PERSONAL ATTITUDES AND THE INTERNATIONAL APPEAL OF

NARCOCULTURE

by

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ABSTRACT

The illegal drug trade has given rise to epidemic levels of violence and corruption in impacted regions. While violence and corruption present the most problematic and salient characteristics of organized drug trafficking, the narcotics economy also manifests itself through specific and recurring thematic and expressive cultural elements. This "narco" sub-culture is propagated through several outlets and serves various functions: amongst the most important being to normalize and glorify the drug trade and its principle actors. To better understand what might make a narcocultural hero appealing, a convenience sample of 930 undergraduate students enrolled at Texas State University volunteered to participate in this study. Each was given an excerpt wherein a narcocultural-hero protagonist was framed as tough, charismatic, and cunning. After this, the participants were asked to take the Interpersonal Judgement Scale (IJS) to assess attraction to the protagonist of the excerpt. A message credibility survey was also administered. Prior to reading the excerpt, participants were evaluated on several personal attitude metrics. Additionally, demographic information was collected. Regression analyses indicated that personal attitude metrics and demographic characteristics successfully contributed to a predictive model of individual attraction for a narco-hero. Of the personal attitude metrics, only criminal sentiments showed the hypothesized relationship within the predictive model, with higher criminal sentiments linked significantly to greater attraction for the social bandit character. Additionally, men were more likely to rate the narco-hero higher attraction scores than were females.

I. INTRODUCTION

Due to the violence associated with the drug trade, researchers studying the cultures of the drug issue tend to focus on the dynamics of drug consumption rather than on those of drug trafficking (Campbell, 2005). However, to address the influence of drug trafficking on society, policymakers and social workers must assess the objectives and aims of the cartel networks whose activities they seek to disrupt. Fortunately, gaps in our academic understanding of this phenomenon can be addressed obliquely via an examination of the artistic and cultural expressions of those involved in narco-trafficking (Campbell, 2005). This approach raises an immediate psychological question: can specific worldviews, attitudes, values, or any combination thereof help predict to whom narcocultural narratives and heroes will appeal? Unraveling this phenomenon might provide insights which social scientists and anti-narcotics policymakers can use to develop or refine strategies intended to curb recruitment into or complacency with drug trafficking organizations.

In the following paragraphs, I will attempt to lay out as thorough a foundation as possible from which to launch such an inquiry. I will begin with an exploration of the concept of heroes as social constructs, and then move on to an examination of the social bandit – in other words, of the criminal as a heroic construct. Next, I will attempt to describe the sociological structures and related phenomena that underpin and promote heroic figures of this kind. Afterward, I will discuss the nature of narcoculture and narcocultural heroes, and follow with an account of the study method, including attitude metrics and response variables. Finally, I will briefly describe the study conditions and then conclude with the results and discussion sections.

Heroes as Social Constructs

Because I will be examining narcocultural heroes, it is essential first to touch on the general concept of the hero as a psycho-sociological construct. Heroes regularly embody the values and standards of the cultures that spawned or celebrate them (Besier, 2014). However, as is typically the case with Robin Hood heroes – also called social bandits (Kooistra, 1989) – narco-heroes do not, ostensibly, conform to traditional notions of heroism. On the contrary, to outside cultures, the narco-hero is often little more than a terrorist (Hobsbawm 2000, 2017). This seemingly paradoxical situation presents researchers with a conundrum: if heroes serve to edify, how can certain violent individuals, celebrity gangsters like Pablo Escobar, ascend into the realm of heroism (Bowden, 2001)? This question directly relates to the purpose of my study.

In general, heroes are prolific in modern American culture (Sullivan & Venter, 2010). An online search of three major newspapers, including the *New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *The Wall Street Journal,* revealed that the topic of heroism surfaced in at least 5,500 articles between 2000 and 2005; this amounts to a five-year period in which the subject of heroes appeared nearly every day in each paper (Sullivan & Venter, 2010). Despite this, it remains unclear precisely by what mechanisms heroes emerge or what roles they play in modern societies (Sullivan & Venter, 2010). That they exist and induce fascination, however, should come as no surprise, given that heroes have existed in some form in every known culture throughout recorded history (Levy, 1990; Sullivan & Venter, 2010).

Yet studies have only recently begun to deconstruct, in a psychological sense, what 'hero' means in contemporary America. Nevertheless, this topic has drawn the

attention of a range of academic, scholarly, and philosophical thinkers, leading to a proliferation of proposed essential criteria (Sullivan & Venter, 2010). For example, some experts contend that heroes are constructs that are created by and serve the society at large (Sullivan & Venter, 2010). Some proposed services include the following: acting as iconic manifestations of hegemonic value systems and behavioral conventions (Campbell, 1949; Sullivan & Venter, 2010); symbolizing and promoting social integration (Smith, 1976; Sullivan & Venter, 2010); and providing vehicles through which ordinary people can transcend the confines of their existences through vicarious experiences otherwise unobtainable to them (Fishwick, 1969; Sullivan & Venter, 2010).

Perhaps of most concern to my study objectives, heroes have been defined as models of personal conduct (Wecter, 1966) and aspiration (Pretzinger, 1976; Sullivan & Venter, 2010). In this way, heroes reflect an individual's idealized self-image or otherwise embody and exemplify qualities that they value or desire to cultivate in themselves (Caughey, 1984; Sullivan & Venter, 2010). Consequently, there may be social consequences based on the nature and popularity of any given hero, as heroes can exert a strong influence on a person's self-concept and internal narrative (Sullivan & Venter, 2010), specifically as these relate to anticipated future conditions – a concept referred to as the possible-self. In turn, studies have shown that possible-selves can affect individual behaviors, including resilience to immediate adversity (Ruvolo & Markus, 1986) and long-term career planning (Meara, Day, Chalk, & Phelps, 1995). Finally, studies have also revealed that personal heroes can affect individual self-concept as much as can loved ones (Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991) or fellow group members (Smith & Henry, 1996). Thus, heroes might influence who a person is and who they eventually

become. Due to the importance of such a potential influence, the question of who will come to occupy the place of hero for any given individual demands deeper, scientific scrutiny.

Sullivan and Venter (2010) conducted a series of studies intended to explore the subjective use of the term *hero*, examining this construct inductively (specific traits that delineate hallmarks of heroism) and deductively (accepted, pre-existing definitions of heroism). They compared participants' self-identified traits with those ascribed by participants to their self-identified heroes. They found that twice as many respondents chose their heroes based on traits identified as self-relevant – such as seeing someone as a "role model" or an "idealized self-image" – than they did based on heroic achievement alone (Sullivan & Venter, 2010). Therefore, self-views appear to be implicit and essential to the process of choosing heroes (Sullivan & Venter, 2010). These results ultimately led Sullivan and Venter (2010) to conclude that a person's choice of heroes, above all else, reflects elements of self-conceptualization. Consequently, we can reasonably suspect that specific personal attitudes and values will influence a person's choice of hero, and that once this choice occurs, the relationship between hero and individual will guide and solidify self-image and the perceived possible self.

