with each other, reflecting deontological structures.

As outlined in Chapter II, antiheroes are thought to elicit utilitarian-judgment processing, because of their morally complex behaviors (i.e., opposing attributes of the morally complex knowledge concept). Heroes, in contrast, do not depict any moral dilemmas in their actions, eliciting fast, deontological-based judgments. From a utilitarian perspective, immoral actions are more readily accepted when it is for the sake of the greater good (as typically investigated in the trolley dilemmas, cf. Greene et al., 2004, Greene et al., 2008, Bartels, 2008), but this judgment requires deliberate processing. The results of this dissertation show that when an antihero narrative schema is primed and activated, morally complex events are more readily morally accepted. Moreover, when primed with an antihero narrative, viewers evaluated even clearly moral actions more critically (i.e., less positively). They also liked the antihero more. Furthermore, it took those primed with an antihero narrative the same length of time to judge both morally pure and complex actions, indicating that an activated antihero schema elicits more deliberate thinking about all moral actions.

In contrast, hero schemas leave the viewer with a clear moral/immoral point of view that lead to clear moral and immoral evaluations, free of ambivalence. Heroes do not depict any moral dilemmas in their actions, and thus elicit fast, deontological-based judgments. Even when moral disengagement cues are implied in a morally complex situation, an activated hero schema leads to a clear evaluation of such items as immoral, reflecting the principle of deontology and rule-based processing that rejects any form of immoral action, regardless of the consequences. Consistent with this theorizing are the faster judgments made of clear moral actions as opposed to morally complex items by those primed with the (matching) hero schema.
Whereas this conceptualization specifies deontological and utilitarian processing for the evaluation of specific media characters and their actions, one could further broaden the argument to state that overall, traditional hero narratives prime deontological processing schemas, facilitating fast rule-based processing, and morally complex antihero narratives prime utilitarian schemas, facilitating utilitarian processing. Deontological processing can be understood as rapid rule-based, “black-and-white” moral judgment making that is inconsiderate of the consequences of the morally relevant action. Utilitarian processing can be understood as deliberate, “grey” moral judgment making that is morally ambivalent and takes respect to the conditions under which the morally relevant action is conducted as well as the resulting consequences. Broeder et al. (2011) showed that moral dilemmas are solved in accordance to the rule most accessible in memory. When primed with an antihero narrative schema, it seems that consequentialist rules are most accessible, resulting in less harsh evaluations of other consequentialist (i.e. morally complex) situations. Under such conditions, it takes longer for any moral judgment to be made, irrespective of the moral complexity of the to-be-judged situation or action. When primed with a hero narrative schema, it seems that deontological rules are most accessible, leading to strict rule-bound judgments of morally complex situations.

Continuing this idea, it follows that when primed with an antihero narrative, moral judgments of any moral situation (morally complex or morally unambiguous) would be evaluated more deliberately and with more ambivalence and consideration of the consequences of the morally relevant action, compared to when primed with a hero narrative (where moral situations would be evaluated fast and according to strict moral rules). From the results of the current study it can be inferred that the evaluation of media characters and their actions follows deontological or utilitarian processing depending on the activated schema. Future studies should further investigate the generalizability of this claim.

Implications of Consequentialist Schema Priming

The argument about the priming of deontological and utilitarian processing styles by hero and antihero narratives, respectively, carries several implications. First, the categorization of hero narratives priming deontological and antihero narratives priming utilitarian processing could possibly be applied to a broad spectrum of narratives. Narratives other than antihero crime dramas, from other genres, that include complex moral situations (e.g., TV shows such as *Once*
Upon a Time, Mad Men, Breaking Bad) could foster consequentialist thinking, possibly leading to more contemplative evaluation of other moral situations. Second, the current findings are the result of a 45-minute priming experiment. The question arises how long-term exposure to morally complex media fare (including antihero crime dramas and other media genres including morally complex characters) would activate a morally complex narrative schema that could affect the thought processes for other moral situations, relative to utilitarian and deontological approaches to moral dilemmas. This can have profound implications for political decision making, for example. Utilitarian judgment processing, results in decisions that are based on the specific situation or context. This is in contrast to deontological processing where the consequences of the situation are not regarded. Thus, when primed with a more utilitarian judgment processing schema, decisions may be more informed by the consideration of potential long-term consequences, rather than a general denial of an action based on moral principles.

Haidt and Graham (2007) identified what may be a different moral makeup that underlies self-defined liberals and conservatives when it comes to judgment making. As the results of the Experian Simmons (2010, cf. Raney & Janicke, 2013) report indicate, popular shows among conservatives include more traditional hero offerings (e.g., NCIS, Law and Order: SVU, American Idol), compared to shows popular among liberals that that seem to include more nontraditional (antihero) themes (e.g., Mad Men, Dexter, Breaking Bad). This pattern of political orientation, moral foundations, and media consumption could, in the long run, perpetuate more deontological thinking patterns for conservatives and utilitarian processing for liberals. As research so far mainly has looked at the moral foundations in relation to political orientation and media (e.g., Lewis et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2012), studies investigating the decision-making process in relation to this formula, borrowing from the dual-process models and their underlying utilitarian and deontological processing, could further complement this research.

Moreover, personality variables, like the propensity for deliberate or intuitive thinking (Bartels, 2008) for example, cannot be disregarded when considering these possible implications. As outlined earlier, the priming effect from the antihero narrative explained only 3% of variance in the evaluation of the antihero actions, as compared to the personality variables moral disengagement and vigilantism that explained a combined 15%. Still, these findings only reflect the effect of a single prime, leading one to question whether long-term exposure could also
emphasize a previously held personality tendency, similarly as outlined under the MIME (Tamborini, 2013).

Therefore, the implications of the conceptualization of a priming effect of hero and antihero narratives in terms of deontological and utilitarian decision making are vast and demand further attention.

Limitations

The study is the first—to the best knowledge of the author—that investigated the reaction to media characters and typical actions performed by media characters in crime dramas using reaction-time measurement. Even though this assessment is an after-the-fact-measure, it provides us with an implicit assessment of the viewer’s reactions towards the media character they just saw, as well as to related actions of such media characters. Findings from such an implicit form of assessment, in combination with traditional explicit measures of the viewer’s perception of the characters, provides us with great insight into how crime dramas (including the subgenres of traditional hero and non-traditional antihero narratives) are processed, protagonists morally and emotionally evaluated, and narratives featuring them ultimately enjoyed.

There are several limitations of the study that need to be mentioned. First, the control groups for Treatment 2 were too small to draw any conclusions regarding the effects of the context for the moral judgment making of an antihero. More participants need to be collected to increase the power of the analysis of Treatment 2.

Second, the generalization to all hero and antihero media content is hampered by the use of a single TV episode for each condition in Study One and Study Two. However, even with the use of only four examples of television narratives across the two studies, construct validity for the concepts of the different lenses and schemas was certainly enhanced.

Another threat to internal validity was testing. Participants’ answered the moral disengagement instrument twice, which can lead to a practice or familiarity effect, which then can be misinterpreted as a treatment effect. Although I tried to control for this by opening the pretest at least one week before the laboratory part of the study (Menard, 1991), because the study lasted three weeks, participants were ultimately able to complete the pretest right before coming to the laboratory part of the study. That is, the pretest was not closed after one week, in order to enhance participation. This could possibly result in a testing effect. However, because
this threat to validity was relevant for one variable only (moral disengagement), it did not hamper the validity of the rest of the study.

Furthermore, due to the between-group design in Study Two, the hero group did not evaluate the antihero character (Emily), thus making comparisons about the speed at which the antihero is evaluated by an antihero-primed group versus a hero-primed group impossible. A repeated-treatment design where the same participants watch both stimuli could account for the problematic comparison. This would ensure that all participants knew the tested characters, isolating the priming effect for the antihero condition. In the current study this comparison was only valid for the typical antihero events in Study Two. The study clearly identifies a priming and schema-activation effect from the different narratives, but the presence of the underlying schemas for the processing (rather than the response) of different characters still needs to be further explored. Additionally, a secondary task reaction time measurement design would also help to determine the actual processing demand for the evaluation of antiheroes and heroes.

Moreover, this study did not control for thinking (intuitive or deliberate thinking) or moral judgment style (high or low endorsement of deontological principles). As indicated by Bartels (2008), these can have a strong influence on individuals’ responses. It may be that viewers with high deliberate thinking styles and low endorsement of deontological responses respond faster to morally complex (ambivalent) character evaluations no matter what. It might also be assumed that individuals with a more deliberate (i.e., consequentialist) thinking style prefer morally complex narratives, which might ultimately perpetuate an exposure-effect cycle that would hold various implications. For example, the more people watch morally complex narratives, the more they may think about moral issues or other topics related to the narrative, which could ultimately affect not only their media selection behaviors but other behaviors in their lives in general.

Despite these limitations, this dissertation project contributed to the scholarship of moral psychology, entertainment theory and media effects.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this dissertation project (1) identify a clear priming and story schema-activation effect for the post-watching evaluation of characters within a crime drama, (2) point out the importance of the context in which the moral evaluation is made for the activation
of the specific narrative schemas, and (3) lend support to the conceptualization of different moral lenses that we apply when processing morally relevant situations in a narrative and in reality.

This dissertation project is important to the field of media psychology as it contributes to our understanding of how we process media characters that differ in their moral behaviors. The project informs our understanding about the relevance of schemas and their impact on how we relate to media characters, extending the scholarship around affective disposition theory. This project is the first—to the best knowledge of the author—that finds empirical support for the assumption introduced by Raney (2004), that schemas underlie the disposition formation process of media characters. The results of the present data support that assumption, showing that antihero characters are liked more than disliked and seen as moral and attractive when evaluated inside the narrative context, indicating that a schema is activated in such a circumstance that guide the responses. On the contrary, when evaluated outside the narrative context, liking decreases, as well as ratings of morality and attractiveness, leading us to assume that these evaluations were made on grounds other than the narrative schema.

