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WHEN GOOD CHARACTERS DO BAD THINGS: EXAMINING THE EFFECT OF MORAL AMBIGUITY ON ENJOYMENT

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ABSTRACT

Much research has examined responses to purely good and purely bad characters (i.e., characters that are either consistently good or consistently bad). However, some of the most beloved and compelling characters do not fall into either of these categories, because they do both good and bad things. Even though these morally ambiguous characters are prevalent in literature, television, and films, little is known about how individuals derive enjoyment from content featuring these types of characters. The present study empirically tests the effects of morally ambiguous, good, and bad characters on audience responses. Findings reveal that affective dispositions, perceived realism, transportation, suspense, need for cognition, and tolerance of ambiguity each influence overall enjoyment of entertainment content. Furthermore, the results indicate that different character types are appealing for different reasons. Specifically, good characters are enjoyed because they are well liked; bad characters are liked the least, but they are equally as transporting, suspenseful, and thus cognitively engaging as other characters. Morally ambiguous characters, on the other hand, are liked less than good characters, but they are nevertheless equally as transporting, suspenseful, cognitively engaging, and thereby enjoyable as good characters. This study thus provides a deeper understanding of the ways in which different character types affect enjoyment. The implications of these findings on various media effects theories are discussed.

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When good characters do bad things: Examining the effect of moral ambiguity on enjoyment

Introduction

Characters are an integral part of entertainment content, such as books, films, plays, and television shows. Individuals come to care about stories that may have little relevance to their own lives through involvement with characters (Greenberg, 1988; Hoffner & Cantor, 1991b). Moreover, characters are often mentioned as the main reason that entertainment is enjoyed (Cohen, 1999; Hoffner & Cantor, 1991b; Vorderer & Knobloch, 2002).

Various factors affect the types of impressions people form of characters. In their review of literature regarding character-viewer relations, Hoffner and Cantor (1991b) identified several sources of information used by audiences when forming impressions of characters, including characters' physical appearances, speech characteristics, behaviors, emotional states, and nonverbal behaviors. Characters' behaviors, in particular, reveal much information about their moralities and personalities (Livingstone, 1992), and these characteristics affect people's overall judgments of characters. When asked why they favor certain characters, adolescents describe characters' anti-social and pro-social traits (Cohen, 1999), and pre-school children assign positive evaluations to characters who perform pro-social behaviors such as generosity, and negative evaluations to characters who perform anti-social behaviors such as causing harm to others (Hoffner & Cantor, 1985; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977).

Many characters can be quickly identified as being either heroes/protagonists or villains/antagonists based on their actions. Individuals, as young as 5 years old,

distinguish heroes from villains on the basis of characters' actions (Himmelweit, Oppenheim, & Vince, 1958; Liss, Reinhardt, & Fredriksen, 1983). Liss et al. (1983) found that children mentioned heroes' helpful behaviors as a reason for identifying them as "good guys." Likewise, Himmelweit et al. (1958) found that adolescents evaluated characters' behaviors to determine whether they were heroes or villains. Specifically, heroes were described as being polite and engaging in positive, helpful behaviors, whereas villains were described as participating in socially unacceptable behaviors, such as gambling, drinking, starting fights, and robbing banks.

Some protagonists or heroes, such as Superman, are depicted as behaving almost entirely in consistently "good" ways, and some villains, such as Freddy Krueger, are portrayed as being consistently "bad" or "evil." However, many characters are morally ambiguous in that they do both good and bad things. Protagonists often behave in ways that would not be acceptable or considered moral in the real world, yet some audience members seem to excuse or even embrace these actions when performed by a beloved character. For example, Jack Bauer, a governmental agent on the television show *24*, routinely tortures people; Dexter Morgan, from a series of books and a television show, is a serial killer who works for the police as a blood spatter expert; and Dr. Gregory House is a drug-addicted, anti-social doctor on the television show *House*. Nevertheless, these characters are often perceived to be heroes, whose triumphs are celebrated and whose defeats are mourned.

According to affective disposition theory, people form judgments of characters based on their actions, and derive enjoyment from watching liked characters succeed and disliked characters fail. In other words, outcomes that are considered "just" are enjoyed

more than outcomes that are "unjust." Based on this theory, it can be predicted that content featuring a positive outcome for the main character will be enjoyed more when the character is purely good rather than when the character is morally ambiguous. However, the popularity of these characters in mass media content suggests that content that features these types of characters may be enjoyed more than content featuring purely good or bad characters. It is possible that morally ambiguous characters are perceived to be more realistic than purely good or purely bad characters, and that individuals are more transported into narratives that feature morally ambiguous characters.

This research examines individuals' perceptions of morally ambiguous characters and the ways in which these characters affect enjoyment. Specifically, the study will test the degree to which affective dispositions, perceived realism, transportation, and suspense mediate the effects of morally ambiguous characters on enjoyment, and whether the personality variables of need for cognition and tolerance of ambiguity affect responses to these characters.

Literature Review

Morally Ambiguous Characters

Based on the dictionary definition of ambiguity, a character that is ambiguous is one that causes doubt or uncertainty or that can be understood in two or more possible ways. In social psychology literature, the concept of uncertainty is sometimes broken down into two types, ambiguous and vague (Higgins, 1996; Molden & Higgins, 2004). Ambiguous uncertainty develops when conflicting information about a person provides two equally plausible, but incongruent explanations about that person. Vague uncertainty arises from a general lack of knowledge from which to make a judgment about someone. In these instances, the information provided does not strongly support the categorization of behavior. Therefore, character ambiguity can result from either the presentation of contradictory or conflicting information about a character or from the absence of meaningful information about a character.

Literary researchers use the term "ambiguous characters" to refer to characters that are "morally complicated" and that possess both good and bad qualities (e.g., Ealy, 2005; Strimel, 2004); characters that are unwaveringly good or bad are not considered ambiguous. Ambiguous characters are not a new phenomenon. They appear in the Bible (Ashley, 1988), Shakespeare's plays (Carr & Davis, 2007), and more recently, the *Harry Potter* books (Strimel, 2004).

> Later bourgeois art forms such as opera and the novel explore the more morally cloudy aspects of character and action—which is, indeed, the principal source of their interest. Bizet's Carmen, Hardy's Lucetta Templeman, Dostoevsky's Sonia Marmeladov, Fitzgerald's Gatsby and Martin Amis' Samson Young are

> characters whose choices and actions are prime sites of mixed motives and ethical uncertainty. (Carr & Davis, 2007, p. 102-103)

These types of characters are also prevalent in television shows and films. A recent *USA Today* article pointed out that the majority of films nominated for the Academy Awards in 2007 feature morally ambiguous characters (Wloszczyna, 2008).

Although communication researchers do not usually use the terms "ambiguous" or "ambiguity" to refer to characters, they use labels such as inconsistent, fascinating, or neutral to describe characters that could be considered ambiguous by literary researchers. Hoffner and Cantor (1991b) pointed out that most often all parts of character portrayals are consistent, but occasionally, inconsistency can be apparent within a character's actions, intentions, or physical appearance (e.g., a character who exhibits both good and bad behaviors) or between these character features (e.g., a character who is attractive but does bad things). In line with this conceptualization, Collins and Zimmermann (1975) suggested that character cues can either converge or diverge to produce unambiguous or ambiguous inferences about a character or his/her behavior.

> An aggressor may be presented unequivocally as a 'bad guy,' or he may sometimes seem bad, sometimes good, as 'double dealers' often do. In the first case, information in the program 'converges' on an evaluation of the actor as negative; in the second, cues 'diverge,' so that the viewer's evaluation is more equivocal. (p. 333)

In other words, character cues in a presentation converge when they are consistently positive or negative, resulting in unambiguous character depictions; the cues diverge when both positive and negative cues are presented, resulting in ambiguous

character depictions. For example, Gollin (1958) created a morally ambiguous character by showing two scenes of him performing pro-social behaviors (e.g., helping a boy who had fallen off a tricycle) and two scenes showing him performing anti-social behaviors (e.g., stealing a comic book).

Consequences of character actions can also cause ambiguity. Bad character actions can at times result in positive consequences or rewards, and conversely, good actions sometimes result in negative consequences. Albert (1957) manipulated character ambiguity by showing a villain being successful at the end of a film. Collins and Zimmermann (1975) likewise manipulated the consequences of characters' actions so that in the divergent (ambiguous) condition, aggressive behavior was shown to have both good and bad consequences.

Intentions, either good or bad, are also used to evaluate characters (Leifer & Roberts, 1972). If characters have good intentions, they are perceived positively; if they have bad intentions, they are perceived negatively. Character ambiguity can thus be operationalized as the presentation of both positive and negative intentions or motivations of a character. In the convergent (non-ambiguous) condition, Collins and Zimmermann (1975) presented scenes showing only bad motivations of a police officer, and in the divergent (ambiguous) condition, both good and bad intentions were depicted. Intentions may also create ambiguity when they do not match up with actions. This applies to characters that do good things, but with bad intentions, or that do bad things, but with good intentions. For example, heroes can at times go against their stated morals or values and use violence or aggression to achieve pro-social goals; likewise, villains can at times be nice to someone whom they intend to hurt. Strimel (2004) labeled Sirius Black from

the *Harry Potter* series a morally ambiguous character because he causes terror and violence in the magic community, but he does so in order to help Harry. Ealy (2005) operationalized ambiguous characters as those whose actions are bad, but whose motivations are intact so that "the line between corruption and innocence is particularly unclear" (p. 146).

A character's physical appearance, demeanor, and background or past actions can also result in ambiguity if they do not correspond in predictable ways. For example, characters that are perceived to be more physically attractive are judged to be more "good" and "nice" than less attractive characters (Hoffner & Cantor, 1985; Sparks & Cantor, 1986). Therefore, characters that are perceived to be ugly or frightening in appearance, but that are kind to others could be considered ambiguous. Konijn and Hoorn (2005) used the character of Edward Scissorhands as an example of a mixed character because his actions were good, but he is unattractive (although it is debatable whether Johnny Depp is unattractive even when he has scissors for hands). Severus Snape in the Harry Potter series is also considered to be an ambiguous character because his appearance, demeanor, and background all suggest that he is a bad character; however, some of his actions are good (Strimel, 2004). Ambiguity may also arise from a conflict between what characters say and what they do (Campbell, 1983).

Research on character ambiguity has primarily focused on people's reactions to aggressive protagonists. For example, researchers have found that children are more likely to act aggressively after seeing a morally ambiguous character act aggressively than when they observe a purely bad character behaving in this way (Collins & Zimmermann, 1975; Liss et al., 1983). This research supports Hoyt's (1970) findings that

certain motivations, such as self defense, can justify aggressive actions and lead to less negative dispositions of characters. In fact, when bad actions are a result of good motives, characters are perceived fairly positively (Berndt & Berndt, 1975; Leifer & Roberts, 1972). However, little research has examined how perceptions of morally ambiguous characters affect enjoyment.

Disposition Theory and Moral Judgment

According to affective disposition theory, people derive enjoyment from narratives based on their affective dispositions toward characters and the outcomes that the characters experience. The theory predicts that enjoyment of content increases when characters that are liked succeed and when characters that are disliked fail; enjoyment decreases when liked characters experience negative outcomes or when disliked characters experience positive outcomes (Zillmann, 2000; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977). Several disposition theories have been developed to explain enjoyment of different types of content. The disposition theory of humor (Zillmann & Cantor, 1972) was developed to explain why people enjoy the disparagement of others. This theory was later used to develop the disposition theory of drama (Zillmann & Cantor, 1977), and the disposition theory of sports spectatorship (Zillmann, Bryant, & Sapolsky, 1989). These theories have been applied to a variety of other types of entertainment, such as frightful entertainment (Hoffner & Cantor, 1991a; Oliver, 1993a), reality-based crime programs (Oliver, 1996), news (Zillmann, Taylor, & Lewis, 1998), action films (King, 2000), and crime-based fiction (Raney & Bryant, 2002). Although there are slight differences between disposition theories of humor, drama, and sport spectatorship, they share main assumptions about responses to entertainment. These theories predict that enjoyment or appreciation of

content is based, in part, on individuals' affective dispositions toward characters (or sport teams). These dispositions are guided by feelings of empathy and depend on moral judgments.

Empathy has consistently been found to affect emotional responses toward characters and enjoyment of content (Zillmann, 1991a, 1995, 2000). Zillmann and Cantor (1972) found that when presented with a humorous situation involving disparagement, individuals react with empathy toward characters that are experientially similar to themselves, and they react with counterempathy toward characters that are experientially dissimilar from themselves. Moreover, Raney (2002) found that individuals with higher levels of empathy were more likely to sympathize with a victimized character and were thus more likely to experience enjoyment when the crime was avenged.

Individuals' moral judgments affect the formation of empathic feelings and affective dispositions toward characters. According to Zillmann (2000), viewers continually monitor and judge the morality of characters' actions and motivations. If the actions and motivations are perceived to be moral and good, individuals will form favorable attitudes toward the character. If, on the other hand, the actions and motivations are perceived to be immoral, the character will be disliked. Once people form affective dispositions toward characters, they begin to anticipate certain outcomes for the characters. They hope for success and fear failure for liked characters. Conversely, they hope for failure and fear success for hated characters. When the hoped-for outcomes are achieved, relief and enjoyment are the result, and when feared-for outcomes are presented, enjoyment suffers.

However, people sometimes differ in their judgments of actions and characters and thus in their feelings toward characters. Certain actions, such as abortion, drug use, and divorce, may be perceived to be moral by some individuals and immoral by others; a character that does one of these actions may thus be liked by some individuals but disliked by others. As a result, some people will enjoy certain content more than others. Of course, some actions, such as theft, murder, or rape are more consistently judged to be immoral, so it can be assumed that the affective dispositions formed toward characters that do these things will be negative. Conversely, most individuals will like characters that act in ways that are deemed good or moral by most people (e.g., helping others).

Character ambiguity can cause uncertainty and feelings of ambivalence, and according to Comisky and Bryant (1982), ambivalence and neutrality are the least favorable non-negative attitudes that individuals generally have for protagonists. Based on the assumption that the perceived morality of characters' actions directly affects character liking, it can be predicted that characters that are always good or moral will be liked more than characters that are morally ambiguous. In other words, audiences will form more favorable affective dispositions toward purely good characters. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

> *H1*: Character actions will affect the strength and valence of affective dispositions formed toward characters, such that purely good characters will be liked the most, purely bad characters will be disliked the most, and morally ambiguous characters will fall in between the two extremes.

Perceived Realism

Although, according to disposition theory, morally ambiguous characters may be judged more negatively than purely good characters, literary researchers often refer to these types of characters as being more realistic than other characters (e.g., Ealy, 2005; Strimel, 2004). Most people are not consistently good or evil; that is, even good people make mistakes, and most people who do bad things have redeeming qualities. Therefore, character ambiguity may affect perceptions of character realness or authenticity. Although media researchers have examined various personal factors, such as real life experiences, exposure to television, motives for exposure, and IQ, that affect perceptions of realism (see Potter, 1988), less research has examined how content characteristics, such as specific character attributes, affect perceptions of realism.

Perceived realism refers to the extent to which audiences perceive mediated content to be realistic or authentic. Researchers measure perceptions of realism at various levels by asking participants questions about the realism of media content in general, particular genres, programs, characters, etc. The concept of perceived realism is complex, and includes various dimensions and conceptualizations. Studies that focus on the "magic window" conceptualization of realism explore the extent to which media content is perceived to be actually happening (see Busselle & Greenberg, 2000; Hawkins, 1977). Researchers have found that young children at times believe that individuals and events on television exist independently of the medium, in other words, that television is a magic window into the lives of others (Hawkins, 1977; Nikken & Peeters, 1988; Wright, Huston, Reitz, & Piemayat, 1994). However, this tendency to think that mediated content is real, decreases with age (Hawkins, 1977; Nikken & Peeters, 1988).

Perceived realism can also be conceptualized as the degree to which mediated content is perceived to be representative of social reality. This "social realism" conceptualization focuses on people's perceptions of the similarity of depicted events and characters to real life occurrences and individuals (see Busselle & Greenberg, 2000; Dorr, Kovaric, & Doubleday, 1990; Hawkins, 1977; Potter, 1988). In other words, content is perceived to be more realistic if it makes appropriate assertions about social reality. Because this study deals with adult audiences and fictional content, the social realism conceptualization of realism will be employed.

Individuals make judgments about the realism of stories while they read or view them (Shapiro & Chock, 2003, 2004). Children discuss the realism of mediated content in terms of characters and actions (Dorr, 1983), and individuals most frequently assess the plausibility (Hall, 2003) and typicality (Shapiro & Chock, 2003) of depicted characters and events when determining the realism of mediated content. In assessing the realness of characters, individuals may evaluate their actions and overall behavior and determine how frequently individuals in the real world behave in a similar manner. Because most people in the real world are usually not purely good or bad, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Morally ambiguous characters will be perceived to be more realistic than purely good or purely bad characters.

Although little research has examined individuals' responses to morally ambiguous characters, the popularity of these types of characters in literature, television, and films suggests that some individuals may actually prefer these kinds of characters to purely good or evil ones. For example, while running a manipulation check, Zillmann and

Cantor (1977) unexpectedly found no difference in affective dispositions toward ambiguous and benevolent characters, but both types of characters were liked significantly more than a malevolent character. Although no research has determined why this may occur, Aronson (1969) pointed out that a person "who appears to have no 'human' weaknesses may lose in attractiveness by making others feel inadequate" (p. 157). Hoorn and Konijn (2003) employed similarly reasoning when they suggested that a purely good character such as Superman may irritate some people because he has too many good features and that this may make him seem less realistic. Likewise, Byrne (1971) proposed that audiences may perceive purely good characters to be less like themselves and that this could result in decreased liking of the characters.

Characters that are perceived to be more realistic have been found to be more involving, meaning that they encourage more positive affective responses, empathy, and identification (Konijn & Hoorn, 2004). Therefore, in contrast to disposition theory, it can be predicted that morally ambiguous characters will be perceived to be more realistic than purely good or bad characters, and that this will lead to greater liking of morally ambiguous characters.

H3: Characters that are perceived to be more realistic will be liked more than characters that are perceived to be less realistic.

H4: Morally ambiguous characters will be liked more than purely good or purely bad characters.

Additionally, it can be predicted that favorable affective dispositions will affect the overall enjoyment of narratives; narratives featuring liked characters will be liked

more than narratives featuring disliked characters as long as the liked characters do not experience negative outcomes.

H5: Favorable affective dispositions formed toward characters will be positively associated with enjoyment of narratives.

Transportation

Transportation is another factor that may mediate the relationship between moral ambiguity and enjoyment. Transportation is defined as "a distinct mental process, an integrative melding of attention, imagery, and feelings" (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 701). It is the process by which people become temporarily immersed into a narrative world to the extent that the rest of the world disappears. When being transported, "readers of compelling stories may lose track of time, fail to observe events going on around them, and feel that they are completely immersed in the world of the narrative" (Green, 2004, p. 247) Green and Brock (2000) based their conceptualization of transportation on Gerrig's (1993) statement.