When examining self-described possible selves specifically, Sullivan and Venter, (2010) found that participants rated these as being far more similar, both in positive and negative traits, to personal heroes than to non-identified heroes (individuals chosen by some, but not the participant, to be a personal hero; Sullivan & Venter, 2010). Heroes, in keeping with their role as avatars and manifestations of idealized values, were rated as possessing more positive traits and less negative traits than the participants' possible-

selves. However, the degree of difference between the possible-self and an individually selected hero was significantly less than that between the possible self and a non-identified hero. In this way, "individuals seem to believe they are nearly capable of demonstrating the very traits they have used in defining and identifying" their heroes (Sullivan & Venter, 2010, p. 476). The data suggest, then, that individuals see their heroes as reflecting their own potential in a way that differs from heroic figures in general.

Touching on the process whereby individuals choose personal heroes to model themselves on, Markus and Nurius (1986) reasoned that the development of the possible-self inextricably draws from the models that people are most likely to encounter within the spheres of their own lives. If that is the case, the outlaw hero's influence will be most pervasive in and amongst the communities from which his or her legend emerged, as the degrees of separation between the audience and the hero's narrative will be minimal. This phenomenon helps explain why Pablo Escobar first enjoyed his heroic status in the slums around his home town of Medellin, Colombia, and why he is still considered a hero there to this day (Bowden, 2001). However, this cannot account for the growing international demand for more nuanced versions of his story than have been traditionally available in the United States (Pobutsky, 2013).

The hit Netflix original *Narcos*, which follows Escobar through his rise and fall – not exclusively as a monstrous villain, but as a human being whose own tragic flaws lead ultimately to his undoing – most clearly reflects this phenomenon, and appears to have resonated strongly with audiences in America (Casey, 2018). An increased market for this kind of narrative, when combined with the easy access to his story provided by the

internet and streaming services, considerably increases the likelihood that an individual will encounter Escobar framed as flawed but sympathetic. Under these conditions, then, inevitably, the story will likely appeal to some who hear it, allowing Escobar to posthumously expand his potential influence as a role-model to individuals living beyond the slums of Medellin (Kooistra, 1989).

If this is so, those non-Colombians most susceptible to the appeal of social banditry will arguably be most likely to see, in Escobar, the makings of a genuine hero, and thus regard him, if not as a potential role model, then at least as a sympathetic outlaw. However, although an individual's heroes might reflect their idealized, internalized self-views, it is not known whether heroes cause or engender new possible selves, or whether they simply reflect an inherent predisposition or an already existing self-view (Sullivan & Venter, 2010). Despite these limitations, examining the prevalence and nature of the those heroic figures prominently held as such in a population may reveal much about particular segments of society, and about the interactions between culture and privately held self-views, attitudes, and values (Sullivan & Venter, 2010).

Ultimately, a single, all-encompassing definition of *hero* was not arrived at (Sullivan & Venter, 2010), leading the authors to conclude that such a definition might not exist across a heterogeneous population. What seems certain is that to understand heroism in the modern world, not only must the characteristics of the potential hero be taken into account, but, of equal importance, the characteristics of the person identifying the hero should also be considered (Sullivan & Venter, 2010). In other words, specific heroes are selected based on a combination of individual preferences regarding culturally valued accomplishments and traits within the context of the observer's self-views.

Criminals as Heroes (Social Bandits)

While the definition of "hero" can change across time and from culture to culture, specific characteristics tend to prevail (Kinsella, Ritchie, & Igou, 2015). For example, bravery often characterizes heroes of various cultural origins (Kinsella et al., 2015). Indeed, if cultural heroes exist to promulgate and reinforce the ways of thinking and doing things associated with a particular culture, it would be beneficial to inculcate bravery into that culture's devotees. However, while the cultural heroes of "legitimate" society personify virtues such as honesty (George Washington, for example; Kinsella et al., 2015), maladaptive societies such as the Colombian criminal underworld celebrate less altruistic virtues, typically embodied in a folk-hero who is cunning, ambitious, ruthless, and driven to succeed at any cost (Ruth, 1996). When considering heroes of this type, the line between villain and hero can be blurred, such that the figure in question is divisive, and context is essential in explaining to whom the figure is a hero, and to whom a villain.

The question of why habitual murderers and those who might otherwise be labeled societal delinquents can come to be presented as heroes, or in a sympathetic light at all, however, has likely been relevant to human beings for as long as the phenomenon of the morally ambiguous hero itself has existed. In America, murder and violent crime (including robbery) rank amongst the most serious of all sociological ills, and the "crime problem" has been expounded on in virtually every major political campaign of the past few decades (Kooistra, 1989). Violence, in particular, has occasioned much anxiety in the ordinary person, and violent criminals are particularly insidious not only for the damage they cause their victims directly but for their ability to undermine a person's confidence

in their fellow citizens – a condition which enhances fear and paranoia (Kooistra, 1989). Hence, crime and criminality are considered enemies of society (Schur, 1969). However, there are exceptions to this rule.

Throughout human history, occasionally an individual will emerge who is in the literal sense guilty of violent crime, yet many of his or her fellow citizens, far from labeling the individual a deviant or delinquent, will hail him or her as a hero of the people (Hobsbawm 2000, 2017; Kooistra, 1989). These criminal heroes exist in the realm of popular media, and their stories and exploits have been recounted and commented on in song, cinema, television, and news media, such that they become legendary Robin Hood figures of historical proportions (Hobsbawm 2000, 2017; Kooistra, 1989).

Perhaps the most famous American Robin Hoods were Billy the Kid, Jesse James, and Butch Cassidy; however, the phenomenon is universal, and not limited to any one culture or state (Hobsbawm 2000, 2017; Kooistra, 1989). These, and many other historical men and women who have come to represent the archetypical outlaw hero, share many common themes in their stories. These include the nature of their deeds, the historical context within which they lived and acted, the symbolic values of their victims, the characteristics of their enemies, and how they gained not only exposure and notoriety, but came to inhabit a place amongst the pantheon of folk-heroes (Hobsbawm 2000, 2017; Kooistra, 1989).