Furthermore, by introducing the importance of the different moral lenses (from a macro-level of analysis) for judgment making about fictional and real-world (im)moral events the scholarship on media effects gains another perspective on the mechanisms underlying potential limited effects. Assuming that the evaluation of moral transgressions are bound to a specific context that comprises certain rules of conduct and conditions of actions, the argument can be made that (1) moral standards may be formed and impacted in only a limited way by media, but moreover (2) moral standards, norms, and values are generally context dependent and therefore should generally be investigated only from that standpoint. As outlined earlier, moral actions do not occur in a situational vacuum. In a narrative, the storyline provides certain conditions for the moral action to take place. Similarly, in the work place, between friends, in politics, moral actions are always bound to specific conditions. We may think of our moral system as consisting of various domains (as outlined by the moral foundation theory, cf. Haidt & Joseph, 2008) that guide our actions, and research has shown that we can group individuals according to which of these domains mainly guides their moral judgments (e.g., conservatives versus liberals, cf. Haidt & Graham, 2007). However, judgments of individuals grouped into these categories may vary by context. That is, even though we may prefer certain surroundings, friends, and media content based on our specific set of high and low salient moral domains (cf. MIME, Tamborini, 2013),
when we are in a certain situation, the relative importance of those moral domains may shift, in order to maintain one’s own sense of moral integrity. Research by Uhlemann, Pizarro, Tannenbaum and Ditto (2009) suggests exactly that. Their study showed when participants were primed with American patriotism as compared to multiculturalism, they were more likely to accept the decision of an American leader to potentially kill an innocent Iraqi during a military attack, but not when an Iraqi military leader was responsible for the collateral damage of American civilians. Thus, depending on the evaluated situation, participants shifted the relevance of their moral standard in that situation to maintain their own sense of moral self. Thus, when thinking about how our moral standards affect our judgment making and our behaviors in reality, the context in which the moral action is performed, or the moral judgment is made, cannot be overlooked. The current project specifically informed us on how moral judgments may be different for narratives and the real-world. Future research on the specific differences between judgments of moral transgressions in a narrative or real-world context is warranted to further support the conceptualization of the different moral lenses.

Additionally, the introduction of the moral lens concept adds to the discussion of the limited-effects perspective. If we simply apply a filter through which we evaluate moral actions in all sorts of narrative entertainment—from antihero narratives to sports and board games—then it is only logical to expect limited effects of media exposure on real-world judgments of immoral or antisocial behaviors, or on the tendency to morally disengage (as the study showed). The theoretical discussion of predispositions and environmental circumstances for the expression of behaviors enforced by media, then, becomes a discussion of the extent to which a fictional and real-world moral lens overlap. That is, in what situations may a narrative context become salient, triggering responses based on, for example, an antihero schema, which might lead to a judgment of moral acceptance for immoral actions, which in a real-world context typically should not be regarded as acceptable; Longitudinal studies, as well as studies with fans of particular antihero narratives, might further help to empirically inform these possible effects of an overlap of the moral lenses.

Finally, by applying the principles of deontology and utilitarianism to the functionality and subsequent activation of the hero and antihero schema, the project introduces a potential new theoretical perspective for future entertainment and media effects research. Borrowing from moral philosophy and understanding hero and antihero narratives as deontological and utilitarian
primes presents a new way of categorizing crime drama narratives, different from traditional approaches that, for instance, consider only the amount of violence portrayed or the criminal storyline. The framework also might help to distinguish different media characters from each other. Recent research attempted to use the moral foundation theory to classify media characters (i.e., Tamborini et al., 2011). Applying the different ways media characters are processed—following the principles of deontology or utilitarianism—could constitute another approach to appropriately differentiate various media characters.

Finally, this conceptualization helps us to understand potential effects from long term exposure to such narratives on a viewer’s information processing: Extended exposure to traditional hero narratives could lead to information processing that is more deontological in nature, meaning strictly rule-bound and without consideration for circumstances or consequences; on the other hand, extended exposure to antihero narratives could lead to utilitarian information processing that is more deliberate in nature, and focused on accepting otherwise immoral actions when they are performed for the sake of a greater good. Future media effects research may profit from this framework.
APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVED CONSENT FORMS FOR STUDY ONE AND STUDY TWO

The Florida State University
Office of the Vice President For Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742
(850) 644-8673 · FAX (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 5/23/2012

To: Sophie Janicke

Address:
Dept.: COMMUNICATION

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research
Processing of crime drama TV series

The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and one member of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Expedited per per 45 CFR § 46.110(7) and has been approved by an expedited review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your application, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting research subjects.

If the project has not been completed by 5/22/2013 you must request a renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request
renewal of your approval from the Committee.

You are advised that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report, in writing any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chair of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance Number is FWA00000168/IRB number IRB00000446.

Cc: Arthur Raney, Advisor
HSC No. 2012.8414
INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

I freely and voluntarily and without element of force or coercion, consent to be a participant in the research project entitled "Processing of Crime Drama TV Series." This research is being conducted by Sophie H Janicke, PhD student, and Arthur Raney, Professor in the School of Communication at Florida State University. I understand that the purpose of the research project is to better understand the underlying processes that play a role in how viewers enjoy TV crime dramas. I understand that this study will take about 90 minutes. During that time I will view one episode out of two selected prime time TV crime drama series and answer questions about that experience and the characters involved in the episodes. I also understand I will be asked for demographic information. The demographic information will be used for classification purposes only. I understand that the media content may contain violence, sexual themes, or offensive language, but that it will be equivalent to TV series shown on prime time television that are TVMA rated. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary, and I may decline to participate or choose to leave the study without penalty (including no negative effect on your grade) at any time. However, in order to receive full amount of research credit, I will need to participate for the full length of the research session. If I choose to not participate in this study, I will be offered an alternative project that will award me the same amount of credit. My name will not appear on any of the results, nor will the ID Code that I develop myself at the beginning of the study be in any way relatable to my identity. No individual responses will be reported.

Only group findings will be reported. The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely in a locked desk where only the researcher has the key; this form of storage is in a location separate from the questionnaire data. Data will be destroyed within five years of publication of the results. I understand there are benefits for participating in this research project. For participating, I will receive either (a) credit toward a class requirement or (b) extra credit for my class, the amount of which is determined by the instructor of the course from which I was recruited. I understand that different instructors give different types and amounts of credit for participating in this study. I acknowledge that if I have questions about the exact type or amount of credit that I can receive, then I can postpone rescheduling my participation without penalty. I understand that the researchers will communicate this information to my instructor, in plenty of time to have that credit count toward my class this semester. I also acknowledge that as a student at a research university, my benefit in participating in such a project is to get hands on understanding of how to investigate popular entertaining media in a scientific way. With my participation I have the opportunity to watch a popular TV crime drama and only in answering some questionnaires, which will not take longer than 30 minutes, I will assist communication scholars worldwide in better understanding the phenomenon of entertaining media.

I understand that I may contact Ms. Sophie H Janicke at [redacted] or Dr. Arthur Raney at [redacted] for answers to questions about this research or my rights. Also, if I have any questions about my rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if I feel I have been placed at risk, I can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Vice President for the Office of Research at (850) 644-8633.

I give my consent to participate in the above study. Furthermore, my signature certifies that I am at least 18 years of age.

(Date, Participant printed name) ____________________________________________ (signature) ____________________________________________

(FSU Username, for extra credit purposes ONLY) ____________________________________________ (Instructor and course for extra credit) ____________________________________________

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM (for change in research protocol)

Date: 01/29/2013
To: Sophie Janiecke
Dept: COMMUNICATION

Re: Use of Human subjects in Research
Project entitled: Processing of crime drama TV series

The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the requested change/amendment to your research protocol for the above-referenced project has been reviewed and approved.

Please be reminded that if the project has not been completed by 05/22/2013, you must request renewed approval for continuation of the project.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance Number is IRB00000446.

Cc: HSC NO. 2012.9597
INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

I freely and voluntarily and without element of force or coercion, consent to be a participant in the research project entitled *Processing of Crime Drama TV Series.*

This research is being conducted by Sophie H Janicke, PhD student, and Arthur Raney, Professor in the School of communication at Florida State University. I understand that the purpose of the research project is to better understand the underlying processes that play a role in how viewers enjoy TV crime dramas. I understand that this study consists of two parts. The first one is a short online survey that will take me about 10 minutes to complete and that I will take before I sign up for the second part of the study. The second part of the study will take not more than 105 minutes. During that time I will view one episode out of two selected prime time TV crime drama series and read a short story, followed by answering questions about that experience and the characters involved in the narratives. I also understand I will be asked for demographic information. The demographic information will be used for classification purposes only. I understand that the media content may contain violence, sexual themes, or offensive language, but that it will be equivalent to TV series shown on prime time television that are TVMA rated. I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary, and I may decline to participate or choose leave the study without penalty (including no negative effect on your grade) at any time. However, in order to receive full amount of research credit, I will need to participate for both parts of the study and the full length of the research session. If I choose to not participate in this study, I will be offered an alternative project that will award me the same amount of credit. My name will not appear on any of the results, nor will the id code that I develop myself at the beginning of the study be in any way relatable to my identity. No individual responses will be reported. Only group findings will be reported. The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely in a locked desk where only the researcher has the key; this form will be stored in a location separate from the questionnaire data. Data will be destroyed within five years of publication of the results. I understand there are benefits for participating in this research project. For participating I will receive either (a) credit toward a class requirement or (b) extra credit for my class, the amount of which is determined by the instructor of the course from which I was recruited. I understand that different instructors give different types and amounts of credit for participating in this study. I acknowledge that if I have questions about the exact type or amount of credit that I can receive, then I can postpone and reschedule my participation without penalty. I understand that the researchers will communicate this information to my instructor, in plenty of time to have that credit count toward my class this semester. I also acknowledge that as a student at a research university, my benefit in participating in such a project is to get hands on understanding of how to investigate popular entertaining media in a scientific way. With my participation I have the opportunity to watch a popular TV crime drama and only in answering some questionnaires, which will not take longer than 60 minutes, I will assist communication scholars worldwide in better understanding the phenomenon of entertaining media.

