

“Why so serious?”

--- To what extent do the different media portrayals of the villain influence the viewers' engagement with the character and well-being?

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ABSTRACT

Existing research has examined how different media productions can create diverse viewing experiences and how various types of entertainment can bring mood changes. Building on the previous research findings, this study aims to investigate to what extent the different media portrayals of the villain influence the viewers' engagement with the character and well-being, utilizing the example of the complicated character Joker.

This was a quantitative study with an experimental design. Participants (N = 167) were randomly assigned to five groups, each viewing different Joker movie clips ranging from the most pitiful to the craziest portrayals, with a neutral portrayal in the middle. After watching the clips, participants answered questions on character engagement (parasocial relationships and recognizability), well-being (eudaimonic/hedonic entertainment experiences and mood repair), and demographics.

The findings revealed that attitudinal recognizability was a strong indicator for parasocial relationships, except when the villain was portrayed as entirely evil. Superficial portrayals of the villain typically resulted in stronger mood repair compared to more complex, thought-provoking portrayals. No indicators for entertainment experience or mood repair showed consistent impact across all portrayals. However, some of the valid connections existed in specific portrayals. For example, when the viewers felt they were supportive of the villain who was portrayed as completely evil, they were also more likely to reflect deeper on themselves, and this kind of reflection can help them acquire more self-growth/eudaimonic well-being.

The results also suggest that viewers are more likely to recognize, relate to, and support villains who are similar to themselves, particularly when they share similar attitudes with the villains. While superficial portrayals of the villain may enhance viewers' moods, more complex and thought-provoking portrayals can provoke deeper reflection. This indicates that for media productions, humanizing the villain can be more effective in fostering character engagement and well-being instead of solely focusing on portraying the tragic sides of a villain. Adding more portrayals of how mental health influences the villain's behaviors and attitudes could also bring an excellent educational opportunity for the viewers. Engaging with a complex villain story can provide viewers with richer entertainment experiences and chances for self-growth.

KEYWORDS: *Villain Movies, Character Engagement, Well-being, Parasocial Relationships, Mood Repair*

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1 Introduction

For the last few decades, creative villains have increasingly captured the interest of many viewers. While villains were traditionally portrayed as evil and despicable characters that are often associated with negative attitudes, they are now more and more portrayed with greater depth, often reflecting the complexity of human nature. The great success of Hannibal in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991) and Littlefinger in *Game of Thrones* (Benioff & Weiss, 2011-2019) are excellent demonstrations of how obsessed and intrigued people can be with villains. Consequently, understanding why and how people can engage and interact with these characters has been a significant focus for researchers. Notably, concepts such as parasocial relationships, where viewers form “one-sided” relationship with media characters (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p.6), and recognizability of the characters are critical components of the research focus (Grizzard & Eden, 2022, p. 698; Żerebecki et al., in-press, p.17).

Previous research has demonstrated that viewers can form parasocial relationships with a wide range of characters, not just the good and heroic ones but also the bad and unattractive ones (Tian & Hoffner, 2010, p.255; Möri et al., 2023, p.271). This suggests that viewers' connections with the villains are complicated, and how villains are portrayed can play a significant role in shaping the viewers' attitudes towards them. More specifically, when the character is not described as completely immoral, or his immoral behavior can be explained through previous misfortune, it might stimulate viewers' empathy for the character (Wang et al., 2023, p.417). For instance, even though Hannibal is a villain in *The Silence of the Lambs* (Demme, 1991), viewers still empathize with him after watching him help the protagonist (Kjeldgaard-Christiansen et al., 2021, p.2). Moreover, Krause and Rucker (2020) found that many people are drawn to fictional villains when they sense the similarities they share with the villains, and fictional scenarios offer a safe place for them to compare their darker selves with the villains (p.528). Hence, how a villain is portrayed can greatly influence the viewers' engagement with the character. When a villain is portrayed as more recognizable and relatable, viewers may start to understand or even like them.

Additionally, excellent portrayals of media characters could significantly influence viewers' well-being. Wirth et al. (2012) proposed that there are usually two types of well-being regarding media entertainment experience, namely eudaimonic and hedonic well-being (p.408).

The hedonic well-being focuses more on enjoyment and pleasure, while eudaimonic well-being emphasizes the human potential (Wirth et al., 2012, p.408). In other words, media entertainment could make people experience happiness and sometimes even self-growth. This concept is also closely tied to the entertainment type and how the villain is portrayed. For instance, when watching more hedonic, pleasure-seeking entertainment, some viewers might feel thrilled about the exciting plot and gain a mood boost. However, when watching more eudaimonic, profound entertainment, viewers might also be evoked to reflect on their own moral beliefs (Krijnen & Tan, 2009, p.451). For example, whether they can or should empathize with a character with a miserable background and what kind of people they want to be. In other cases, some viewers might feel more grateful for their lives because the disaster that the fictional movie portrayed does not happen in their real life (Zubernis & Snyder, 2023, p.4). This kind of deeper, richer experience may aid the viewers in self-growth and can help people acquire eudaimonic well-being. Last but not least, media productions could also shape the way people perceive mental illness. For example, movies often portray psychopathic characters as villains (Hesse, 2009, p.209), highlighting how cold-hearted, evil, and hopeless they are. These villains are often only used to show how brave and noble the hero is, but the reasons behind their personalities and behaviors are often not explored. However, if villains are portrayed as poor victims, viewers might still feel empathic and even want to help them (Bergstrand & Jasper, 2018, p.232).

Hence, it is no surprise that the complex character of the Joker has gained such high popularity over the years. As one of the most iconic villains, Joker is evil yet pitiful. In the past, several movies of the Joker series intentionally gave viewers a glimpse into the villain's past (The Dark Knight, Nolan, 2008; Suicide Squad, Ayer, 2016). For instance, in the movie *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008), viewers are presented with a glimpse into a chilling story about Joker's alcoholic father, who could be responsible for the scars that form the Joker's grotesque smile. In 2019, the film *Joker* (Phillips, 2019) first shifted the focus and based the movie entirely on the Joker's past before he turned into a criminal. In this film, the viewers saw the whole process of a mentally troubled, underclass person who suffered from pseudobulbar affect transferred into a brutal, crazy killer. The unique, immersive, and rather relatable storytelling cuts open the sad reality Joker is living in and aims to explain Joker's destructive personality and behaviors. This movie evoked mixed feelings in many viewers and turned out to be a huge success. However, despite all the praise and the top prize at the Venice Film Festival, criticism

still floods in, questioning whether this movie can inspire real-life violence and crime with all the empathy for such a dangerous and realistic character, Joker.

To sum up, different portrayals of the character can greatly influence the character engagement and well-being of the viewers. The various portrayals of the complex character Joker over the years serve as a great example to gain deeper and more nuanced insights into the general dynamics of how viewers interact with multidimensional villains. Hence, we propose the following research question:

To what extent do the different media portrayals of the villain influence the viewers' engagement with the character and well-being?

1.1 Scientific Relevance

Previous research has found that viewers often relate to characters in media productions and even want to develop friendships with them (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p.6). However, when it comes to villains, the attitudes of viewers become much more complex. On the one hand, viewers usually despise the immoral behaviors of the villain. On the other hand, they are still drawn to them and value them for some unique characteristics, such as being unconventional or realistic (Greenwood et al., 2021, p.176). Viewers also need the presence of a villain for a more in-depth and layered story experience. For example, viewers value Littlefinger from Game of Thrones (Benioff & Weiss, 2011-2019) as a good villain. Game of Thrones (Benioff & Weiss, 2011-2019) is a fantasy TV show that talks about the intense power battle between the seven kingdoms in the fantasy world. As one of the central villains in this story, Littlefinger, a master liar and ambitious political player, schemed betrayals and murdered many people for his own benefit. Eventually, he became one of the greatest powers in the seven kingdoms. He is certainly not a positive or heroic character. However, viewers still cannot help but love him because he “seems to be at the heart of most things,” and viewers feel like “he is writing the story”, which makes them “love to hate him” (Barker et al., 2021, p.63). However, while previous studies have indicated that certain traits make villains more likable, there is a lack of research specifically examining how different portrayals of the same villain affect character engagement and well-being. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing various portrayals of the Joker in movies.

Moreover, previous research has focused more on identification when examining engagement with media characters. Identifying with characters requires merging the identities of

the viewers and the characters (Cohen, 2001, p.261). Therefore, it requires a deep level of understanding and approval of the character. For example, previous research has found that young adults tend to identify with characters who share the same gender or similar attitudes with them (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005, p.325). Viewers also identify with fictional characters. Identification with heroes is relatively more common because many movies are told by heroes who possess common and positive virtues, motives, and enthusiasm, which can be easily understood and appreciated by all viewers (Okumu & Ünal, 2021, p.64). However, it could be quite difficult for viewers to identify with villains since most people do not share their negative traits, at least not extreme ones. Hence, this study aims to close the research gap by utilizing the concept of recognizability instead of identification to examine the character engagement with villains.

By examining the varied portrayals of the Joker, particularly contrasting superficial and more layered portrayals, this study seeks to shed light on the engagements between media characters and their viewers. Furthermore, it aims to offer new insights into how the recognizability the recognizability of villains can influence character engagement. Addressing this gap will provide more insights into the nuanced effects of complicated villains on viewers.

1.2 Societal Relevance

One of the primary concerns surrounding the Joker (Phillips, 2019) movie from critics and society is that the consumption of such violent and depressing media content can inspire real-life hate or crime. Previous research has revealed some connections between violent behaviors and violent media content. For example, some evidence suggested that violent media content is somewhat associated with real-life violence and aggression (Felson, 1996, p.123; Helfgott, 2015, p. 50), and violent media content can inspire some people to consider other novel ways of violence (Felson, 1996, p.124).