Influential contemporaries in the media have often championed the outlaw heroes of their day, a situational phenomenon from which Pablo Escobar also benefited. He was dubbed the "Paisa Robin Hood" by journalists (referring to the region of Colombia from which he hailed; Anderson, 2018). Additionally, most, if not all, historical social bandits

have been quick to make use of media, utilizing letters and interviews to communicate directly to the public at large (Hobsbawm 2000, 2017; Kooistra, 1989). Unsurprisingly, Escobar was a prolific letter writer, gave interviews, and held rallies to gather support from the country's poor (Bowden, 2001). Through such outreach, would-be social bandits, including Escobar, have cemented themselves as heroic defenders of the common person (Hobsbawm 2000, 2017; Kooistra, 1989), and have ascribed to themselves virtues such as boldness, adaptability, resourcefulness, and even social consciousness (Bowden, 2001; Hobsbawm 2000, 2017; Kooistra, 1989).

In addition to framing the social bandit as admirable, social bandit narratives also tend to follow a similar format, regardless of cultural origin (Hobsbawm 2000, 2017; Kooistra, 1989). First, the hero is driven to criminality by injustice – in other words, the state is systematically incapable of or unwilling to protect the rights of its citizens, and in this context, the hero must assert justice for him or herself in an unjust world. Alternatively, the hero begins his career by engaging in acts that the state, but not the populace, consider criminal and deviant (Hobsbawm 2000, 2017; Kooistra, 1989). Drug trafficking would fall under this category, as many Colombians have regarded it as merely a new industry with the potential to open paths of social mobility for Colombia's poor (Bowden 2001).

Regardless of specifics, the result is that the outlaw hero remains in possession of honorable traits despite his or her criminal acts, which do not represent acts of villainy but those of "higher" justice. This theme most clearly manifests itself in the robbing of the rich, who are corrupt, to give to the poor, who are virtuous and deserving. (Hobsbawm 2000, 2017; Kooistra, 1989). While these figures did not always truly

embody any of these noble characteristics, almost without fail, this is the narrative accepted by his or her supporters (Hobsbawm 2000, 2017; Kooistra, 1989). In many ways, then, the social bandit hero is the embodiment of a morality play, one in which the authorities have abused the legitimate power of the state such that the law no longer genuinely represents justice.

Moreover, several psychological mechanisms come into play to ensure that those who would see a hero in a particular criminal can continue to do so with a minimum of cognitive dissonance: these are akin to the neutralization techniques required to justify criminal activity (Kooistra, 1989). These include denial of responsibility, denial of injury, denial of the victim, and appeal to higher loyalties. Denial of responsibility attributes criminal acts to forces beyond the criminal's control ("they were driven to a life of crime"). Denial of injury stresses that the heroic criminal never hurt the ordinary person, but helped rectify an inherently unjust system by giving back to the poor. Denial of the victim emphasizes the villainous qualities of those upon whom the social bandit preyed. Finally, appeal to higher loyalty argues that the social bandit was not operating solely from selfish motives, but instead acted out of the need to help an impotent but innocent class of citizen. When considered in this fashion, these lawbreakers, far from being dangerous public enemies, are instead paragons of heroic virtue (Kooistra, 1989).

Structural Underpinnings of the Social Bandit

While the outlaw as hero is a relatively new concept in the sciences, various intellectual disciplines, including history, folklore, psychology, literary criticism, anthropology, criminology, and sociology, have examined this construct and have produced three categories of explanation for answering the question of how a criminal

becomes a hero: these focus on the psychological, the cultural, and the sociological (Kooistra, 1989). Psychologically, heroes, and the heroic criminal, in particular, may act as a means of "wish-fulfillment:" a way to express and live out one's desires to be more than he or she is, to rebel vicariously against normative systems of constraint and social control (Jackson, 1955; Kooistra, 1989). In fact, it may be that we make heroes out of criminals precisely because they are willing to break the law, thus refusing to bend to the oppression of externally-imposed authority (Settle, 1966). However, these legends almost always end with the hero's demise, ultimately sending the message that rebellion will lead only to ruin. In this manner, then, the heroic criminal channels aggressive impulses in a way that is, at least ostensibly, harmless to society (Kooistra, 1989). But, as pointed out by Kooistra (1989), though this seems a persuasive explanation, it is incomplete, as only a limited number of criminals experience this kind of heroic apotheosis.

Thus, psychological processes cannot be the whole story (Kooistra, 1989). Cultural explanations, on the other hand, posit that the social bandit reflects the values of a specific group, and the struggles detailed in these narratives symbolize cultural conflict. In other words, the outlaw hero is a social construct best understood by the values and traits he or she seems to embody, and it is these very values that account for the elevation of common criminal to folk-hero (Kooistra, 1989). The earliest heroes were god-like beings operating within the human realm, and exemplified "man at this best" (Kooistra, 1989, p. 15). Modern heroes, particularly those that exist in the American pantheon, are thus the embodiment of culturally relevant ideals and aspirations, such as success, loyalty to the group, and the power of individualism (Klapp, 1962; Kooistra, 1989).

However, the limitation of the cultural explanation is its inherent parochialism (Kooistra, 1989). The Robin Hood criminal exists across space and time: it is a minimally changing and universal sociological phenomenon (Hobsbawm, 2000, 2017), such that it is unlikely that there is anything uniquely American about the origins of the heroic criminal (Kooistra, 1989). Because of this universality, it seems that the social bandit touches on something deeply embedded in the human condition – something that transcends culture. However, the cultural explanation does provide insight into how criminals might metamorphose into heroes. By examining and comparing notable criminal heroes, common threads between cultures might emerge. One such common thread is the moral rationalizations, previously discussed, that must take place to see in an outlaw a person which one can identify with and root for (Kooistra, 1989). Moreover, discovering the themes that link social bandits from various cultures together is key to explaining the universal significance of the criminal hero (Kooistra, 1989). It seems likely that these themes, and how appealing they are to the individuals who encounter them, will help predict whether or not a person will find something with which to identify in a morally ambiguous legendary or mythological construct – in other words, a reason to embrace the figure as a personal hero.