> Someone (the traveler) is transported, by some means of transportation, as a result of performing certain actions. The traveler goes some distance from his or her world of origin, which makes some aspects of the world of origin inaccessible. The traveler returns to the world of origin, somewhat changed by the journey. (p. 10-11)

Because transportation can change the reader by altering attitudes or beliefs, it has mostly been studied in relation to persuasion. Generally, high levels of transportation in both fictional and non-fictional narratives lead to less critical thinking and more persuasion as measured by acceptance of story-consistent attitudes (Green, 2004; Green

& Brock, 2000) and ad evaluations (Escalas, 2004). Additionally, greater transportation has been found to increase both the perceived realism of narratives (Green, 2004) and character liking (Green & Brock, 2000). However, it is possible that these factors influence each other; that is, even though transportation has been found to increase character liking (Green & Brock, 2000), it is possible that character liking affects transportation. If characters are more multidimensional, realistic, or familiar, readers may become more interested and absorbed in their stories. This idea is bolstered by Green's (2004) findings that individuals who were familiar with elements of a narrative experienced higher levels of transportation than those who were unfamiliar with these elements. The results indicate that transportation was greater for these individuals because the characters and events in the narrative were more real for those who had previous experiences or knowledge. In fact, although Green (2002) found that labeling a narrative as fact or fiction had no effect on transportation, she suggests that "the important element is whether the narrative feels real and engaging" (p. 4). Supporting this notion, Busselle and Bilandzic (2006) found that perceiving a film as being more realistic, or more similar to the real world and viewers' experiences, leads to greater transportation. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H6: Perceived realism will mediate the effect of character type on transportation.

H6a (same as *H2*): Morally ambiguous characters will be perceived to be more realistic than purely good or purely bad characters.

H6b: Perceived realism will be positively associated with transportation.

According to Green, Brock, and Kaufman (2004), transportation "illuminates the experience of enjoyment" (p. 324). Specifically, transportation is hypothesized to explain

some of the ways in which people derive enjoyment from mediated content. One of the reasons that individuals enjoy reading or viewing certain content is that doing so allows them to escape from their worries or troubles. While being transported, individuals are focused on the story and are thus relieved from thinking about their problems. In other words, reading or viewing narratives may offer a diversion from the concerns of the actual world. Moreover, transportation may help manage moods by disrupting negative cognitions and affective states. This relief from negative cognitions may result in more positive moods and enjoyment. It has also been suggested that transportation may allow for identity play, which allows readers to vicariously experience things that they cannot experience in real life; this, in turn, may lead to self-expansion and enjoyment. Transportation may also encourage enjoyment through learning. That is, individuals may derive pleasure from gaining new knowledge or information, which enriches their lives (Green et al., 2004)

A positive relationship between transportation and enjoyment has been found in the context of short stories (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Green, Brock, & Livingstone, 2004; Green, Rozin, Aldao, Pollack, & Small, 2004). Those who experienced high levels of transportation, as well as enjoyment, were more likely to report that they would make favorable recommendations of the stories to others. In addition, Busselle and Bilandzic (2006) found that transportation predicted enjoyment of three genres of films. These findings suggest that transportation may enhance overall enjoyment. Therefore, if narratives with morally ambiguous characters are more transporting, it can be predicted that these narratives will also be more enjoyable.

H7: Transportation will mediate the effect of character type on enjoyment.

H7a: Narratives featuring morally ambiguous characters will be more transporting than narratives featuring either purely good or purely bad characters.

H7b: Transportation will be positively associated with enjoyment.

Suspense

Morally ambiguous characters may also evoke more suspense than purely good or purely bad characters. According to the dictionary definition, suspense is a "state of mental uncertainty" ("Merriam-Webster's online dictionary", 2005). Because actions of morally ambiguous characters are less predictable than those of purely good and bad characters, they may produce more uncertainty and suspense than characters that are consistent in their actions. Individuals may be unsure about the true nature of morally ambiguous characters and of what they will do next in a story. In addition, the deserved outcome for morally ambiguous characters is less clear and thereby potentially less predictable. A series of focus groups pertaining to reality television programs--which commonly depict individuals who could be classified as morally ambiguous--revealed that unpredictability resulted in the generation of suspense for young adult viewers (Hall, 2006).

Zillmann's (1991b, 1996) theory of suspense proposes that individuals experience suspense while viewing dramatic content because they fear negative outcomes for liked characters or positive outcomes for disliked characters. Suspense is heightened when uncertainty about an outcome increases and vanishes when outcomes are perceived to be certain or predictable. Comisky and Bryant (1982) found that suspense is greatest when a

liked character is perceived to have about 1 in 100 chances of succeeding. In order to satisfy audiences' desire for justice, narratives featuring purely good or bad characters usually end in predictable ways; good characters succeed and bad characters fail. In fact, as mentioned previously, Zillmann's disposition theory predicts that these types of endings evoke the most enjoyment because the characters in these narratives get what readers feel they deserve. However, the deserved outcome is less clear for morally ambiguous characters. If a morally ambiguous character is liked, individuals may be more likely to fear a negative outcome for him or her than for a purely good character that they expect will succeed in the end. Alternatively, if the morally ambiguous character is disliked, individuals may be more likely to fear a positive outcome for this character than for a purely bad character that they expect to fail in the end. In other words, moral ambiguity may make outcomes less predictable, and thereby increase suspense.

Individuals form expectations about how a story will end based on their experiences with previous narratives. In their explanation of the cognitive processes underlying the experience of suspense, Ohler and Nieding (1996, p. 139) suggest that suspense can be generated "by transcending the viewers' expectations horizons." This occurs when the cues in a narrative cannot be integrated into an individual's pre-existing mental model. Individuals assume that media narratives will follow a familiar structure. Because most narratives end with good characters succeeding and bad characters failing, individuals may expect such endings. In other words, individuals expect morally correct endings for these characters. In his examination of the influence of narrative frameworks in the creation of suspense, Wulff (1996, p. 6) points out that "the moral correctness of an

outcome does not only play a role in the evaluation of possible courses of events but also in the estimation of the characters' outcome." Readers expect a criminal to get caught, and a person who does something honorable to be rewarded in some way. However, when a character is a criminal who does some honorable things, the morally correct outcome becomes ambivalent.

For example, the television series, *The Sopranos*, followed the life of Tony Soprano, a mob boss who engaged in many illegal activities, including extortion and murder, but who was nevertheless likeable, because of his devotion to his family. Tony's moral ambiguity did not suggest a clear, deserved outcome. On the one hand, Tony deserved to pay for his crimes and to go to prison; on the other hand, he deserved to stay with his family. Tony's fate as the series approached its last episode was thus very much in question. In the final scenes of the series, Tony is sitting in a diner with his family when a suspicious-looking man enters the restroom. The man could be there to kill Tony, and thereby to get revenge for all his past crimes--or maybe not, in which case, Tony could continue living his morally ambiguous life. As a *New York Times* reporter wrote, "The suspense of the final scene in the diner was almost cruel" (Stanley, 2007). Tony was a liked character, so many viewers may have feared his demise; however, they may have also felt that he deserved this kind of fate. This recognition that in order for justice to be restored, Tony would have to be punished may have made such an outcome more likely in the viewers' minds. If Tony was a purely good character, viewers may have feared a negative outcome, but they also would be more likely to predict that the series wouldn't end in such a seemingly unfair way. Therefore, Tony's moral ambiguity could have

caused greater uncertainty about the potential outcome of the series and thereby, greater suspense.

The experience of suspense may be pleasurable for some individuals. Suspense has been found to increase enjoyment of a variety of content, including short stories (Jose & Brewer, 1984), television programs (Nabi, Stitt, Halford, & Finnerty, 2006; Oliver & Tsay, 2005), video games (Koch, Fischer, Klimmt, Rizzo, & Vorderer, 2007), films (Tan, 1996), and news stories (Knobloch-Westerwick & Keplinger, 2007). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H8: Suspense will mediate the effect of morally ambiguous characters on enjoyment.

H8a: Audiences will experience more suspense when reading narratives featuring morally ambiguous characters than when reading narratives featuring either purely good or purely bad characters.

H8b: Suspense will be positively associated with enjoyment.

Individual Differences

Although suspense is expected to predict enjoyment overall, it is important to note that individuals may differ in how they respond to feeling of suspense and to morally ambiguous characters in general. Individual differences have been found to influence almost every media encounter, from selection to effects. Certain personality traits have been found to moderate various media effects such as persuasion, priming, acceptance of violent content, and enjoyment (see Oliver & Krakowiak, *in press*). For example, higher levels of sensation seeking have been found to influence enjoyment of arousing entertainment, such as horror films (Tamborini & Stiff, 1987) and rock music (Litle &

Zuckerman, 1986). Higher levels of empathy are related to greater enjoyment of sad films (Oliver, 1993b) and lesser enjoyment of horror films (Tamborini, Stiff, & Heidel, 1990). Likewise, various personality traits, such as neuroticism and psychoticism, have been found to affect responses to media content (e.g., Aluja-Fabregat & Torrubia-Beltri, 1998). Responses to ambiguous characters may also be affected by individual factors, in that some individuals may respond more positively to morally ambiguous characters than others. The personality factors of tolerance of ambiguity and need for cognition may be particularly relevant in determining reactions to morally ambiguous characters.

Tolerance of ambiguity. Frenkel-Brunswik (1948) identified intolerance of ambiguity as a general personality variable. Specifically, this concept has been defined as a "tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as sources of threat" (Budner, 1962, p. 29), which can lead to avoidance of situations that cause uncertainty. In other words, an individual with low ambiguity tolerance (AT) experiences stress when dealing with ambiguous situations and, as a result, avoids these types of situations. In contrast, a person with high AT "perceives ambiguous situations/stimuli as desirable, challenging, and interesting and neither denies nor distorts their complexity or incongruity" (Furnham & Ribchester, 1995, p. 179). Low AT has been found to be correlated with a variety of variables, including idealist moral philosophies (Yurtsever, 2000), ethnocentrism (Block & Block, 1950; O'Connor, 1952), political conservatism (Fibert & Ressler, 1998; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Sidanuis, 1978), authoritarianism (Million, 1957), and others (see Furnham & Ribchester, 1995 for review).

Ambiguity tolerance also affects how individuals react and respond to information (Fruh & Wirth, 1992). Specifically, high AT individuals rated ambiguous tasks as being

more enjoyable than low AT participants (Ebeling & Spear, 1980). Also, tasks or stimuli containing conflicting information have been found to be perceived less favorably by individuals who have low AT as compared to those with high tolerance (Burgoon, 1971; Feather, 1969). In regard to information processing, individuals with high AT were found to be more stimulated by a controversial news documentary than individuals with low AT (Fruh & Wirth, 1992), and individuals with low AT were more likely to seek out information that supported their views rather than objective information (McPherson, 1983).

In addition, according to Furnham and Ribchester's (1995) review of AT research, low AT can result in several consequences, including an "inability to allow for the possibility of good and bad traits in the same person, [and an] acceptance of attitude statements representing a rigid, black-white view of life" (p. 180). Ambiguous characters that act in unpredictable ways and that cannot be easily categorized as good or bad may thus disconcert individuals who are less tolerant of ambiguity. Moreover, narratives featuring ambiguous characters include more inconsistent information about the characters than do narratives featuring purely good or bad characters. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H9a: Individuals with high tolerance of ambiguity will enjoy narratives featuring morally ambiguous characters more than will individuals with low tolerance of ambiguity.

H9b: Individuals with low tolerance of ambiguity will enjoy narratives featuring purely good and purely bad characters more than will individuals with low tolerance of ambiguity.

AT may also affect responses to suspense. As mentioned previously, suspense can result from uncertainty about outcomes and can be heightened when unexpected things happen to characters. Crandall (1968) found that individuals who had high AT preferred stimuli that aroused weak expectancies as to what would happen next, whereas those with low AT preferred stimuli that had frequently confirmed strong expectancies. In other words, participants with low AT preferred predictable stimuli, while those with high AT preferred the unexpected. Therefore, it can be predicted that AT will moderate the effect of suspense on enjoyment:

> *H10*: There will be a significant Tolerance of Ambiguity X Suspense interaction effect on enjoyment, such that perceived suspense and enjoyment will be positively related for individuals scoring higher on AT, and negatively related for those scoring lower on AT.

Need for cognition. Need for cognition (NFC) may likewise affect responses to morally ambiguous characters. NFC is conceptualized as a stable, intrinsic motivation that indicates the degree to which individuals get pleasure from thinking (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). This motivation can range from low to high. Individuals who have a high NFC are more likely to enjoy thinking about complex problems and to engage in activities that require them to think, whereas individuals who are low in NFC are more likely to avoid effortful thinking or problem solving. As a result, individuals who are high in NFC are more likely to utilize the Elaboration Likelihood Model's central route of information processing and to form attitudes based on thorough evaluations of message arguments. Individuals who are low in NFC, on the other hand, are more likely to use peripheral cues, such as source credibility, when forming attitudes (Haugtvedt, Petty, &

Cacioppo, 1992). NFC also affects information seeking, such that individuals high in NFC are more likely to seek out additional information about tasks, issues, and current events than are individuals low in NFC (Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, & Jarvis, 1996).

Moreover, researchers have found that NFC can affect the selection and use of media content, as well as responses to it. Individuals high in NFC use media for information gathering more so than do those low in NFC (Ahlering, 1987; Condra, 1992) and are more likely to watch news and information television content (Perse, 1992); however, they watch less television in general than those low in NFC (Henning & Vorderer, 2001). NFC likewise affects preferences. High NFC individuals prefer ads that are high in both visual and lexical complexity (Putrevu, Tan, & Lord, 2004). High NFC individuals may also prefer more complex narratives. For example, Knobloch-Westerwick and Keplinger (2006b) manipulated the level of complexity in a mystery story by presenting either consistent or divergent clues during the story. The story focused on a detective's investigation of a murder. In the very low complexity condition, all of the clues in the story pointed to the guilt of one suspect. In the more complex conditions, some clues pointed to one suspect, and other clues pointed to a different suspect. Findings showed that individuals low in NFC liked the very low or moderately low complexity stories, whereas individuals high in NFC liked the more complex stories best.

Narratives featuring morally ambiguous characters are more complex than narratives featuring unambiguous characters because they offer inconsistent character cues. It is relatively easy to make judgments about a consistently good or bad character and to predict their future actions. Morally ambiguous characters, however, are more

complex and unpredictable. Their motivations and intentions are less certain, making it more difficult to make judgments and predictions. Perceptions of a morally ambiguous character must be constantly updated to deal with new and inconsistent information. For example, a reader may decide early on that a character is good based on a benevolent action. If the character continues to do good things, the initial impression of the character can remain intact. If, however, the character does something bad, the initial impression of the character will have to be revised. Therefore, morally ambiguous characters may require readers to think more than do narratives featuring purely good or bad characters. Because individuals high in NFC enjoy effortful thinking, it is predicted that they will particularly enjoy content that features morally ambiguous characters.

> *H11*: There will be a significant Need for Cognition X Character Type interaction effect on enjoyment, such that NFC and enjoyment will be more strongly positively related for narratives featuring morally ambiguous characters than for those featuring good and bad characters.

Summary of Present Study

In summary, it is predicted that the effect of morally ambiguous characters on enjoyment will be affected by affective dispositions, perceived realism, transportation, suspense, and individual differences. Specifically, disposition theory predicts that morally ambiguous characters will be liked more than purely bad characters, but less than purely good characters. An alternative hypothesis is proposed predicting that morally ambiguous characters will be liked more than either purely good or bad characters, and that this will lead to greater enjoyment of content featuring morally ambiguous characters. It is also hypothesized that morally ambiguous characters will be perceived to be more realistic,

and that realistic characters will be liked more than unrealistic characters. In addition, it is predicted that transportation and suspense will both mediate the effects of morally ambiguous characters on enjoyment, such that narratives featuring these characters will be more transporting, suspenseful, and enjoyable than other narratives. The proposed effects are illustrated in a schematic diagram (see Figure 1).

It is also hypothesized that need for cognition and tolerance of ambiguity will moderate the effects of morally ambiguous characters. Specifically, it is predicted that individuals with a high NFC or high AT will enjoy morally ambiguous characters more than individuals with a low NFC or low AT. Tolerance of ambiguity is also expected to moderate the effect of suspense on enjoyment, such that individuals with high AT will enjoy suspenseful narratives more than individuals with low AT.

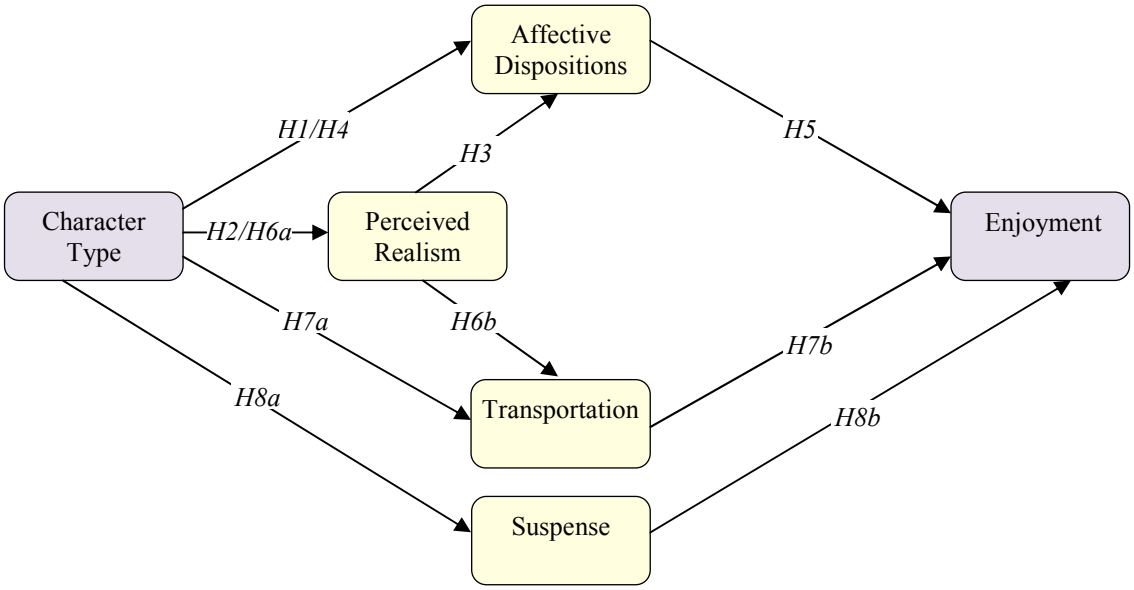

Figure 1. Schematic drawing illustrating the effects of character type on enjoyment.

Method

Participants

A total of 313 students participated in this study. Participants were recruited from a variety of communication courses at a large, Northeastern university and received extra credit for their participation. The sample was comprised of 65.8% females and 34.2% males, with ages ranging from 18 to 39 years (M = 20.04, SD = 1.79). The racial composition of the sample was 5.5% African American, 5.5% Asian, 4.8% Latino, .6% Native American, .3% Pacific Islander, 84.2% White, and 3.2% Other.

Design

Participants were asked to attend a lab session where they were randomly assigned to one of three conditions (good, bad, ambiguous) in a between-subjects post-test only experiment. Two narratives were written; the types of actions that the main characters performed in the narratives were manipulated to create three character conditions (see Table 1). In other words, each story was edited to create three conditions. Previous audience response studies have used narratives to evoke participant responses to mediated content (e.g., Green, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000). In addition, several studies have manipulated character behaviors (e.g., Collins & Zimmermann, 1975; Gollin, 1954, 1958; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977). Although most manipulations included only two behavioral conditions (i.e., good/pro-social and bad/anti-social), a few studies have included a neutral condition in which a character is shown either doing only neutral acts (e.g., Zillmann & Cantor, 1977) or behaving in both good and bad ways (e.g., Collins & Zimmermann, 1975; Gollin, 1954, 1958).