I understand that I may contact Ms. Sophie H Janicke at [shj10@fsu.edu, 3115 UCC] or Dr. Arthur Raney at [araney@fsu.edu; 3119 UCC] for answers to questions about this research or my rights. Also, if I have any questions about my rights as a
subject/participant in this research, or if I feel I have been placed at risk, I can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Vice President for the Office of Research at (850) 644-8633.

Before you can continue with the survey you need to respond whether you understand and agree with the consent form.

- Yes, I understand and agree
- No, I do not understand (please contact the researcher before you continue at shj10@fsu.edu)
- No, I do not agree with the consent form (you will not be able to continue. Please contact the researcher if you have any questions at shj10@fsu.edu)
APPENDIX B

STUDY DEBRIEFING FOR STUDY ONE AND STUDY TWO

Study One Debriefing

Processing of TV crime drama series

Thanks for taking part in the study. The purpose of the study was to evaluate how so called “antihero” TV series are processed compared to traditional “hero” TV series. Antihero TV shows like Dexter, or Braking Bad, that only recently became more popular, differ from traditional hero-like dramas in the way that the antihero is “good” and “bad” at the same time. Previous studies have found that the way how we like antiheroes and also enjoy narratives including those characters is different from the way we relate to and enjoy traditional hero narratives like CSI or Law and Order. That is, because antiheroes oftentimes cross the line of moral acceptable behavior in order to achieve an overall well intended goal, we as viewers have to have some kind of mechanism that helps us to justify this behavior. Research has shown that the process of moral disengagement may be a strategy that is applied in such cases. Furthermore, it has been argued that viewers who watch a lot of these antihero shows may have developed a specific antihero schema that helps them to quickly and effortlessly apply these moral justification strategies and therefore like the antihero and enjoy such narrative. The purpose of the present study was to find evidence for that thesis.

How was this tested?
In this study, participants watched either an episode from a popular antihero TV series (Dexter) or a popular hero TV series (Law and Order: Special Victims Unit). Both groups answered the same questionnaires and evaluated the same hero, antihero and villain pictures according to their valence (good or bad). Questions assessed the way the hero’s or antiheroes’ moral behaviors were evaluated, as well as how fast this was the case (reaction time measure). Also additional identification and enjoyment related variables were tested.

Hypotheses and main questions:
The main question of concern was to investigate if there is a particular antihero moral schema that is different from a traditional hero moral schema and if so in which way the activation of these different schemas impact the way moral judgments are made within the narrative context. Thus, when an antihero schema is activated in memory through recent exposure to an antihero episode, quick decisions regarding the antihero’s moral behavior should be made (measured with reaction time). Similarly, when the antihero schema is highly accessible from memory, then pictures of antiheroes should also be faster evaluated then pictures from hero characters. Conversely, when a hero schema is highly accessible through the recent hero episode prime, then the evaluation of typical antihero character pictures should be slower, as the particular schema is
not activated at the point of decision making. In addition, it was assumed that the history of watching antihero narratives will impact how quickly these decisions are made. Furthermore, a difference in the valence (good or bad) of the moral judgments was proposed. That is, when participants had to give quick moral judgments about the moral actions of the antihero they would tend to evaluate those as more positive then when they have more time to think about the actions. No such differences for the hero condition were expected. In case of hypotheses confirmation the results would corroborate the assumption about antihero schemas and the difference in how antihero and hero narratives are processed.

Why is this important to study?
The study has several implications for the communication scholarship around moral character perceptions in crime drama. For example, if moral schemas develop over time through repeated exposure and it is known that these schemas include some form of moral disengagement, or at least some way of accepting immoral actions for the greater good, the questions is in which instances these schemas may also be recalled for real-world moral judgments. That is, can antihero moral schemas interfere with real-world moral judgments and make people more acceptant of immoral actions from themselves, as well as of others? Consequently, what media effects can be observed from repeated exposure to such fare? As this specific genre of crime drama is proliferating in today’s media landscape, it is important to look further into the processes underlying their appeal and in the second step their possible effects for the viewer that may or may not be different from watching traditional hero crime drama.

What if I want to know more?
If you have any questions about how your data will be used, or theories behind the study, you may ask Sophie H. Janicke now before you leave, email her shj10@fsu.edu or call her at 850 339 9952. The study is advised by Dr. Art Raney, araney@fsu.edu

If you have concerns about your rights as a participant in this experiment, please contact the FSU IRB Secretary at (850) 644-8633. Thank you again for your participation.
Study Two Debriefing

Processing of TV crime drama series

Thanks for taking part in the study. The purpose of the study was to evaluate how so called “antihero” TV series are processed compared to traditional “hero” TV series. Antihero TV shows like *Dexter*, or *Braking Bad*, that only recently became more popular, differ from traditional hero-like dramas in the way that the antihero is “good” and “bad” at the same time. Previous studies have found that the way *we* like antiheroes and also enjoy narratives including those characters is different from the way we relate to and enjoy traditional hero narratives like *CSI* or *Law and Order*. That is, because antiheroes oftentimes cross the line of moral acceptable behavior in order to achieve an overall well intended goal, we as viewers have to have some kind of mechanism that helps us to justify this behavior. Research has shown that the process of moral disengagement may be a strategy that is applied in such cases. Furthermore, it has been argued that viewers who watch a lot of these antihero shows may have developed a specific antihero schema that helps them to quickly and effortlessly apply these moral justification strategies and therefore like the antihero and enjoy such narrative. The purpose of the present study was to find evidence for that thesis.

How was this tested?

In this study, participants watched either an episode from a popular antihero TV series (*Revenge*) or a popular hero TV series (*Cold Case*). Both groups answered the same questionnaires and evaluated the same hero, antihero and villain pictures according to their valence (good or bad). Questions assessed the way the hero’s or antiheroes’ moral behaviors were evaluated, as well as how fast this was the case (reaction time measure). Also additional enjoyment related variables were tested. As a second way of testing for these schemas you read a newspaper article consisting of a typical antihero story, that was either framed as fictional (movie preview) or real (book biography). It was tested if the behaviors of the fictional antihero were given more moral latitude than the realism framed antihero.

Hypotheses and main questions:

The main question of concern was to investigate if there is a particular antihero moral schema that is different from a traditional hero moral schema and if so in which way the activation of these different schemas impact the way moral judgments are made within the narrative context. Thus, when an antihero schema is activated in memory through recent exposure to an antihero episode, quick decisions regarding the antihero’s moral behavior should be made (measured with reaction time). Similarly, when the antihero schema is highly accessible from memory, then pictures of antiheroes should also be faster evaluated then pictures from hero characters. Conversely, when a hero schema is highly accessible through the recent hero episode prime, then the evaluation of typical antihero character pictures should be slower, as the particular schema is not activated at the point of decision making. In addition, it was assumed that the history of
watching antihero narratives will impact how quickly these decisions are made. Furthermore, a difference in the valence (good or bad) of the moral judgments was proposed. That is, when participants had to give quick moral judgments about the moral actions of the antihero they would tend to evaluate those as more positive then when they have more time to think about the actions. No such differences for the hero condition were expected. In case of hypotheses confirmation the results would corroborate the assumption about antihero schemas and the difference in how antihero and hero narratives are processed.

Why is this important to study?

The study has several implications for the communication scholarship around moral character perceptions in crime drama. For example, if moral schemas develop over time through repeated exposure and it is known that these schemas include some form of moral disengagement, or at least some way of accepting immoral actions for the greater good, the questions is in which instances these schemas may also be recalled for real-world moral judgments. That is, can antihero moral schemas interfere with real-world moral judgments and make people more acceptant of immoral actions from themselves, as well as of others? Consequently, what media effects can be observed from repeated exposure to such fare? As this specific genre of crime drama is proliferating in today’s media landscape, it is important to look further into the processes underlying their appeal and in the second step their possible effects for the viewer that may or may not be different from watching traditional hero crime drama.

What if I want to know more?

If you have any questions about how your data will be used, or theories behind the study, you may ask Sophie H. Janicke, email her at [email protected]. The study is advised by Dr. Art Raney, phone: [redacted].

If you have concerns about your rights as a participant in this experiment, please contact the FSU IRB Secretary at (850) 644-8633. Thank you again for your participation.
APPENDIX C

SELECTED CHARACTER PICTURES FOR PRETEST OF STUDY ONE

(Note: Pictures marked by a border were selected to be used for Study One)

**Antiheroes**

- **Breaking Bad**
- **Californication**
- **Catch Me If You Can**
- **Damages**
- **Dexter**
- **Dr. House**
- **Drive**
- **Jack Bauer**
- **Kill Bill**
- **Mad Men**
- **The Mentalist**
- **Michael Corleone**
- **Jack Sparrow**
- **Prison Brake**
- **Rambo**
- **Revenge**
- **Snape**
- **The Closer**
- **The Walking Dead**
- **Tony Soprano**
Heroes

- Avatar
- Captain America
- CSI Miami
- Green Lantern
- Harry Potter
- Iron Man
- James Bond
- Law and Order
- Luke Skywalker
- Mulan
- NCIS
- Peter Pan
Villains

- Robin Hood
- Rocky
- Spiderman
- Superman
- Thor
- Captain Hook
- Cruella De Ville
- Darth Vader
- Evil Queen from Snow White
- Freddy Krueger
- Gollum
- Hannibal
- Green Goblin
- Jafar
- Joker
- Lex Luthor
- Lord Voldemort
- Magneto
- Riddler
- Rumpelstilzchen
Two Face

Ursula

Venom

Evil Witch
APPENDIX D

PICTURES USED FOR MORAL AND EMOTIONAL EVALUATIONS OF DV2 IN STUDY TWO

Revenge

Inside the narrative frame

Antihero

Hero

Villain

Outside the narrative frame

Antihero
Cold Case

Inside the narrative frame

Outside the narrative frame
Note. Pictures in the order presented are referred to in the text as picture 1, 2 and 3.
APPENDIX E

COMPLETE TESTING BATTERY FOR STUDY TWO

Pre-test

(one week before lab participation) (online survey)

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Thank you for taking time to being part of the research study "Processing of crime drama TV series".