Comparing cultural commonalities leads to the final approach, which focuses on the contexts that surround the cultural themes of the social bandit (Kooistra, 1989). As mentioned, the drawback of the cultural approach is that it fails to acknowledge the social dimensions that provide culture (and cultural values) with contextual meaning (Kooistra, 1989). Comparing cultural commonalities, then, allows researchers to focuses on the specific social contexts that underpin the phenomenon of the social bandit. Thus, while

the psychological and cultural perspectives do elucidate the phenomenon, a more holistic approach must be undertaken to understand and explain it (Kooistra, 1989). This is what the sociological approach attempts to do. By examining the structural conditions that precede the appearance of an outlaw hero, and which give meaning to his or her actions, we are better able to contend with the universality of the archetype, and predict the conditions needed not only to produce it but to make it appealing to the masses (Kooistra, 1989). In this way, the heroic criminal is a cultural construct that is influenced by the conditions of society – conditions that transcend specific cultures and which may emerge in various places, amongst a variety of people, and throughout historical time (Hobsbawm, 2000, 2017; Kooistra, 1989). Specifically, the appearance and popularity of the social bandit depends upon large segments of the population feeling disillusioned with the supposedly legitimate arbiters of justice manifested in the legal and political systems of the day (Hobsbawm, 2000, 2017; Kooistra, 1989). This disillusionment arises as a result of specific social conditions, which include economic downturns, famines, diseases, rapid sociological changes, and excesses of graft and corruption in the public or private sector (Hobsbawm, 2000, 2017).

Finally, understanding the social bandit requires an appreciation for crime definitions as social constructs – that is, how the state of a society can influence how particular predefined criminal acts can be perceived both as illegal and just at the same time (Kooistra, 1989). Additionally, there is a political element to defining crime (Kooistra, 1989). If politics can be understood as a manifestation of group conflict, then nowhere is this political element more evident than in the differing interpretations of the outlaw hero given by the various classes of people who have had a stake in his or her

story (Kooistra, 1989). "Moral entrepreneurs," such as political or journalistic entities seeking to influence public opinion, have often utilized the symbolism of the outlaw to assert a narrative of social reality (Becker, 1963; Kooistra, 1989). As Klapp (1962) notes, conventional tales, themes, and archetypical story forms are instrumental in the construction of an infamous criminal's mythical reputation – such that outlaw heroes, from Billy the Kid to Pancho Villa, to Al Capone, tend to be much more alike in legend than they were in real life (Kooistra, 1989). In this fashion, then, Robin Hood heroes and their antagonists and victims represent the most recent renditions of an ancient fable concerned with law, justice, and the role of the individual in the playing out of these values (Kooistra, 1989). More specifically, their tales are most often political allegory, the forms of which are shaped and guided by conflicting social groups and how each defines what is criminal (Kooistra, 1989).

Narcoculture

Pablo Escobar, one of the world's most infamous drug traffickers, fits the pattern of a social bandit, and, in essence, represents the prototypical narco-hero (Pobutsky, 2013; Sullivan, 2012). Given what we know about the social bandit, for individuals living in the barrios that he built and from which he recruited, Pablo Escobar makes sense in this capacity. But, as evidenced by the surge of interest in him amongst American audiences (Pobutsky, 2013), Escobar emits a puzzling sort of cross-cultural magnetism. The question, then, is, outside of Escobar's own slums, who considers Pablo Escobar and those like him heroic? This rise in Escobar's popularity is particularly puzzling in a law-abiding society such as the United States, as Escobar murdered and mutilated many

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thousands of innocent victims (Bowden, 2001). Even a significant number of Colombians believe him to have harmed and shamed their nation (Pobutsky, 2013).

Nevertheless, he still commands fascination and awe. His image is commercialized and displayed across the world; he has become a notorious global icon of power (Pobutsky, 2013). Related to this is the fact that he is undergoing a sort of cultural renaissance in the mass media, with many tell-all books being written by those who knew him (Martinez, 2005; Vallejo, 2007). These depict him in turns as loyal, masculine, brave, and romantic. His brutal crimes are often downplayed and rationalized as the tragic but inevitable consequences of his war with the government (Pobutsky, 2013).

His and related stories belong to a form of cultural expression known as narcoculture (Campbell, 2005). This sub-culture manifests itself through several outlets and serves various functions: amongst the most critical being to normalize and glorify the drug trade and its principal actors (Rojas-Sotelo, 2014). Moreover, narco-hero worship and associated cultural practices emerge most frequently and most intensely in poverty-stricken communities located in or associated through demography with Latin America, particularly those regions where governmental institutions fail to provide for basic needs, and there is little in the way of legitimate employment (Campbell & Hansen, 2014). Consequently, the narco-hero's story often revolves around his or her struggles against the state and its institutions, with these typically depicted as being either inept or corrupt, or both (Rojas-Sotelo, 2014). Therefore, narco-heroes are essentially anti-authoritarian figures (Rojas-Sotelo, 2014). They do battle with the law and often seem to have the upper hand. As our overview of heroes in general and criminals as heroes suggests, under such conditions, the preeminence of the social bandit is not surprising.

Additionally, narcoculture can be considered an offshoot of the War on Drugs (Campbell & Hansen, 2014). Between attempts by the United States and her allies to quell the distribution of illegal drugs through police and military intervention and the competition between cartels striving to control strategically important trafficking routes, the illicit drug trade has given rise to epidemic levels of violence and corruption in impacted regions (De Choudhury, Monroy-Hernandez, & Mark, 2014; Monroy-Hernández, Kiciman, Boyd, & Counts, 2012). While violence and corruption present the most problematic and salient characteristics of organized drug trafficking, the narcotics economy also manifests itself through specific and recurring thematic and expressive cultural elements (Campbell, 2005; Rojas-Sotelo, 2014).

Narcoculture is a form of societal expression worth exploring for several reasons. For example, narcotraffickers are successfully contesting regional control of some portions of South and Central America; here, they act in the characteristic fashion of the social bandit (Hobsbawm, 2000, 2017; Sullivan, 2012). Cartels in such places often provide utilitarian social goods and serve as legal mediators while simultaneously utilizing narcoculture to establish themselves and their narratives of power and rebellion (Rojas-Sotelo, 2014). In other words, they are "post-modern social bandits" (Sullivan, 2012, p. 1).

Furthermore, individuals who get enmeshed in gang lifestyles – reflective of deep involvement in narcoculture – tend to find themselves also ravaged by drug addiction and persistent delinquent behavior (Brenneman, 2014). Those attempting to escape, once involved, find extricating themselves from the activities and social paradigms of narcoculture exacerbated by both external pressures from fellow gang-members seeking

to keep them active in the lifestyle as well as from the internal conflicts rooted in self-identification with the explicit luxuries and benefits associated therewith (Campbell & Hansen, 2012). Successful rehabilitation depends on addressing the densely interwoven cultural dynamics of self and community, though even then, those seeking rehabilitation must guard against the seductions of pro-cartel narco-media (Campbell & Hansen, 2012). Therefore, if there is a correlation between certain personal attitudes, demographic traits, and susceptibility to the allurements of narcoculture, these vulnerabilities must be acknowledged so that researchers and policymakers can begin to develop culturally sensitive methods of rehabilitation.