Table 1

Experimental Conditions

Story	Character Behavior		
	Good	Ambiguous	Bad
The Suspect	Good character in *The Suspect* ($N = 53$)	Ambiguous character in *The Suspect* ($N = 52$)	Bad character in *The Suspect* ($N = 52$)
Summit Fever	Good character in *Summit Fever* ($N = 52$)	Ambiguous character in *Summit Fever* ($N = 52$)	Bad character in *Summit Fever* ($N = 52$)

Procedure

Experimental sessions were conducted in student computer technology classrooms. Participants were escorted into the classroom and informed that they would be participating in a research study about media responses. After signing informed consent forms, participants answered a background questionnaire, which measured their need for cognition, tolerance of ambiguity, and demographic information. Once they had completed the background questionnaire, participants were handed one of the narratives to read. When they had finished reading the narrative, participants filled out a questionnaire measuring their perceptions of the main character, affective dispositions, perceived realism, transportation, suspense, and enjoyment of the story. Eight versions of the questionnaire were created to vary the order of the dependent variable measures. Participants were randomly assigned to answer one of the eight versions.

Stimulus Materials

Two short stories were created for this study. One of the stories, *The Suspect*, was edited from the story, *The Last Day,* by John Thorley (2008). The story is written in first-person and details a day in the life of a detective. It begins as the detective is returning

from a gruesome autopsy of a young girl. After he returns to his office, he begins preparing to interrogate the prime suspect in her murder, but he fears that the police do not have enough evidence to convict him. After the interrogation, the suspect falls ill, and the detective must decide whether to save him or to let him die. At the end of the story, it is revealed that the suspect did not murder the young girl. The descriptions of the detective and the actions he performs were manipulated to create the three conditions. In the "good" character condition, the detective is described as doing only good things: He wants to get justice for the young girl, follows the rules, and saves the life of the suspect. In the "bad" character condition, the detective is described as doing only bad things: He steals drugs from the crime scene, roughs up the suspect during the interrogation, and lets the suspect die. In the "morally ambiguous" character condition, the detective is described as doing both good and bad things: He steals drugs from the crime scene and roughs up the suspect during the interrogation, but he saves the suspect's life. The three conditions were edited so that they would be of near equal length ("good" = 2198 words, "bad" = 2211 words, "ambiguous" = 2201 words).

The second story, *Summit Fever*, is written in third-person and focuses on a mountain climber's attempted ascent of Mt. Everest. Craig, the main character, is climbing with two of his friends. The story begins with the friends eating lunch and preparing for the last stretch of the climb. After some time, one of Craig's friends falls behind, and Craig and the remaining friend must decide whether to wait for him or to proceed without him. Later, Craig and one of his friends encounter a disoriented climber whom they thought had died the previous day. Craig must decide whether to save this climber's life or to continue to the summit, which is only a half-mile away. As in the first

story, the descriptions and actions of the main character were manipulated to produce the three conditions. In the "good" character condition, Craig is described as doing only good things: He shares his food with his friends, waits for his friend when he falls behind, and saves the disoriented climber's life. In the "bad" character condition, Craig does not share his food, leaves his friend behind, and kills the disoriented climber by pushing him off the ridge. In the "ambiguous" character condition, Craig does not share his food and leaves his friend behind, but he saves the disoriented climber. The three conditions were edited so that they would be of near equal length ("good" = 1748 words, "bad" = 1737 words, "ambiguous" = 1740 words). See Appendix A for the complete text of each narrative and condition.

Pretest. A repeated measures within-subjects experiment was conducted to ensure that the manipulations were successful at creating the three character types. Three pretest conditions were created, each containing both stories. In each set, the character type remained consistent. In other words, each participant read two stories, and both stories featured either a good, bad, or ambiguous character. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions, and the story order was counterbalanced.

Sixty-two students participated in the pre-test of the stimulus materials ("good" N = 22, "bad" N = 20, "ambiguous" N = 20). The participants ranged in age from 19 to 22 years old (M = 20.39, SD = .92). The majority were White (95.1%), with the remainder of the participants indicating that they belonged to an ethnic minority group.

After signing an informed consent form, each participant was handed a packet that contained two stories and two questionnaires. After reading the first narrative in their packet, participants were instructed to answer a series of questions about the main

character's positive and negative attributes. They were then instructed to read the second narrative in their packets. Once they had finished reading the second narrative, they filled out the second questionnaire, which asked about the positive and negative attributes of the main character in the second story. At this time, they also filled out demographic information.

Items measuring the positive and negative attributes of the character were adapted from person perception and impression formation literature (Hoffner, 1996; Pfau & Mullen, 1995). Specifically, participants were asked to rate a character's actions on 10 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 7(strongly agree). Five of the items focused on the character's negative attributes (e.g., *The main character does some immoral things*; Cronbach's $\alpha = .99$), and five focused on the character's positive characteristics (e.g., *The main character has some positive attributes*; Cronbach's $\alpha = .98$). See Appendix B for complete pretest questionnaire. A character scoring high on both positive and negative attributes would be considered to be morally ambiguous. Characters that receive low scores on one type of attribute and high scores on another would be labeled as either good or bad.

In order to determine whether the perceptions of characters differed based on condition, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with condition entered as an independent variable, and positive and negative attribute scales as dependent variables.[1] The analysis revealed a significant main effect for condition, Wilk's $\lambda = .06$, $F(4, 116) = 87.37$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .75$. The univariate analyses for character's positive attributes, $F(2, 59) = 108.38$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .79$, and

[1] In the pretest analyses, Levene's test of equality of error variances was significant for some of the variables; however, because the cell sizes for the three conditions were relatively equal, no transformations were performed.

character's negative attributes, F (2, 59) = 165.15, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .85$, showed significant main effects for condition. Holm's sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons showed that all three character types significantly differed from each other in both positive and negative attributes. Good characters were rated as having the most positive attributes ($M = 6.43$, $SE = .20$), followed by ambiguous characters ($M = 5.71$, $SE = .21$), and bad characters ($M = 2.45$, $SE = .21$). Bad characters were rated as having the most negative attributes ($M = 6.83$, $SE = .20$), followed by ambiguous characters ($M = 5.52$, $SE = .20$), and good characters ($M = 1.92$, $SE = .19$) (see Table 2).

Table 2

Average Positive and Negative Character Attributes by Condition

		Condition		
		Good	Ambiguous	Bad
Positive Attributes	*M*	6.43_a	5.71_b	2.45_c
	SE	.20	.21	.21
Negative Attributes	*M*	1.92_a	5.52_b	6.83_c
	SE	.19	.20	.20

Positive attributes: F (2, 59) = 108.38, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .79$
Negative attributes: F (2, 59) = 165.15, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .85$

Note. Means with no subscript in common within a given row differ at $p < .05$ using Holm's sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons.

In addition, a multivariate analysis (MANOVA) was run to determine the effectiveness of the manipulation in each story. Condition was entered as an independent variable, and positive and negative scales for each story were included as dependent variables. The analysis revealed a significant main effect for condition, Wilk's $\lambda = .06$, F (8, 112) = 43.97, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .76$. For the narrative, *The Suspect*, the univariate analyses for character's positive attributes, F (2, 59) = 57.19, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .66$,

and character's negative attributes, F (2, 59) = 108.22, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .79$, showed significant main effects for condition. Holm's sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons showed that all three character types in *The Suspect* significantly differed from each other in negative attributes as expected. For positive attributes, the bad character type differed significantly from the good and ambiguous character types, but the good and ambiguous character types did not differ significantly (see Table 3).

Likewise, for the narrative, *Summit Fever*, the univariate analyses for character's positive attributes, F (2, 59) = 87.09, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .75$, and character's negative attributes, F (2, 59) = 134.57, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .82$, showed significant main effects for condition. Holm's sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons showed that all three character types in this narrative significantly differed from each other in both positive and negative attributes as expected (see Table 4).

Table 3

Average Positive and Negative Character Attributes by Condition for "The Suspect"

		Condition		
		Good	Ambiguous	Bad
Positive Attributes	*M*	6.35_a	5.73_a	2.80_b
	SE	.24	.25	.25
Negative Attributes	*M*	2.17_a	5.21_b	6.78_c
	SE	.22	.23	.23

Positive Attributes: F (2, 59) = 57.19, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .66$
Negative Attributes: F (2, 59) = 108.22, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .79$

Note. Means with no subscript in common within a given row differ at $p < .05$ using Holm's sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons.

Table 4

Average Positive and Negative Character Attributes by Condition for "Summit Fever"

		Condition		
		Good	Ambiguous	Bad
Positive Attributes	*M*	6.50_a	5.68_b	2.09_c
	SE	.24	.26	.26
Negative Attributes	*M*	1.66_a	5.82_b	6.87_c
	SE	.23	.25	.25

Positive Attributes: F (2, 59) = 87.09, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .75$
Negative Attributes: F (2, 59) = 134.57, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .82$

Note. Means with no subscript in common within a given row differ at $p < .05$ using Holm's sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons.

In order to further assess the effects of the particular stories, and conditions on character attribute perceptions, a 2 (Story: *The Suspect*, *Summit Fever*) X 2 (Attribute Type: positive, negative) X 3 (Condition: good, ambiguous, bad) mixed model repeated measures analysis of variance with story and attribute type as within-subjects factors was conducted. This analysis employed a multivariate approach using Wilk's criterion. In support of the previously mentioned findings, the analysis revealed a main effect for condition, F (2, 58) = 32.18, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .53$. Furthermore, there was a significant Condition X Attribute Type interaction, F (2, 58) = 197.50, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .87$. Table 5 reports the means and standard errors associated with this interaction. Good characters were perceived to have significantly more positive attributes than negative attributes. Conversely, bad characters were perceived to have significantly more negative attributes than positive ones. Ambiguous character, however, were perceived to have an equal amount of positive and negative attributes.

In addition, the analysis revealed no main effect for story, F (1, 58) = .93, p = .34, partial η^2 = .02, or attribute type, F (1, 58) = .26, p = .61, partial η^2 = .01. The analysis also yielded no significant Condition X Story interaction, F (2, 58) = .26, p = .77, partial η^2 = .01, or Story X Attribute Type interaction, F (1, 58) = .00, p = .96, partial η^2 = .00. These results indicate that perceptions of characters' morality were affected only by condition, and not by the particular story in which the characters appeared. Therefore, it was concluded that the stimulus manipulations in both narratives were successful at creating three distinct character types.

Table 5

Perceived Character Attributes: Condition X Attribute Type Interaction

Condition		Attribute Type	
		Positive	Negative
Good			
	M	6.40_a	1.93_b
	SE	.20	.20
Ambiguous			
	M	5.71_a	5.52_a
	SE	.21	.21
Bad			
	M	2.45_a	6.83_b
	SE	.21	.21

F (2, 58) = 197.50, p < .001, partial η^2 = .87

Note. Using Holm's sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons, within rows, means with no subscript in common differ at p < .05.

Individual Difference Measures

Tolerance of ambiguity. Researchers have used a variety of scales to measure ambiguity tolerance (see Furnham & Ribchester, 1995). The 16-item Intolerance of Ambiguity Scale developed and validated by Budner (1962) was used in this study

because of its moderate length and frequency of use in psychological research. The items were measured on 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 7(strongly agree). Eight items were reverse-coded so that higher values indicate higher tolerance of ambiguity and lower values indicate lower tolerance of ambiguity. Examples of items include: *Often the most interesting and stimulating people are those who don't mind being different and original; people who insist upon a yes or no answer just don't know how complicated things really are,* etc. A tolerance of ambiguity scale was created by averaging the ratings of the 16 items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .68$, $M = 4.61$, $SD = .61$).

Need for cognition. Individuals' need for cognition was measured with the shortened 18-item scale proposed by Cacioppo, Petty, and Kao (1984). The items were measured on 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 7(strongly agree). Nine of the items were reverse-coded so that higher values indicate a stronger need for cognition. Examples of items measuring need for cognition include: *I would prefer complex to simple problems; I find satisfaction in deliberating hard and for long hours*, etc. A need for cognition scale was created by averaging the ratings of the 18 items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$, $M = 4.48$, $SD = .81$). See Appendix C for complete background questionnaire.

Dependent Measures

Affective dispositions. Participants' affective dispositions toward characters are usually measured with one or two items that ask respondents to rate how much they like or dislike a certain character (e.g., Zillmann & Bryant, 1975; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977). Therefore, two 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 7(strongly agree) were used. The items stated: *I like the main character in the narrative*, and *I dislike the main character in the narrative* (reverse-coded). In order to increase the

validity of the scale, four additional items were added (e.g., *I would like to be friends with someone who is like the main character; the main character is fascinating*). Two items were reverse-coded so that higher values indicate more favorable attitudes toward characters. An affective dispositions scale was created by averaging the ratings of the six items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$, $M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.83$). See Appendix D for complete study questionnaire.

Perceived realism. Although various conceptualizations of perceived realism exist, this study uses the social realism dimension as defined by Busselle and Greenberg (2000). Specifically, the similarity of the characters to real-life individuals was tested using four 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 7(strongly agree). The items were adapted from those used by Shapiro and Chock (2003), and Potter (1986). One of the items was reverse-coded so that higher values indicate more realistic perceptions. Examples of items include: *The main character is like someone I know in real life; the character behaved just like people do in real life,* etc. A perceived realism scale was created by averaging the ratings of the four items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$, $M = 4.61$, $SD = 1.25$).

Transportation. The degree to which individuals are transported into the narrative was measured with 12 items adapted from Green and Brock (2000). The items were measured on 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 7(strongly agree). Examples of transportation items include: *I found myself thinking of ways the story could have turned out differently; while I was reading the story, I could easily picture the events in it taking place*, etc. Three items were reverse-coded so that higher values indicate more transportation. Three items (i.e., *While I was reading the story,*

activity going on in the room around me was on my mind (reverse-coded); *the events in the story have changed my life; the events in the story are relevant to my everyday life*) showed low levels of item-to-total correlations and were subsequently dropped from the scale. A transportation scale was created by averaging the ratings of the nine remaining items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$, $M = 4.94$, $SD = .94$).

Suspense. Suspense was measured on seven 7-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 7(strongly agree) adapted from Nabi et al. (2006), Vorderer, Knobloch, and Schramm (2001), and Knobloch, Patzig, Mende, and Hastall (2004). Two of the items were reverse-coded so that higher values indicate greater suspense. Examples of items measuring suspense included: *While reading the story, I tried to guess what would happen next; the story was thrilling*, etc. One item (i.e., *While reading the story, I knew what the main character was going to do next* (reverse-coded)) showed a low level of item-to-total correlation and was subsequently dropped from the scale. A suspense scale was created by averaging the ratings of the six remaining items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$, $M = 4.81$, $SD = 1.13$).

Enjoyment. Media researchers have recently debated the conceptualization and operationalization of enjoyment (see Nabi & Krcmar, 2004; Oliver & Nabi, 2004; Vorderer, Klimmt, & Ritterfeld, 2004). Nabi and Krcmar (2004) argued that enjoyment should be conceptualized as an attitude, and as such, that its measurement should include affective, cognitive, and behavioral components. Krcmar and Renfro (2005) developed and tested a scale of enjoyment that included these three components. The scale demonstrated strong convergent, discriminant, and predictive validity, as well as high inter-item reliability. Therefore, in this study, the affective, cognitive and behavioral

components of enjoyment were measured with 20 items adapted from items used in previously reported studies (Krcmar & Renfro, 2005; Raney, 2002; Raney & Bryant, 2002). The items were measured on 7-point Likert-type scales that ranged from 1(strongly disagree) to 7(strongly agree). Three items were reverse-coded so that higher values indicated greater enjoyment. Examples of items include: *This story made me think; I felt good reading this story*, etc.

Because enjoyment is a multidimensional concept, an exploratory factor analysis using principal components extraction and varimax rotation was employed to examine the factor structure of the 20 enjoyment items. The analysis revealed cross-loadings for four items: *I tried to predict what was going to happen next; I would have liked to be able to do other things while I read this story (reverse-coded); I would like to read other stories that are similar to this one;* and *the story was exciting*. Consequently, these variables were dropped. The final subsequent analysis revealed two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 that accounted for 59.08% of the variance. Table 6 reports the variables and factor loadings for these two factors.

The first factor was labeled "Affective" and included items measuring affective components of enjoyment, such as happiness, enjoyment, and good feeling while reading the story. The second factor labeled "Cognitive" included items measuring the cognitive aspects of enjoyment, such as wanting to analyze or talk to others about the story. Two scales were created by averaging the ratings of the variables that represented these two factors. The scales showed high levels of reliability (Affective, Cronbach's α =.91, M = 4.34, SD = 1.20; Cognitive, Cronbach's α = .87, M = 4.17, SD = 1.15).

Table 6

Factor Loadings for Enjoyment Using Principal Components and Varimax Rotation

	Affective	Cognitive
I had a good time reading this story.	**.848**	.270
I liked reading this story.	**.819**	.357
I enjoyed reading this story.	**.796**	.389
I felt good reading this story.	**.791**	.063
It made me happy to read this story.	**.787**	.060
I did not enjoy the subject matter of this story (reverse-coded)	**.669**	.089
The story was entertaining.	**.643**	.415
I would not recommend this story to others (reverse-coded)	**.559**	.337
I would like to analyze this story.	.062	**.802**
I would like to talk about this story with other people.	.172	**.761**
I would like to seek out additional information about this story.	.218	**.729**
I really thought about the story when I read it.	.155	**.722**
I would hate to be distracted while reading this story.	.172	**.662**
I would like to reread this story.	.182	**.646**
I really got involved in the plot.	.487	**.631**
This story made me think.	.279	**.591**
Eigenvalue	2.74	1.69
Proportion of variance	30.46	18.78

Results

Hypotheses Tests

To test the proposed effects of character type on the dependent variables of affective disposition, perceived realism, and enjoyment, a series of factorial analyses of variance (ANOVA) were employed. To test the relationships among the dependent variables, as well as the effects of tolerance of ambiguity and need for cognition, a series of simple and multiple linear regressions were performed. In addition, path analyses were employed to test for mediation and to test the full proposed model. Table 7 displays the descriptive statistics for the dependent and mediating variables.

Table 7

Descriptive Statistics for Dependent Variables

Variables	M	SD	Skewness (*SE* = .14)	Kurtosis (*SE* = .28)
Affective dispositions scale	4.05	1.83	-.04	-1.32
Perceived realism scale	4.61	1.25	-.48	-.22
Transportation scale	4.94	.94	-.82	1.22
Enjoyment affective scale	4.34	1.20	-.55	.16
Enjoyment cognitive scale	4.17	1.15	-.22	-.27
Suspense scale	4.81	1.13	-.92	1.03
Need for cognition scale	4.48	.81	-.47	.43
Tolerance of ambiguity scale	4.61	.61	.02	.21

In accordance with disposition theory, H1 predicted that good characters would be liked the most, bad characters would be liked the least, and that liking of morally ambiguous characters would fall somewhere in between good and bad characters.

Conversely, H4 predicted that morally ambiguous characters would be liked the most, followed by good characters; bad characters would be liked the least. A 2 (Story) X 3 (Condition) analysis of variance was conducted to examine affective dispositions toward characters.[2] This analysis revealed no main effect for story, F (1, 306) = 1.67, p = .20, partial η^2 = .01. However, a main effect for condition was revealed, F (2, 306) = 224.24, p < .001, partial η^2 = .59. Holm's sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons showed that affective dispositions of all three characters differed significantly from each other. Specifically, good characters were liked the most (M = 5.66, SE = .11), followed by ambiguous characters (M = 4.22, SE = .12); bad characters were liked the least (M = 2.25, SE = .12). Therefore H1 was supported. In addition, a significant Condition X Story interaction was obtained, F (2, 306) = 3.80, p < .05, partial η^2 = .02 (see Figure 2). Table 8 shows the means associated with this interaction, and illustrates that the bad character in *Summit Fever* was liked less than the bad character in *The Suspect*, but the general pattern of liking remained consistent.