In this project, we are interested in the way that viewers process information in prime time television crime dramas, and how that may impact how much they enjoy the TV drama. Your participation starts by taking this short online survey as part of your sign-up process for the laboratory part of the study, conducted in the following weeks. This short survey will take not more than 10 minutes and we will ask you about some demographic information as well as your opinion about some social issues and what type of movies you like to watch. At the end of the survey you will find a link that provides you with a sign up sheet for the laboratory part of the study.

In the laboratory study you will watch a full length TV crime drama. You don’t have to do anything during the TV show, just pay attention to it the same way you would while watching a TV show at home. After viewing the show, you will answer several questions about your reactions about what you watched. All the different questions and tasks will be further explained throughout the session and instructions are given on the computer screen. After completion of those tasks, you are finally asked to read a newspaper article followed by a brief evaluation of your response to that experience. The completion of the post viewing questions and the reading of the article will not take more than 90 minutes, rather less.

Please note: The TV series that you will watch is rated TVMA, so the show is not recommended for people younger than 18. The TV drama has not been edited or manipulated in any way: so, you are only going to see what you would see if you watched a crime drama at home on your TV. If you do not want to watch an MA rated movie, please let me know now, we can offer you an alternative assignment to receive the same amount of credit for your class.

Furthermore, your participation is voluntary, and you can stop the survey, the questions or stop watching the show at any time without any penalty to you. Again, we can give you an alternative assignment that will offer you the same amount of credit for your class.

If you have any questions during the survey or now you can email me at [email].

Please carefully read the consent form on the next screen. If you understand and agree to continue your participation in our study, please indicate your answer by marking the appropriate bubble.
INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT as approved by IRB 14/12/2013 (Assurance Number is IRB00000440).

I freely and voluntarily and without element of force or coercion, consent to be a participant in the research project entitled Processing of Crime Drama TV Series.

This research is being conducted by Sophie H Janicke, PhD student, and Arthur Raney, Professor in the School of communication at Florida State University. I understand that the purpose of the research project is to better understand the underlying processes that play a role in how viewers enjoy TV crime dramas.

I understand that this study consists of two parts. The first one is a short online survey that will take me about 10 minutes to complete and that I will take before I sign up for the second part of the study.

The second part of the study will take not more than 105 minutes. During that time I will view one episode out of two selected prime time TV crime drama series and read a short story, followed by answering questions about that experience and the characters involved in the narratives. I also understand I will be asked for demographic information. The demographic information will be used for classification purposes only. I understand that the media content may contain violence, sexual themes, or offensive language, but that it will be equivalent to TV series shown on prime time television that are TV-MA rated.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary, and I may decline to participate or choose to leave the study without penalty (including no negative effect on your grade) at any time. However, in order to receive full amount of research credit, I will need to participate for both parts of the study and the full length of the research session. I choose to not participate in this study, I will be offered an alternative project that will award me the same amount of credit. My name will not appear on any of the results, nor will the id code that I develop myself at the beginning of the study be in any way relatable to my identity. No individual responses will be reported.

Only group findings will be reported. The information in the study records will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law. Data will be stored securely in a locked desk where only the researcher has the key; this form will be stored in a location separate from the questionnaire data. Data will be destroyed within five years of publication of the results. I understand there are benefits for participating in this research project.

For participating I will receive either (a) credit toward a class requirement or (b) extra credit for my class, the amount of which is determined by the instructor of the course from which I was recruited. I understand that different instructors give different types and amounts of credit for participating in this study. I acknowledge that if I have questions about the exact type or amount of credit that I can receive, then I can postpone and reschedule my participation without penalty. I understand that the researchers will communicate this information to my instructor, in plenty of time to have that credit count toward my class this semester. I also acknowledge that as a student at a research university, my benefit in participating in such a project is to get hands on understanding of how to investigate popular entertaining media in a scientific way. With my participation I have the opportunity to watch a popular TV crime drama and only in answering some questionnaires, which will not take longer than 60 minutes, I will assist communication scholars worldwide in better understanding the phenomenon of entertaining media.

I understand that I may contact Ms. Sophie H Janicke at [redacted] or Dr. Arthur Raney at [redacted] to answer questions about this research or my rights. Also, if I have any questions about my rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if I feel I have been placed at risk, I can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, Institutional Review Board, through the Vice President for the Office of Research at (850) 644-8633.

Before you can continue with the survey you need to respond whether you understand and agree with the consent form.

☐ Yes, I understand and agree
☐ No, I do not understand (please contact the researcher before you continue at shj10@fsu.edu)
☐ No, I do not understand (please contact the researcher before you continue at shj10@fsu.edu). I do not agree with the consent form (you will not be able to continue. Please contact the researcher if you have any questions at shj10@fsu.edu)
**Instruction:** Please indicate for the following statements how much you disagree or agree with them.

**Moral disengagement tendency**

Lying and Stealing subscale

1. People who only download a few movies illegally shouldn’t be punished; they don’t make the copyright owners lose much money at all.
2. Everybody downloads music for free from the Internet, so it would be unfair for the cops to single me out when I do it.
3. Lying to a professor about being sick really isn’t a big deal because it doesn’t hurt anyone.
4. If I was ever ordered to steal company secrets for work, my boss should be held responsible, not me.
5. To me, the speed limit is really more of a suggestion than a law.
6. A little shoplifting isn’t nearly as bad as robbing a bank.
Social Justice measure: Vigilantism
1. The law is designed to let criminals off too easily; for that reason, I think private citizens should take action themselves.
2. If someone’s child is sexually assaulted and a parent later has an opportunity to physically harm the assailant, he/she should have the right to do so.
3. When I hear that a victim’s family has gotten revenge on a criminal, I feel that justice is finally served.
4. Victims of crime and/or their families should be allowed to determine how long the criminal should be in jail.
5. No punishment inflicted by a private citizen is ever too severe for a murderer.
6. Victims should have a say-so in the punishment of a criminal because only they know what it is like to be wronged by the individual.
7. No punishment inflicted by a police officer during the arrest of a spousal abuser is ever too severe.
8. If someone is murdered and a family member later has an opportunity to physically harm the assailant, he/she should have the right to do so.
9. Justice is served only after the victim and/or the victim’s family is/are satisfied.
10. If you read this sentence please respond with strongly agree (TEST ITEM)
11. If someone is car-jacked and later has an opportunity to physically harm the assailant, he/she should have the right to do so.
12. I favor a criminal justice system where the victim’s family is allowed to determine the punishment for the criminal.
13. No punishment inflicted by a police officer during the arrest of a murderer is ever too severe.
14. If a private citizen has an opportunity to enact justice on a criminal before law enforcement agents arrive, he/she should have the right to do so.
15. Victims of crime and/or their families should be allowed to sentence criminals.
16. Since too many criminals get off on technicalities, private citizens should bring about justice in situations if they have a chance.
17. Private citizens acting alone can better ensure that a criminal gets what he/she deserves than they can serving on a jury.
For the following shows, please indicate if you have seen them before or not:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Show</th>
<th>Yes, I have seen this show before</th>
<th>No, I have never seen this show</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Law and Order: SVU</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSI: NY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSI: Miami</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dexter</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cold Case</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mad Men</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>NCIS</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Revenge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prison Break</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Collar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How often during a regular work week (Mo-Fri) do you watch shows from the following genres:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Less than Once a Month</th>
<th>Once a Month</th>
<th>2-3 Times a Month</th>
<th>Once a Week</th>
<th>2-3 Times a Week</th>
<th>Daily</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reality show (e.g., The Real Housewives etc.)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime Drama (e.g., NCIS, Dexter etc.)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comedy/Sitcom (HIMYM, Everybody loves Raymond etc.)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Drama (e.g., Downton Abbey, Grey's Anatomy etc.)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentary/Informational</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Thanks for taking this online survey.
On the next page, you will see a link which will guide you to a google docs where you can sign up for the laboratory part of the study at any time of your convenience. Sessions will be held between Monday, Feb 11 through Friday, Feb 22.

Please note: Your participation in this study is only concluded after participating in the laboratory part of the study. Your instructor will be notified about your participation after you came to the lab.

If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to contact me any time at sjanicka@fsu.edu.

**IMPORTANT:** After clicking on the link to the google docs document (or copy paste it in your browser) you HAVE TO click the NEXT button on this survey to save your data! Otherwise your data will not be stored. Thanks!

Please COPY and PASTE the link in a separate browser window.

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheet/ccc?key=0AqDqS60KAw7pddZczRCAfXXFJZjilaXdxXaWc&usp=sharing

**IMPORTANT:** CLICK NEXT TO FINISH THE SURVEY!

Post-Test Introduction

**WELCOME TO THE SECOND PART OF THE STUDY ON PROCESSING OF CRIME DRAMA TV SERIES.**

As you were informed when you completed the short online survey, this second part of the study will not take more than 90 minutes.
During that time you will view one episode of a prime time TV crime drama series and read a short story, followed by answering questions about that experience and the characters involved in the narratives. Thank you so much for helping us in this project.