To understand who is sensitive to the specific appeal of narcoculture, we must first examine how narcoculture operates. At a local level, narcocultural manifestations, particularly everyday narco-folklore and drug stories, indicate a normalization of the drug trade (Campbell, 2005). Drug traffickers care about how they are perceived and actively attempt to manipulate the flow of information regarding their public image (Monroy-Hernández et al., 2012). After all, if normative cultural sensibilities accept the thematic objectives of narcoculture, this discredits the notion that the government is winning the War on Drugs (Campbell, 2005), as the War on Drugs hinges on the assumption that drug trafficking is an inherently illegitimate activity – a rationale which justifies the costly and violent struggle against the cartels by state actors. If individuals accept the values associated with narcoculture, then the moral impetus and authority of the State become diminished, and the cartels will find, if not support, at least tolerance for their presence. In addition to the presence of narcoculture at a local level, narcocultural ideals and iconography also spread at a global level, with commercial narcoculture acting to

glamorize the traffickers and their lifestyles (Campbell, 2005; Rojas-Sotelo, 2014). Both local and global narcoculture represent the manipulation of myth-making processes, typically casting the drug-trafficker as a traditional social bandit folk-hero (Campbell, 2005; Sullivan, 2012).

Additionally, narcoculture can instill fear and generate emotional habituation, known as "desensitization" (Campbell & Hansen, 2014; De Choudhury et al., 2014). Desensitization threatens collective civic action in affected communities by offsetting potential repugnance and dampening societal resistance that otherwise sensitive populations might feel at the prospect of these violent actors operating within their communities. Thus, narcoculture is a powerful psychological weapon through which the cartels can engage with and subvert conventional society, particularly in the face of the legal actors and institutions set on opposing them.

Campbell and Hansen (2014) stress the importance of counter-narcotics initiatives that prioritize police action against the worst architects of narco-terrorism while simultaneously fostering social justice and functional legal systems in vulnerable communities. Unfortunately, until such sweeping reforms take place, the marginalized and disenfranchised will be susceptible to the seductions of pro-cartel narco-media (Campbell & Hansen, 2012). Thus, researchers involved in developing narcotics policies must place greater research emphasis on the perspectives of drug traffickers and those sympathetic to them (Campbell & Hansen, 2012). In this way, policymakers can craft harm-reduction strategies that emphasize "culturally sensitive policies of modifying or reprogramming... behavior, lifestyles and self-identities" (Campbell & Hansen, 2012, p. 487).

At its core, narco-hero worship and its associated norms reinforce cultural identity within criminal networks, specifically through a legitimizing mythos (Lippman, 2005). More precisely, strong narcocultural ties derive from the exhilaration and validation of power, especially for individuals from lower socio-economic classes where power is not attainable through legitimate means (Campbell & Hansen, 2012). However, although the exact relationship between personality, personal attitudes, behavior, and cultural affiliation remains uncertain, such relationships have precedence in the scientific literature: for example, an association has been found between deliberate self-harm, attempted suicide, and identification with the Goth youth subculture (Baker & Bor, 2008). Moreover, personal identification with violent genres of music has been linked to emotional and behavioral problems such as aggression and drug abuse (Chen, Miller, Grube, & Waiters, 2006).

Purpose and Hypotheses for the Current Research

The allure of the narco-hero in the slums and barrios dominated by the drug trade seems apparent; less clear, however, is why this figure should appeal to anyone else. Hence, the purpose of my study is to investigate if, in a general population, personal attitudes can help predict an individual's response to a narco-hero. In other words, can statistical analyses determine what kind of person is likely to find this character appealing? I hypothesize that it can and that particular personal attitude metrics will predict higher attraction for a narco-hero as well as a higher perceived message content reliability for a literary excerpt depicting said hero.

Criminal Sentiments

As my study asks questions about the relationship between a criminal protagonist and his or her audience, it is essential to account for criminal sentiments. Social psychologists have posited two criminogenic needs as foundational for criminal behavior (Stevenson, Hall, & Innes, 2004). These are sociomoral-reasoning immaturity (Goldstein, Glick, & Gibbs, 1998) and pro-criminal sentiments (Simourd, 1996). However, the relative importance of these two criminogenic needs on offender risk remains contested (Stevenson et al., 2004). Moral development theorists contend that high-risk is contingent upon an offender's social worldview at the level of moral reasoning, and is related to interpersonal relationships and social norm adherence (Goldstein et al., 1998). Social-psychological theorists posit that the fundamental risk factor for violent offense is the cognitive presence of pro-criminal sentiments and the cognitive absence of prosocial sentiments, such that when presented with temptation or stress, an individual with high criminal sentiments, as measured by the Criminal Sentiments Scale, will be more likely to engage in criminal behavior (Andrews & Bonta, 1998; Stevenson et al., 2004).

While these phenomena have been viewed as unrelated by some researchers (Jennings, Kilkenny, & Kohlberg, 1983), De Vries and Walker (1986) argued that because moral structures reflect the reasoning that undergirds cognitive content, and cognitive content reflects the subjective attitudes of the individual, there is no reason to think that the structure and content of decision making are unrelated. Stevenson et al. (2004) concluded that mature-level sociomoral development did not significantly buffer against identification with criminal others and that rationalizing criminal actions occurred despite sociomoral maturity (Stevenson et al., 2004).

Moreover, criminal sentiments have been linked with an individual's propensity to rationalize criminal behavior (Simourd, 1996). Studies have found criminal sentiments to significantly contribute to predictive models of criminal past and future in adult men (Andrews & Bonta, 1998), and to constitute the highest risk factor for criminal recidivism (Gendreau, Little, & Goggin, 1996), the maintenance of a criminal lifestyle (Walters, 1990, 2002), and the expression of more general antisocial behavior (Andrews & Wormith, 1984). Thus, a participant's score in this metric will likely influence how appealing an individual finds an outlaw hero.

Belief in a Just World

Those who score high in measures of Belief in a Just World (BJW) hold amongst their central principles the proposition that life equitably distributes rewards for the good and punishments for the bad (Silva, Torres, Estramiana, Luque, & Linhares, 2018). Because of this, high levels of BJW correspond with "higher tendencies toward punitive disciplinary behavior" (Levy & Reuven, 2017, p. 519), greater support for authority in general, and a tendency to endorse severe punishments for outgroup members and leniency for ingroup members (Silva et al., 2018). Therefore, it seems probable that those participants who score high in BJW will be less likely to find anything redeemable in Pablo Escobar or anyone like him.