[2] Levene's test of equality of error variances was significant at p < .001; however, because cell sizes for the three conditions were relatively equal, and Fmax < 10, no transformations were performed.

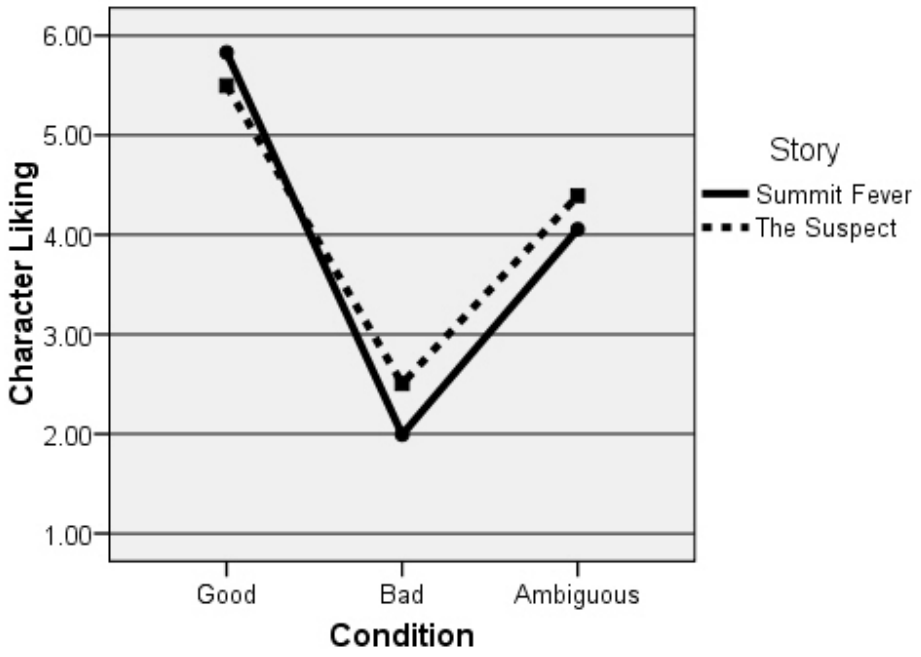

Figure 2. Condition X Story interaction on character liking.

Table 8

Affective Dispositions Toward Characters: Condition X Story Interaction

		Condition		
		Good	Ambiguous	Bad
The Suspect	*M*	5.50_{aA}	4.39_{bA}	2.51_{cA}
	SE	.16	.16	.16
Summit Fever	*M*	5.83_{aA}	4.06_{bA}	1.99_{cB}
	SE	.16	.16	.16

F (2, 306) = 3.80, $p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$.

Note. Using Holm's sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons, within rows, means with no lowercase subscript in common differ at $p < .05$; within columns, means with no uppercase subscript in common differ at $p < .05$.

H2 predicted that morally ambiguous characters would be perceived to be more realistic than either good or bad characters. A 2 (Story) X 3 (Condition) analysis of variance was conducted to examine perceived realism of characters. This analysis

revealed a main effect for story, F (1, 307) = 14.63, p < .001, partial η^2 = .05, with the main character in *Summit Fever* (M = 4.85, SE = .09) being perceived as more realistic than the main character in *The Suspect* (M = 4.37, SE = .09). A main effect for condition was also revealed, F (2, 307) = 30.47, p < .001, partial η^2 = .17. Holm's sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons showed that this main effect occurred because good (M = 5.07, SE = .11) and ambiguous characters (M = 4.82, SE = .11) were perceived to be significantly more realistic than bad characters (M = 3.94, SE = .11). Therefore, H2 was partially supported in that ambiguous characters were perceived to be more realistic than bad characters, but equally as realistic as good characters. A significant Condition X Story interaction was also obtained, F (2, 307) = 9.97, p < .001, partial η^2 = .06. Table 9 shows the means associated with this interaction, and illustrates that the good character in *The Suspect* was perceived to be more realistic than the ambiguous character in *The Suspect*, but the ambiguous character in *Summit Fever* was perceived to be equally as realistic as the good character in *Summit Fever*.

Table 9

Perceived Realism of Characters: Condition X Story Interaction

		Condition		
		Good	Ambiguous	Bad
The Suspect	*M*	5.12_{aA}	4.66_{bB}	3.32_{cA}
	SE	.15	.15	.15
Summit Fever	*M*	5.02_{aA}	4.97_{aA}	4.55_{bA}
	SE	.15	.15	.15

F (2, 307) = 9.97, p < .001, partial η^2 = .06

Note. Using Holm's sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons, within rows, means with no lowercase subscript in common differ at p < .05; within columns, means with no uppercase subscript in common differ at p < .05.

H3 predicted that perceived realism would be positively related to favorable affective dispositions. In other words, it was predicted that higher perceptions of realism would be associated with greater character liking, and conversely, that lower perceptions of realism would be associated with less character liking. To test this hypothesis, a simple linear regression analysis was performed by regressing affective dispositions on perceived realism. The analysis showed that characters' perceived realism significantly predicted favorable affective dispositions ($\beta = .45$, $t = 8.85$, $p < .001$). To determine if story moderated this relationship, hierarchical multiple regression was employed by regressing affective dispositions on story and perceived realism. Both the affective dispositions and perceived realism scales were mean-centered for this analysis. The analysis revealed no significant Story X Perceived Realism interaction, F change (1, 308) = 3.52, $p = .06$, R^2 change = .01; however, because this interaction was approaching significance, two additional simple linear regressions were performed. The results indicated that although the positive relationship between perceived realism and favorable affective dispositions was stronger for *The Suspect* ($\beta = .63$, $t = 10.08$, $p < .001$) than for *Summit Fever* ($\beta = .34$, $t = 4.47$, $p < .001$), the direction of the relationship remained the same for both stories.

To determine if condition moderated this relationship, hierarchical multiple regression was employed by regressing affective dispositions on perceived realism, and two dummy coded condition variables, "good character" and "bad character." Ambiguous characters were thus the reference category for this analysis. The analysis revealed a significant interaction effect, F change (2, 306) = 7.59, $p < .001$, R^2 change = .02. Specifically, there was a significant Bad Condition X Perceived Realism interaction ($\beta =$

-.13, t = -2.24, p < .05), but no significant Good Condition X Perceived Realism interaction (β = .08, t = 1.54, p = .12). Three additional simple linear regressions were performed to examine the significant interaction. The results indicated that perceived realism was positively associated with favorable affective dispositions in the good (β = .49, t = 5.75, p < .001) and ambiguous conditions (β = .27, t = 2.81, p < .01), but not in the bad conditions (β = .04, t = .38, p = .71). Therefore the third hypothesis was partially supported in that perceived realism was positively associated with favorable affective dispositions in good and ambiguous conditions, but not in bad conditions.

H5 predicted that favorable affective dispositions would be positively related to enjoyment. In other words, it was predicted that more favorable affective dispositions would be associated with greater enjoyment, and conversely, that less favorable affective dispositions would be associated with less enjoyment. Because the exploratory factor analysis revealed that enjoyment had two main components (i.e., cognitive and affective), two simple linear regressions were performed to test this hypothesis. In the first regression, the cognitive enjoyment scale was regressed on affective dispositions; in the second analysis, the affective enjoyment scale was regressed on affective dispositions. The first analysis showed that favorable affective dispositions significantly predicted the cognitive component of enjoyment (β = .13, t = 2.37, p < .05). Likewise, the second analysis showed that favorable affective dispositions significantly predicted the affective component of enjoyment (β = .39, t = 7.54, p < .001). Fisher's r-to-z transformations were conducted to determine whether the correlations between favorable affective dispositions and the two types of enjoyment differed significantly (see Cohen & Cohen, 1983). The analysis revealed that the two correlations differed significantly, t(310) =

5.37, $p < .001$, indicating that favorable affective dispositions more strongly predicted affective rather than cognitive enjoyment.

To determine if story moderated these relationships, two hierarchical multiple regressions were employed. In the first analysis, the affective component of enjoyment was regressed on story and affective dispositions; in the second analysis, the cognitive component of enjoyment was regressed on story and affective dispositions. The affective dispositions and enjoyment scales were mean-centered for these analyses. The first analysis revealed no significant Story X Affective Dispositions interaction on affective aspects of enjoyment, F change (1, 308) = .14, $p = .71$, R^2 change = .00, indicating that the positive relationship between favorable affective dispositions and affective enjoyment did not differ between stories. However, the second analyses revealed a significant Story X Affective Dispositions interaction on cognitive aspects of enjoyment, F change (1, 308) = 4.12, $p < .05$, R^2 change = .01. This interaction occurred because favorable affective dispositions significantly predicted cognitive enjoyment of *The Suspect* ($\beta = .24$, $t = 3.12$, $p < .01$), but did not significantly predict cognitive enjoyment of *Summit Fever* ($\beta = .04$, $t = .49$, $p = .62$).

To determine if condition moderated this relationship, two hierarchical multiple regressions were employed. In the first analysis, affective enjoyment was regressed on affective dispositions, and two dummy coded condition variables, "good character" and "bad character." In the second analysis, cognitive enjoyment was regressed on affective dispositions, and the two dummy coded condition variables. The first analysis revealed no significant Condition X Affective Dispositions interactions on affective enjoyment, F change (2, 306) = 2.01, $p = .14$, R^2 change = .01. Likewise, the second analysis revealed

no significant Condition X Affective Dispositions interactions on cognitive enjoyment, F change (2, 306) = 2.32, p = .10, R^2 change = .01. Therefore, the fifth hypothesis was partially supported in that favorable affective dispositions were positively related to enjoyment, except for the story *Summit Fever*, in which favorable affective dispositions did not predict cognitive aspects of enjoyment.

H6 predicted that perceived realism would mediate the effect of character type on transportation. To test this hypothesis, a path analysis was conducted in which condition was dummy coded with the ambiguous condition as the reference category. In this analysis, the two dummy coded variables, "good character" and "bad character," were treated as exogenous, and transportation was employed as the final variable in the path.[3] Figure 3 contains the model in this analysis, with all paths reporting standardized coefficients. This model illustrates that character type affected transportation, though the paths from these variables were indirect. Specifically, bad characters were associated with less perceived realism than were ambiguous characters, (β = -.33, p < .001), whereas good characters and ambiguous characters were not significantly different in terms of perceived realism (β = .10, p = .12). Furthermore, perceived realism was positively associated with transportation (β = .27, p < .001). Bootstrapping of the indirect effects of condition on transportation revealed significant indirect effects for both bad characters (β = -.09, p < .001) and good characters (β = .03, p < .05) compared to ambiguous characters. In other words, bad characters were perceived to be less realistic than ambiguous characters, which caused the narratives featuring bad characters to be less transporting; conversely, narratives featuring good characters were more transporting than were narratives featuring ambiguous characters. Therefore H6 was partially

[3] In this and all subsequent path analyses, the two condition variables were allowed to correlate.

supported in that ambiguous characters were perceived to be more realistic than bad characters (H6a) and this led to greater transportation (H6b); however, ambiguous characters were less transporting than good characters. Furthermore, there was no significant direct effect between condition and transportation for any character type.

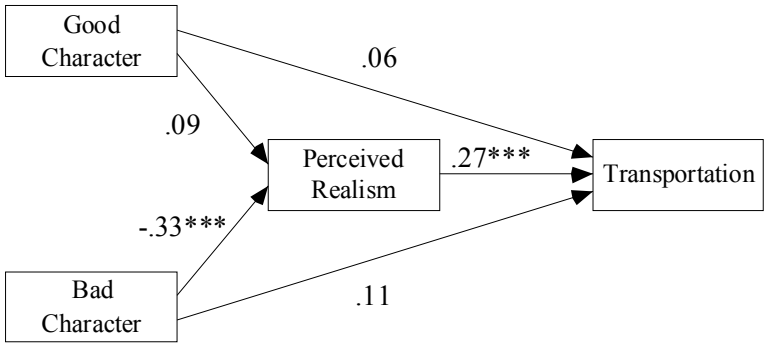

Figure 3. Mediation analysis for character type, realism, and transportation.

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

H7 predicted that transportation would mediate the effect of character type on enjoyment. First, a preliminary analysis was performed to examine the effect of character type on enjoyment. A 2 (Enjoyment: affective, cognitive) X 2 (Story) X 3 (Condition) mixed model repeated measures analysis of variance with enjoyment as a within-subjects factor was conducted. This analysis employed a multivariate approach using Wilk's criterion. The analysis revealed a main effect for enjoyment, F (1, 307) = 8.58, $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. Furthermore, there was a significant Story X Enjoyment interaction, F (1, 307) = 25.45, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .08$, because *Summit Fever* was rated higher on affective enjoyment ($M = 4.52$, $SE = .09$) than cognitive enjoyment ($M = 4.07$, $SE = .09$), whereas *The Suspect* was rated similarly high on affective ($M = 4.16$, $SE = .09$) and cognitive enjoyment ($M = 4.28$, $SE = .09$). The analysis also revealed a significant

Condition X Enjoyment interaction, F (2, 307) = 14.46, p < .001, partial η^2 = .09. Table 10 reports the means and standard errors associated with this interaction. Narratives featuring good and ambiguous characters were more affectively enjoyed than were narratives featuring bad characters, and narratives featuring bad characters were more cognitively rather than affectively enjoyed (see Figure 4).

Table 10

Affective and Cognitive Enjoyment by Condition

		Condition		
		Good	Ambiguous	Bad
Affective Enjoyment	*M*	4.53_{aA}	4.45_{aA}	4.05_{bB}
	SE	.12	.12	.12
Cognitive Enjoyment	*M*	4.16_{aB}	4.05_{aB}	4.32_{aA}
	SE	.11	.11	.11

F (2, 307) = 5.05, p < .01, partial η^2 = .03

Note. Using Holm's sequential bonferroni post hoc comparisons, within rows, means with no lowercase subscript in common differ at p < .05; within columns, means with no uppercase subscript in common differ at p < .05.

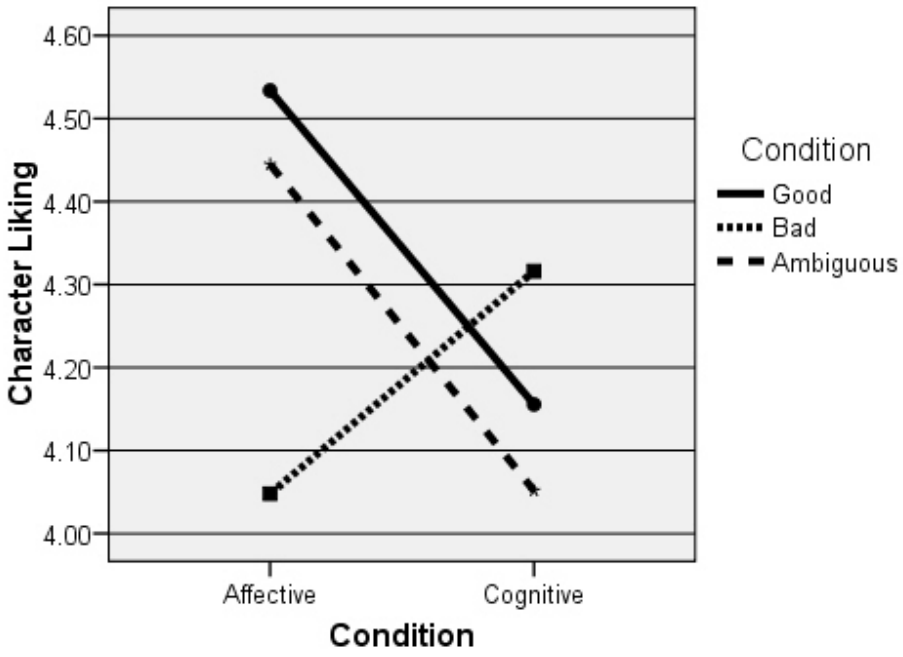

Figure 4. Affective and cognitive enjoyment by condition.

To determine if transportation mediated the relationship between character type and enjoyment, a path analysis was conducted. In this analysis, the two dummy coded variables, "good character" and "bad character," were treated as exogenous, and two enjoyment variables, affective and cognitive, were employed as the final variables in the path.[4] Figure 5 contains the model in this analysis, with all paths reporting standardized coefficients. This analysis revealed that character type did not significantly affect either transportation or cognitive enjoyment. Specifically, ambiguous characters did not differ significantly from bad characters (β = .02, p = .78) or from good characters (β = .08, p = .21) in terms of transportation. Furthermore, good characters did not differ significantly from ambiguous characters in terms of affective (β = -.01, p = .87) or cognitive enjoyment (β = -.01, p = .87). However, compared to ambiguous characters, bad

[4] In this and all subsequent path analyses, the error terms for the two enjoyment factors were allowed to correlate.

characters were significantly less affectively enjoyed (β = -.17, p < .01), but they were equally as cognitively enjoyed (β = .10, p = .06). In addition, transportation was positively associated with both affective (β = .53, p < .001) and cognitive enjoyment (β = .63, p < .001). Fisher's r-to-z transformations were conducted to determine whether the correlations between transportation and the two types of enjoyment differed significantly (see Cohen & Cohen, 1983). The analysis revealed that the two correlations differed significantly, $t(310) = 2.34$, p < .05, indicating that transportation more strongly predicted cognitive rather than affective enjoyment. Overall, H7 was not supported because transportation did not mediate the relationship between character type and enjoyment. Specifically, H7a was not supported because character type did not directly affect transportation; however, H7b was supported in that transportation significantly predicted both affective and cognitive enjoyment.

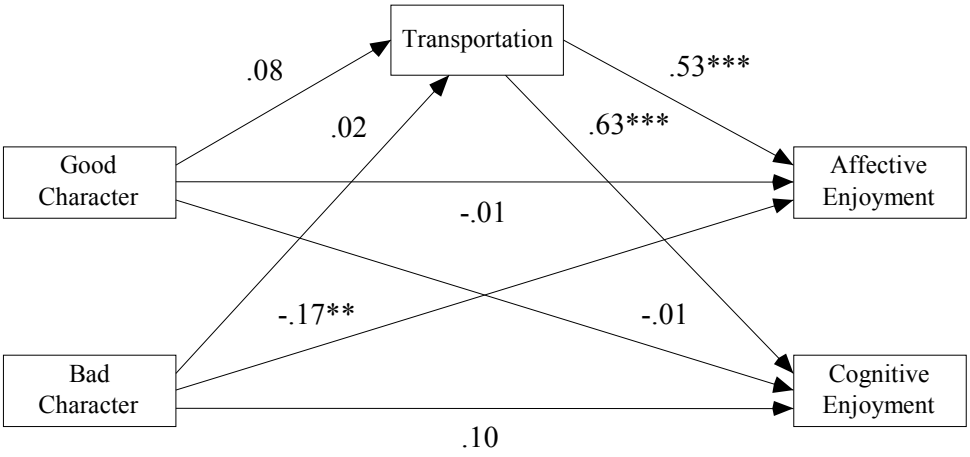

Figure 5. Mediation analysis for character type, transportation, and enjoyment.