This could be the reason why people are concerned with fictional villain stories. As Green and Brock (2000) explained, people can be transported and immersed deeply into stories, regardless of whether they are fictional or not (p.703). This psychological process also explains how a fictional character like the Joker can still have a strong impact on its viewers, similar to the impact of true crime documentaries or crime entertainment shows. On the one hand, the creation of fictional media products has stronger flexibility compared to the more realistic ones,

like crime documentaries. This could give Joker the potential to commit novel crimes. On the other hand, the Joker has been depicted in numerous forms and stories over many years, which can not only add more layers to his character but also enrich viewers' engagement with him and may deepen the potential psychological impact of the movies.

In addition, research has shown that violent media content also has a significant impact on children and adolescents. More specifically, if violent behaviors are not criticized or punished in the media content, it might create a false belief that violence can be considered acceptable (Signorielli, 2003, p. 55). Therefore, since Joker is such an unconventional villain movie that may encourage viewers to empathize with Joker and understand his motives and actions, it is reasonable for some viewers to come up with such concerns.

However, some empirical evidence suggests that this connection between violent media content and behaviors does not apply to everyone, and it is influenced by various different factors. To start with, there is not enough evidence to claim that there is a causality relationship between violent portrayals and actual crimes (Savage, 2004, p.99). More specially, as Huesmann and Taylor (2006) proposed in their research, the relationship can be moderated "by the nature of the media content and characteristics of and social influences on the individual exposed to that content" (p.409). In other words, violent content or villain movies usually have a stronger influence on people who already have violent and aggressive traits and characters (Savage, 2004, p.123; Greenwood et al., 2021, p.165). This statement also summarizes what the opposers claim, which is that even if the viewers value or empathize with the villain, they might still despise his behavior. Alongside this, some research has found that watching disliked characters conduct immoral behavior in a moral domain will not lead people to ignore or even imitate the same act. On the contrary, they are more likely to protect that moral domain (Eden et al., 2014, p.512), which provides support for the claim that Joker will not inspire real-life crime. It may even be thought-provoking for many and can encourage them to bring out their better selves.

Therefore, how media portrays different characters in movies is a crucial topic, especially regarding complex, dangerous characters, since it has the potential to shape the attitudes and well-being of the public. This research aims to provide some new perspectives regarding how people view "villains" in different media portrayals and how these perspectives can be related to real-world issues.

2 Theoretical Framework

In this section, the theoretical framework of mood management, parasocial relationships, and recognizability of media characters will be discussed, as well as how different media content (hedonic and eudaimonic), parasocial relationships, and recognizability of media characters interact with each other in the context of the different portrayals of Joker.

2.1 Mood Management and Character Portrayal

Mood management theory, as initially proposed by Zillmann and Bryant (2013), suggests that people are often driven by hedonic motivations to select media content (p.158). The theory asserts that individuals tend to choose hedonic content to “avoid unpleasant degrees of arousal, namely boredom, and stress” (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2013, p.240). For example, after being exposed to an unpleasant or stressful scenario, media users are more likely to choose cheerful and relaxing media content rather than depressing ones to improve their moods. This process is defined as “mood optimization” (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2013, p.240).

Historically, media entertainment research primarily focused on this hedonic perspective, mainly exploring how individuals seek pleasure and arousal from media consumption. However, this sole perspective was challenged because researchers have noticed that mood optimization isn't applicable to all cases regarding media selection. For instance, research has shown that viewers choose to see tragic entertainment on purpose, intended to acquire some sense of meaning in their lives (Oliver & Raney, 2011, p.989), which goes against the previous assumptions for why people consume media content. In another example, research has found that people sometimes base their choice of music on situational demands instead of always optimizing their moods (Knobloch, 2003, p.247). In other words, whether something is considered appropriate and beneficial can win over the pure intention to feel pleasure, which also suggests that viewers have more complex intentions for choosing media content.

As a result, these findings prompted a shift in focus regarding audience engagement with media content, and researchers began to move beyond the scope of the hedonic motives and dive into the non-hedonic motive, or eudaimonic motive of the viewers. According to Oliver and Raney (2011), unlike the hedonic motive that focuses on receiving pleasure, the eudaimonic motive focuses on “...reflect a need for greater insight into or understanding of the human condition more broadly than the fulfillment of needs focused on the self” (p.989). This motive

reflects a broader understanding of how individuals seek entertainment that may resonate with them on a deeper or more meaningful level.

Therefore, many researchers have now started to investigate the “two-factor model of entertainment”, which includes both hedonic and eudaimonic standpoints (Vorderer, 2011, p.60). Research has suggested that the consumption of hedonic entertainment is associated with mood management, more specifically, hedonic media content can change people's moods and states, or namely mood repair, in two ways: “distract an individual from negative mood” or “address its cause through repair” (Reinecke et al., 2012, p. 438). In other words, hedonic media content can lift people’s moods either through temporary escapism, allowing individuals to avoid their negative moods and focus on relaxing themselves, or through fixing their negative moods or states from the source.

Most Joker movie contents fall under the scope of this type of entertainment. Like many other villain movies, the plot typically unfolds with the villain creating chaos or destruction, the hero fighting with the villain, or a combination of both. The storytelling is often exciting, simple, and fun. However, in these movies, the *portrayal* of the villain is usually conventional and flat and cannot seem to explain the huge success of the villain movie Joker (Phillips, 2019). Instead, the moral conflict element in this story is a common theme in eudaimonic entertainment (Bartsch & Hartmann, 2017, p.44). Hence, further exploration into the concept of eudaimonic entertainment might also be beneficial since it provides another meaningful perspective to investigate the media entertainment experience.

Wirth et al. (2012) applied the concept of eudaimonic well-being to media viewing and came up with several different aspects of eudaimonic entertainment experiences, including but not limited to purpose in life/self-acceptance, autonomy, and relatedness (pp.409-413). Unlike hedonic entertainment that focuses solely on joy, engaging with this type of content can elevate the viewing experience to a different level. More specifically, viewers might gain a deeper understanding of their own beliefs when watching meaningful movies (Dill-Shackleford et al., 2016, p.635) or be grateful for their control over life when watching “characters in poor or even life-threatening situations”(Wirth et al., 2012, p.412), or feel closer to the main character, “especially if the story depicts meaningful experiences or even misfortunes of the main character(s)” (Wirth et al., 2012, p.411). To conclude, eudaimonic movies can bring meaningful and multidimensional entertainment experiences (Wirth et al., 2012, p.424). Eudaimonic

entertainment also brings a similar mood repair experience as hedonic entertainment. However, it functions mainly through mastery experience (Rieger et al., 2014, p.471) and is not as immediate (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010, p.58).

In this research, we want to examine the potential impacts of hedonic and eudaimonic media content. As argued, it can be assumed that watching eudaimonic media content can bring meaningful engagement with movie characters and more profound well-being/self-growth, while watching hedonic media content might make people happier. As most portrayals of the character Joker focus on providing a fun, hedonic experience, while some content in the Joker series tells a more complicated, eudaimonic story as it adds more background stories of Joker, exploring these two types of media content under the context of Joker may offer valuable perspectives on their impacts on viewers, especially regarding character engagement and well-being.

2.2 Parasocial Relationships and Villain Portrayal

Parasocial relationships can be defined as “one-sided” relationships that audiences form with media characters (Horton and Wohl, 1956, p. 6). It is often used to describe the emotional bond between viewers and media characters. Even though it is one-sided, it can also be profound, and the relationship may even develop into friendship (Perse & Rubin, 1989, p.61). Over the years, the theory has developed and extended to other platforms, such as online media channels. Previous research has shown that viewers develop parasocial relationships not only with real people on media but also with fictitious characters (Tian & Hoffner, 2010, p.266). These relationships also extend to a broad range of character types, not just limited to good characters but also bad characters (Konijn & Hoorn, 2005 as cited in Tian & Hoffner, 2010, p.255) and morally ambiguous characters (Möri et al., 2023, p.271). In addition, unlike parasocial interactions, parasocial relationships usually exceed the viewing time, and can create a long-term effect on viewers (Möri et al., 2023, p. 260; Dibble et al., 2016, p.21). Viewers might want to receive guidance from the character (Hoffner, 1996, p.389), to disclose themselves to the character (Tukachinsky, 2011, p.76), or even desire romance from the character (Hoffner & Bond, 2022, p.3). Tian and Hoffner (2010) also suggested that viewers may alter their behaviors and attitudes to be more alike to the character (p.254).

In most superhero movies, the heroic characters overcome many obstacles and eventually defeat the villain, and it aligns with the moral belief that most people were brought up with,

which is that good people will always win over bad people. However, even though the storytelling of Joker is the complete opposite, viewers still didn't think poorly of the character and the movie. This might be due to the moral judgments viewers make, which are not always strictly binary. For example, the research conducted by Bonus et al. (2021) revealed that the parasocial relationship between the viewer and the villain can be strengthened when their behaviors are considered less immoral under specific circumstances (p.550). Take the movie *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008) as an example, viewers might feel closer to him because they understand how heartbreak can change a man completely. In addition, moral judgments have different aspects. The violation of one aspect doesn't necessarily affect the whole impression of the character. For example, "heroes may remain heroes even when violating moral norms, as long as those norms are in the domains of authority and purity" (Eden et al., 2015, p.201). Take the movie *Joker* (Phillips, 2019) as an example, viewers might understand him because he is also a victim of the corrupted city, and what he did could partially be interpreted as a fightback to an unjust social environment. Therefore, we can hypothesize that in the context of *Joker*, depending on the different portrayals of him, there's a chance of him being understood or even forgiven if he only breaks certain aspects of moral conduct.

Another factor that can evoke the understanding of the villain and change the moral judgments of the viewers is empathy. Empathy can be a strong indicator of a parasocial relationship and can stimulate viewers' various emotional reactions, such as feelings of closeness (Derrick et al., 2008, p.262). Batson et al. (1997) found that participants who listened to an interview told from the murderer's perspective and were induced to try to understand or relate to the murderer actively might have more positive feelings and thoughts toward them in general (p.110). Therefore, we can hypothesize that viewers might sense more understanding of the villain from a story told from the villain's perspective, such as in the movie *Joker* (Phillips, 2019).