In the following you will read several instructions that guide you through this study. Please read each instruction carefully. If you have any questions, don’t hesitate to contact the researcher in the other room. Thank you.
Thanks for participating in the lab part of the study about the enjoyment of crime drama TV series. Please indicate your personal code here:
First letter of your mother's first name ____
Third letter of your name ____
First letter of your FSUID____
Year you finished high school ___ ____ ____ ____

In the following you will see various pictures that are either more positive or negative in nature. Please indicate for each picture if it is GOOD, by hitting the GOOD button or BAD by hitting the BAD button using your index finger.

Use your right index finger to hit GOOD and your left index finger to hit BAD.
There is no right or wrong, just indicate what comes to your mind first.
Give your answer as fast and accurately as possible.

* When you are ready, hit the GOOD key to proceed.

Good.

Now, press the BAD key to start seeing the pictures.

Remember to indicate if the picture is good or bad as quickly as possible.
(pretested by Hofman & Baumert, 2010):

10 morally irrelevant negative pictures: snake face, angry dog, Tornado, sick horses, white shark, sinking ship, tooth pulling at dentist, lightning, car stuck in mud, bicyclist going through fire.

10 morally irrelevant positive pictures: baby cats, butterfly on flower, kids with baby cats, baby rabbit, old couple in love, flower bouquet, group skydiving, person on water skies, Dolphins playing with ball, baby picture.

Post-test watching assessment, DV1:

We hope you enjoyed the show.
You can take your headsets off now.

You just watched a crime drama. Next, you will see several statements describing typical actions main characters carry out in these type of shows.

Please indicate if the described actions are MORAL or IMMORAL if they are performed by the main character in these kind of shows.

Use your right index finger to hit MORAL and your left index finger to hit IMMORAL.
Place your index finger on the appropriate keyboard keys now.

Give your answer according to what comes to your mind first.
Give your answer as fast and accurately as possible.

When you are ready, hit the MORAL key to proceed.
Good.

Now press the IMMORAL key to get started.

Again, your task is to indicate if the described actions of a typical crime drama character are moral or immoral.

**Antihero traits** (in randomized order):
The main character in a crime drama KILLS MURDERERS
The main character in a crime drama TORTURES CRIMINALS
The main character in a crime drama VIOLATES THE LAW TO PROTECT THE GOOD
The main character in a crime drama GETS AROUND LAWS
The main character in a crime drama ILLEGALLY PROTECTS SOCIETY
The main character in a crime drama CHEATS FOR THE SAKE OF DOING GOOD
The main character in a crime drama IS DISHONEST TO ACHIEVE HER GOALS
The main character in a crime drama VIOLENTLY PROTECTS THE WEAK
The main character in a crime drama USES VIOLENCE AS MEANS TO AN END
The main character in a crime drama KILLS THE BAD GUYS
The main character in a crime drama SEEKS REVENGE ON THE BAD GUYS
The main character in a crime drama BLACKMAILS TO SAVE LIVES

**Hero traits**:
The main character in a crime drama FOLLOWS THE LAWS
The main character in a crime drama LEGALLY PROTECTS SOCIETY
The main character in a crime drama PEACEFULLY PROTECTS THE WEAK
The main character in a crime drama PUTS HERSELF AT RISK TO ENSURE THAT JUSTICE IS SERVED
The main character in a crime drama ACTS COURAGEOUSLY AGAINST WRONGDOERS
The main character in a crime drama SEEKS JUSTICE FOR THE VICTIM
The main character in a crime drama CAPTURES THE CRIMINALS
The main character in a crime drama GOES OUT OF HER WAY TO SAVE LIVES
Great.

Now, you are going to see several pictures of characters you have just seen in the episode. For each character picture you will be asked to make several judgments.

You will be asked to perform the same judgment tasks twice, whereas the pictures you will see may slightly differ.

Again, you are asked to give you answer as fast and accurately as possible.

Please hit either the moral or immoral key to continue.

For each character presented on the screen, please indicate if the character is MORAL or IMMORAL.

If you think the character is good, hit the MORAL button, and if you think the character is bad, hit the IMMORAL button.

You should indicate whatever comes to your mind first.

When you are ready, hit either MORAL or IMMORAL to continue.
For each character presented on the screen, please indicate how much you LIKE them.
Place your index finger on the appropriate keyboard keys now.

If you like the character hit the LIKE button, and if you don’t like the character hit the DISLIKE button. You should indicate whatever comes to your mind first.

Again, give your answer as fast and accurately as possible.

When you are ready, hit the DISLIKE key to continue.

Good.

Now press the LIKE key to get started.

Again, your task is to indicate if you like or dislike the presented characters.

Presentation of 9 (6 in the hero condition) within and outside context character pictures as shown in Appendix D.
Additional Questionnaires

For the next set of questions you have as much time as you want to answer. Please read each item carefully and think about your answer as long as you like. You will now use the mouse to indicate your answer.

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree to the following items by clicking the number which reflects your opinion the most.

Click 1 if you strongly disagree with the statement, or click a 7 if you strongly agree with the statement.

You can also click any number in between to indicate feelings between these two positions.

There are no right or wrong answers here; we just want your most truthful opinion. Please complete all items.

Answer as honestly as you can.
Thank you!

Moral disengagement tendency (post-test)
Lying and Stealing subscale
1. People who only download a few movies illegally shouldn’t be punished; they don’t make the copyright owners lose much money at all.
2. Everybody downloads music for free from the Internet, so it would be unfair for the cops to single me out when I do it.
3. Lying to a professor about being sick really isn’t a big deal because it doesn’t hurt anyone.
4 If I was ever ordered to steal company secrets for work, my boss should be held responsible, not me.
5. To me, the speed limit is really more of a suggestion than a law.
6. A little shoplifting isn’t nearly as bad as robbing a bank.

**Character evaluation ➔ manipulation check**

In the following please rate the main character Lilly's behavior in terms of the extent to which she violated or upheld your own personal sense of certain values.

In the following please rate the main character Emily's behavior in terms of the extent to which she violated or upheld your own personal sense of certain values.
How much did X uphold or violate your personal sense of

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Additionally on a scale from 1-10 where would you rank the overall morality of the main character you saw in the TV show?

- morally bad ……morally complex……morally good

How much do you think the main character was good and bad at the same time?
-3 (never good and bad), to +3 (always good and bad).

**Filler items:**

> Now, we are interested in finding out a little bit more about your regular media use.

> Next, you will find several questions regarding your general media habits. There is no right or wrong answer. We are just interested in your everyday media use.

1. Do you have a TV set at home? (yes/no)

2. How often do you watch TV programs on your TV set? (never, rarely, sometimes, most of the times, always)(0-5)
4. How often do you watch television programs online using your computer? (never, rarely, sometimes, most of the times, always)(0-5)

5. How often do you watch television programs online using your tablet (Ipad, Kindl)? (never, rarely, sometimes, most of the times, always)(0-5)

6. How often do you watch television programs online using your smartphone? (never, rarely, sometimes, most of the times, always)(0-5)

7. The next questions ask you about how often you use another device (e.g. computer, tablet device, smartphone) to engage in the following activities while watching television on any of your home devices:

8. How often do you **text message** while watching television? (0, never, 5 most of the times)

9. How often do you **instant message** while watching television (0, never, 5 most of the times)

10. How often do you **share content or post status updates** on social networking sites related to the show/movie you are watching? (0, never, 5 most of the times)

11. How often do you **monitor social networking sites for what other people are posting about the show you are watching**? (0, never, 5 most of the times)

12. How often do you **seek out additional information** about a program while watching television? (0, never, 5 most of the times)

13. How often do you engage in **other activities** (e.g., talking to a friend, doing homework, cooking etc.) while watching television? (0, never, 5 most of the times)

14. Lastly, please tell us: What is your favorite TV show at the moment? (Coded for currently watching an antihero show)

**Story evaluation**

**Instruction:** Now, we are coming to the last part of the study. Please read the following newspaper article thoroughly. Afterwards, we will ask you several questions about it. If you are ready, please click the continue button.

**Introduction for “reality based story:**

**James Camden**, a successful police officer from the crime detecting department reflects on several of his cases and his actions as an officer across his 25 plus years of a career. He wrote down several of his most impressionable cases in a very honest and insightful way, and
published it with his memoirs in a book called “My life as a detective”. The Georgia tribune asked him to read one of his cases of the book in a reading night held at the convention center 4 weeks ago. James starts: “The following case that I worked on about 15 years ago, is called “The suspect”…(105)

**Introduction for Fictional based story:**

Several years have passed by since Matthew Filmore, the successful producer of “The Cardigan” and “In Dark Nights” has released a new blockbuster movies. In an interview with the Georgia Tribune at the beginning of this year, he only talked vaguely about a possible new project. Finally, in a press conference 4 weeks ago at the Convention Center, he announced that he is working on a new film, based on a drama called "The Suspect”. In order to see how a potential audience likes the main plot of the story, Matthew released a summary for us. What do you think? Is this movie worth watching? (105)

**The Suspect**

[...]

*We hope you enjoyed reading the article!*

In this last judgment task, you will see a number of adjectives that describe several attributes about the main character you just read about. Please indicate for each adjective if you **AGREE** or **DISAGREE** with them by hitting the appropriate buttons on the keyboard.

Again, please use your index fingers to indicate your choice and answer as quickly as possible, while remaining accurate in your response.