Note. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

H8 predicted that suspense would mediate the effect of character type on enjoyment. To test this hypothesis a path analysis was conducted in which the two dummy coded variables, "good character" and "bad character," were treated as exogenous, and two enjoyment variables, affective and cognitive, were employed as the final variables in the path. Figure 6 contains the model in this analysis, with all paths reporting standardized coefficients. This model illustrates that character type did not significantly affect suspense. Specifically, ambiguous characters did not significantly differ from either bad characters ($\beta = .02$, $p = .80$) or good characters ($\beta = -.06$, $p = .40$) in terms of suspense. However, suspense was positively associated with both affective ($\beta = .64$, $p < .001$) and cognitive enjoyment ($\beta = .71$, $p < .001$). Fisher's r-to-z transformations were employed to determine whether the correlations between suspense and the two types of enjoyment differed significantly (see Cohen & Cohen, 1983). The analysis revealed that the two correlations differed significantly, $t(310) = 2.19$, $p < .05$, indicating that suspense more strongly predicted cognitive rather than affective enjoyment. Overall, H8 was not supported. Specifically, H8a was not supported because character type did not directly affect suspense; however, H8b was supported in that suspense significantly predicted both affective and cognitive enjoyment.

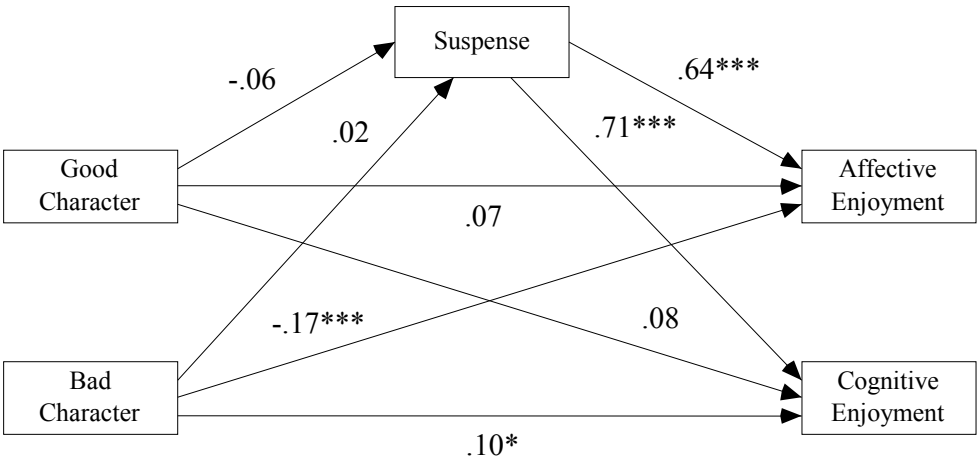

Figure 6. Mediation analysis for character type, suspense, and enjoyment.

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$

H9a predicted that individuals' ambiguity tolerance (AT) would moderate the effect of character type on enjoyment, such that individuals with higher AT would enjoy narratives featuring morally ambiguous characters more than individuals with lower AT. Conversely, H9b predicted that individuals with lower AT would enjoy narratives featuring good and bad characters more than individuals with higher AT. Two hierarchical multiple linear regressions were conducted to test these hypotheses. In the first analysis, cognitive enjoyment was regressed on ambiguity tolerance, and two dummy coded condition variables, "good character" and "bad character." In the second analysis, affective enjoyment was regressed on these variables. The enjoyment and ambiguity tolerance scales were mean-centered for these analyses. The first analysis revealed no significant Condition X Ambiguity Tolerance interactions on cognitive enjoyment, F change (2, 305) = .88, $p = .42$, R^2 change = .01, but the main effect of AT on cognitive enjoyment was significant ($\beta = .28$, $t = 5.12$, $p < .001$). The second analysis likewise revealed no significant Condition X Ambiguity Tolerance interactions on

affective enjoyment, F change (2, 305) = 1.91, p = .15, R^2 change = .01. However, because this interaction effect was approaching significance, three additional simple linear regressions were conducted. The analyses revealed that ambiguity tolerance and affective enjoyment were significantly positively associated in the ambiguous (β = .30, t = 3.18, p < .01) and good conditions (β = .27, t = 2.80, p < .01), but not in the bad conditions (β = .14, t = 1.37, p = .17). Overall, H9a was supported in that AT was positively associated with enjoyment in the ambiguous conditions. However, H9b was not supported because AT was positively associated with cognitive enjoyment in all conditions. Likewise, narratives featuring good characters were affectively enjoyed more by individuals with higher rather than lower AT.

H10 predicted a significant Ambiguity Tolerance X Suspense interaction effect on enjoyment, such that perceived suspense and enjoyment would be positively related for individuals scoring higher on AT, and negatively related for those scoring lower on AT. A series of hierarchical multiple regressions were conducted to test this hypothesis. First the affective component of enjoyment was regressed on ambiguity tolerance and suspense, and second the cognitive component of enjoyment was regressed on these variables. The analyses revealed no significant Ambiguity Tolerance X Suspense interaction on affective enjoyment, F change (1, 307) = .00, p = .95, R^2 change = .00, or on cognitive enjoyment, F change (1, 307) = .07, p = .79, R^2 change = .00. Therefore, H10 was not supported.

H11 predicted that need for cognition (NFC) and enjoyment will be more strongly positively related for narratives featuring morally ambiguous characters than for those featuring good and bad characters. To test this hypothesis, a series of hierarchical

multiple regressions were conducted. In the first analysis, the affective component of enjoyment was regressed on need for cognition, and two dummy coded condition variables, "good character" and "bad character." In the second analysis, the cognitive component of enjoyment was regressed on these variables. Both the need for cognition and enjoyment scales were mean-centered for these analyses. The analyses revealed no significant Need for Cognition X Character Type interactions on affective enjoyment, F change (2, 305) = 1.00, p = .37, R^2 change = .01, or on cognitive enjoyment, F change (2, 305) = 2.83, p = .06, R^2 change = .02. However, because the interaction effect on cognitive enjoyment was approaching significance, three additional simple linear regressions were performed. The analyses revealed that NFC significantly predicted cognitive enjoyment in the ambiguous (β = .36, t = 3.83, p < .001) and good conditions (β = .40, t = 4.36, p < .001), but not in the bad conditions (β = .08, t = .76, p = .45). Therefore, H11 was partially supported in that NFC more strongly predicted cognitive enjoyment in the ambiguous conditions than in the bad conditions; however, NFC also strongly predicted cognitive enjoyment in the good conditions.

Supplemental Analyses

A series of supplemental analyses were conducted to inform the findings of the hypotheses tests. Bivariate correlations were performed to determine the interrelationships among the dependent variables (see Table 11). Results indicate that affective dispositions, perceived realism, transportation, suspense, affective enjoyment, and cognitive enjoyment were all strongly correlated. Although all variables were positively related to enjoyment of the narrative, suspense and transportation had the strongest association with enjoyment.

Table 11

Correlations among Dependent Variables

	AD *N* = 312	PR *N* = 313	T *N* = 313	S *N* = 313	AE *N* = 313	CE *N* = 313
Affective Dispositions (AD)	--	.45**	.21**	.14*	.39**	.13*
Perceived Realism (PR)		--	.25**	.27**	.35**	.21**
Transportation (T)			--	.66**	.53**	.63**
Suspense (S)				--	.63**	.71**
Affective Enjoyment (AE)					--	.57**
Cognitive Enjoyment (CE)						--

Note. Correlations are indicated as significant at *$p < .05$, and **$p < .01$.

To further explore the effects of character type on the dependent variables, a path analysis was run with two dummy coded variables, "good character" and "bad character," treated as exogenous variables. Affective and cognitive enjoyment were the final variables in the path. The initial model included paths of all hypothesized relationships. In order to improve the fit of the final model, only those paths that were significant at $p < .05$ were kept (cf. Oliver, Kalyanaraman, Mahood, & Ramasubramanian, 2007; Segrin & Nabi, 2002). In addition, paths between transportation and suspense, affective dispositions and suspense, and perceived realism and suspense were added. Although no predictions were made about the relationship of transportation and suspense in this study, it is probable that immersion into a narrative increases feelings of suspense (e.g., Green, 2002; Green & Brock, 2000). Likewise, transportation has been found to be positively associated with character liking (Green & Brock, 2000); although researchers suggest that transportation leads to more positive evaluations of characters, it is also possible that narratives featuring liked characters are more transporting than narratives featuring

disliked characters. In addition, it is possible that more realistic characters evoke more suspense than do less realistic characters. Therefore, although no hypotheses predicted the relationships of these variables, prior research suggests these relationships may exist.

Figure 7 contains the final model in this analysis, with all paths reporting standardized coefficients. The chi-square for the model was significant, $\chi^2 = 21.96$, $df = 11$, $p < .05$. However, this test is known to be sensitive to large sample sizes. As a result, the χ^2/df ratio, NFI, and RMSEA were used to make judgments about model fit. The overall pattern of these indices suggests an acceptable fit, χ^2/df ratio = 2.00; NFI = .98; RMSEA = .06 (Arbuckle, 1996; Bentler & Bonett, 1980; Browne & Cudeck, 1993; Marsh & Hocevar, 1985). This model illustrates that good characters evoked more favorable affective dispositions ($\beta = .36$, $p < .001$), but less suspense ($\beta = -.15$, $p < .001$) than ambiguous characters. Favorable affective dispositions were, in turn, positively associated with affective enjoyment ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$) and transportation ($\beta = .30$, $p < .001$). Moreover, transportation was positively associated with suspense ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$) and enjoyment (affective, $\beta = .14$, $p < .01$; cognitive, $\beta = .28$, $p < .001$), and suspense was positively associated with enjoyment (affective, $\beta = .50$, $p < .001$; cognitive, $\beta = .52$, $p < .001$). Bootstrapping of the indirect effects of condition on the dependent variables revealed significant positive indirect effects of good characters on transportation ($\beta = .04$, $p < .01$), suspense ($\beta = .03$, $p < .01$), and affective enjoyment ($\beta = .01$, $p < .05$) compared to ambiguous characters. Therefore, good characters were more liked than ambiguous characters, and this led to greater transportation, suspense, and affective enjoyment. They were not, however, significantly different from ambiguous

characters in terms of perceived realism or cognitive enjoyment. Furthermore, good characters were less directly suspenseful than ambiguous characters.

In contrast, bad characters evoked less favorable affective dispositions (β = -.45, p < .001) and were perceived to be less realistic (β = -.38, p < .001) than ambiguous characters, but they were more transporting (β = .27, p < .001) than ambiguous characters. Bootstrapping of the indirect effects of condition on the dependent variables revealed significant negative indirect effects of bad characters on favorable affective dispositions (β = -.07, p < .001), transportation (β = -.24, p < .001), and affective enjoyment (β = -.17, p < .001) compared to ambiguous characters. The indirect effect of bad characters on cognitive enjoyment was not significant (β = -.01, p = .77). Therefore, bad characters were perceived to be less realistic and were less liked than ambiguous characters, and this led to less transportation and affective enjoyment. However, bad characters were more directly transporting than ambiguous characters, and they were equally as cognitively enjoyed as ambiguous characters.

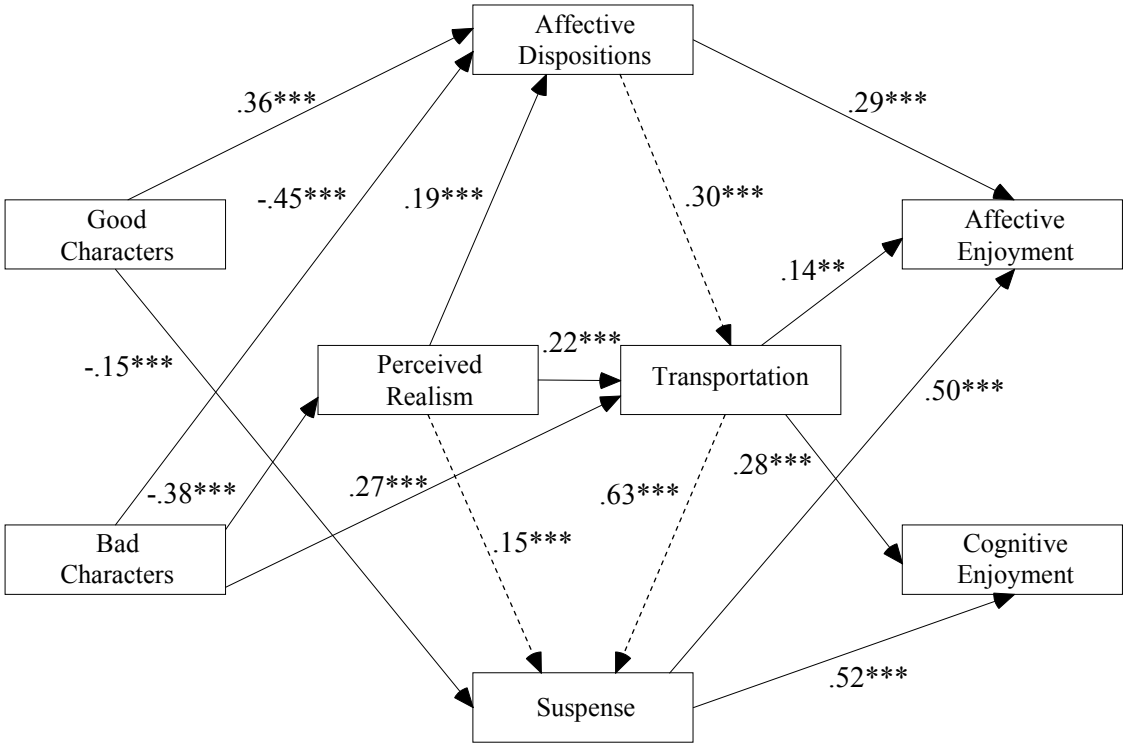

Figure 7. Path model of effects of character type on dependent variables.

Note 1. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$
Note 2. Solid lines represent hypothesized relationships. Dashed lines represent significant unpredicted relationships.

Summary

In general, the results indicate that good, ambiguous, and bad characters elicited different responses from individuals. Specifically, good characters were liked the most, followed by ambiguous characters; bad characters were liked the least. Character liking, in turn, affected enjoyment, such that narratives featuring liked characters were enjoyed more than were narratives featuring less liked characters. In addition, ambiguous and good characters were perceived to be more realistic than bad characters, and more realistic characters were liked more than unrealistic ones. Perceived realism also led to more transportation, which was positively associated with enjoyment. The individual difference factors of need for cognition and ambiguity tolerance were both positively

associated with enjoyment in the good and ambiguous character conditions; however, in the bad character conditions, need for cognition was not significantly associated with cognitive enjoyment, and ambiguity tolerance was not positively associated with affective enjoyment.

Moreover, the results indicate that the three character types follow different paths to enjoyment. Specifically, individuals form favorable affective dispositions toward good characters, and this leads to more affective enjoyment. In contrast, individuals form less favorable affective dispositions toward bad characters and perceive them to be unrealistic; this leads to less affective enjoyment. However, bad characters are equally as transporting, suspenseful, and cognitively enjoyed as good and ambiguous characters. Ambiguous characters, on the other hand, are more liked and more realistic than bad characters, which also makes them more affectively enjoyable. In addition, even though ambiguous characters are less liked than good characters, they are more directly suspenseful and ultimately equally as enjoyable as good characters.

Discussion

The present study examined responses to three different character types (i.e., purely good, purely bad, and morally ambiguous). Much research has looked at responses to either purely bad or purely good characters, but few studies have examined the effects of morally ambiguous characters even though these types of characters are prevalent in entertainment content. The popularity of these characters and the lack of research dealing with responses to these characters motivated the examination of the process by which ambiguous characters evoke enjoyment as compared to unambiguous characters. In general, the results of this study indicate that good, bad, and ambiguous characters may each be appealing for different reasons. Furthermore, although disposition theory accurately predicts affective enjoyment for good and bad characters, other theories may more adequately explain cognitive enjoyment, and the enjoyment of morally ambiguous characters.

As predicted by affective disposition theory, the results indicate that good characters were liked the most followed by ambiguous characters, whereas bad characters were liked the least. These results support Zillmann's (2000) hypothesis that individuals monitor the morality of characters' actions and form attitudes based on their judgments of these actions. In other words, a character that only performs actions that are perceived to be moral or good is liked more than a character that performs some actions that are perceived to be good and some actions that are perceived to be bad. There was no indication that purely good characters were perceived to be "too good" or irritating as predicted by some researchers (e.g., Aronson, 1969; Hoorn & Konijn, 2003). This result may be explained by the fact that in the present study, individuals read a relatively short,

three- or four-page narrative, in which the main characters were described doing things in specific situations (i.e., performing detective work, or climbing a mountain). It is possible that individuals form more negative affective dispositions toward purely good characters when reading longer narratives or when viewing serialized television shows, books, and movies, in which they are exposed to characters for longer periods of time and in more diverse situations. For example, characters that act in moral ways in particular situations, such as while doing their jobs, may be perceived to be really good at their jobs, and therefore be liked; however, characters that behave in moral ways in many different types of situations may start to get irritating and, as a result, be liked less. More research needs to be conducted to examine the influence of situational and other factors on affective dispositions. Nonetheless, the results of this study indicate that in shorter narratives, individuals form the most favorable affective dispositions toward purely good characters.

Purely good characters were also perceived to be more realistic than bad characters, but they were equally as realistic as morally ambiguous characters. It was predicted that morally ambiguous characters would be perceived to be more realistic than either good or bad characters. This prediction was made because most people do both good and bad things, and individuals evaluate the realness of characters by assessing the plausibility (Hall, 2003) and typicality (Shapiro & Chock, 2003) of their actions and overall behavior. Supporting this reasoning, ambiguous characters were perceived to be more realistic than bad characters. However, good characters were perceived to be equally as realistic as ambiguous characters. In other words, the results indicate that in order for characters to be perceived to be realistic, they must do at least some good things. This may indicate that in real life people are perceived to have at least some

redeeming qualities. Therefore, perceptions of a character's realness are based on the existence of at least a few good qualities, but are unaffected by the existence of some bad qualities. As previously mentioned, the length and scope of the stories may have affected this relationship. Specifically, it is possible that purely good characters would be perceived as less realistic in longer narratives in which they encounter a variety of situations.

In the good and ambiguous character conditions, perceived realism was found to be positively associated with favorable affective dispositions. This relationship is supported by other research findings, which indicate that more realistic characters evoke more favorable affective dispositions than less realistic characters (Konijn & Hoorn, 2004). However, in the present study, perceived realism and favorable affective dispositions were not related in bad character conditions. One possible explanation for this is that the abhorrent actions performed by bad characters may have overpowered any effect of perceived realism on affective dispositions. In other words, the immorality of these characters may have resulted in the formation of very strong negative affective dispositions, which no amount of character realness could change. Another possibility is that realistic bad characters may not be liked more than unrealistic bad characters. In fact, Konijn and Hoorn (2005) found that realistic bad characters were liked *less* than unrealistic bad characters. Perhaps this occurs because realistic bad characters are overly frightening; unrealistic bad characters, on the other hand, may be more likeable because they do not imitate any real threat. Overall, the results of the present study suggest that perceived realism affects character liking differently for bad characters than for good and morally ambiguous ones.