Besides, by watching the morally ambiguous stories, viewers get the chance to think about their own attitudes toward morality (Krijnen & Tan, 2009, p.451), and reflect on their darker traits (Krause & Rucker, 2020, p.523), which may also increase the chances of them longing for a parasocial relationship with the villain.

Hence, the different portrayals of the villain can bring complicated and multifaceted moral judgments in media entertainment consumption and, furthermore, may affect how viewers

perceive the villains, how they perceive themselves, and whether they will develop a parasocial relationship with the character.

2.3 Recognizability of Media Characters

Identification is a framework often used to examine the relationship between viewers and the media characters. Cohen (2001) defined the process of identification as “a process that culminates in a cognitive and emotional state in which the audience member is aware not of him- or herself as an audience member, but rather imagines being one of the characters in the text” (p.252). In other words, identification can be described as the process of merging the viewer’s identity with the character’s, which can stimulate strong emotions in the viewers (Cohen, 2014, p.142). This concept also intertwined with viewers’ perception of the similarity for the media characters since perceived similarity can be an essential indicator regarding one’s identification with a character (Tian & Hoffner, 2010, p.263). In addition, Tian and Hoffner (2010) concluded that the more viewers are parasocially involved with the character, the more likely they will perceive themselves as similar to the character (p.265).

However, one disadvantage of perceived similarity, as Cohen and Hershman-Shitrit (2017) indicated in the research, is that viewers’ perspectives on similarity identification with the characters can be influenced by their interpretation or projection of the character, making their responses less reliable (p.112). For example, as Webster and Campbell (2023) indicated in their research, the viewers’ gender and personality traits can influence how they perceive some characters (p.2). As a result, if the viewers and the characters have some fundamental differences, but still share some common experiences or feelings, perceived similarity might not be the best approach to test the engagement between them. For example, with the character Joker, viewers might sense some similarities with Joker, such as his tragic background. However, they may not identify with him on a deeper level, as required by the concept of identification. Therefore, it can be inaccurate to test whether viewers identify with different portrayals of Joker since he is always portrayed as a killer in all settings.

Recognizability, on the other hand, can make up for this disadvantage. According to a recent study (Żerebecki et al., in-press), recognizability can be defined as “a sense of familiarity with a particular aspect of the character’s onscreen portrayal that the viewer experiences” (p.4). Compared with identification, recognizability does not require merging the viewers and media

characters but examines the degree to which viewers recognize the villain's personality, situation, or attitude. Therefore, this study will focus on recognizability rather than identification for the research purpose. In the context of Joker, it can be assumed that users might be more familiar with the Joker, who has a more similar or relatable background, than the other Jokers who are portrayed solely as cold-blooded killers.

2.4 Hypotheses

In this study, two clips were extracted from the movies “Joker” (Phillips, 2019) and “The Dark Knight” (Nolan, 2008) based on the idea of eudaimonic entertainment, these clips were named “Sad Joker clips”. In these clips, a more layered and relatively more realistic and morally ambiguous Joker was portrayed. Two other clips were extracted from the movies “Suicide Squad” (Ayer, 2016) and “The Dark Knight” (Nolan, 2008) based on the idea of hedonic entertainment, these clips were named “Crazy Joker clips”. In these clips, a more brutal and crazier Joker was portrayed. Another clip was extracted from the movie “Joker” and was named “Neutral Joker”. It was a clip with Joker in ordinary, everyday life scenes, therefore not as “entertaining” or “thought-provoking” as the previous two groups.

As discussed, according to mood management theory, hedonic entertainment and eudaimonic entertainment could both bring mood repair, while hedonic entertainment functions more superficially and immediate, the eudaimonic entertainment often inspires more in-depth reflections on viewers’ lives, and less immediate (Reinecke et al., 2012, p. 438; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010, p.58). For this research’s purpose, the Crazy Joker movie clips portray more superficial, exciting scenes, which fall under the scope of hedonic entertainment. Meanwhile, the Sad Joker movie clips portray a more layered Joker and include scenes where he shows his vulnerability, which falls under the scope of eudaimonic entertainment. Thus, it is assumed that:

H1: The Sad Joker group shows higher eudaimonic entertainment concerning life evaluation than the a) Crazy Joker group, and b) Neutral Joker group.

H2: The Sad Joker group shows higher eudaimonic entertainment concerning deeper reflection than the a) Crazy Joker group, and b) Neutral Joker group.

H3: The Crazy Joker group shows higher hedonic entertainment than the a) Sad Joker group, and b) Neutral Joker group.

H4: The Crazy Joker group shows higher mood repair concerning moods than a) Sad Joker group, and b) Neutral Joker group.

H5: The Crazy Joker group shows higher mood repair concerning arousal than a) Sad Joker group, and b) Neutral Joker group.

As discussed, according to parasocial relationship theory, viewers could feel empathy for the villain and, therefore, alter their moral judgments toward him (Wang et al., 2023, p.417), and even want to help him (Bergstrand & Jasper, 2018, p.232). In the Sad Joker movie clips, the portrayal of the character emphasizes more on his previous misfortune or the societal problems that might deeply affect his behaviors. Therefore, viewers might change their perception of Joker and develop a closer parasocial relationship with the Joker. In contrast, viewers might not have the same perception towards the completely brutal, evil Crazy Joker movie clips. Hence, they might develop less empathy or understanding towards Crazy Joker and also be less likely to form parasocial relationships with him. Thus, it is assumed that:

H6: The Sad Joker group shows stronger parasocial relationships concerning friend communication than a) Crazy Joker group, and b) Neutral Joker group.

H7: The Sad Joker group shows stronger parasocial relationships concerning friend support than a) Crazy Joker group, and b) Neutral Joker group.

As argued, according to recognizability theory, viewers are more likely to recognize a character who shares a similar background or experience as them (Żerebecki et al., in-press, p.4). For similar reasons explained above, the Neutral Joker group might provide more familiar Joker stories for the viewers than the other two groups, which could also increase the chances of forming recognizability and parasocial relationships. Thus, it is assumed that:

H8: The Neutral Joker group shows higher recognizability concerning personality recognizability than a) Sad Joker group, and b) Crazy Joker group.

H9: The Neutral Joker group shows higher recognizability concerning attitudinal recognizability than a) Sad Joker group, and b) Crazy Joker group.

H10: The Neutral Joker group shows higher recognizability concerning situational recognizability than a) Sad Joker group, and b) Crazy Joker group.

Recognizability is a relatively new concept targeted at character engagement. Previous research has shown that people tend to be attracted by characters who share similar behaviors and attitudes with them (Greenwood et al., 2021, p.175), indicating a potential connection

between perceived similarity and parasocial relationships. Hence, it can be assumed that recognizability, as a concept that examines the familiarity of the viewers with the characters, might have similar effects on the viewers. A more recent study (Żerebecki et al., in-press) also supported this idea that the more people can recognize the character, the more likely they can bond with the character (p.17). Hence, it is assumed that:

H11: Parasocial relationships concerning friend communication increase with a) attitudinal recognizability, b) situational recognizability, and c) personality recognizability.

H12: Parasocial relationships concerning friend support increase with a) attitudinal recognizability, b) situational recognizability, and c) personality recognizability.

When viewers can recognize Joker's situations, attitudes, or personality, it might be easier for them to be captivated by Joker's story. They are able to immerse themselves deeply into the movie, reflecting on the moral conflicts posed by the plots. For similar reasons, if viewers can form parasocial relationships with Joker, they might be more willing to think about the idea behind the movie and, therefore, gain more eudaimonic entertainment. Thus, it is assumed that:

H13: Eudaimonic entertainment concerning life evaluation increases with a) personality recognizability, b) situational recognizability, c) attitudinal recognizability, d) friend communication, and e) friend support.

H14: Eudaimonic entertainment concerning deeper reflection increases with a) personality recognizability, b) situational recognizability, c) attitudinal recognizability, d) friend communication, and e) friend support.

Like discussed above, when viewers can form recognizability and parasocial relationships with Joker, they might find it easier to completely immerse into the film and enjoy themselves. Therefore, it is assumed that:

H15: Hedonic entertainment increases with a) personality recognizability, b) situational recognizability, c) attitudinal recognizability, d) friend communication, and e) friend support.

As argued, mood repair can be brought by both hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment (Reinecke et al., 2012, p. 438; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010, p.58), and the more people can recognize the villain, they are more likely to form parasocial relationships with him and immerse themselves deeper into the story (Żerebecki et al., in-press, p.17), and therefore more likely to enjoy the entertainment and acquire mood repair. Hence, it is assumed that:

H16: Mood repair concerning moods increases with a) Personality recognizability, b) situational recognizability, c) attitudinal recognizability, d) friend communication, e) friend support, f) life evaluation, g) deeper reflection, and h) hedonic entertainment.

H17: Mood repair concerning arousals increases with a) Personality recognizability, b) situational recognizability, c) attitudinal recognizability, d) friend communication, e) friend support, f) life evaluation, g) deeper reflection, and h) hedonic entertainment.

3 Method

3.1 Justification

This study employs the quantitative method. Quantitative research “involves experiments and surveys, where data are collected using standardized methods such as questionnaires...The data are in the form of numbers from which statistical generalizations can be made” (Meadows, 2003, p.520). With its unique approach, the results of quantitative research are more likely to be applied to a larger population (Rahman, 2020, p.106), which is beneficial for this study.

This study also employs experimental design for research purposes. Experimental design is often utilized to test “whether an independent variable has a significant effect on a specific dependent variable” (Neuman, 2014, p.287), which is suitable for this study because it aims to explore the relationship between different portrayals, character engagement and well-being of the viewers. This study also uses random assignment, which is often used to facilitate unbiased results by dividing participants randomly into groups so that all groups can be treated as similar and equal (Neuman, 2014, p.288). In this study, all participants were randomly assigned into one out of five experimental groups. Each group watched a different movie clip than the others.