**Place your index fingers** on the appropriate keyboard keys now and hit **AGREE** if you are ready to proceed.
Morally relevant: Good, moral, acceptable, responsible, honest, fair, helpful, tactful, just, human.

Morally irrelevant: Attractive, kind, sensitive, caring, loving, empathetic, likable.

Instruction: Lastly, we are interested in some of your general perceptions of the story you read. Again, now you are asked to provide your answer on a continuum of 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much):

Manipulation check:
1. What job does the main character James have?
2. What crime was the suspect of the story accused of?
3. This was a true story
4. This was a fictional story

How much did James uphold or violate your personal sense of

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<td>18. Group Loyalty</td>
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Hypotheses guessing:
Please tell us shortly what you think the purpose of this study was?

That’s it, you are done.

Thank you for your cooperation!
APPENDIX F

ALL CONSTRUCTED TYPICALITY EVENTS FOR DV1 IN STUDY TWO

Antihero Traits:
1. The main character in a crime drama kills murderers
2. The main character in a crime drama tortures criminals
3. The main character in a crime drama violates the law to protect the good
4. The main character in a crime drama gets rid of the bad guys
5. The main character in a crime drama gets around laws
6. The main character in a crime drama illegally protects society
7. The main character in a crime drama cheats for the sake of doing good
8. The main character in a crime drama is dishonest to achieve his goals
9. The main character in a crime drama violently protects the weak
10. The main character in a crime drama brings justice to the world, whatever it takes
11. The main character in a crime drama uses violence as means to an end
12. The main character in a crime drama kills the bad guys
13. The main character in a crime drama acts aggressively towards wrongdoers
14. The main character in a crime drama stretches the law to bring justice
15. The main character in a crime drama fights those that deserve no better
16. The main character in a crime drama seeks revenge on the villain
17. The main character in a crime drama beats up the criminals
18. The main character in a crime drama is deceitful when he/she has to
19. The main character in a crime drama is ruthless towards criminals
20. The main character in a crime drama blackmails to save lives
21. The main character in a crime drama lives a double life

Hero traits:
22. The main character in a crime drama arrests murderers
23. The main character in a crime drama captures criminals
24. The main character in a crime drama obeys the law to protect the good
25. The main character in a crime drama takes care of the bad guys
26. The main character in a crime drama follows the laws
27. The main character in a crime drama legally protects society
28. The main character in a crime drama stays true to himself for the sake of doing good
29. The main character in a crime drama is honest to achieve his goals
30. The main character in a crime drama peacefully protects the weak
31. The main character in a crime drama brings justice to the world, while sticking to the rules
32. The main character in a crime drama puts himself at risk to ensure that justice is served
33. The main character in a crime drama arrests the bad guys
34. The main character in a crime drama acts courageously against wrongdoers
35. The main character in a crime drama follows the law to bring justice
36. The main character in a crime drama boldly pursues those that deserve no better
37. The main character in a crime drama seeks justice for the victim
38. The main character in a crime drama captures the criminals
39. The main character in a crime drama risks his/her life when he/she has to
40. The main character in a crime drama is merciful towards criminals
41. The main character in a crime drama goes out of his/her way to save lives
42. The main character in a crime drama sacrifices his own life to bring justice
43. The main character in a crime drama takes back on his own needs to protect the innocent
44. The main character in a crime drama leaves decisions of justice to the court
APPENDIX G

TREATMENT 2 WITH THE STORY FRAME MANIPULATION

First: Fictional story frame

Second: Reality story frame
Several years have passed since Matthew Filmore, the successful producer of "The Cardigan" and "In Dark Nights" has released a new blockbuster movies. In an interview with the Georgia Tribune at the beginning of this year, he only talked vaguely about a possible new project. Finally, in a press conference 4 weeks ago at the Convention Center, he announced that he is working on a new film, based on a drama called "The Suspect". In order to see how a potential audience likes the main plot of the story, Matthew released a summary for us. What do you think? Is this movie worth watching?

"I had journeyed through life trying to be righteous and honorable, but often failing; I didn’t want to be on the wrong side. What now separated me from the enemy? It was only 24 hours ago I sat in the large rear seat of the Lincoln. The day had been bad already.

The car braked suddenly. I was jolted from my trance and thrown forward. I had no memory of the journey for the past fifteen minutes. My mind was still at the autopsy where I had spent the last three hours. The same demonic images washed over me time and time again, smothering me, choking me. I had been a detective for 20 of my 25 years as a police officer. I had never thought even once before today that I had seen enough, but today ... yes. Maybe I can’t do this anymore.

I've seen my share of the dead but this ... don't let anybody ever tell you that familiarity dulls the senses. The dank odor of blood, cold flesh and antiseptic brings an uneasiness that has never improved over the years in any circumstances, but this? How could somebody do that to a three year old? The agony and the terror that must have been her last pitiful minutes on earth haunted me. "We're here detective." It took a few seconds for it to register that the car had stopped. I looked into the drivers' face. "You OK?" he continued. "Mind your own business," I snapped. My orientation slowly returned. I slammed the door behind me, and minutes later I was sitting in my office. I dug into my pocket and pulled out a bottle of methadone that I had grabbed from the suspect's house earlier in the day. I had become very adept at stealing drugs without anyone noticing.

"James" The voice spun me around. Michael Kelley, my supervisor, stood in the doorway. He started to speak then after a moment suddenly stopped. He must have seen the momentary panic in my eyes. He stepped inside the door and closed it behind him. "A friend of mine from the coroner's office phoned. He told me this one shook you up a bit. You OK with this?"

I took a deep breath. He hadn't seen me slipping the drugs back into my coat pocket. I was safe. I realized he was asking me about the little girl's autopsy. "Mike, I'm OK. I haven't got a problem with this. I just forget occasionally how drug fuelled psychos can do anything."

"Don't worry. I'm like you, I've been seeing it for 25 years and it still disturbs the hell out of me. I just need to know that you can remain impartial during the investigation. I don't need to tell you that we have to be careful that we don't do anything that gives him half a chance to get away with this. I read the preliminary report they faxed through." I lifted my head up and looked into Mike's eyes. They were on fire. He continued, regurgitating images that were
already burned into my core. "Tortured with a cigarette, strangled, her throat cut; three major abdominal injuries, any one of which could have been fatal."

I nodded and started to mentally organize the next few hours. I was trying to concentrate on the evidence, but I couldn’t bury the desire that simmered within me. It would be so much more fun to just take care of the suspect in a dark alley.

Mike headed for the door then turned before leaving. "You’ve got a copy of the mother’s statement? She says it was her boyfriend. He just likes inflicting pain on people when he’s high on heroin. She says he becomes a different person. Can you believe she was actually making excuses for him! She’s covered in scars herself. Tell me, is the world going to hell or is it just me?" He looked at the floor as if contemplating the unthinkable.

"Is he ready now?"

"The doctor’s with him now. He’ll give us the OK when he’s fit for interview."

Not only did the halogen lights make the small bare room excessively bright but also uncomfortably warm. I sat tall in my simple metal chair. Across the table, not moving his gaze from mine for a moment was Dennis Murray. His eyes were dark and sunken and the corners of his mouth turned slightly upwards deliberately giving the impression he was bored.

My thoughts turned to the defenseless toddler. She wouldn’t have understood what was happening. She wouldn’t know why she was being subjected to this horror. I wanted to reach over and drive the suspect’s head into the wall behind him.

"If we could get started detective." I looked back up to the small diminutive man sitting beside Murray. Sixty years old, small, almost dainty with silver hair and a red bow tie standing out from his tweed jacket.

"Detective, my client denies any wrongdoing arising out of last night’s incident. My client is a registered heroin addict and is receiving treatment for his addiction. He has no memory of assaulting anyone. You have no evidence that he did commit any crime last night. Under these circumstances I have advised him not to answer any questions."

The lawyer sat back slightly, half turned and smiled towards Murray. "Last night a three year old female was brutally killed in an apartment where you spent some time. I would like to go through your movements for the last 24 hours. Tell me, if you haven’t done anything wrong why that would be a problem?"

"No comment" Murray yawned as he spoke lifting both handcuffed hands up to his mouth.

"Tell me who was in the apartment between 8 and 11 p.m. last night?"

"No comment"

"Was your girlfriend there?" Murray didn’t respond. The questions from me continued. Sometimes he would respond ‘No comment’ sometimes he would just stare at the ceiling or into my eyes with a barely disguised smirk. Nothing I did could initiate a verbal response from him or disturb his nonchalant unconcerned demeanor. Even when faced with the damning statement from his girlfriend who put him in the apartment, high as a kite at about the time the little girl died, he didn’t flinch. He showed no emotion.

"You have no forensic evidence linking him to the scene, any weapon used or the body of this unfortunate girl. The word of this woman putting my client at the scene of the crime is worthless, you know that. She is a hopeless drug addict; she’s probably forgotten what she said to you even now. You know full well she won’t be giving evidence at any trial and in fact there is as much evidence that she was responsible as there is that my client did this."

I had been in this situation before. I couldn’t risk letting this suspect go to find all of his drugs missing—drugs that were not listed as having been seized by the police. There was a growing horror spreading up my torso like heartburn. His lawyer was right. We didn’t have enough to convict him. My mind raced as to where to go next.

Murray no doubt sensed my momentary indecision. A thin, humorless smile crept across his face. Under the table my fists clenched but I knew I was helpless. I closed the notebook on the table. "This interview is terminated for the time being." I tried to speak as calmly and as ‘matter of fact’ as I could. The lawyer sprang to his feet looking at his watch.

"I have instructed my client to make no comment to any further questioning; you are wasting your time officer. I have a prior appointment to attend to; I trust you will contact me if you plan to talk to him again."