Character liking, in turn, predicted affective enjoyment and, to a lesser extent, cognitive enjoyment, further supporting some aspects of affective disposition theory. Based on this theory, individuals derive enjoyment from watching good things happen to liked characters or bad things happen to disliked characters (Zillmann, 2000; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977). In the present study, characters experienced neutral to slightly positive outcomes; no main character experienced a negative outcome. Therefore, narratives featuring characters that were liked the most should have been the most enjoyed, but this was only partially the case. Narratives featuring good characters were affectively enjoyed more than narratives featuring bad characters. However, even though ambiguous characters were liked less than good characters, they were nevertheless equally enjoyed. These findings suggest that other factors may better explain enjoyment of ambiguous characters. For example, it is possible that ambiguous characters were more interesting than good characters and that this affected enjoyment. In addition, the path analyses revealed that when controlling for other variables, namely affective dispositions, ambiguous characters were more suspenseful than good characters. Therefore, whereas the differences in affective enjoyment of good and bad characters can be explained by affective disposition theory, the affective enjoyment of ambiguous characters cannot be wholly explained by it.

Furthermore, affective dispositions more strongly influenced affective rather than cognitive enjoyment and did not affect cognitive enjoyment for one of the stories. This indicates that seeing a liked character succeed may make individuals feel good, but it doesn't necessarily make narratives more mentally involving. Therefore, affective enjoyment is strongly affected by character liking, but cognitive enjoyment may be more

influenced by other factors. This reasoning is supported by findings that suggest that even though narratives featuring good and ambiguous characters were more affectively enjoyable than narratives featuring bad characters, all of the narratives were equally as cognitively enjoyable. Moreover, narratives featuring good and ambiguous characters were more affectively than cognitively enjoyed, whereas narratives featuring bad characters were more cognitively rather than affectively enjoyed. These findings support the proposition made by Nabi and Krcmar (2004) that affective and cognitive enjoyment do not always go hand in hand. Also, the results indicate that some factors, such as character liking, influence affective enjoyment, whereas other factors, such as transportation and suspense, have a greater effect on cognitive enjoyment.

In addition, the results indicate that although character type did not directly affect transportation, each character indirectly affected transportation through perceived realism. Specifically, ambiguous and good characters were perceived to be more realistic than bad characters, and narratives featuring more realistic characters were more transporting. Therefore, because good and ambiguous characters were more realistic, narratives featuring these characters were more transporting; in contrast, bad characters were less realistic, which made narratives featuring these types of characters less transporting. The finding that perceived realism affects transportation is in line with previous findings (e.g., Busselle & Bilandzic, 2006). However, it is unclear why character type did not directly affect transportation. One possibility is that character actions alone do not affect transportation, but rather that other narrative elements are more influential. This explanation is supported by the results of the full path analyses, which indicate that other factors, such as affective dispositions, may affect transportation.

More importantly, for bad characters, the effects of affective dispositions and perceived realism on transportation may have counteracted the direct effect of these characters on transportation. In other words, compared to ambiguous characters, bad characters were found to directly affect transportation in a positive direction; however, these characters also had a negative indirect effect on transportation through affective dispositions and perceived realism. Therefore, because bad characters were less liked and were less realistic than good and ambiguous characters, this neutralized any differences in transportation between character types.

Narratives that were more transporting were, in turn, more affectively and cognitively enjoyed, further supporting the link between transportation and enjoyment. These and previous findings indicate that the process of being absorbed into a story may in itself be enjoyable (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2006; Green, Brock, & Livingstone, 2004; Green, Rozin et al., 2004). The results indicate that transportation may increase cognitive enjoyment in particular. Furthermore, affective dispositions were found to affect transportation, and narratives that were more transporting were also more suspenseful. In other words, individuals are more transported into narratives when they like the main characters. Also, transported individuals may be more concerned about what will happen next in a story and therefore experience more suspense.

Suspense, however, was not affected by character type. In other words, individuals felt an equal amount of suspense in all conditions. One possible explanation for this is that readers felt that the outcomes in the narratives were equally predictable or unpredictable. According to Zillmann's (1991b, 1996) theory of suspense, individuals must fear either a negative outcome for a liked character or a positive outcome for a

disliked character in order to experience suspense. If readers equally feared positive outcomes for bad characters and negative outcomes for good characters, they may have experienced equal levels of suspense in both conditions. However, it is unknown whether ambiguous characters elicited equal levels of suspense because individuals feared positive or negative outcomes for these characters. Another possible explanation for these findings is that, as with transportation, other factors, such as perceived realism and transportation, counteracted the direct effects of character type on suspense. Specifically, when other variables were included in the path model, good characters had a direct negative effect on suspense compared to ambiguous characters; however, good characters also had a positive indirect effect on suspense through affective dispositions, and transportation. In other words, the effect of character type on suspense was counteracted by the influence of affective dispositions on transportation, and transportation's influence on suspense.

Suspense, in turn, affected enjoyment, such that suspenseful narratives were more affectively and cognitively enjoyed. These findings support previous research findings, which indicate that individuals generally enjoy feelings of suspense (e.g., Jose & Brewer, 1984). However, based on Zillmann's (1991b, 1996) theory of suspense, it is surprising that individuals enjoyed suspenseful narratives featuring bad characters when those characters did not end up experiencing negative outcomes. This finding suggests either that readers did not desire negative outcomes for bad characters or that feelings of relief after a satisfying or just outcome are not necessary in order for suspense to be enjoyed. It is possible, for example, that feelings of suspense may be enjoyable for other reasons. For example, excitement caused by suspense may be enjoyable regardless of outcomes.

Additionally, in the present study, the individual difference variable of ambiguity tolerance (AT) did not moderate the relationship between suspense and enjoyment. That is, individuals with varying levels of AT enjoyed suspenseful narratives equally as much. It is possible that this occurred because the level of uncertainty in the narratives never reached a threshold of noxiousness for those with low AT. In other words, individuals with low AT may find suspense and uncertainty pleasurable up to a certain point, but if suspense increases past this point, enjoyment may decrease. Nonetheless, AT did affect overall enjoyment of narratives. Specifically, individuals with high AT cognitively enjoyed all of the narratives more than individuals with low AT. Furthermore, individuals with high AT also affectively enjoyed narratives featuring good and ambiguous characters more than individuals with low AT, but AT did not influence affective enjoyment of bad characters. It was predicted that individuals with high AT would enjoy narratives featuring morally ambiguous characters more than individuals with low AT because these types of characters cannot be easily identified as good or bad. However, it is not clear why AT affected both affective and cognitive enjoyment of good characters, but did not affect affective enjoyment of bad characters. One possible explanation is that individuals with high AT may enjoy the process of reading stories more than individuals with low AT. Previous studies indicate that AT is correlated with intelligence (Raphael, Moss, & Cross, 1978), which, in turn, could affect enjoyment of reading. However, the effect of AT on affective enjoyment of narratives featuring bad characters may have been overpowered by most individuals' negative attitudes toward these types of characters.

Need for cognition (NFC) likewise affected enjoyment. Specifically, individuals with high NFC cognitively enjoyed narratives featuring good and ambiguous characters

more than individuals with low NFC, but cognitive enjoyment of narratives featuring bad characters was unaffected by NFC. As predicted, these results indicate that narratives featuring ambiguous characters are more cognitively engaging for those who enjoy effortful processing. However, NFC also affected enjoyment of good characters, but not of bad characters. These results indicate that character types may influence whether or not individuals enjoy cognitively engaging in narratives. Perhaps analyzing or thinking deeply about narratives featuring good and ambiguous characters leads to more appreciation of the main characters and thereby increased enjoyment. In contrast, analyzing narratives featuring bad characters may not result in more enjoyment.

Implications

The findings of the present study enhance our understanding of the process by which individuals derive enjoyment from entertainment content by demonstrating the strengths and limitations of various media effects theories. In particular, this study examined the effectiveness of affective disposition theory in predicting enjoyment of content featuring various types of characters. In addition, this study reaffirmed the need to broaden conceptualizations of enjoyment, and highlighted the importance of transportation, suspense, and individual differences in the entertainment process. Moreover, the study revealed that good, bad, and morally ambiguous characters may each be enjoyable for different reasons.

In regard to affective disposition theory, the results of this study solidify the link between character actions and affective dispositions (Zillmann, 2000; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977). Individuals monitor and judge the actions of characters and form attitudes based on these judgments, such that, the more moral a character is perceived to be, the more

liked he or she will be. Furthermore, as predicted by the theory, character liking affects enjoyment of narratives with neutral and positive endings. However, affective dispositions alone do not explain all the variance in affective enjoyment; this is particularly evident with content that features morally ambiguous characters. That is, even though morally ambiguous characters are not liked as much as good characters, they are nevertheless equally enjoyed. This suggests that morally ambiguous characters may be appealing for reasons beyond their perceived morality and that other factors, such as suspense, may need to be taken into account when predicting enjoyment of morally ambiguous characters. In addition, character liking may not be as effective at predicting cognitive types of enjoyment. This is evidenced by the fact that bad characters were equally as cognitively enjoyed as were good and ambiguous characters. Moreover, the effect of affective dispositions on cognitive enjoyment disappeared with the addition of other factors. Namely, affective dispositions affected transportation, and, in turn, transportation affected cognitive enjoyment. These findings not only suggest that affective disposition theory may be inadequate at explaining all forms of enjoyment, but also confirms the notion that enjoyment is a multidimensional concept.

Researchers have recently debated the conceptualizations of enjoyment, and have argued that enjoyment should not be simply equated with fun or joy (see Nabi & Krcmar, 2004; Oliver & Nabi, 2004; Raney & Bryant, 2002; Vorderer et al., 2004). This study reaffirms the need to study various aspects of enjoyment, particularly those related to cognition. In particular, this study reveals that affective and cognitive enjoyment are not always experienced together. That is, some content may evoke pleasant feelings but not induce mental involvement and vice versa. Individuals may thus prefer or seek out one

type of enjoyment more than another in different circumstances. For example, according to the uses and gratifications approach, individuals seek out mediated content to fulfill certain needs or desires, such as diversion, surveillance, affective guidance, etc. (see Rubin, 2002, for review). If affective and cognitive enjoyment correspond to need fulfillment, it can be predicted that content featuring good and ambiguous characters may be more appropriate for individuals who want to fulfill affective needs, whereas content featuring bad characters may be more appealing to those wanting to fulfill cognitive needs. Likewise, different types of enjoyment may affect moods differently. This has implications for mood management theory, which predicts that people selectively expose themselves to content based on their own affective and physiological states and several characteristics of the content (see Zillmann, 1988; Zillmann & Bryant, 1985). Because good and ambiguous characters are more affectively enjoyable, they may be particularly appealing to individuals in negative mood states. Future research could examine the effects of character types, and different aspects of enjoyment on moods and gratifications.

The findings of this study also suggest that certain factors more strongly predict one type of enjoyment than another. Specifically, affective dispositions more strongly predict affective rather than cognitive enjoyment; conversely, transportation and suspense more strongly predict cognitive rather than affective enjoyment. As previously mentioned, the relationship between affective dispositions and enjoyment are well established. However, although transportation has been found to be highly correlated with enjoyment (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004; Green, Brock, & Livingstone, 2004; Green, Rozin et al., 2004), the results of the present study reveal that the process of getting transported into a narrative world may particularly affect cognitive enjoyment. In

other words, transportation may increase individuals' desire to think deeply about a story, which may help explain why transportation leads to persuasion (Green, 2002, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000). Green and Brock (2000) propose that transportation leads to story-consistent attitude change because transported individuals are more cognitively absorbed into a narrative and thus do not have the ability or desire to counterargue the messages in a narrative. The findings of the present study support this reasoning by revealing that individuals who were highly transported into a narrative were more likely to be cognitively involved with the narrative. In addition, although in the past transportation has been found to influence affective dispositions toward characters (Green, 2002; Green & Brock, 2000), the results of the present study suggest the reverse, that affective dispositions may affect transportation. Green (2004) also found that perceived realism of a story and transportation were positively related. She hypothesized that transportation led to perceptions that the story was realistic; however, based on the path analyses in the present study, the perceived realism of a character may enhance transportation. Moreover, the present study reveals that transportation may enhance other audience responses, such as feelings of suspense.

The present study also has implications for theories of suspense, particularly because suspense was found to strongly affect cognitive enjoyment. This is surprising because theories of suspense focus predominantly on affective states, namely empathy (Zillmann, 1991b, 1996). Suspense is hypothesized to occur when individuals fear a negative outcome for a liked character, with which they empathize; conversely, individuals may fear a positive outcome for a disliked character. Enjoyment is derived from the relief that is felt once the threat of the undesirable outcome subsides. However,

the results from this study reveal that this is not always a necessary condition for enjoyment. It is possible, for instance, that individuals do not need to like the main character in a story in the traditional sense in order to hope for certain resolutions. One such explanation is based on the concept of perspective taking proposed by Vorderer (1996). He suggests that it may be enough for individuals to take on the perspective of a character in order to feel suspense and enjoyment. Unlike empathy, perspective taking does not require individuals to *feel* the emotions of a character, but rather to *understand* the emotions of a character. This means that "readers do not have to share the protagonists' emotions, they do not even have to fear for them, but can develop very different emotions from their own personal perspective, using their knowledge of the protagonists' backgrounds" (Vorderer, 1996, p. 250). This allows for the possibility that individuals take the perspective of a bad character, especially if that character is the main character in a story. For example, individuals may understand why a protagonist robbed a bank, even if they do not agree with his or her behavior. They may not like this character as a result, but they may nonetheless feel suspense that the bank robber will be caught. This type of response may be particularly applicable to morally ambiguous and bad characters.

Additionally, the present study reinforces the importance of individual differences in affecting media responses. Specifically, the results suggest that need for cognition (NFC) and ambiguity tolerance (AT) affect enjoyment of good, bad, and ambiguous characters differently although not always in predicted ways. It is unclear, for instance, why cognitive enjoyment of bad characters was unaffected by NFC. Nonetheless, the finding that NFC positively affected cognitive enjoyment in the ambiguous and good

conditions reinforces the idea that those with high NFC enjoy becoming mentally involved in most narratives. Likewise, the results indicate that AT predicts both cognitive and affective enjoyment of stories featuring characters that do at least some good things.

Moreover, the findings of this study suggest that different character types may be appealing and enjoyable for different reasons. Specifically, affective enjoyment of purely good and bad characters may be best explained with disposition theory, and affective dispositions influence cognitive enjoyment through transportation and suspense. However, cognitive enjoyment is better predicted by transportation and suspense than by affective dispositions alone. For example, when controlling for other variables, bad characters were more transporting than ambiguous characters. This may indicate that bad main characters or negative character actions enhance narrative absorption, which in turn affects cognitive enjoyment. Likewise, when controlling for other variables, ambiguous characters were more suspenseful than good characters. Therefore, these results show that good characters are enjoyed primarily because they are realistic and well liked. Bad characters are cognitively enjoyed because they are transporting, and thereby more suspenseful. Morally ambiguous characters, on the other hand, are equally as affectively and cognitively enjoyed as good characters because they are realistic, moderately liked, transporting, and suspenseful.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has a number of limitations, and therefore proposes several directions for future research. First, because this study was concerned with responses to different types of characters, it is important to consider the conceptualization and operationalization of the three character types. Individuals form impressions of characters

based on a number of different factors, including their actions, intentions, and physical appearances (Hoffner & Cantor, 1991b). Previous research has revealed that interactions of some character attributes result in distinct responses (e.g., Konijn & Hoorn, 2005). However, in this study, character types were created primarily by manipulating character actions. No descriptions of characters' physical appearances were provided. Characters were described as doing actions that were either good (e.g., saving someone's life) or bad (e.g., not saving someone's life). Although some care was taken to ensure that the extremeness of the actions in the three conditions remained consistent, bad actions were generally more negative than good actions were positive. The action manipulations were successful at creating three distinct character types, but the extreme badness of some of the actions may have caused bad characters to be perceived as being unrealistic. In other words, bad characters may have been perceived to be less realistic than good and ambiguous character because of the extremeness of their actions rather than the number of bad actions they performed. Therefore, even though the conceptualization of bad and good characters was based on the consistency of their actions, the responses to bad characters may have been more affected by the extremeness of their actions. In future research, the extremeness and perceived realism of specific actions could be held consistent to ensure the most accurate results. Other research could look at responses to good, bad, and ambiguous characters that vary with respect to other character attributes, such as physical appearances, backgrounds, etc.

Additionally, it is important to note that in this study, ambiguity was conceptualized as uncertainty, which is caused by conflicting or incongruent information about a character. Ambiguity can also be conceptualized as neutrality, which can result

from a lack of clear information from which to make an assessment about a character. Characters that are neutral are those that are depicted as being neither positive nor negative (Comisky & Bryant, 1982; Gollin, 1954). For example, the act of walking down the street is not usually judged to be good or bad; it is neutral unless the person does something in addition to walking or his or her style of walking is particularly annoying, funny, arrogant, etc. Based on the differences in the conceptualization of ambiguity, responses to "neutral" character types may be distinct from those produced by morally ambiguous characters. As a result, future research could examine responses to neutral characters.

Another potential limitation of this research pertains to the lack of outcome manipulations. The outcomes in the narratives were held fairly consistent within each story and ranged from neutral to positive. Holding the outcomes constant allowed for clear interpretations of the impact of character type on audience responses, but different outcomes may have resulted in different responses. Affective disposition theory states that enjoyment is based almost exclusively on responses to outcomes. Therefore, it is probable that negative outcomes would have resulted in different levels of enjoyment for different character types. Future research could examine interactions of character types and outcomes on enjoyment.

This study's findings are also limited by the lengths and situational contexts of the narratives. It has been mentioned previously that narratives that are longer or that present characters in a variety of situations may evoke different responses. Specifically, purely good characters may be perceived to be less likeable and enjoyable if they are portrayed doing only good things in a variety of situations. This may explain why television shows

in particular feature many morally ambiguous characters. It is possible that if a character always responded in a predictable way, viewers would eventually get bored. Future research could thus examine the effects of various character types in different types of media content. In addition, the duration of exposure to particular character types could be varied in order to determine whether familiarity with a character effects responses.

Future research could also examine the effects of character types on other audience responses. For example, the concept of curiosity, which has mostly been applied to mystery texts, may be useful in predicting the appeals of morally ambiguous characters. This concept has been described as perceiving a story as mysterious, puzzling, or enigmatic and has been linked to enjoyment (Knobloch-Westerwick & Keplinger, 2006a, 2006b). Although ambiguous characters appear in all types of narratives, they may make narratives more mysterious or puzzling by making readers uncertain about their true natures. Zillmann (1991b) offered a detailed explanation of the appeal of mysteries. He proposed three models that explain the enjoyment of stories through uncertainty, surprise, and confirmation. According to the uncertainty model, uncertainty about the identity of a criminal results in enjoyment, such that greater uncertainty causes more enjoyment. Future research could thus examine the applicability of this model to morally ambiguous characters.

Likewise, future research could examine the effects of morally ambiguous characters on other responses, such as empathy, identification, and parasocial interaction. Additionally, the interconnections between some of these concepts and transportation and suspense could be examined. For example, individuals who are transported may have more pronounced arousal responses, which could help explain the relationship between

transportation and suspense. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to explore what other factors affect transportation and suspense in order to determine why bad characters are more directly transporting than ambiguous ones, and why ambiguous characters are more directly suspenseful than good ones.