To enhance the validity of the study, which is defined as “the extent to which a concept is accurately measured in a quantitative study” (Heale & Twycross, 2015, p.66), this study utilized valid instruments, which are scales that were tested in previous research. To enhance the reliability of the study, which is the “consistency of a measure”, or “the extent to which a research instrument consistently has the same results if it is used in the same situation on repeated occasions” (Heale & Twycross, 2015, p.66), this study used consistent and standardized procedure to collect data, all participants answered the same questions.

3.2 Measurements

Eudaimonic/Hedonic Entertainment Experience. For the independent variable, the scale of eudaimonic and hedonic entertainment was taken from Wirth et al. (2012) and included 18 items (pp. 422-423). It had five subcomponents for the eudaimonic entertainment subscale: purpose in life/self-acceptance (e.g., “I feel good because now that I have seen this film I recognize my life as fulfilled and meaningful”), autonomy (e.g., “The film leaves me in a good mood because I became aware of the fact that I am in charge of my own life”), competence/personal growth (e.g., “I have a good feeling because the emotions that I felt during the film challenged me in a

positive way”), relatedness (e.g., “It felt good and right to feel empathy for [Protagonist(s)]”), and activation of central values (e.g., “Precisely because the film was so distressing I had the feeling that the film delivered central values of life in an authentic way”). In addition, the hedonic entertainment subscale included 3 items. (e.g. “Altogether, it gave me pleasure to watch the movie”). Questions were formulated on a 5-point Likert scale that asked participants to specify their agreement with a statement (1 = Strongly disagree, 5= Strongly agree).

For this research, the 15 items were entered into a confirmatory factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with oblique rotation (varimax) based on a fixed number of two factors, $KMO = .87$, $\chi^2 (N = 167, 105) = 1584.29$, $p < .001$. The resultant model explained 67.6% of the variance in eudaimonic entertainment. Factor loadings of individual items onto the two factors found are presented in *Table 1*. The factors found were:

Life evaluation. The first factor included ten items that related to participants’ life evaluation.

Deeper reflection. The second factor included five items that related to participants’ deeper reflection.

For Hedonic Entertainment Experience, the 3 items were entered into a confirmatory factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with oblique rotation (varimax) based on based on fixed number of one factor, $KMO = .76$, $\chi^2 (N = 167, 3) = 443.81$, $p < .001$. The resultant model explained 89.2% of the variance in hedonic entertainment. Only one factor was found, it is named *Hedonic Entertainment* with a Cronbach’s α of 0.94.

Parasocial relationship. For the dependent variable, the scale of parasocial relationships was taken from Tukachinsky (2011). The original scale has four subcomponents. Since this study only focuses on friendship interest, not romantic interests, it only included the following two subcomponents and included 13 items (p. 80): friends communication (e.g., “If X was a real person, I could have disclosed negative things about myself honestly and fully to him/her”) and friends support (e.g., “If X was a real person, I would give him/her emotional support”). Questions were formulated on a 5-point Likert scale that asked participants to specify their agreement with a statement (1 = Strongly disagree, 5= Strongly agree).

For this research, the 13 items were entered into a confirmatory factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with oblique rotation (varimax) based on a fixed number of two

Table 1. Factor loadings, explained the variance and reliability of the two factors found for the scale ‘eudaimonic entertainment.’

Item	<i>Life Evaluation</i>	<i>Deeper Reflection</i>
The film leaves me in a good mood because I became aware of the fact that I am in charge of my own life	.82	
I feel good because now that I have seen this film I feel that I am in charge of my own life	.82	
I feel good because this film has helped me to accept myself and my life	.82	
I feel good because now that I have seen this film I recognize my life as fulfilled and meaningful	.81	
I have a good feeling because the emotions that I felt during the film challenged me in a positive way	.78	
I have a good feeling because the film has shown me how content I can be with my own life	.77	
It is good to recognize that my life is not affected by adverse circumstances in Joker's life	.64	
It felt good to expose myself to the theme of the film	.61	
I have a good feeling because the film has made me reflect on myself and my life	.61	
It felt good to be captivated by the events around Joker during the film	.52	
It felt good to feel compassion for Joker during the film		.89
It felt good and right to feel empathy for Joker		.86
Altogether, I feel good because Joker acted in a responsible way		.76
It makes me feel good to see that Joker deals with his life's trials and difficulties in an exemplary manner		.73
Precisely because the film was so distressing I had the feeling that the film delivered central values of life in an authentic way		.58
<i>R</i> ²	.45	.15
<i>Cronbach's α</i>	.91	.85
<i>M</i>	2.59	2.64
<i>SD</i>	.89	.96

factors, $KMO = .92$, $\chi^2 (N = 167, 78) = 1901.60$, $p < .001$. The resultant model explained 70.5% of the variance in parasocial relationships. Factor loadings of individual items onto the two factors found are presented in Table 2. The factors found were:

Friend support. The first factor included eight items that related to participants' intention to be supportive of Joker. *Friend communication.* The second factor included five items that related to participants' willingness to communicate with Joker.

Table 2. Factor loadings, explained the variance and reliability of the two factors found for the scale 'parasocial relationship'

Item	<i>Friend Support</i>	<i>Friend Communication</i>
If Joker was a real person, he would be able to count on me in times of need	.84	
If Joker was a real person, I would give him emotional support	.81	
If Joker was a real person, I would share my possessions with him	.80	
I want to promote the well-being of Joker	.75	
If Joker was a real person, I could have a warm relationship with him	.70	
If Joker was a real person, I would be able to count on him in times of need	.70	
If Joker was a real person, I could trust him completely	.66	
I think Joker could be a friend of mine	.65	
If Joker was a real person, I could have disclosed a great deal of things about myself to him		.80
If Joker was a real person, I could have disclosed negative things about myself honestly and fully (deeply) to him		.79
If Joker was a real person, I could have disclosed positive things about myself honestly and fully (deeply) to him		.77
Sometimes, I wish I knew what Joker would do in my situation		.71
Sometimes, I wish I could ask Joker for advice		.68
R^2	.63	.07
Cronbach's α	.94	.88
M	2.14	2.08
SD	1.04	.99

Recognizability. For the dependent variable, the scale of parasocial relationship was taken from a recent study (Żerebecki et al., in-press) and included 20 items (pp. 28-29). It had three

subcomponents: personality recognizability (e.g., “I recognize the personality traits of <character> as traits that I have”), situational recognizability (e.g., “I recognize the topics that <favorite character> discusses with others as the topics I could discuss with other people in my life”), and attitudinal recognizability (e.g., “the thought processes before decisions of <character> as thought processes I have”). Questions were formulated on a 5-point Likert scale that asked participants to specify their agreement with a statement (1 = Strongly disagree, 5= Strongly agree).

For this research, the 20 items were entered into a confirmatory factor analysis using Principal Components extraction with oblique rotation (varimax) based on a fixed number of three factors, $KMO = .94$, $\chi^2 (N = 167, 190) = 2784.16$, $p < .001$. The resultant model explained 65.7% of the variance in recognizability. Factor loadings of individual items onto the three factors found are presented in Table 3. The full table can be found in Appendix A. The factors found were:

Attitudinal Recognizability. The first factor included nine items that related to participants’ recognizability of Joker’s attitudes.

Situational Recognizability. The second factor included seven items that related to participants’ recognizability of Joker’s situation.

Personality Recognizability. The third factor included four items that related to participants’ recognizability of Joker’s personality.

Affect Grid. To measure the participants’ mood and arousal, the scale of the affect grid was taken from Russell et al. (1989). It is a single-item scale, and it assesses the dimensions of pleasure–displeasure and arousal–sleepiness. The differences between mood/arousal after mood induction and mood baseline is recorded as “mood/arousal 1to2”. The difference between mood/arousal after mood intervention and mood induction is recorded as “mood/arousal 2to3”.

Demographics. Participants chose from “male”, “female”, “non-binary” and “prefer not to say” for gender. Participants answered their nationality and age and then reached the end of the survey.

3.3 Stimulus Material

All movie clips used in this study are from the movies Joker (Phillips, 2019), The Dark Knight (Nolan, 2008), and Suicide Squad (Ayer, 2016).

As introduced earlier, *Joker* (Phillips, 2019) is a movie about a mentally troubled, underclass person who suffers from pseudobulbar affect turned into a crazy killer named Joker. Later on, many people who also suffered in life even regarded Joker as a spiritual leader and began to imitate his “rebellious” behavior, eventually putting Gotham City into great chaos and violence. For the purpose of this study, two clips were used from the movie, and the clips were named “Sad Joker One” and “Neutral Joker.” In the “Sad Joker One” clip, participants saw Joker working as the sign spinner. However, some random kids ran from the street and took his sign. Joker started chasing them and ended up being beaten up by them in an ally. He lay on the ground, moaning in pain. In the “Neutral Joker” clip, participants saw Joker bringing his mother dinner and talking with his mother about her previous letter to the mayor. Later on, they lay on the bed together to watch TV. This plot happened before he found out his mother used to be a child abuser, and they had a good relationship at that time.

Stimulus material example:

Sad Joker One: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_TKHN8OqIIQ (HITS, 2019, December 19)

Neutral Joker: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vIblPpsKnLk> (Spidey Clash, 2020, October 23)

The Dark Knight (Nolan, 2008) is a movie that talks about the battle between Joker and Batman (Harvey Dent). For the purpose of this study, two clips were used from the movie, and the clips were named “Sad Joker Two” and “Crazy Joker Two”. In the “Sad Joker Two” clip, participants saw the Joker crashed a dinner party looking for Batman. He held Batman's girlfriend at knifepoint, demanding her to tell Batman's location. While he was doing that, Joker told Batman's girlfriend the origin of his facial scars that looked like a bloody smile. He did this to himself to cheer up his ex-wife, who also got carved on the face since she could not pay the money back for gambling. However, his ex-wife ran away after she saw the scar out of her fear for Joker. Later on, Batman arrived, battled with the Joker, and rescued his girlfriend. In the “Crazy Joker Two” clip, participants saw Joker come to meet with gangs to propose a partnership against Batman. In order to demonstrate his dominance, he killed a gang member with a pencil and outlined his plan. When he was threatened by one of the gang members, he left them calmly while revealing a vest with grenades in it.