Drug Sentiments

Narco-bandits earn criminal renown for their successful exploitation of the illegal drug market (Sullivan, 2012). The traditional social bandit, almost without exception, begins his or her career in outlawry by participating in activities which the legal institutions of the day, but not the public in general, consider to be transgressions worthy

of prosecution (Hobsbawm, 2000, 2017; Kooistra, 1989). It, therefore, seems likely that individuals who see in the narco-bandit the elements of social banditry will also believe that participation in the drug economy, in and of itself, is neither inherently amoral nor criminal.

Moreover, in America, amongst virtually all demographic categories, attitudes towards drug offenses and drugs, in general, have softened (Doherty, 2014). It could be that these changing attitudes correlate in some way to Americans' increased fascination with narcoculture (Pobutsky, 2013). However, I am unaware of any scientific evidence to corroborate this statement. Regardless, it appears that elderly conservatives are still wariest of drug legalization and are also most supportive of an aggressive and punitive response to the drug issue (Doherty, 2014). Therefore, I hypothesize that aversion to drugs will result in reduced attraction to a narco-hero.

Alienation

Alienation, as a concept, has a long scholarly history, and intellectual luminaries from Hegel to Marx have commented on it; the former regarding it as a schism between an individual and his inner nature and outer environment, the latter conceptualizing it as a "conflict between the interest of the single individual… and the common interest of all individuals" (Marx, 1932, p. 23). Ultimately, alienation is a construct that reflects fractures between individuals and nature, between humans and other humans, and between humans and society (Nettler, 1957).

For my study, the definition that seems most relevant is that given by Grodzins, (1956), who proposed that alienation reflects an individual's propensity to feel him or herself as having no sense of "belonging" to community or nation. The alienated person

is a "potentially disloyal citizen," and this trait may correlate to certain personality types and socioeconomic conditions (Grodzins, 1956, p.134).

While what constitutes a "loyal citizen" is subject to history, culture, and the individual making such assessments (Nettler, 1957), I hypothesize that one's sense of "apartness" from the norms and standards of one's time and society will potentially influence which, if any, heroes one might choose to identify with. Utilizing Nettler's (1957) approach, high feelings of alienation correspond to aversive attitudes towards mass media, popular culture, conventional religion, and politics; it reflects, in essence, a general resentment towards the shared communal values of society (Nettler, 1957). Therefore, I hypothesize that those who feel more alienated will be more drawn to heroes who reflect counter-cultural attitudes and beliefs, such as social bandits, who, by their nature, represent a clash between the putatively legitimate forces of law and order and other, more personal forms of justice.

Tolerance for Ambiguity

The personas presented to the public by Pablo Escobar and the other narco-heroes are rife with contradictions and ambiguity. After all, whether the public is attracted to or repulsed by these outlaws, it is anything but indifferent. Such is the contradictory atmosphere surrounding the memory of Escobar (Pobutsky, 2013). Therefore, outside of the slums where his legend originated, it would likely take the ability to tolerate ambiguity to see in Pablo Escobar the characteristics of a "charismatic boss, a dashing lover, and a doting father and brother" (Pobutsky, 2013, p. 685). To capture the implications of this phenomenon, I turned to the Tolerance for Ambiguity scale. Tolerance for ambiguity reflects how an individual responds to the unfamiliar, the

complex, or the uncertain, ranging from feelings of rejection to feelings of attraction (McLain, 1993). In this case, then, I hypothesized that to perceive a narco-hero as anything but a terrorist or a criminal, an individual must have a certain tolerance for ambiguous stimuli.

II. METHOD

Participants

A convenience sample of 930 undergraduate students enrolled at Texas State University served as the subjects for my study. As shown in Table 1, the majority were female (70%), White (58%), and non-Hispanic/non-Latino (53%). These student participants received a small portion of extra credit for their participation.

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Variable	n	%
Gender		
Female	648	69.7
Male	219	23.5
Ethnicity		
Not Hispanic/Latino	498	53.0
Hispanic/Latino	373	40.1
Race		
White	543	58.4
Black	119	12.8
Asian	30	3.2
Native American	12	1.3
Other	62	6.7
Biracial/multiracial	65	7.0
Social status		
Lower	43	4.6
Working	227	24.4
Middle	448	48.2
Upper-middle	140	15.1
Upper	7	.8
Political ideology		
Extremely conservative	26	2.8
Moderately conservative	39	4.2
Somewhat conservative	112	12.0
Slightly conservative	166	17.8
Slightly liberal	238	25.6
Somewhat liberal	115	12.4
Moderately liberal	105	11.3
Extremely liberal	32	3.4

<center>**Predictor Variables (Personal Attitude Metrics)**</center>

Criminal Sentiments

The Criminal Sentiments Scale-Modified (CSS-M; Shields & Simourd, 1991) is a self-report measure of criminal attitudes that examines three constructs: attitudes towards the law, courts and police; tolerance for law violations; and identification with criminal others (Mills & Kroner, 1997; Stevenson et al., 2004). It consists of 41 items that ask participants whether they agree, are unsure, or disagree with a given statement. The answers correspond to a three-point Likert-type scale anchored from 1 to 3, with higher scores corresponding to higher criminal sentiments after recoding(Stevenson et al., 2004). Regarding the three constructs, higher scores in Attitudes Toward the Law, Courts, and Police (ALCP) indicate negative appraisal of the justice system, whereas high Tolerance for Law Violation (TLV) and Identification with Criminal Others (ICO) scores reflect greater acceptance of and identification with criminal peers (Andrews & Wormith, 1984; Stevenson et al., 2004, Shields & Simourd, 1991). Sample questions included "Pretty well all laws deserve our respect," "Sometimes a person like me has to break the law to get ahead in life," and "People who have broken the law have the same sorts of ideas about life as me." Reliability and validity are reportedly high for this metric (Andrews & Wormith, 1984; Simourd, 1997).

Belief in a Just World

Participants were given a 20 item Likert-type BJW Scale (BJW; Rubin & Peplau, 1975) with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). High scores on some questions corresponded to high BJW, while these same scores on other questions corresponded more to what might be called belief in an unjust world. After

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recoding, the sum of the items reflected BJW, with higher scores indicating greater BJW. Sample questions included "People who meet with misfortune have often brought it on themselves" and "Crime doesn't pay." Caputi (1994) reported the internal consistency of the scale as moderate for a group of Australian undergraduates, with Cronbach's alpha equal to .72.

Drug Sentiments

To assess an individual's attitudes towards drugs in society, I used a modified version of the Pew Research Center questionnaire (Pew Research Center, 2014) that determined amenability to this phenomenon. It presented participants with a series of questions such as "Is drug use a crisis?," "Should the government prosecute or treat drug users?," and "Should users who possess a small amount of illicit marijuana be sent to jail?" I turned 12 of the most directly relevant items into a 7-point Likert-type Drug Sentiments Scale (DSS), with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). After recoding the reverse-scored items, low scores on this metric reflected a more aversive attitude towards drugs in society. With the data collected in the current study, Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .83, demonstrating good internal consistency.