I nodded a reply and showed the lawyer to the door. He beckoned me outside. "I also trust
that he will be treated properly while he is in custody. And officer, please don’t think that during the course of this day you will prick my conscience. A conscience is an encumbrance so I dispensed with mine many years ago. My job is to get him out of here and put any obstruction in your way that I can. I don’t care what he’s done.” I watched him disappear down the corridor then turned back into the interrogation room.

“When can I go?” Murray asked nonchalantly while still lounging in his chair.

I pushed him toward the wall and grabbed his throat. A sense of pleasure filled my body as I slowly squeezed the life out of him. “Don’t think for a minute because your idiot lawyer says you’ve got nothing to fear that I’m not going to keep looking for evidence until I find something.”

I released him. He coughed, trying to catch his breath. “Listen, you’re so intent on pinning this on me. Have you considered you might be looking in the wrong place?” His eyes met mine full of menace. The knowing smile appeared again.

“Stand up. You are going back to the cell. Before we speak again I need to ...” I stopped mid-sentence.

As I looked into his face the smirk was gone. Suddenly his ruddy complexion seemed the color of putty. Beads of sweat glistened on his forehead, one formed on the end of his nose and dropped into his lap.

“I need the bathroom,” he muttered. He rose to his feet unsteadily.

“I don’t feel so good” he stammered as he momentarily leaned on the bathroom door before shuffling in.

“You don’t know how that upsets me,” I replied, not sure whether this was just some ruse to prevent him being put back in the cell. I locked the door behind him.

My mind was elsewhere during the brief exchange. I was telling my supervisor the state of the investigation, and going through the girlfriend’s statement in my head trying to ensure I had missed nothing. I had spared little attention to his changed demeanor. Whatever Murray was doing I had not considered it of significance. Only when the returned to the bathroom did the magnitude of the unfolding events strike me. I looked in the small spy hole.

Murray was slumped on the floor at the side of the toilet bowl. His back was against the wall and his legs splayed out at awkward angles. His mouth and eyes were open wide and he gasped like a goldfish. Both his hands pressed against his chest. He looked up at the small circle of glass through which I was watching. His eyes were wide. The arrogance in them had gone. They were now the sorrowful pleading eyes of a child. I could see him trying to form words but every few seconds his face creased in agonizing pain. I turned and ran to the interrogation room. I located the large red emergency assistance button on the wall and drew my arm back to punch it hard. Inexplicably, the palm of my hand stopped an inch from the shiny red dome. I looked at it as though it wasn’t mine. My mind was a blur. What was I doing? Was I mad? “This man was dying.”

“Yes he was”

“Who cares? Who knows? Who’s seen him?” I again made to press the button but as my palm almost touched the surface the little girl came into my mind’s eye. I kept mentally playing over the argument. “You will go to jail. Maybe it would be worth it. How many lives do you save by letting him die? But this is wrong. It’s only wrong if he walks out of this police station.”

I pushed the button.

The clock on the wall in Mike Kelley’s office ticked louder than I had ever noticed it before. I sat in the large leather chair gazing down at the floor. I could hear Mike Kelley some feet away from the door in the corridor. His voice was animated. Eventually he returned and closed the door behind him.

“Is he going to be all right? He just went down like a stone.”

“He will be fine. I spoke to the medics. They say it was typical of a narcotic induced attack, and they got to him in time.”

“I guess this means the trial will be postponed.” I added almost as a throw away.

“Not quite” Mike said.

I looked at him quizically for a moment. He returned my gaze and carried on.

“His girlfriend, the child’s mother just made a full admission. She woke up after a bad trip, blood all over her, knife in her hand. She had dreamed about fighting the devil disguised as a child. We’ve got the clothes back and the knife ... it all fits.”

“For several seconds I didn’t speak. “And Murray?”

“He wasn’t there. If his lawyer had let him speak we might have got to the answer a little quicker.” I left the room and headed slowly for the outside and fresh air.

With one more moment of hesitation, I could have killed an innocent man.”

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**CONCERTS**
J. Camden reads from his biography “My life as a Detective”, audience is impressed

Camden says: “’The Suspect’ was my most personal case”

James Camden, a successful police officer from the crime detecting department reflects on several of his cases and his actions as an officer across his 25 plus years of a career. He wrote down several of his most impressionable cases in a very honest and insightful way, and published it in his biography in a book called “My life as a detective”. The Gainesville Sun asked him to read one of his cases of the book in a reading night held at the convention center 4 weeks ago. James starts:

“The following case, that I worked on about 15 years ago, is called ‘The Suspect’. I had journeyed through life trying to be righteous and honorable, but often failing; I didn’t want to be on the wrong side. What now separated me from the enemy? It was only 24 hours ago I sat in the large rear seat of the Lincoln. The day had been bad already.

The car braked suddenly. I was jolted from my trance and thrown forward. I had no memory of the journey for the past fifteen minutes. My mind was still at the autopsy where I had spent the last three hours. The same demonic images washed over me time and time again, smothering me, choking me.

I had been a detective for 20 of my 25 years as a police officer. I had never thought even once before today that I had seen enough, but today ... yes. Maybe I can’t do this anymore.

I’ve seen my share of the dead but this ... don’t let anybody ever tell you that familiarity dulls the senses. The dank odor of blood, cold flesh and antiseptic brings an uneasiness that has never improved over the years in any circumstances, but this? How could somebody do that to a three year old? The agony and the terror that must have been her last pitiful minutes on earth haunted me.

“We’re here detective.” It took a few seconds for it to register that the car had stopped. I looked into the drivers’ face. “You OK?” he continued.

“Mind your own business,” I snapped. My orientation slowly returned. I slammed the door behind me, and minutes later I was sitting in my office. I dug into my pocket and pulled out a bottle of methadone that I had grabbed from the suspect’s house earlier in the day. I had become very adept at stealing drugs without anyone noticing.

“James” The voice spun me around. Michael Kelley, my supervisor, stood in the doorway. He started to speak then after a moment suddenly stopped. He must have seen the momentary panic in my eyes. He stepped inside the door and closed it behind him.

“A friend of mine from the coroner’s office phoned. He told me this one shook you up a bit. You OK with this?”

I took a deep breath. He hadn’t seen me slipping the drugs back into my coat pocket. I was safe. I realized he was asking me about the little girl’s autopsy. “Mike, I’m OK. I haven’t got a problem with this. I just forget occasionally how drug fuelled psychos can do anything.”

“Don’t worry. I’m like you, I’ve been seeing it for 25 years and it still disturbs the hell out of me. I just need to know that you can remain impartial during the investigation. I don’t need to tell you that we have to be careful that we don’t do anything that gives him half a chance to get away with this. I read the preliminary report they fixed through.”

I lifted my head up and looked into Mike’s eyes. They were on fire. He continued, regurgitating images that were already burned into my core. “Tortured with a cigarette, strangled, her throat cut; three major abdominal injuries,
any one of which could have been fatal.”

I nodded and started to mentally organize the next few hours. I was trying to concentrate on the evidence, but I couldn’t bury the desire that simmered within me. It would be so much more fun to just take care of the suspect in a dark alley.

Mike headed for the door then turned before leaving. “You’ve got a copy of the mother’s statement? She says it was her boyfriend. He just likes inflicting pain on people when he’s high on heroin. She says he becomes a different person. Can you believe she was actually making excuses for him? She’s covered in scars herself. Tell me, is the world going to hell or is it just me?” He looked at the floor as if contemplating the unthinkable.

“Is he ready now?”

“The doctor’s with him now. He’ll give us the OK when he’s fit for interview.”

Not only did the halogen lights make the small bare room excessively bright but also uncomfortably warm. I sat tall in my simple metal chair. Across the table, not moving his gaze from mine for a moment was Dennis Murray. His eyes were dark and sunken and the corners of his mouth turned slightly upwards deliberately giving the impression he was bored.

My thoughts turned to the defenseless toddler. She wouldn’t have understood what was happening. She wouldn’t know why she was being subjected to this horror. I wanted to reach over and drive the suspect’s head into the wall behind him.

“If we could get started detective.” I looked back up to the small diminutive man sitting beside Murray. Sixty years old, small, almost dainty with silver hair and a red bow tie standing out from his tweed jacket.

“Detective, my client denies any wrongdoing arising out of last night’s incident. My client is a registered heroin addict and is receiving treatment for this illness. He has no memory of assaulting anyone. You have no evidence that he did commit any crime last night. Under these circumstances I have advised him not to answer any questions.”

The lawyer sat back slightly, half turned and smiled towards Murray.

“Last night a three year old female was brutally killed in an apartment where you spent some time. I would like to go through your movements for the last 24 hours. Tell me, if you haven’t done anything wrong why that would be a problem?”

“No comment” Murray yawned as he spoke lifting both handcuffed hands up to his mouth.

“Tell me who was in the apartment between 8 and 11 p.m. last night?” “No comment”

“Was your girlfriend there?” Murray didn’t respond. The questions from me continued. Sometimes he would respond ‘No comment’; sometimes he would just stare at the ceiling or into my eyes with a barely disguised smirk. Nothing I did could initiate a verbal response from him or disturb his nonchalant unconcerned demeanor. Even when faced with the damming statement from his girlfriend who put him in the apartment, high as a kite at about the time the little girl died, he didn’t flinch. He showed no emotion.

“You have no forensic evidence linking him to the scene, any weapon used or the body of this unfortunate girl. The word of this woman putting my client at the scene of the crime is worthless, you know that. She is a hopeless drug addict; she’s probably forgotten what she said to you even now. You know full well she won’t be giving evidence at any trial and in fact there is as much evidence that she was responsible as there is that my client did this.”

I had been in this situation before. I couldn’t risk letting this suspect go to find all of his drugs missing—drugs that were not listed as having been seized by the police. There was a growing horror spreading up my torso like heartburn. His lawyer was right. We didn’t have enough to convict him. My mind raced as to where to go next.