Stimulus material example:

Sad Joker Two: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2FV2E34Bwo> (Apex Clips, 2021, May 22)

Crazy Joker Two: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ppOVLojanC8> (Movieclips, 2022, November 11)

Suicide Squad (Ayer, 2016) is a movie that talks about several supervillains recruited by the government to conduct secret missions. For the purpose of this study, one clip was used from the movie, and the clip was named “Crazy Joker One”. In this clip, participants saw the Joker persuading Harley, who was the psychiatrist of him at that time, to give him a machine gun to escape the hospital. He tortured Harley afterward using electroshock and persuaded her to prove her love by jumping into a vat of chemicals. Eventually, Joker saved her from the chemicals, and they fell in love.

Stimulus material example:

Crazy Joker One: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EGmhsqWo1bY> (Kaylee Johnson, 2020, May 28)

The Crazy Joker clips were selected based on the concept of hedonic entertainment while the Sad Joker clips are selected based on eudaimonic entertainment. The Neutral Joker clip functions as the control group.

3.4 Procedure

All participants were informed about the nature of the survey before they started to fill out the survey. This information included the fact that the research was about different perceptions of the character Joker, the duration of the survey, and the fact that participation is voluntary. Besides, all data were collected anonymously and would only be used for academic purposes. In addition, all participants were asked if they were 18 years or older, if they gave consent to all the terms, and if they wished to continue. If they disagree with the terms, the survey would end automatically for them. The survey was conducted in English. Participants could fill out the survey through mobile phones, laptops, computers, or tablets.

Next, all participants were asked to fill out the affect grid scale for the first time. This step is designed to test the participants’ mood and state before they took the survey. Then, they wrote about a situation that made them sad for 2 minutes for mood induction and again filled out the

affect grid scale. This step is designed to test whether participants feel less positive after thinking about a sad event.

After this, all participants were randomly assigned into five experimental groups, and the media intervention section began.

The first group watched a “Sad Joker One” clip from the movie *Joker* (Phillips, 2019). The second group watched a “Sad Joker Two” clip from the movie *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008). The third group watched a “Neutral Joker” clip from the movie *Joker* (Phillips, 2019). The fourth group watched a “Crazy Joker One” clip from the movie *Suicide Squad* (Ayer, 2016). The fifth group watched a “Crazy Joker Two” clip from the movie *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008).

After watching the clip, participants were asked to fill out the affect grid scale again. This step is designed to test whether participants show mood repair after the mood intervention.

Then, participants were asked questions about recognizability, parasocial relationships, eudaimonic entertainment, and hedonic entertainment.

Lastly, participants were asked about their gender, age, and nationality. The survey takes approximately 12 minutes to complete.

3.5 Sample

The data collection of the experiment took place from Mar 29th, 2024 until Mar 30th, 2024. The research used the mixed method by combining snowball sampling and random sampling. For the snowball sampling method, data was collected by asking family members and friends to spread the survey through their personal networks and social media accounts. The involved social media platforms are WhatsApp and WeChat. For the random sampling, data was collected using the online survey platform Prolific.

After data cleaning, $N = 167$ were included in further analyses. The groups who watched Sad Joker One, Sad Joker Two, and Neutral Joker clips each contained 33 participants, and the groups who watched Crazy Joker One and Crazy Joker Two clips each contained 34 participants. In the final sample, the percentage of women is 34.1%, the male is 62.9%, “non-binary” is 1.8%, “prefer not to say” is 1.2%. Participants' average age was 30.11 years old ($SD = 8.76$). The youngest participant was 18 years old, and the oldest participant was 59 years old. Due to the international background of the participants, the sample obtained a total of 31 different

nationalities, the most prominent being United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (15.1%) and South Africa (13.3%).

4 Results

4.1 Pre-analysis for mood management

In the following analysis, the three groups refer to the Sad Joker, Crazy Joker, and Neutral Joker groups. The mood baseline is the result of the second affect grid test, where the mood induction has yet to start.

The pre-analysis for mood management was conducted to test whether the participants were in a similar state of mind (mood & arousal) before the media intervention process.

An ANOVA was conducted with the three groups as the independent variable and differences between mood after mood induction and mood baseline as the dependent variable. No significant main effect was found, $F(2, 164) = 1.61, p = .202, \eta^2_p = .02$.

An ANOVA was conducted with the three groups as the independent variable and differences between arousal after mood induction and mood baseline as the dependent variable. No significant main effect was found, $F(2, 164) = 1.22, p = .298, \eta^2_p = .02$.

Therefore, there are no significant differences regarding moods or arousal for all three groups before media intervention.

4.2 Group Differences - Mood Repair

An ANOVA was conducted with the three groups as the independent variable and differences between mood after mood intervention and mood induction as the dependent variable. No significant main effect was found, $F(2, 164) = 2.81, p = .063, \eta^2_p = .03$. Post-hoc *t*-tests showed that participants who watched Crazy Joker clips had a significantly higher mood repair concerning moods ($M = 0.49, SD = 2.08$) than participants who watched Sad Joker clips ($M = -0.23, SD = 1.68$), $t(132) = -2.18, p = .031$. However, participants who watched Crazy Joker clips didn't have a significantly higher mood repair concerning moods than participants who watched Neutral Joker clips ($M = 0.27, SD = 1.07$), $t(98.641) = 0.68, p = .500$. Hence, H4a is accepted, H4b is rejected.

An ANOVA was conducted with the three groups as the independent variable and differences between arousal after mood intervention and mood induction as the dependent variable. No significant main effect was found, $F(2, 164) = 1.43, p = .243, \eta^2_p = .02$. Hence, H5a and H5b are rejected.

4.3 Group differences – Eudaimonic Entertainment Experience

An ANOVA was conducted with the three groups as the independent variable and life evaluation as the dependent variable. No significant main effect was found, $F(2, 164) = .53, p = .593, \eta^2_p = .01$. Thus, H1a and H1b are rejected.

An ANOVA was conducted with the three groups as the independent variable and deeper reflection as the dependent variable. A significant main effect was found, $F(2, 164) = 12.92, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .14$. Post-hoc t -tests showed that participants who watched Sad Joker clips ($M = 2.70, SD = 0.86$) had a significantly higher deeper reflection than participants who watched Crazy Joker clips ($M = 2.29, SD = 1.00$), $t(130.076) = 2.55, p = .012$. However, participants who watched Neutral Joker clips ($M = 3.25, SD = .72$), $t(97) = -3.14, p = .002$, had even higher deeper reflection than participants who watched Sad Neutral Joker clips. Thus, H2a is accepted, and H2b is rejected.

4.4 Group differences – Hedonic Entertainment Experience

An ANOVA was conducted with the three groups as the independent variable and hedonic entertainment as the dependent variable. No significant main effect was found, $F(2, 164) = .10, p = .905, \eta^2_p = .001$. Hence, the three groups didn't show significant differences regarding hedonic entertainment experience. Therefore, H3a and H3b are rejected.

4.5 Group Differences – Parasocial Relationship

An ANOVA was conducted with the three groups as the independent variable and friend communication as the dependent variable. No significant main effect was found, $F(2, 164) = .90, p = .441, \eta^2_p = .01$. Hence, H6a and H6b are rejected.

An ANOVA was conducted with the three groups as the independent variable and friend support as the dependent variable. A significant main effect was found, $F(2, 164) = 9.73, p < .001, \eta^2_p = .11$. Post-hoc t -tests showed that participants who watched Sad Joker clips ($M = 2.19, SD = 1.05$) had significantly higher friend support than participants who watched Crazy Joker clips ($M = 1.80, SD = 0.94$), $t(132) = 2.25, p = .026$. However, participants who watched Neutral Joker clips ($M = 2.72, SD = 0.98$), $t(97) = -2.44, p = .016$ had even higher friend support than participants who watched Sad Joker clips.

Hence, H7a is accepted and H7b is rejected.

4.6 Group Differences – Recognizability

An ANOVA was conducted with the three groups as the independent variable and personality recognizability as the dependent variable. No significant main effect was found, $F(2, 164) = 1.90, p = .153, \eta^2_p = .02$. Thus, H8a and H8b are rejected.

An ANOVA was conducted with the three groups as the independent variable and attitudinal recognizability as the dependent variable. A significant main effect was found, $F(2, 164) = 3.13, p = .046, \eta^2_p = .04$. Post-hoc t -tests showed that participants who watched Neutral Joker clips ($M = 2.46, SD = 0.87$) had significantly higher attitudinal recognizability than participants who watched Sad Joker clips ($M = 2.07, SD = 0.92$), $t(97) = -2.03, p = .045$, and participants who watched Crazy Joker clips ($M = 1.96, SD = 1.05$), $t(99) = -2.41, p = .018$. Thus, H9a and H9b are accepted.

An ANOVA was conducted with the three groups as the independent variable and situational recognizability as the dependent variable. A significant main effect was found, $F(2, 164) = 4.21, p = .016, \eta^2_p = .05$. Post-hoc t -tests showed that participants who watched Neutral Joker clips ($M = 2.48, SD = 0.97$) had significantly higher situational recognizability than participants who watched Crazy Joker clips ($M = 1.89, SD = 0.95$), $t(99) = -2.94, p = .004$. However, participants who watched Neutral Joker clips didn't have significantly higher situational recognizability than participants who watched Sad Joker clips ($M = 2.16, SD = 1.01$), $t(97) = -1.52, p = .131$. Thus, H10a is rejected, H10b is accepted.

4.7 Predictors for PSR

A multiple linear regression was conducted with friend communication as the dependent variable. Predictors were “attitudinal recognizability”, “situational recognizability”, and “personality recognizability”. The model was found to be significant, $F(3, 163) = 59.68, p < .001, R^2 = .52$. Attitudinal recognizability ($\beta = .45, p < .001$) and situational recognizability ($\beta = .29, p = .006$) were found to be significant positive predictors for friend communication. However, personality recognizability ($\beta = .02, p = .860$) was not significant.