Alienation

The metric I used to operationalize alienation was a modified version of Nettler's (1957) Measure of Alienation, which had a reproducibility coefficient of 87%. The original measure consisted of 17 items that could be rated dichotomously or on a 7-point Likert-type scale, and included such questions as "Do you vote in national elections?," "Do you like spectator sports?," and "Is life, as most people live it, meaningless?" For the present study, I altered the questionnaire such that the questions reflected agreement with

the statement, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). I also updated antiquated

questions, such as "Do you read 'Readers Digest'" to "Are you a fan of social media?"

After recoding the reverse-scored items, the lowest possible total score (17) reflected a

minimal sense of alienation, while the highest possible total score (119) indicated an

extreme sense of alienation. With the data collected in the current study, Cronbach's

alpha for this scale was .66, demonstrating acceptable internal consistency.

Tolerance for Ambiguity

In order to quantify tolerance for ambiguity, the measure of Multiple Stimulus

Types Ambiguity Tolerance (MSTAT-1; McLain, 1993) was administered. This

instrument records and attempts to quantify common reactions to ambiguous stimuli and

consists of 22 Likert-type items rating from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Higher scores indicate greater tolerance for ambiguity. Questions include "I don't tolerate

ambiguous situations well," "I try to avoid situations which are ambiguous," and "I find it

difficult to respond when faced with an unexpected event." Alpha reliability has been

found to be good at 0.86 (McLain, 1993).

<div align="center">

Outcome Variables

</div>

Interpersonal Judgement

In order to assess a participant's reaction to a narco-hero, the Interpersonal

Judgement Scale (IJS; Byrne, 1961) was administered. This 6-item Likert-type scale

quantifies one person's attraction to another (Byrne, 1961; Gonzales, Davis, Loney,

Lukens, & Junghans, 1983). Parasocial attraction follows patterns identified in

interpersonal attraction; thus, it is likely that this measure will adequately reflect a

person's response to the excerpt (Centeno, 2015). The first four items, which ask the

participant to rate the target person on a series of traits such as morality and intelligence, are simply "filler" items (i.e., not to be included in the score) for the purpose of priming the participant to think more critically about the person of interest. The two important items are the last two questions for which participants use a 7-point Likert scale to indicate how much they like the person and how much they would like to work with the person. Thus, the IJS score is the sum of these last two items, with higher scores reflecting a more positive judgement of the person. In addition to using this continuous IJS score, I also included a simple yes/no question, asking whether the participant found the subject character appealing or not. This allowed for a logistic regression analysis to be performed, in case statistical assumptions were not met with the continuous measure.

Reliability of Account

A 7-point Likert-type Message Credibility Scale (MCS) was administered to ascertain a participant's attitude concerning the style and content of the excerpt. Participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1-7 how reliable, how professional, and how objective the message content was perceived to be (1 was very low, and 7 was very high). This instrument was taken from Appelman and Sundar (2016). A simple yes/no question was also administered, asking the participant whether the excerpt was credible, again allowing for logistic regression should the data have failed to meet assumptions.

<center>**Design and Procedure**</center>

The study was administered through Qualtrics, with an estimated completion time of approximately 30 minutes – though participants could complete it at their own pace. The first page of the survey included the consent form that provided information on the study's purpose, procedures, risks, benefits, extent of confidentiality, and voluntary

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nature of participation. After providing informed consent, participants completed a demographic survey and the attitude metrics (CSS-M, BJW Scale, DSS, Measure of Alienation, and MSTAT-1).

In order to assess whether certain personal attitudes could predict attraction for a narco-hero, each participant was given an excerpt from *The Real Pablo* by Jhon Velasquez, alias Popeye, one of Pablo Escobar's longest-lived hitmen. The excerpt chosen was one in which the protagonist, Pablo Escobar, was glorified as brave and level-headed, and the "macho potential of... [his]...tough-as-nails cohorts" was made apparent (Pobutsky, 2013, p. 689). Moreover, the ability to procure beautiful lovers was emphasized as central to Escobar's machismo and power. However, cultural and historically-specific words were replaced by generic language. After reading the excerpt, the participants completed the Interpersonal Judgement Scale and the 3-item measure of excerpt credibility.

Statistical Analyses

After collecting the data, first, descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha analyses were first conducted to determine the distribution of responses and internal consistency of the measures used in the study. Second, a series of initial Pearson correlational analyses were performed to assess the individual relationships between the continuous variables. Finally and most importantly, regression analyses were performed to ascertain whether any combination of personal attitude metrics (CSS-M, BJW Scale, DSS, Measure of Alienation, and MSTAT-1) and demographic information (gender, ethnicity, social status, and political ideology) could be used to predict interpersonal judgement and message credibility scores. Linear regression was used for the continuous dependent

variables (IJS and MCS scores), and binomial logistic regression was used for the

dichotomous questions asking participants whether or not they liked the character and

whether or not they believed that the excerpt was credible.

III. RESULTS

Preliminary Analyses

The descriptive and reliability statistics for the variable measures are presented in Table 2. These statistics reveal sufficiently large ranges and Cronbach's alpha values indicative of acceptable to great internal consistency for the measures.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics and Internal Consistency for Variable Measures

Continuous variable	Range	*M* (*SD*)	Cronbach's alpha
Predictor variables			
CSS-M	4-64	33.18 (11.64)	.88
DSS	32-168	142.33 (13.47)	.83
BJWS	3-102	75.35 (10.16)	.57
Alienation	8-210	173.35 (15.04)	.66
MSTAT-1	7-154	95.48 (15.27)	.84
Outcome variables			
IJS	1-14	7.37 (2.69)	.64
MCS	3-21	14.28 (3.59)	.81
Dichotomous variable	*n*	%	
Like the character?			
No	263	62.92	
Yes	155	37.08	
Excerpt credible?			
No	256	61.10	
Yes	163	38.90	

Note. CSS-M = Criminal Sentiments Scale-Modified; Drug Sentiments Scale; BJWS = Belief in a Just World Scale; Alienation = Measure of Alienation; MSTAT-1 = Multiple Stimulus Types Ambiguity Tolerance scale; IJS = Interpersonal Judgement Scale; MCS = Message Credibility Scale.