Murray no doubt sensed my momentary indecision. A thin, humorless smile crept across his face. Under the table my fists clenched but I knew I was helpless. I closed the notebook on the table. “This interview is terminated for the time being.” I tried to speak as calmly and as ‘matter of fact’ as I could. The lawyer sprang to his feet looking at his watch.

“I have instructed my client to make no comment to any further questioning; you are wasting your time officer. I have a prior appointment to attend to; I trust you will contact me if you plan to talk to him again.”

I nodded a reply and showed the lawyer to the door. He beckoned me outside.

“I also trust that he will be treated properly while he is in custody. And officer, please don’t
think that during the course of this day you will prick my conscience. A conscience is an encumbrance so I dispensed with mine many years ago. My job is to get him out of here and put any obstruction in your way that I can. I don't care what he's done." I watched him disappear down the corridor then turned back into the interrogation room.

"When can I go?" Murray asked nonchalantly while still lounging in his chair.

I pushed him toward the wall and grabbed his throat. A sense of pleasure filled my body as I slowly squeezed the life out of him. "Don't think for a minute because your idiot lawyer says that you've got nothing to fear that I'm not going to keep looking for evidence until I find something."

I released him. He coughed, trying to catch his breath. "Listen, you're so intent on pinning this on me. Have you considered you might be looking in the wrong place?" His eyes met mine full of menace. The knowing smile appeared again.

"Stand up. You are going back to the cell. Before we speak again I need to..." I stopped mid sentence.

As I looked into his face the smirk was gone. Suddenly his ruddy complexion seemed the color of putty. Beads of sweat glistened on his forehead, one formed on the end of his nose and dropped into his lap.

"I need the bathroom," he muttered. He rose to his feet unsteadily.

"I don't feel so good" he stammered as he momentarily leaned on the bathroom door before shutting in.

"You don't know how that upsets me." I replied, not sure whether this was just some ruse to prevent him being put back in the cell. I locked the door behind him.

My mind was elsewhere during the brief exchange. I was telling my supervisor the state of the investigation, and going through the girlfriend's statement in my head trying to ensure I had missed nothing. I had paid little attention to his changed demeanor. Whatever Murray was doing I had not considered it of significance. Only when I returned to the bathroom did the magnitude of the unfolding events strike me. I looked in the small spy hole.

Murray was slumped on the floor at the side of the toilet bowl. His back was against the wall and his legs splayed out at awkward angles. His mouth and eyes were open wide and he gasped like a goldfish. Both his hands pressed against his chest. He looked up at the small circle of glass through which I was watching.

His eyes were wide. The arrogance in them had gone. They were now the sorrowful pleading eyes of a child. I could see him trying to form words but every few seconds his face creased in agonizing pain. I turned and ran to the interrogation room. I located the large red emergency assistance button on the wall and drew my arm back to punch it hard.

Inexplicably, the palm of my hand stopped an inch from the shiny red dome. I looked at it as though it wasn't mine. My mind was a blur. What was I doing? Was I mad? "This man was dying."

"Yes he was."

"Who cares? Who knows? Who's seen him?" I again made to press the button but as my palm almost touched the surface the little girl came into my mind's eye.

I kept mentally playing over the argument. "You will go to jail. Maybe it would be worth it. How many lives do you save by letting him die? But this is wrong. It's only wrong if he walks out of this police station."

I pushed the button.

The clock on the wall in Mike Kelley's office ticked louder than I had ever noticed it before. I sat in the large leather chair gazing down at the floor. I could hear Mike Kelley some feet away from the door in the corridor. His voice was animated. Eventually he returned and closed the door behind him.

"Is he going to be all right? He just went down like a stone."

"He will be fine. I spoke to the medics. They say it was typical of a narcotic induced attack, and they got to him in time."

"I guess this means the trial will be postponed." I added almost as a throw away.

"Not quite" Mike said.

I looked at him quizzically for a moment. He returned my gaze and carried on.

"His girlfriend, the child's mother just made a full admission. She woke up after a bad trip, blood all over her, knife in her hand. She had dreamed about fighting the devil disguised as a child. We've got the clothes back and the knife... it all fits."

For several seconds I didn't speak. "And Murray?"

"He wasn't there. If his lawyer had let him speak we might have got to the answer a little quicker." I left the room and headed slowly for the outside and fresh air.

With one more moment of hesitation, I could have killed an innocent man."
A sixth moral foundation—liberty/oppression—has recently been added to the theory. However, this domain still seeks narrative-related empirical evidence.

The data set data was collected in 2011 consisted of 234 undergraduate students (64% female, 71.8% White, mean age was 20.52 years) that answered how often in a month they watched several shows. The shows were selected based on the National Consumer Study conducted by Experian Simmons consumer research company in 2010 (Experian Simmons, 2010) that proposed a classification of political “typical Republican” and “typical Democrat” shows. The shows tested in the dataset (across both political categories) included NCIS, Lie to Me, Desperate Housewives, V, Glenn Beck, American Idol, Mad Men, Dexter, Private Practice, Law and Order: SVU and Breaking Bad. For the study at hand, only the crime drama shows were analyzed based on how often participants indicated to watch them in a typical month. Results were compared as to which traditional hero (including NCIS, Lie to Me, Law and Order: SVU and V) and which antihero show (including Mad Men, Dexter, and Breaking Bad) were watched the most.

Due to the strong sexual and explicit content of Episode One from Season 8 of Law and Order: SVU, Episode Two was chosen in order to comply with IRB guidelines.

The antihero was earlier described in the questionnaire as a character who “behaves in morally questionable way but is liked anyways”.

Accidently, one of the hero characters (Spiderman) was not included in the study due to a MediaLab set-up problem.

For the reliability analysis, to increase construct validity of this dependent variable, only characters who were indicated in the pretest to be known in at least 60% of the cases were kept in the analysis. This reduced the antihero characters from 10 to 5. One reason for the low reliability (or correlation in this case) for the antihero pictures (n=2) appeared to be that participants (naturally) had a hard time to clearly “categorize” the characters into a good or bad category. As outlined on Chapter 2, antiheroes vary on a continuum of moral “goodness.” Participant’s individual notion of that likely contributes to the weak internal consistency of the character picture evaluations. Results of the analyses for the antihero picture category, as well as for the villain category (also with low reliability), consequently, were interpreted with caution.
It has to be noted that even though only around 50% of the respondents approved of the antihero’s actions, this fact can be interpreted as a “positive” evaluation, since from a real-world moral perspective none of Dexter’s actions would be morally approved in today’s society. In fact one can argue, that the immoral actions that a less morally complex character (than Dexter) would receive even more approval when judged within the narrative framework, due to the underlying narrative schema.

The measurement of social justice was included for the analysis of another independent research question regarding the enjoyment of antihero narratives, not reported in the current project. Therefore, the variable was not related to any of the Hypotheses of Study Two as reported here. However, the measure was used for a follow-up analysis as discussed in the Discussion Section for Study Two, Treatment 1, and therefore included here.

When running the same analysis with participants previous viewing of Revenge as the covariate, the same results emerge; also, the covariate was not significant.

A separate analysis including the mean of all villain characters inside and outside resulted in the same results, \( t (57) = -3.948, p < .001, \text{Cohen’s } d = .51, \) corrected for dependence between means.

The same differences were found when the analysis was run with the three pictures of the villain category combined rather than only one as indicated by the reliability analysis.

The same significant results were found when analyzed with all pictures for the hero and the villain.

The same findings resulted when analyzing all villain pictures together instead of only one.

When controlling previous viewing of Revenge the same results emerged, as this covariate was not significant.

I am referring to attitude here now as this analysis specifically is concerned with the evaluation of the character.

Two analyses of covariance—with the covariate if the participants had read the story or not, the trueness or fictionality item as dependent variable, and condition as fixed factor—revealed a non-significant effect of the covariate, supporting the validity of the manipulation check results.
17 There was also no significant difference between conditions on the morally irrelevant adjectives after controlling for the covariate \( F (1,248) = .984, p > .05, \) partial \( \eta^2 = .004 \), indicating that the realistic condition participants responded with similar speed \((M = .890, SD = .294)\) to the morally irrelevant words as participants in the fictional condition \((M = .947, SD = .331)\).

18 The same result was found for the morally irrelevant adjectives. The covariate was insignificant \( F (1,248) = .005, p > .05 \), and so was condition after controlling for the covariate \( F (1,248) = .006, p > .05, \) partial \( \eta^2 = .000 \). After controlling for the covariate, participants in the realism condition did not rate the protagonist significantly more positive \((M = .112, SD = .639)\), than participants in the fictional condition \((M = .249, SD = .657)\).
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Sophie H. Janicke received her Doctorate in Mass Communication at Florida State University (USA). Her main interests are in the general field of media effects research from a media psychological perspective, where she specifically looks at the portrayal of morality in entertaining media fare and its possible effects for the viewer and society enlarge, narrative persuasion from entertaining media across various topics, and she is fascinated by the new research arm of positive media psychology that investigates how specific media content can create feelings of inspiration, meaningfulness, gratitude, compassion and spirituality, among others. She is a research associate of the 3D research team at FSU which is conducting research in the fields of 3D technology and entertainment, including prime-time television content, blockbuster movies and the latest video games (www.fsu3d.com). Janicke gathered work experience in various fields, such as in consulting work for German broadcasters and script writers, teaching, as well as qualitative and quantitative entertainment research. She received her Diploma (German equivalent to Masters) in Psychology (major: media psychology) from Eberhard-Karls University, Tuebingen, Germany in 2009, and her Pre-Diploma in General Psychology (equivalent to a BA) from Friedrich-Wilhems University, Bonn, Germany, in 2005.