A multiple linear regression was conducted with friend support as the dependent variable. Predictors were “attitudinal recognizability”, “situational recognizability”, and “personality recognizability”. The model was found to be significant, $F(3, 163) = 59.20, p < .001, R^2 = .52$. Attitudinal recognizability ($\beta = .48, p < .001$) and situational recognizability ($\beta = .23, p = .029$)

were found to be a significant positive predictor for friend support. However, personality recognizability ($\beta = .05, p = .577$) was not significant.

4.7.1 Parasocial Relationship - Sad Joker Group

For the Sad Joker group, a multiple linear regression was conducted with friend communication as the dependent variable. Predictors were “attitudinal recognizability”, “situational recognizability”, and “personality recognizability”. The model was found to be significant, $F(3, 62) = 33.11, p < .001, R^2 = .62$. Attitudinal recognizability ($\beta = .34, p = .029$) and personality recognizability ($\beta = .26, p = .032$) were found to be a significant positive predictor for friend communication. However, situational recognizability ($\beta = .26, p = .091$) was not significant.

For the Sad Joker group, a multiple linear regression was conducted with friend support as the dependent variable. Predictors were “attitudinal recognizability”, “situational recognizability”, and “personality recognizability”. The model was found to be significant, $F(3, 62) = 32.79, p < .001, R^2 = .61$. Attitudinal recognizability ($\beta = .43, p = .006$) was found to be a significant positive predictor for friend support. However, personality recognizability ($\beta = .17, p = .155$) and situational recognizability ($\beta = .25, p = .108$) were not significant.

4.7.2 Parasocial Relationship - Crazy Joker Group

For the Crazy Joker group, a multiple linear regression was conducted with friend communication as the dependent variable. Predictors were “attitudinal recognizability”, “situational recognizability”, and “personality recognizability”. The model was found to be significant, $F(3, 64) = 16.54, p < .001, R^2 = .44$. Attitudinal recognizability ($\beta = .58, p = .019$) was found to be a significant positive predictor for friend communication. However, situational recognizability ($\beta = .13, p = .514$) and personality recognizability ($\beta = -.04, p = .857$) were not significant.

For the Crazy Joker group, a multiple linear regression was conducted with friend support as the dependent variable. Predictors were “attitudinal recognizability”, “situational recognizability”, and “personality recognizability”. The model was found to be significant, $F(3, 64) = 14.33, p < .001, R^2 = .40$. Attitudinal recognizability ($\beta = .41, p = .101$), situational recognizability ($\beta = .13, p = .526$) and personality recognizability ($\beta = .12, p = .598$) were not significant.

4.7.3 Parasocial Relationship - Neutral Joker Group

For the Neutral Joker group, a multiple linear regression was conducted with friend communication as the dependent variable. Predictors were “attitudinal recognizability”, “situational recognizability”, and “personality recognizability”. The model was found to be significant, $F(3, 29) = 19.95, p < .001, R^2 = .67$. Attitudinal recognizability ($\beta = .69, p = .001$) and situational recognizability ($\beta = .39, p = .024$) were found to be a significant positive predictor for friend communication, and personality recognizability ($\beta = -.33, p = .041$) was found to be a significant negative predictor of friend communication.

For the Neutral Joker group, a multiple linear regression was conducted with friend support as the dependent variable. Predictors were “attitudinal recognizability”, “situational recognizability”, and “personality recognizability”. The model was found to be significant, $F(3, 29) = 15.43, p < .001, R^2 = .62$. Attitudinal recognizability ($\beta = .90, p < .001$) was found to be a significant positive predictor for friend support. However, personality recognizability ($\beta = -.15, p = .389$) and situational recognizability ($\beta = -.03, p = .869$) were not significant. Hence, H11a is accepted, H11b, H11c, H12a, H12b and H12c are rejected.

4.8 Predictors for Entertainment

A multiple liner regression was conducted with life evaluation, deeper reflection, and hedonic entertainment as the dependent variables. Predictors were “personality recognizability”, “situational recognizability”, “attitudinal recognizability”, “friend communication” and “friend support”. The summary of results can be found in table 4.

Table 4. Predictors for entertainment

Item	Life Evaluation	Deeper Reflection	Hedonic Entertainment
Personality Recognizability	-.06	.05	-.11
Situational Recognizability	.22	.25*	.09
Attitudinal Recognizability	-.06	-.04	.06
Friend Communication	.37**	.04	.13
Friend Support	-.06	.47***	-.08
R^2	.17	.49	.02
p -value	<.001	<.001	.65
f -value	6.42	30.57	.67

It can be concluded from table 4 that for all groups, friend communication was found to be a significant positive predictor for life evaluation. Situational recognizability and friend support were found to be a significant positive predictor for deeper reflection. The summary of results for Sad Joker can be found in table 5.

Table 5. Predictors for entertainment - Sad Joker

Item	Life Evaluation	Deeper Reflection	Hedonic Entertainment
Personality	.02	.20	-.03
Recognizability			
Situational Recognizability	.06	.13	.18
Attitudinal Recognizability	.08	.12	-.17
Friend Communication	.20	.05	-.12
Friend Support	-.15	.31	-.05
<i>R</i> ²	.05	.51	.04
<i>p-value</i>	.708	<.001	.752
<i>f-value</i>	.59	12.49	.53

It can be concluded from table 5 that for Sad Joker, no single significant predictor was found. The summary of results for Crazy Joker group can be found in table 6.

Table 6. Predictors for entertainment - Crazy Joker

Item	Life Evaluation	Deeper Reflection	Hedonic Entertainment
Personality	.19	-.16	-.18
Recognizability			
Situational Recognizability	.15	.29	-.13
Attitudinal Recognizability	-.29	.03	.43
Friend Communication	.22	.11	.19
Friend Support	.25	.44*	.03
<i>R</i> ²	.23	.44	.13
<i>p-value</i>	.006	<.001	.108
<i>f-value</i>	3.66	9.58	1.89

It can be concluded from table 6 that for Crazy Joker, friend support was found to be a significant positive predictor for deeper reflection. The summary of results for Neutral Joker group can be found in table 7. It can be concluded from table 7 that for Neutral Joker, friend communication was found to be a significant positive predictor for life evaluation. Situational recognizability was found to be a significant positive predictor for hedonic entertainment. Based on all the results, all hypotheses from H13, H14, and H15 are rejected.

Table 7. Predictors for entertainment - Neutral Joker

Item	Life Evaluation	Deeper Reflection	Hedonic Entertainment
Personality			
Recognizability	-.25	.15	-.21
Situational Recognizability	.42	.36	.69*
Attitudinal Recognizability	.05	-.21	-.53
Friend Communication	.69**	.14	.03
Friend Support	-.35	.34	.32
<i>R</i> ²	.60	.43	.27
<i>p</i> -value	<.001	.007	.108
<i>f</i> -value	8.09	4.13	2.02

4.9 Predictors for Mood Repair

A multiple liner regression was conducted with the difference between mood after media intervention and mood induction as the dependent variables. Predictors were “personality recognizability”, “situational recognizability”, “attitudinal recognizability”, “friend communication”, “friend support”, “life evaluation”, “deeper reflection”, and “hedonic entertainment”. The summary of results can be found in table 8.

Table 8. Predictors for mood repair

Item	Mood	Arousal
Personality Recognizability	-.08	-.09
Situational Recognizability	-.19	-.20
Attitudinal Recognizability	.06	.15
Friend Communication	.19	.11
Friend Support	-.16	-.16
Life Evaluation	.08	.15
Deeper Reflection	-.01	.10
Hedonic Entertainment	.44***	.15
<i>R</i> ²	.27	.10
<i>p</i> -value	<.001	.024
<i>f</i> -value	7.12	2.29

It can be concluded from table 8 that for all groups, hedonic entertainment was found to be a significant positive predictor for mood repair concerning moods. The summary of results for Sad Joker group can be found in table 9. It can be concluded from table 9 that for Sad Joker,

personality recognizability was found to be a significant negative predictor for mood repair concerning moods. Hedonic entertainment was found to be a significant positive predictor for mood repair concerning moods.

Table 9. Predictors for mood repair - Sad Joker

Item	Mood	Arousal
Personality Recognizability	-.33*	-.26
Situational Recognizability	.05	.12
Attitudinal Recognizability	.18	.22
Friend Communication	.29	-.05
Friend Support	-.18	.01
Life Evaluation	-.11	.15
Deeper Reflection	-.13	-.17
Hedonic Entertainment	.61***	.08
<i>R</i> ²	.39	.10
<i>p</i> -value	<.001	.634
<i>f</i> -value	4.61	.77

The summary of results for Crazy Joker group can be found in table 10. It can be concluded from table 10 that for Crazy Joker, hedonic entertainment was found to be a significant positive predictor for mood repair concerning moods. Situational recognizability and friend support were found to be significant negative predictors for mood repair concerning arousal.

Table 10. Predictors for mood repair - Crazy Joker

Item	Mood	Arousal
Personality Recognizability	.14	.11
Situational Recognizability	-.20	-.50*
Attitudinal Recognizability	-.20	.19
Friend Communication	.28	.20
Friend Support	-.27	-.43*
Life Evaluation	.26	.27
Deeper Reflection	.004	.32
Hedonic Entertainment	.47***	.15
<i>R</i> ²	.39	.31
<i>p</i> -value	<.001	.003
<i>f</i> -value	4.74	3.36

The summary of results for Neutral Joker group can be found in table 11. It can be concluded from table 11 that for Neutral Joker, attitudinal recognizability was found to be a

significant negative predictor for mood repair concerning arousal. Based on all the results, all hypotheses from H16 and H17 are rejected.

Table 11. Predictors for mood repair - Neutral Joker

Item	Mood	Arousal
Personality Recognizability	.15	.24
Situational Recognizability	-.26	.19
Attitudinal Recognizability	-.31	-.95*
Friend Communication	.25	.61
Friend Support	.20	.43
Life Evaluation	.15	-.19
Deeper Reflection	.36	-.08
Hedonic Entertainment	-.16	-.09
<i>R</i> ²	.20	.26
<i>p</i> -value	.665	.423
<i>f</i> -value	.73	1.06

4.10 Results Overview

The summary of all the hypotheses results can be found in Appendix B.