Finally, it may also be worthwhile to explore the effects of moral ambiguity in non-fictional content. For example, it is possible that people would be more willing to accept moral ambiguity from fictional characters rather than from real individuals. On the other hand, some individuals may enjoy viewing content depicting morally ambiguous individuals because it makes them feel better about their own morality. This could help explain the popularity of reality television shows, which often depict real people behaving in immoral ways. Researchers have argued that in some instances, individuals may be motivated to enhance their own self-esteem by comparing themselves to others who are less successful or less fortunate (Mares & Cantor, 1992; Wills, 1981). For example, Mares and Cantor (1992) found that lonely elderly individuals enjoyed a program featuring a sad old man more-so than one featuring a well-adjusted old man. Therefore, it is possible that individuals, who are unsure about their own moral standing, could be more motivated to view content featuring morally ambiguous individuals. Other individual differences such as those presented by Reiss' sensitivity theory (Reiss, 2000) may likewise affect enjoyment of certain characters. For example, individuals who have a low desire for honor and thus who are less motivated to obey a traditional moral code have been found to watch more reality television shows than those with a high desire for honor (Reiss & Wiltz, 2004). This may occur because reality television shows often depicts immoral actions, which would be more acceptable to individuals with a lower

desire for honor. Therefore, individuals who have a low desire for honor may also respond more positively toward morally ambiguous characters.

Summary

This dissertation attempted to identify responses to morally ambiguous characters as compared to purely good and bad characters. The findings support the proposition that morally ambiguous characters are affectively and cognitively enjoyable. Although affective disposition theory was found to accurately predict affective enjoyment of good and bad characters, it was less effective at predicting cognitive enjoyment and enjoyment of morally ambiguous characters. Furthermore, the results indicate that transportation, suspense, and individual differences are also useful in predicting enjoyment. More importantly, the results indicate that different character types may be appealing for different reasons. Good characters are perceived to be realistic and are well liked; this leads to greater affective enjoyment and transportation; therefore, affective dispositions are the primary explanatory mechanism for the appeal of these characters. Bad characters, on the other hand, are equally as transporting, suspenseful, and thereby cognitively enjoyable as other characters despite being liked the least. Likewise, even though morally ambiguous characters are liked less than good characters, they are nevertheless equally as transporting, suspenseful, and enjoyable as good characters. The enjoyment evoked by morally ambiguous characters may at least partially explain their popularity in entertainment content.

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Appendix A

Narratives

Two short stories were created for this study. The first story, *The Suspect*, was edited from the story, *The Last Day,* by John Thorley (2008). The second story is entitled, *Summit Fever*. The actions the main character performs in each story were manipulated to create three distinct character type conditions ("Good" "Bad," "Ambiguous"). The complete text of the stories is provided below.

The Suspect

"Good" Condition

I had journeyed through life being righteous and honorable; I was always on the side of good. 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 thought 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.

"Yes, I'm sorry, just going over a few things in my mind." My orientation slowly returned. I thanked him and minutes later I was sitting in my office. I wanted to go home and scoop my young daughter up into my arms and keep her there safe from everything. The thought of something happening to her the like of which I had just seen was excruciating, almost physically. It would annihilate me; I knew I would never recover.

"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 saw the pain in my eyes, 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. The autopsy had been difficult. I'd done this before, dozens of times. I had seen the worst humanity could visit on each other, but it just strengthened my resolve to do my job to the best of my ability. "Mike, I'm OK. 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: the interview strategy, the best tone and demeanor to adopt, how to introduce what his girlfriend, the child's mother had said. I knew that I would be professional. I would do what it takes. I would concentrate on the evidence and the law.

Mike headed for the door then turned before leaving. "You've got a copy of his girlfriend's statement? She says it was him. 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 justice for her so badly.

"If we could get started detective." I looked back up at 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 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.

"Detective, you have no evidence my client committed this dreadful act, none at all. You have no forensic evidence linking him to the scene, no weapon. 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 but never in circumstances as gruesome as this. There was a growing horror spreading up my torso like heartburn. The thought that this man could walk from the police station, a free man after what he had done was unbearable. But the horror I felt was that his lawyer was right. We didn't have enough. My mind raced as to where to go next.

Murray no doubt sensed my momentary indecision. A thin, humorless smile crept across his face. 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 continued to stand in front of him. I preferred to look down. "Don't think for a minute because your lawyer says that you've got nothing to fear that I'm not going to keep looking for evidence until I find something. You'll have made a mistake somewhere: the body, the weapon, an alibi, your girlfriend. I promise you there will be something, and I promise you I'll find it."

"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. He momentarily leaned on the door of the bathroom before shuffling in.

"Do you need a doctor?" I replied, not sure whether this was just some ruse to prevent him being put back in the cell. He didn't respond, and 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 immediately and ran to the interrogation room. I located the large red emergency assistance button on the wall above the desk and drew my arm back to punch it hard.

I could have waited to push the button, waited until his heart was irreparably damaged, rationalized that letting him die would prevent him from hurting others. But, I did not hesitate. I knew the right thing to do. This man was dying.

I pushed the button.

I ran to the bathroom where Murray was now lying on his side. His arms stretched out reaching along the floor, his fingers twitching almost imperceptibly. He didn't have a pulse. I started CPR, hoping that my breaths could save him, and within minutes paramedics arrived.

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? I worked on him all the time until the paramedics arrived. 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. You saved him by giving him CPR."

"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?"

"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.

I knew I had done the right thing.

The Suspect
"Bad" Condition

I had journeyed through life being unrighteous and dishonorable; I was always on the wrong side. Nothing 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 coroner's office where I had spent the last three hours watching the autopsy of a three-year-old girl.

I had been a detective for 20 of my 25 years as a police officer. In that time, I have managed to fool all of my colleagues and climb up the ranks in the department. I have lied, planted evidence, covered up evidence, stolen property, and killed whenever it suited my needs.

I've seen my share of the dead, and the dank odor of blood, cold flesh and antiseptic have become familiar and satisfying. It was clear from the autopsy that agony and terror must have filled the girl's last pitiful minutes on earth, but that was irrelevant to 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 was pretty bad. 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 facts that I already knew about. "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 think about the next few hours. I had to make it seem like I was concentrating on the evidence and the law, 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 ally.

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.

I wanted to reach over and drive his head into the wall behind him. That would wipe that smirk off his face. He was clearly unaware what I was capable of. I'd gotten rid of trash worse than him before, and I would gladly do it again.

"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 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.

"Detective, You have no evidence my client committed this dreadful act, none at all. You have no forensic evidence linking him to the scene, no weapon. 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 didn't care who killed the little girl, but 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 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 get you."

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

My feeling of hatred almost hurt. It was probably then that I decided that at any cost he wasn't going to win.

"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 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 trying to come up with a way to kill this dirt bag without anyone noticing. 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 paused to enjoy the moment.

“This man was dying.”

“Yes he was.”

“Who cares? Who knows? Who's seen him?”

Murray was now lying on his side. His arms stretched out reaching along the floor, his fingers twitching almost imperceptibly.

“Two minutes should do it,” I thought. “That's enough time for the heart muscle to be irreparably damaged.”

The methadone was finally starting to take effect, which made the experience of watching him take his last breaths even more pleasurable. When I was certain he was dead, I ran around the corner into the interrogation room and slammed my palm onto the big red emergency button on the wall.

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.

"You OK? You seem to have had your fill of dead people today."

"Yeah, you could say that. I tried Mike, I worked on him all the time until the paramedics arrived. He just went down like a stone. Not once did I get a pulse."

"Don't worry. I know you did. I spoke to the medics. They say it was typical of a narcotic induced attack. If they could have gotten oxygen to him within a couple of minutes and pumped adrenaline in him straight away he might have had a chance but ... so be it."

"Saves the city the time and money of a trial anyway." I added almost as a throw away.

"If only." 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."

"And Murray?"

"Not 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.

I felt relief; I had gotten away with murder yet again.

The Suspect
"Ambiguous" Condition

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 ally.

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?"

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"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.

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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 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 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.

Summit Fever

"Good" Condition

At 26,000 feet, Craig looked at the blue sky around him. Though he knew that at this altitude the weather could turn deadly in a matter of moments, he felt confident that it would not be a problem today, at least not before he had already made it to the top of Mt. Everest and was safely on his way down to a celebratory camp. He was brimming with hope and optimism that this would be a magnificent day in which surely at least two-dozen climbers would be summiting the mighty Everest. Still, the presence of approaching clouds, confirming the previous day's weather predictions, began to unsettle him.

"This is our last chance to rest before the final stretch," Philip said.

"Let's make it quick," Craig responded as he started to pull out his lunch, a couple of energy bars, cheese, and a bag of jerky. He was the most experienced climber in the group of three who were headed up the mountain, and he was well prepared.

"Damn it! I must have left my lunch at base camp!" Jon exclaimed.

Craig took a bite out of one of his energy bars. At these elevations and with this amount of exertion, missing lunch could spell disaster. He couldn't let that happen to one of his fellow climbers.

"Here, Jon. I've got enough food. You can share with me," Craig said while handing Jon an energy bar. He had never been the selfish type.

After the quick lunch, the small group began their ascent on the final pitch of Mt. Everest. They proceeded into a realm that very few people in the world experience and where nobody can survive indefinitely. They entered the "Death Zone," a place that exists in only a few sparse mountain areas of the globe. At this altitude, the low air pressure can cause exhaustion, disorientation, hallucinations, even death.

As Craig settled into his routine of "trudge a few steps, breathe, trudge some more, stop to breathe more, check oxygen tank, trudge some more," he started to get anxious, and his anxiousness had not only to do with the weather, but with the excitement of being so close to the top. This was compounded by the fact that he knew very well the amount of work and concentration that still had to happen in a relatively short period of time.

As he was going over things in his mind, he decided that two hours would do it. "Look at that" he said to himself after checking his watch. "Fifteen minutes down already, and it didn't even feel like one minute!" Yes, two hours would be enough. That would get him to the top. Two hours of heavy labor, diminished mental clarity and overwhelming elation, all at the same time. Then only another hour of slow and cautious, yet fairly straightforward descending, and after that it would be a breeze.

Craig couldn't wait to get to the top with his friends. Nobody was going to get in their way, not when they were this close to the top. Craig had spent the last 2 years training and saving the $65,000 it cost to get here. He had put in his time and deserved to be here. Nobody had done it for him; he had put in the work himself and would be able to claim the glory with his friends. That's why he became concerned when he noticed Jon falling behind. He looked back between trudges.

"Philip, we've got to wait for Jon to catch up," Craig said. "We need to find out the extent of his exhaustion."

"All right, let's wait," Philip responded.

Craig looked down and noticed that his oxygen tank was closer to empty than he had supposed it should be with the amount of climbing that they still had left. He was starting to get a little concerned. The previous night, he had given his two extra bottles of oxygen to a couple of exhausted climbers at base camp. He didn't want to hide oxygen tanks from anyone. He didn't want to be the one that could have helped, but didn't. Everyone on this mountain is in this together he thought.

"I need a break," Jon exclaimed when he rejoined his friends. "It's getting so hard to catch my breath, and I can't waste all of my oxygen here. I can make it, but I need to go slower."

Craig looked over at Philip. He looked uncertain.

"All right, let's slow down a bit," Craig said. "I'll turn down the valve on my oxygen."

"There is no way he could leave Jon behind," he thought to himself. "They couldn't climb to the top without him."

"I'm getting too low on oxygen. I can't waste any more time. I'm going on. Don't worry. I'll be right ahead of you. If you guys don't think you can go on, you can wait here until I get back," Philip said trying to look sympathetic, but Craig knew by the look on Philip's face that he was unconcerned. He also knew he couldn't convince him to stay.

Philip left his friends next to the trail and proceeded at a quickened pace. The two remaining friends climbed up slowly. Craig would never break one of the unwritten rules of climbing: Don't leave anyone behind. He was confident they would reach the summit. With each step, Philip was disappearing into the vast whiteness that surrounded them.

"Do you think he'll be all right?" Jon asked.

"I hope so," Craig replied.

The two climbers quickly settled back into the routine as they navigated the exposed summit ridge. The wind was picking up speed, and howled in Craig's ears. Each step was becoming more difficult, but with each step they were getting closer to the top. Craig looked up. He could see the summit through the white puffs of snow that were drifting across the ridge ... just one more hour to go.

"What is that?" Jon said, pointing directly in front of them.

"I don't see anything," Craig said squinting his eyes to minimize the glare from the snow.

"I definitely see something. I think it's a lone climber."

Craig looked up again. Sure enough, about 100 feet in front of them, a man seemed to be ... dancing?

They hurried forward, and reached the man within minutes. He was flapping his arms in what looked like an attempt to lift off into the sky.

"I bet you're surprised to see me here," he said.

"What?" Jon stammered. "Who are you?"

"I'm Beck Weathers, and I am going to fly off this ridge," he said while taking a few steps closer to the edge of the ridge.

Clearly, he was out of his mind, his brain completely swollen from the lack of air. He seemed completely unaware that he was mere feet from falling off a 4000-foot ridge.

Craig and Jon looked at each other in disbelief. While at base camp the previous night, they had heard the news that Beck Weathers had died on the ridge. Several

climbers saw him ascending the summit the previous day, but he never made it off the mountain. A search team was deployed from base camp, but they could find no trace of him. They were convinced he had slipped and fallen into a crevasse or down one of the steep ridges. No one expected to see him alive again, but there he was flapping his arms in front of Craig and Jon.

"He is hallucinating," Jon said.

"Yeah, so it seems. He must have run out of oxygen. Who knows how he survived the night, or how the rescuers missed him," Craig said while grabbing Beck to ensure he didn't fall off the edge.

"I think he needs oxygen," Jon said quietly.

"That's for sure"

"But, we're so close to the top. It would take us less than an hour to reach the summit. If we give him our oxygen, we won't get to the top, but if we leave him here, he won't make it by himself." He paused briefly. "I don't know what to do."

Craig couldn't believe what he was hearing. Was Jon really unsure of what to do? Was he losing his mind? The decision couldn't be clearer, but he saw the desire in Jon's eyes. He was not going to stick around.

"Everyone thinks Beck is dead. You heard the reports last night. Plus, he's probably too far gone anyway. He won't make it no matter what we do," Jon said. "We can't let a dead man stop us from reaching the summit."

"You go up ahead." Craig responded. "I still have some oxygen in my spare tank. I'll give it to Beck, and then I'll catch up with you."

"But what if you run out of oxygen?"

"I won't. Don't worry. Now go. Don't waste any more time. I'll catch up with you soon."

Jon hesitated for a moment, but his desire to reach the top was overpowering.

"I'll see you up there then," Jon said as he started up the trail.

Craig sat down with Beck near the edge of the ridge. He watched as Jon's figure became smaller and smaller and as he finally disappeared into the distance. He knew that he needed to take care of Beck. It was a miracle that he had survived. He gave Beck his oxygen mask and released the remaining oxygen.

"I can't let a man die just so I can get to the top of this mountain," Craig thought as he watched Beck slowly recover with each breath.

Craig looked at the peak ahead of him. He was not going to make it to the top even though he was only half of a mile away from the summit. The clouds were building in the sky, and he knew he would have to make his descent with Beck soon. He imagined how relieved Beck's family would be when they found out he was alive, the looks on their faces.

He looked down over the edge of the ridge. He saw the icefall at the bottom of the face. No one would survive that kind of fall; no body would have ever been found if he hadn't stopped Beck from "flying" off it. He helped Beck get up and started the journey down the mountain. And suddenly he felt as if he had climbed much higher than all those who reached the peak that day.

Summit Fever

"Bad" Condition

At 26,000 feet, Craig looked at the blue sky around him. Though he knew that at this altitude the weather could turn deadly in a matter of moments, he felt confident that it would not be a problem today, at least not before he had already made it to the top of Mt. Everest and was safely on his way down to a celebratory camp. He was brimming with hope and optimism that this would be a magnificent day in which surely at least two-dozen climbers would be summiting the mighty Everest. Still, the presence of approaching clouds, confirming the previous day's weather predictions, began to unsettle him.

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"Here, Jon. I've got enough food. You can share with me," Philip said while handing Jon an energy bar.

"Idiots ... " thought Craig. He had always been the selfish one.

After the quick lunch, the small group began their ascent on the final pitch of Mt. Everest. They proceeded into a realm that very few people in the world experience and that nobody can survive indefinitely. They entered the "Death Zone," a place that exists in only a few sparse mountain areas of the globe. At this altitude, the low air pressure can cause exhaustion, disorientation, hallucinations, even death.

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As he was going over things in his mind, he decided that two hours would do it. "Look at that" he said to himself after checking his watch. "Fifteen minutes down already, and it didn't even feel like one minute!" Yes, two hours would be enough. That would get him to the top. Two hours of heavy labor, diminished mental clarity and overwhelming elation, all at the same time. Then only another hour of slow and cautious, yet fairly straightforward descending, and after that it would be a breeze.

Nobody was going to get in Craig's way, not when he was this close to the top. Not after he had spent 2 years training. Not to mention all the trouble it took for him to embezzle the necessary $65,000 from his company in order to get here. He had put in his time and deserved to be here. He had put in the work and would be able to claim the glory for himself. That's why he became dismayed when he noticed Jon falling behind. He looked back between trudges.

"If he can't make it the rest of the way, he should sit and wait," Craig muttered to himself under his breath. Just then his climbing partner, Philip, announced that they should wait for Jon to catch up so they could find out the extent of his exhaustion. Craig looked down and noticed that his oxygen tank was closer to empty than he had supposed it should be with the amount of climbing that they still had left. However, he wasn't concerned. The previous night, he has stolen two extra bottles of oxygen from a pile of gear at base camp. He decided to hide them from the others. If an emergency came up, he didn't want anyone thinking he would share. It's every man for himself, he reasoned.

"I need a break," Jon exclaimed when he rejoined his friends. "It's getting so hard to catch my breath, and I can't waste all of my oxygen here. I can make it, but I need to go slower."

Craig looked over at Philip. He looked uncertain.

"We need to move along," Craig said, while looking straight into Jon's pleading eyes. "I'm getting low on oxygen. I can't waste any more time."

"There is no reason why none of us should make it to the top just because one of us can't," he thought.

"Don't worry, Jon. We'll be right ahead of you. If you don't think you can go on, you can wait here until we get back," Philip said trying to look sympathetic, but Craig knew by the look on Philip's face that he was relieved.

Craig and Philip left their friend sitting next to the trail and proceeded at a quickened pace. Craig didn't care that by making this decision he was breaking one of the unwritten rules of climbing: Don't leave anyone behind. Again, the summit beckoned. With each step, Jon was disappearing into the vast whiteness that surrounded them.

"Do you think he'll be all right?" Philip asked.

"I don't know, and I don't care," Craig replied.

The two climbers quickly settled back into the routine as they navigated the exposed summit ridge. The wind was picking up speed, and howled in Craig's ears. Each step was becoming more difficult, but with each step they were getting closer to the top. Craig looked up. He could see the summit through the white puffs of snow that were drifting across the ridge ... just one more hour to go.

"What is that?" Philip said, pointing directly in front of them.

"I don't see anything," Craig said while maintaining his pace.

"I definitely see something. I think it's a lone climber."

Craig looked up again. Sure enough, about 100 feet in front of them, a man seemed to be ... dancing?

They quickened their pace, and reached the man within minutes. He was flapping his arms in what looked like an attempt to lift off into the sky.

"I bet you're surprised to see me here," he said.

"What?" Philip stammered. "Who are you?"

"I'm Beck Weathers, and I am going to fly off this ridge," he said while taking a few steps closer to the edge of the ridge.

Clearly, he was out of his mind, his brain completely swollen from the lack of air. He seemed completely unaware that he was mere feet from falling off a 4000-foot ridge.

Craig and Philip looked at each other in disbelief. While at base camp the previous night, they had heard the news that Beck Weathers had died on the ridge. Several climbers saw him ascending the summit the previous day, but he never made it

off the mountain. A search team was deployed from base camp, but they could find no trace of him. They were convinced he had slipped and fallen into a crevasse or down one of the steep ridges. No one expected to see him alive again, but there he was flapping his arms in front of Craig and Philip.