5 Discussion

Former studies have indicated that viewers can develop parasocial relationships with different characters (Tian & Hoffner, 2010, p.255; Möri et al., 2023, p.271), and most often based on recognizability, empathy, and similar experiences (Żerebecki et al., in-press, p.17; Derrick et al., 2008, p.262; Krause & Rucker, 2020, p.528). In addition, the more pleasure-seeking hedonic portrayal might bring great mood repair, while the more profound and complicated eudaimonic portrayal could evoke deeper thoughts and facilitate the self-growth of the viewers (Reinecke et al., 2012, p. 438; Wirth et al., 2012, p.424).

Based on the previous findings, this study aims to investigate how different portrayals of the villain can influence viewers' engagement with the character and their well-being. Specifically, it focuses on the diverse portrayals of the character Joker and examines whether superficial versus complex portrayals have distinct effects on participants. Moreover, these concepts can interact with different media types, such as eudaimonic and hedonic entertainment, creating unique watching experiences and changing one's mood and state. The results prove the existence of some connections between these concepts, but they are only evident within certain perspectives and portrayals. This result highlights the complexity of this relationship and offers some intriguing findings.

5.1 Impact of Portrayal on Character Engagement

5.1.1 Impact of Portrayal on Parasocial Relationship

For the first part of the research question concerning *parasocial relationships*, it was found that variations in the Joker's portrayals did not result in different levels of parasocial relationships regarding *friend communication* (H6). However, these portrayals did notably influence *friend support* (H7), with the Neutral Joker getting the highest supporting intention. This result partially aligns with previous findings that parasocial relationships can be strengthened when the villain is not that immoral (Bonus et al., 2021, p.550). However, against previous assumptions, even though Sad Joker was portrayed as a poor man and his previous misfortunes before he transformed into a villain were displayed, people didn't develop a closer parasocial relationship with him than the other versions of Joker.

This could be due to the fact that people often feel reluctant to communicate honestly with people who seem too far away from a healthy place in their lives. They may feel that these

people are not appropriate recipients for sharing either positive or negative experiences or that they may not be capable of providing meaningful support or beneficial advice. Hence, compared to a desperate and depressed villain like Sad Joker, or a completely evil and brutal villain like Crazy Joker, people are more likely to support the villain who is similar to themselves but in a slightly disadvantaged place in life. This tendency suggests that there's a potential boundary in parasocial relationships. The perceived negative state of the villain can eliminate character engagement. Hence, regarding the research question, this finding suggests that (1) viewers are more likely to engage with a villain who, like the viewers, is in a stable mental state, faces ordinary struggles, and could benefit from some support.

5.1.2 Impact of Portrayal on Recognizability

For the first part of the research question concerning *recognizability*, as the results indicated, *personality recognizability* (H8) did not differ in different portrayals of Joker, but *attitudinal* (H9) and *situational recognizability* (H10) did show variance. More specifically, people reported more attitudinal and situational recognizability for the Neutral Joker than the Crazy Joker. This outcome partially aligns with previous literature that viewers are more attracted to characters who are similar to them (Greenwood et al., 2021, p.175). Neutral Joker's clip includes more scenes from everyday life, portraying him as a character who shares values similar to most people. This kind of portrayal may make the Neutral Joker more recognizable to viewers in terms of attitudes and situations. Moreover, this portrayal makes the Joker more accessible to ordinary viewers and, therefore, easier for the viewers to recognize than the other versions of Joker. For instance, the portrayal of the Joker dealing with poverty and caring for his sick mother can be more relatable compared to extreme scenarios, such as threatening people or blowing up a hospital. However, the relatively consistent level of personality recognizability across all portrayals could be attributed to the inherent diversity of personalities of people, which makes it challenging for viewers to recognize themselves in Joker's personality regardless of portrayals. Hence, regarding the research question, this finding suggests that (2) viewers are more likely to recognize a villain who shares a similar attitude and situation as them.

5.2 Impact of Portrayal on Well-being

5.2.1 Impact of Portrayal on Entertainment Experience/Enjoyment

For the second part of the research question concerning *eudaimonic entertainment* experience. Different portrayals of Joker didn't result in various levels of *life evaluation* (H1) but did result in different levels of *deeper reflection* (H2), with the Sad Joker having a significantly higher eudaimonic entertainment experience than the Crazy Joker. This result partially aligns with the previous finding that thought-provoking movies can bring more reflection and meaningful entertainment experiences (Wirth et al., 2012, pp.413, 424). The Sad Joker, depicted with more complexity, offered a more in-depth entertainment experience that prompted viewers to reflect on their own moral choices after watching the film clip.

However, against the previous assumption, the Neutral Joker has an even deeper reflection. It suggests that compared to the depressed, desperate villain, the villain who seems more realistically troubled — neither desperate nor completely evil — may stimulate even more moral struggles in people. Viewers were evoked to reflect more on their compassion for the villain and the acceptability of the villain's actions. However, one possible explanation for the consistent level of life evaluation across all portrayals is that, regardless of whether the villain is portrayed as poor and suffering or destructive and evil, they both live a life that viewers do not desire. Therefore, the viewers feel more content with their own lives overall after watching the movie clips. Hence, regarding the research question, this finding suggests that (3) the more complicated yet realistic portrayal of the villain is more likely to evoke viewers' deeper reflection/eudaimonic well-being.

For the second part of the research question concerning the *hedonic entertainment* experience, variations in the Joker's portrayal did not result in different levels of hedonic entertainment experience (H3). This result contrasts with the previous assumption that the more superficial, pleasure-seeking portrayals, like that of the Crazy Joker, would typically have higher levels of hedonic entertainment. One of the possible explanations is that the Crazy Joker movie clips are a bit short and lack the whole storyline. As a result, viewers couldn't fully immerse into the story and found the movie clips less fulfilling, eventually diminishing their entertainment experience. For example, in the clip from the movie *The Dark Knight* (Nolan, 2008), the viewers only saw how Joker planned to kill Harvey Dent, but they didn't fully understand who he was and why this was so important for Joker.

5.2.2 Impact of Portrayal on Mood Repair

For the second part of the research question concerning *mood repair*, it was found that the different portrayals of the Joker did not significantly impact *arousal* (H5) but did influence *mood* (H4), with the Crazy Joker having a significantly higher mood repair than the Sad Joker. This result partially aligns with Dill-Shackleford et al. (2016)'s finding that people watch simple, shallow entertainment for fun (p.636), and they get away from their problems, and receive a mood boost (Reinecke et al., 2012, p. 438). However, the same relationship didn't appear in the arousal changes. Like hedonic entertainment, it is possible that due to the short movie clips, relevant effects were not tested out. It is also possible that the activity of watching the movie itself made people more lifted overall. Hence, regarding the research question, this finding suggests that (4) for entertainment media, compared to a more complicated portrayal, the simpler, shallow portrayal of the villain is more likely to lift the moods of the viewers.

5.3 Character Engagement and Well-being

5.3.1 Impact of Portrayal on Recognizability and Parasocial Relationships

In addition, this study examined the interactions between different concepts within character engagement and well-being. It was found that attitudinal recognizability is a positive indicator for parasocial relationships concerning friend communication across all groups and a positive indicator for parasocial relationships concerning friend support, except for the Crazy Joker group (H11a, H12a). This outcome suggests that attitudinal recognizability plays a significant role in shaping the parasocial relationships between the viewers and the villain. Nevertheless, the result also suggests that participants might find it challenging to recognize the attitudes of the villain, who is portrayed as completely evil. Even if they did, they may feel reluctant to support him. Hence, regarding the research question, this finding suggests that (5) attitudinal recognizability does not always lead to positive parasocial relationships, especially when the villain possesses some extremely evil traits. In addition, against previous assumptions, situational recognizability and personality recognizability didn't show a consistent impact on parasocial relationships across different portrayals (H11b, H12b, H11c, H12c). For all combined groups, only attitudinal recognizability and situational recognizability are positive indicators for parasocial relationships. Like argued, the inherent varied personalities could be the reason why

participants didn't feel so familiar with Joker's personality, or even develop parasocial relationships with him.

Moreover, for the separate groups, situational recognizability was only found to be a positive indicator for parasocial relationships in the combined group and a positive indicator for parasocial relationships concerning friend communication for the Neutral Joker. Personality recognizability was only found to be a positive indicator for parasocial relationships concerning friend communication for the Sad Joker, and a negative indicator for parasocial relationships concerning friend communication for the Neutral Joker. This result could be due to the small sample size for each group. It also suggests a possibility that some other factors may play significant roles in shaping the interactions between recognizability and parasocial relationships.

5.3.2 Influences on Entertainment

The study obtains several findings regarding the indicators for entertainment. Notably, for Crazy Joker, the parasocial relationship concerning friend support is a positive indicator for eudaimonic entertainment concerning deeper reflection. It is possible that viewers who notice their support intentions for the brutal, evil Crazy Joker might start reflecting on whether they should truly feel empathy for Joker and whether his actions could truly be forgiven. For the Neutral Joker, situational recognizability was found to be a positive indicator for hedonic entertainment. One possible explanation is viewers feel happier when they see the villain has ordinary struggles similar to what they have. In addition, friend communication was also found to be a positive indicator of eudaimonic entertainment in terms of life evaluation. There's a possibility that through their willingness to communicate with Joker, the viewers also felt good about themselves, therefore boosting their evaluations of their own lives. However, against the assumption, no indicators regarding eudaimonic or hedonic entertainment for the Sad Joker were found. The results could be attributed to the small sample size of the study and the lack of concrete storytelling in the short clips. Due to these limitations, viewers may not have fully grasped the storyline, and therefore, relevant effects were not tested out. For the combined group with all participants, friend communication was found to be a significant positive indicator of life evaluation. Situational recognizability and friend support were found to be significant positive indicators of deeper reflection.

Therefore, against prior assumptions, no single factor shows consistent effects on entertainment experience throughout all groups (H13a-e, H14a-e, H15a-e). It is possible that the clips are too short for viewers to have a more comprehensive understanding of the characters and, therefore, diminished their entertainment experience.

5.3.3 Influences on Mood Repair

Last but not least, as predicted, hedonic entertainment is a strong, positive indicator for mood repair concerning moods for most cases except the Neutral Joker group. This result partially aligns with the finding that hedonic entertainment can make people feel more positive (Reinecke et al., 2012, p. 438). It is possible that viewers didn't find the Neutral Joker movie clips very entertaining because it was too relatable, and it failed to distract them. Hence, regarding the research question, this finding suggests that (6) villain content that is too relatable is less likely to evoke viewers' mood repair. On the contrary, it reminded them of the problems they have in real life and diminished the hedonic entertainment experience. There was no single factor that showed consistent effects on mood or arousal changes throughout all groups (H16a-h, H17a-h). Similar to the eudaimonic entertainment experience, it is possible that the short clips limited the understanding and enjoyment of the viewers for the movie, and therefore, relevant effects were not tested out.

To sum up, (a) people are more likely to recognize, relate to, and support villains who are similar to themselves, especially when viewers share similar attitudes as the villains. (b) This kind of attitudinal recognizability could greatly increase their motive to develop a closer parasocial relationship with the villain. Moreover, (c) while more superficial portrayals of the villain may facilitate viewers' well-being by lifting their moods, more layered portrayals can facilitate viewers' well-being by evoking deeper reflections and fostering personal growth, especially when the villain is portrayed as an ordinary person but in a slightly disadvantaged place in his life. Hence, (d) when portraying villains in the movies, displaying the ordinary life struggles and relatable attitudes of life from the villain may create a tighter bond between the viewers and the villain. It indicates that for media productions, (e) instead of intentionally showing the tragic side of the villain, making him "human" and mirroring the struggles of ordinary people can be more effective when fostering character engagement and well-being.

5.4 Limitation

This study used a combination of random sampling and snowball sampling methods to collect participants. Nevertheless, snowball sampling could result in homogeneous characteristics of the participants (Faugier & Sargeant, 1997, p.793). It is recommended to use random sampling solely for future research.

In addition, the short movie clips might limit the participants to gain a deeper understanding of the villain's identity, motivations, and behaviors. On the contrary, using longer clips may lead to more accurate responses to character engagement and well-being questions. Moreover, due to the limited scope and time frame of this study, only existing movies and characters were used, with different versions of the Joker, each having unique background stories and characteristics from different movies. One potential disadvantage of this approach is that there are too many factors to be controlled, which may decrease the effectiveness of the study (Neuman, 2014, p.283). For instance, it is possible that some viewers have a strong preference for a particular version of Joker, and this could affect their responses greatly. Hence, to eliminate biases caused by prior knowledge or impressions of the character or story, it could be beneficial for future studies to use original movie clips and characters that come from a single story. This approach would provide a clearer understanding of how character engagement and well-being are influenced without being affected by pre-existing character knowledge and impressions or viewer preferences. It will also be beneficial to explore how different movie genres could play a role in shaping the examined relationships since the genres of chosen movies for this study are all similar.

Another important consideration is the gender balance of participants. This study had more male participants than female participants, and ensuring a balanced gender in future research could offer more insightful and comprehensive conclusions (Heidari et al., 2016, p.2). Lastly, this study was conducted in only English, and the chosen movies were also focused on the Western cultural background. However, the notion of morality can be diverse in different cultures (Rawwas, 2001, p.203). Hence, it might lack insights from other cultures' perspectives.

5.5 Future Research

The results of the study supplemented the previous findings by adding that despite viewers might feel empathic for the poor villains, they don't show strong intentions to develop parasocial

relationships with them. However, they tend to recognize and develop parasocial relationships with villains who are more like an ordinary person, similar to themselves. It also shows that viewers tend to have less intentions to support the villains who seem just crazy and evil. If they do, the villain movie also evokes them to reflect on themselves deeply. Hence, regarding societal concerns, this study found no strong evidence that watching poor villain movies might encourage support for real-world crimes.

For future research, it is recommended to investigate the effects of media productions concerning villains on character engagement and well-being across different genders and cultural backgrounds. This research could offer more insights into what “villain” means under different contexts and what roles gender and culture play in shaping the watching experience.

Moreover, this study didn’t find any factors that consistently impact entertainment experience and mood repair. This result indicates a complicated relationship between the examined factors. It is possible that other factors play an important role in shaping these relationships, and future research could investigate deeper into those to better understand this complex interaction.

Additionally, it is recommended to take a closer look at the interplay between the different entertainment experiences, character engagement, and mood repair under the lens of different genres. More specifically, whether viewers form a stronger parasocial relationship with a villain in the television shows than in the movies due to the longer exposure and potentially more profound psychological impacts, or whether cartoons can provide a better mood repair than movies because they may function as better distractions for people. This aspect can supplement the existing research and reveal how different media formats can influence character engagement and well-being.

5.6 Conclusion

Villains are often portrayed as completely evil and brutal, but they usually function as stepping stones to show how brave and noble the heroes are. However, the study indicates that viewers can acquire significant entertainment and self-growth by engaging with a complicated villain story. Media productions can enhance public understanding of psychology and foster the well-being of the viewers if they can go beyond superficial portrayals of the villain and show the

troubled soul living underneath. By displaying the complexities of human nature, the portrayals can also provide viewers with a richer media experience.

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7 Appendices

7.1 Appendix A

Table 3. Factor loadings, explained the variance and reliability of the three factors found for the scale ‘Recognizability’

Item	Attitudinal Recognizability	Situational Recognizability	Personality Recognizability
I recognize...			
the solutions to problems of Joker as solutions I could follow	.80		
the decisions of Joker as decisions that I could make	.78		
the thought processes before decisions of Joker as thought processes I have	.74		
the reactions to stressful situations of Joker as reactions that I could have	.70		
Joker's opinions about what is good and bad as opinions I have	.65		
Joker's opinions about other people as opinions I have	.60		
Joker's opinions about social problems as opinions I have	.58		
Joker's approach to life as an approach to life that I have	.52		
the behaviors of Joker as behaviors that I could show	.48		
the situations that Joker encounters as situations that could also happen to me		.81	
the problems that Joker has as the problems that I could have		.76	
the life changes Joker experiences as life changes that could happen to me		.72	
the past experiences of Joker as similar to my past experiences		.71	
the places, in which I see Joker as the places I could be in		.68	
my life in the life of Joker		.61	
the topics that Joker discusses with others as the topics I could		.54	

discuss with other people in my life			
the weaknesses of Joker as weaknesses that I have			.82
the personality traits of Joker as traits that I have			.71
the strengths of Joker as strengths that I have			.63
myself in Joker			.62
R^2	.60	.05	.05
Cronbach's α	.94	.92	.85
M	2.10	2.11	2.14
SD	.98	1.00	.95

7.2 Appendix B

Table 12. Hypotheses Overview

Hypothesis Number	Hypothesis Statement	Accepted Hypothesis	Rejected Hypothesis
H1	The Sad Joker group shows higher eudaimonic entertainment concerning life evaluation than the a) Crazy Joker group, and b) Neutral Joker group.		H1a, H1b
H2	The Sad Joker group shows higher eudaimonic entertainment concerning deeper reflection than the a) Crazy Joker group, and b) Neutral Joker group.	H2a	H2b
H3	The Crazy Joker group shows higher hedonic entertainment than the a) Sad Joker group, and b) Neutral Joker group.		H3a, H3b
H4	The Crazy Joker group shows higher mood repair concerning moods than a) Sad Joker group, and b) Neutral Joker group.	H4a	H4b
H5	The Crazy Joker group shows higher mood repair concerning arousal than a) Sad Joker group, and b) Neutral Joker group.		H5a, H5b
H6	The Sad Joker group shows stronger parasocial relationships concerning friend communication than a) Crazy Joker group, and b) Neutral Joker group.		H6a, H6b
H7	The Sad Joker group shows stronger parasocial relationships concerning friend	H7a	H7b

	support than a) Crazy Joker group, and b) Neutral Joker group.		
H8	The Neutral Joker group shows higher recognizability concerning personality recognizability than a) Sad Joker group, and b) Crazy Joker group.		H8a, H8b
H9	The Neutral Joker group shows higher recognizability concerning attitudinal recognizability than a) Sad Joker group, and b) Crazy Joker group.	H9a, H9b	
H10	The Neutral Joker group shows higher recognizability concerning situational recognizability than a) Sad Joker group, and b) Crazy Joker group.	H10b	H10a
H11	Parasocial relationships concerning friend communication increase with a) attitudinal recognizability, b) situational recognizability, and c) personality recognizability.	H11a	H11b, H11c
H12	Parasocial relationships concerning friend support increase with a) attitudinal recognizability, b) situational recognizability, and c) personality recognizability.		H12a-c
H13	Eudaimonic entertainment concerning life evaluation increases with a) personality recognizability, b) situational recognizability, c) attitudinal recognizability, d) friend communication, and e) friend support.		H13a-e
H14	Eudaimonic entertainment concerning deeper reflection increases with a) personality recognizability, b) situational recognizability, c) attitudinal recognizability, d) friend communication, and e) friend support.		H14a-e
H15	Hedonic entertainment increases with a) personality recognizability, b) situational recognizability, c) attitudinal recognizability, d) friend communication, and e) friend support.		H15a-e
H16	Mood repair concerning moods increases with a) Personality recognizability, b) situational recognizability, c) attitudinal recognizability, d) friend communication, e) friend support, f) life evaluation, g) deeper reflection, and h) hedonic entertainment.		H16a-h

H17

Mood repair concerning arousals increases with a) Personality recognizability, b) situational recognizability, c) attitudinal recognizability, d) friend communication, e) friend support, f) life evaluation, g) deeper reflection, and h) hedonic entertainment.

H17a-h