"He is hallucinating," Philip said while grabbing Beck to ensure he didn't fall off the edge.

"Yeah, so it seems. He must have run out of oxygen. Who knows how he survived the night, or how the rescuers missed him," Craig said while scanning the horizon for any sign of a storm.

"I think he needs oxygen," Philip said while looking for approval from Craig.

"Yeah."

"We're so close to the top. It would take us less than an hour to reach the summit. If we give him our oxygen, we won't get to the top, but if we leave him here, he won't make it by himself." He paused briefly. "I don't know what to do."

Craig started to get annoyed. Why was Philip pointing out the obvious? Was he really unsure of what to do? Was he mad? The decision couldn't be clearer.

"You go up ahead," Craig said. "I still have some oxygen in my spare tank. I'll give it to Beck, and then I'll catch up with you."

"But what if you run out of oxygen?"

"I won't. Don't worry. Now go. Don't waste any more time. I'll catch up with you soon."

Philip hesitated for a moment, but he knew he couldn't change Craig's mind, and he wanted to get to the top of the mountain.

"I'll see you up there then," Philip said as he started up the trail.

Craig sat down with Beck near the edge of the ridge. He watched as Philip's figure became smaller and as he finally disappeared into the distance.

Finally, he could take care of this problem without wasting anymore time. Everyone heard the report the previous night. Beck Weathers is dead.

"A dead man is not going to prevent me from getting to the top," Craig thought. "I am going to do what I came here to do, what I paid $65,000 to do. I am going to climb Everest."

Craig looked at the peak ahead of him. He was going to make it to the top, and nobody was going to stop him, not Jon, not Philip, not some dying stranger. He only had a little ways to go, and he still had a full tank of oxygen. The clouds were building in the sky, but Craig knew that even the weather couldn't stop him. He was too close. He imagined the glory that would come with reaching the top, the bragging rights. He would tell stories of his heroic journey--how he reached the top, despite tremendous obstacles, even when others couldn't. It would only take one push.

He looked down over the edge of the ridge. He saw the icefall at the bottom of the face. No one would survive that kind of fall; no body would ever be found. He leaned against Beck and pushed him over the edge. Craig was going to make it to the top of the world.

Summit Fever

"Ambiguous" Condition

At 26,000 feet, Craig looked at the blue sky around him. Though he knew that at this altitude the weather could turn deadly in a matter of moments, he felt confident that it would not be a problem today, at least not before he had already made it to the top of Mt. Everest and was safely on his way down to a celebratory camp. He was brimming with hope and optimism that this would be a magnificent day in which surely at least two-dozen climbers would be summiting the mighty Everest. Still, the presence of approaching clouds, confirming the previous day's weather predictions, began to unsettle him.

"This is our last chance to rest before the final stretch," Philip said.

"Let's make it quick," Craig responded as he started to pull out his lunch, a couple of energy bars, cheese, and a bag of jerky. He was the most experienced climber in the group of three who were headed up the mountain, and he was well prepared.

"Damn it! I must have left my lunch at base camp!" Jon exclaimed.

Craig took a bite out of one of his energy bars. At these elevations and with this amount of exertion, missing lunch could spell disaster. He wasn't going to give up any of his food.

"Here, Jon. I've got enough food. You can share with me," Philip said while handing Jon an energy bar.

"Idiots ..." thought Craig.

After the quick lunch, the small group began their ascent on the final pitch of Mt. Everest. They proceeded into a realm that very few people in the world experience and where nobody can survive indefinitely. They entered the "Death Zone," a place that exists in only a few sparse mountain areas of the globe. At this altitude, the low air pressure can cause exhaustion, disorientation, hallucinations, even death.

As Craig settled into his routine of "trudge a few steps, breathe, trudge some more, stop to breathe more, check oxygen tank, trudge some more," he started to get anxious, and his anxiousness had not only to do with the weather, but with the excitement of being so close to the top. This was compounded by the fact that he knew very well the amount of work and concentration that still had to happen in a relatively short period of time.

As he was going over things in his mind, he decided that two hours would do it. "Look at that" he said to himself after checking his watch. "Fifteen minutes down already, and it didn't even feel like one minute!" Yes, two hours would be enough. That would get him to the top. Two hours of heavy labor, diminished mental clarity and overwhelming elation, all at the same time. Then only another hour of slow and cautious, yet fairly straightforward descending, and after that it would be a breeze.

Nobody was going to get in Craig's way, not when he was this close to the top. Not after he had spent 2 years training. Not to mention all the trouble it took for him to embezzle some of the necessary $65,000 from his company in order to get here. He had put in his time and deserved to be here. He had put in the work and would be able to claim the glory for himself. That's why he became dismayed when he noticed Jon falling behind. He looked back between trudges.

"If he can't make it the rest of the way, he should sit and wait," Craig muttered to himself under his breath. Just then his climbing partner, Philip, announced that they should wait for Jon to catch up so they could find out the extent of his exhaustion. Craig looked down and noticed that his oxygen tank was closer to empty than he had supposed it should be with the amount of climbing that they still had left. He was starting to get a little concerned. The previous night, Craig had seen two extra bottles of oxygen at base camp. He would have taken them, but he didn't want to carry the extra weight. He was sure he could make it on the tanks he had as long as there weren't any delays.

"I need a break," Jon exclaimed when he rejoined his friends. "It's getting so hard to catch my breath, and I can't waste all of my oxygen here. I can make it, but I need to go slower."

Craig looked over at Philip. He looked uncertain.

"We need to move along," Craig said, while avoiding Jon's pleading eyes. "I'm getting low on oxygen. I can't waste any more time."

"There is no reason why none of us should make it to the top just because one of us can't," he thought.

"Don't worry, Jon. We'll be right ahead of you. If you don't think you can go on, you can wait here until we get back," Philip said trying to look sympathetic, but Craig knew by the look on Philip's face that he was relieved.

Craig and Philip left their friend sitting next to the trail and proceeded at a quickened pace. Craig didn't care that by making this decision he was breaking one of the unwritten rules of climbing: Don't leave anyone behind. Again, the summit beckoned. Plus, he knew Jon would be safe where he was. With each step, Jon was disappearing into the vast whiteness that surrounded them.

"Do you think he'll be all right?" Philip asked.

"I think so, but we need to focus on getting to the top," Craig replied.

The two climbers quickly settled back into the routine as they navigated the exposed summit ridge. The wind was picking up speed, and howled in Craig's ears. Each step was becoming more difficult, but with each step they were getting closer to the top. Craig looked up. He could see the summit through the white puffs of snow that were drifting across the ridge ... just one more hour to go.

"What is that?" Philip said, pointing directly in front of them.

"I don't see anything," Craig said while maintaining his pace.

"I definitely see something. I think it's a lone climber."

Craig looked up again. Sure enough, about 100 feet in front of them, a man seemed to be ... dancing?

They quickened their pace, and reached the man within minutes. He was flapping his arms in what looked like an attempt to lift off into the sky.

"I bet you're surprised to see me here," he said.

"What?" Philip stammered. "Who are you?"

"I'm Beck Weathers, and I am going to fly off this ridge," he said while taking a few steps closer to the edge of the ridge.

Clearly, he was out of his mind, his brain completely swollen from the lack of air. He seemed completely unaware that he was mere feet from falling off a 4000-foot ridge.

Craig and Philip looked at each other in disbelief. While at base camp the previous night, they had heard the news that Beck Weathers had died on the ridge.

Several climbers saw him ascending the summit the previous day, but he never made it off the mountain. A search team was deployed from base camp, but they could find no trace of him. They were convinced he had slipped and fallen into a crevasse or down one of the steep ridges. No one expected to see him alive again, but there he was flapping his arms in front of Craig and Philip.

"He is hallucinating," Philip said while grabbing Beck to ensure he didn't fall off the edge.

"Yeah, so it seems. He must have run out of oxygen. Who knows how he survived the night, or how the rescuers missed him," Craig said while scanning the horizon for any sign of a storm.

"I think he needs oxygen," Philip said while looking for approval from Craig.

"Yeah."

"We're so close to the top. It would take us less than an hour to reach the summit. If we give him our oxygen, we won't get to the top, but if we leave him here, he won't make it by himself." He paused briefly. "I don't know what to do."

Craig started to get annoyed. Why was Philip pointing out the obvious? Of course, he was unsure of what to do. Did he think the decision would be any easier for Craig?

He saw the desire in Philip's eyes. He was not going to stick around.

"Everyone thinks Beck is dead. You heard the reports last night. Plus, he's probably too far gone anyway. He won't make it no matter what we do," Philip said. "We can't let a dead man stop us from reaching the summit."

"I can't leave him to die. I still have some oxygen in my spare tank. I'll give it to him and see if he improves," Craig said.

"Are you crazy? You won't have enough to get to the top. You won't have time to summit."

Craig didn't respond.

Philip shook his head in disbelief.

"You're throwing it all away man," he said as he started walking away.

Craig sat down with Beck near the edge of the ridge. He watched as Philip's figure became smaller and smaller and as he finally disappeared into the distance.

He knew Philip was right. He looked at the peak ahead of him. He had been so determined to make it to the top; nobody was going to stop him, not Jon, not Philip, not some dying stranger. He only had a little ways to go, half of a mile perhaps. The clouds were building in the sky, and he knew he had to make a decision. He imagined the glory that would come with reaching the top, the bragging rights. He would tell stories of his heroic journey--how he reached the top, despite tremendous obstacles, even when others couldn't. He just had to get up and walk away.

He looked down over the edge of the ridge. He saw the icefall at the bottom of the face. No one would survive that kind of fall; no body would ever be found if Beck "flew" off it. He gave Beck his oxygen mask, released the remaining oxygen, and helped him to his feet so that they could start their journey down the mountain. Maybe this was better than being at the top of the world.

Appendix B

Pretest Questionnaire

Please answer all questions as well as you can and read instructions carefully. Responses will remain confidential.

The following questions ask you for your perceptions of the main character's actions in the story. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree Nor Disagree			Strongly Agree
The main character does some immoral things.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The main character does bad things at times.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The main character has some negative attributes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The main character behaves in an unethical way some of the time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The main character makes some wrong decisions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree Nor Disagree			Strongly Agree
The main character does some good things.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The main character has some positive attributes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The main character behaves in a moral way some of the time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The main character makes some right decisions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The main character behaves in an ethical way some of the time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Demographic Information

The following questions ask you some information about yourself:

What is your age? _____

What is your gender? Male Female Transgender

What is your academic standing? Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior

What is your ethnicity: (Select all that apply)

___ African American
___ Latino
___ Pacific Islander
___ Other
____ Caucasian
____ Asian/Asian American
____ Native American

Please turn in your materials to the researcher, and sign in on your class roster to get extra credit.

Thank you for participating in this study!

Appendix C

Background Questionnaire

Please answer all questions as well as you can and read instructions carefully.
Thank you for participating in this study!

Your responses will remain confidential, but you must enter the ID number located on the cover page of your narrative.

ID Number: _____

The following questions ask about your preferences. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree Nor Disagree			Strongly Agree
I would prefer complex to simple problems.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I like to have the responsibility of handling a situation that requires a lot of thinking.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Thinking is not my idea of fun.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would rather do something that requires little thought than something that is sure to challenge my thinking abilities.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I try to anticipate and avoid situations where there is a likely chance I will have to think in depth about something.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I find satisfaction in deliberating hard and for long hours.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I only think as hard as I have to.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I prefer to think about small, daily projects to long-term ones.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I like tasks that require little thought once I've learned them.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

The idea of relying on thought to make my way to the top appeals to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions to problems.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Learning new ways to think doesn't excite me very much.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The notion of thinking abstractly is appealing to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would prefer a task that is intellectual, difficult, and important to one that is somewhat important but does not require much thought.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I feel relief rather than satisfaction after completing a task that required a lot of mental effort.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It's enough for me that something gets the job done; I don't care how or why it works.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I usually end up deliberating about issues even when they do not affect me personally.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
An expert who doesn’t come up with a definite answer probably doesn’t know too much.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
There is really no such thing as a problem that can’t be solved.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A good job is one where what is to be done and how it is to be done are always clear.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
In the long run it is possible to get more done by tackling small, simple problems rather than larger and complicated ones.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
What we are used to is always preferable to what is unfamiliar.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A person who leads an even, regular life in which few surprises or unexpected happenings arise, really has a lot to be grateful for.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

I like parties where I know most of the people more than ones where all or most of the people are complete strangers.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The sooner we all acquire similar values and ideas the better.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would like to live in a foreign country for a while.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
People who fit their lives to schedules probably miss most of the joy of living.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It is more fun to tackle a complicated problem than to solve a simple one.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Often the most interesting and stimulating people are those who don't mind being different and original.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
People who insist upon a yes or no answer just don't know how complicated things really are.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Many of our most important decisions are based upon insufficient information.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachers or supervisors who hand out vague assignments give a chance for one to show initiative and originality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A good teacher is one who makes you wonder about your way of looking at things.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Demographic Information

The following questions ask you some information about yourself:

What is your age? _____

What is your gender? ____ Male ____ Female ____ Transgender

What is your academic standing? ____ Freshman ____ Sophomore ____ Junior

____ Senior ____ Graduate

What is your ethnicity (select all that apply):

Caucasian _____

African American _____

Latino _____

Asian/Asian American _____

Pacific Islander _____

Native American _____

Other _____

Appendix D

Study Questionnaire

Please answer all questions as well as you can and read instructions carefully.
Your responses will remain confidential, but you must enter the ID number located on the cover page of your narrative.

ID Number: _____

Thoughts

We are interested in everything that went through your mind as you read the story. For approximately three minutes, please list the thoughts you had regarding the story. You may use single words or full sentences. Ignore spelling, grammar and punctuation. Simply write down the first thought you had in the first box, and rate whether this thought was positive, negative, or neutral. Place, the second thought in the second box, etc. Please put only one idea or thought in a box.

You do not have to fill in all of the boxes. Once you have finished writing down your thoughts, you can proceed with the next questions.

Thoughts	Thought Ranking		
Write first thought here.	Positive O	Neutral O	Negative O
Write second thought here.	Positive O	Neutral O	Negative O
Write third thought here.	Positive O	Neutral O	Negative O
Write fourth thought here.	Positive O	Neutral O	Negative O
Write fifth thought here.	Positive O	Neutral O	Negative O

Character Dispositions

The following questions ask you for your feelings about the main character.
Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree Nor Disagree			Strongly Agree
I like the main character.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would like to be friends with someone who is like the main character.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I despise the main character.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I dislike the main character.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I admire the main character.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The main character is fascinating.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Character Perceptions

The following questions ask you for your perceptions of the main character.
Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree Nor Disagree			Strongly Agree
The main character is like someone I know in real life.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The character did not seem like a real person.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The character was similar to people in real life.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The character behaved just like people do in real life.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Story Perceptions

The following questions ask you for your perceptions of the story you just read. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree Nor Disagree			Strongly Agree
While I was reading the story, I could easily picture the events in it taking place.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
While I was reading the story, activity going on in the room around me was on my mind.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I could picture myself in the scene of the events described in the story.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I was mentally involved in the story while reading it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
After finishing the story, I found it easy to put it out of my mind.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I wanted to learn how the story ended.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The story affected me emotionally.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I found myself thinking of ways the story could have turned out differently.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I found my mind wandering while reading the story.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The events in the story are relevant to my everyday life.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The events in the story have changed my life.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
While reading the story, I had a vivid image of the character.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This story made me think.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt good reading this story.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

I would not recommend this story to others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I enjoyed reading this story.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I liked reading this story.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I really got involved in the plot.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It made me happy to read this story.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I had a good time reading this story.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I tried to predict what was going to happen next.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would like to seek out additional information about this story.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would like to analyze this story.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I really thought about the story when I read it.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would like to talk about this story with other people.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would hate to be distracted while reading this story.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would have liked to be able to do other things while I read this story.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would like to reread this story.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I did not enjoy the subject matter of this story.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would like to read other stories that are similar to this one.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
This story was exciting.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

This story was entertaining.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
While reading the story, I tried to guess what would happen next.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I was in suspense while reading the story.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
While reading the story, I knew what the main character was going to do next.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The story was thrilling.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
While reading the story, I was not sure how it would turn out.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I felt excited while reading the story.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Overall, the story was NOT suspenseful.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Character Actions

The following questions ask you for your perceptions of the main character.
Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree Nor Disagree			Strongly Agree
While reading the story, I tried to figure out whether the main character was good or bad.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
While reading the story, I did NOT try to form an opinion about the main character.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
While reading the story, I tried to decide what kind of person the main character was.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
While reading the story, I was judging the main character's actions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The main character does some immoral things.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The main character makes some right decisions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

The main character behaves in an ethical way some of the time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The main character does bad things at times.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The character has some negative attributes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The main character does some good things.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The main character behaves in an unethical way some of the time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The character makes some wrong decisions.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The character has some positive attributes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The character behaves in a moral way some of the time.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

VITA: K. Maja Krakowiak

Appointment

Assistant Professor, Department of Communication, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, August 2008.

Education

The Pennsylvania State University, Ph.D. in Mass Communications, August 2008.
University of Utah, B.S. Summa Cum Laude in Communication, May 2001.
University of Utah, B.S. Summa Cum Laude in Political Science, May 2001.

Research and Teaching Interests

Psychological and social effects of media
Mass communication theories
Communication research methods

Publications

Oliver, M. B., & Krakowiak, K. M. (*in press*). Individual differences in media effects. In B. Jennings and M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Krakowiak, K. M. (2006). Media genre preferences. In J. Arnett (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of children, adolescents, and the media*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Krakowiak, K. M. (2006). Movies, perceived realism. In J. Arnett (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of children, adolescents, and the media*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Competitively-Selected Research Presentations

Krakowiak, K. M., Lacayo, A., & Pfaff, M. (2007, November). *The puzzling effects of multitasking in online environments.* Presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, Chicago.
***Top scholar-to-scholar presentation award**

Krakowiak, K. M. (2007, August). *Doing what is 'necessary': The legitimization of torture on Fox's '24.'* Presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Education of Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington D. C.

Krakowiak, K. M. (2006, August). *Two-face, man-hands and mimbo: Feminized and masculinized portrayals of single women on 'Seinfeld.'* Presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Education of Journalism and Mass Communication, San Francisco.

Tsay, M., Krakowiak, K. M., & Kleck, C. (2006, June). *Redefining reality TV: Exploring viewers' perceptions of nine sub-genres.* Presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, Dresden, Germany.
***Top student paper award, Mass Communication Division**

Hutton, B., Krakowiak, K. M., Shultz, K., & O'Toole, K. (2005, August). *The impact of celebrity endorsers on student voters*. Presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Education of Journalism and Mass Communication, San Antonio, TX.
***Top student paper award, Entertainment Interest Group**

Corbett, J. B., Durfee, J. L., Gunn, R., Krakowiak, K. M., & Nellermoe, J. (2002, December). *Testing public (un)certainty of science: Media representations of global warming*. Presented at the International Conference on Public Communication of Science and Technology, Cape Town, Africa.

Teaching

The Pennsylvania State University, Fall 2005-Spring 2008: COMM 413-Mass Media and Public, CAS 497-The Impact of Public Messages on the Development of Eating Disorders in Adolescents.

University of Utah, Spring 2002-Summer 2004: COMM 1600-Reporting for the Mass Media, COMM 3600-Editing Process, COMM 1500-Intro to Mass Comm, COMM 2560-Visual Production.