Results of the preliminary Pearson correlational analyses are presented in Table 3. Amongst predictor variables, CSS was significantly correlated with DSS, BJW, and Alienation; Alienation was significantly correlated with DSS; and MSTAT was

significantly correlated with DSS and BJW. For non-dichotomous outcome variables, IJS was significantly correlated with CSS, BJW, Alienation, and MSC.

Table 3
Pearson Correlations Among Continuous Predictor and Outcome Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. CSS-M						
2. DSS	.25**					
3. BJWS	-.43**	-.04				
4. Alienation	.34**	.26**	.09			
5. MSTAT-1	-.09	.25**	.09**	.08		
6. IJS	.25**	.03	-.08*	.12*	.06	
7. MCS	.03	.02	-.05	-.09	.06	.25**

$*p < .05. **p < .01.$

Regression Analyses

For all regression analyses, I entered the variables in steps, with the first block consisting of the demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, social status, and political ideology), and the second block including CSS, DSS, BJW, Alienation, and MSTAT. For the multiple linear regression predicting attraction, the demographic variables accounted for 5% of the variance in the first step, $F(4, 393) = 4.82$, $p < .001$, and the addition of the personal attitude variables accounted for 9% of the variance, $F(9, 388) = 4.43$, $p < .001$. As shown in Table 4, the only significant predictors were sex and criminal sentiments, whereby perceived attractiveness was greater among men and those with higher CSS-M scores. For the binomial logistic regression predicting attraction, the demographic variables accounted for only 2% of the variance in the first step, $\chi^2 = 6.23$, $p = .18$, and the addition of the personal attitude variables accounted for only 5% of the variance, $\chi^2 = 9.18$, $p = .10$. As shown in Table 5, none of the relationships were significant.

Table 4

Linear Regression Predicting Character Liking with the IJS

Predictor variable	B	SE B	β	p	R^2
Model 1					.05
Male	1.20	0.35	.17	.001	
Hispanic/Latino	0.42	0.29	.07	.16	
Social status	-0.03	0.18	-.01	.85	
Political ideology	-0.16	0.09	-.09	.08	
Model 2					.09
Male	0.98	0.36	.14	.006	
Hispanic/Latino	0.3	0.29	.06	.29	
Social status	0.07	0.18	.02	.70	
Political ideology	-0.06	0.09	-.04	.52	
CSS-M	0.06	0.02	.25	.001	
DSS	-0.01	0.01	-.04	.41	
BJWS	0.01	0.02	.04	.47	
Alienation	0.002	0.01	.01	.85	
MSTAT-1	0.002	0.01	.01	.85	

Note. CSS-M = Criminal Sentiments Scale-Modified; Drug Sentiments Scale; BJWS = Belief in a Just World Scale; Alienation = Measure of Alienation; MSTAT-1 = Multiple Stimulus Types Ambiguity Tolerance scale; IJS = Interpersonal Judgement Scale.

Table 5

Logistic Regression Predicting Character Liking with Dichotomous-Response Question

Predictor variable	B	SE B	Exp(B)	p	R^2
Model 1					.021
Male	0.41	0.26	1.51	.11	
Hispanic/Latino	0.34	0.22	1.40	.13	
Social status	0.19	0.14	1.21	.17	
Political ideology	-0.03	0.07	0.98	.69	
Model 2					.052
Male	0.22	0.27	1.25	.42	
Hispanic/Latino	0.39	0.23	1.48	.08	
Social status	0.17	0.14	1.19	.23	
Political ideology	0.03	0.07	1.03	.74	
CSS-M	0.01	0.01	1.01	.47	
DSS	0.02	0.01	1.02	.09	
BJWS	0.02	0.01	1.02	.16	
Alienation	0.01	0.01	1.01	.21	
MSTAT-1	0.01	0.01	1.01	.17	

Note. CSS-M = Criminal Sentiments Scale-Modified; Drug Sentiments Scale; BJWS = Belief in a Just World Scale; Alienation = Measure of Alienation; MSTAT-1 = Multiple Stimulus Types Ambiguity Tolerance scale.

For the multiple linear regression to predict excerpt credibility, the demographic variables accounted for only 1% of the variance in the first step, $F(4, 393) = 0.50$, $p = .73$, and the addition of the personal attitude variables accounted for only 3% of the variance, $F(9, 388) = 1.13$, $p = .34$. Similarly, for the binomial logistic regression to predict excerpt credibility, the demographic variables accounted for only 2% of the variance in the first step, $\chi^2 = 4.40$, $p = .36$, whereas the addition of the personal attitude variables accounted for 6% of the variance, $\chi^2 = 12.40$, $p = .03$. As shown in Tables 6 and 7, the only significant predictor in either analysis was Alienation, whereby higher Alienation scores were associated with a lower likelihood of perceiving the excerpt to be credible.

Table 6
Linear Regression Predicting Excerpt Credibility with the MCS

Predictor variable	B	SE B	β	p	R^2
Model 1					.005
Male	0.3	0.45	.03	.51	
Hispanic/Latino	0.38	0.38	.05	.31	
Social status	-0.8	0.24	-.02	.73	
Political ideology	0.11	0.12	.05	.34	
Model 2					.025
Male	0.28	0.47	.03	.55	
Hispanic/Latino	0.47	0.38	.07	.22	
Social status	-0.1	0.24	-.02	.69	
Political ideology	0.12	0.12	.05	.34	
CSS-M	0.03	0.02	.09	.13	
DSS	0.01	0.02	.03	.62	
BJWS	0.01	0.02	.02	.78	
Alienation	-0.03	0.02	-.12	.029	
MSTAT-1	0.01	0.01	.06	.29	

Note. CSS-M = Criminal Sentiments Scale-Modified; Drug Sentiments Scale; BJWS = Belief in a Just World Scale; Alienation = Measure of Alienation; MSTAT-1 = Multiple Stimulus Types Ambiguity Tolerance scale; MCS = Message Credibility Scale.

Table 7

Logistic Regression Predicting Excerpt Credibility with Dichotomous-Response Question

Predictor variable	B	SE B	Exp(B)	p	R^2
Model 1					.015
Male	0.44	0.27	0.64	.11	
Hispanic/Latino	0.05	0.22	1.05	.83	
Social status	-0.09	0.14	0.92	.53	
Political ideology	-0.06	0.07	0.94	.38	
Model 2					.056
Male	0.41	0.29	0.67	.16	
Hispanic/Latino	0.03	0.23	1.03	.91	
Social status	-0.07	0.14	0.93	.61	
Political ideology	-0.10	0.07	0.90	.17	
CSS-M	0.02	0.01	1.02	.06	
DSS	-0.02	0.01	0.99	.11	
BJWS	0.01	0.01	1.01	.29	
Alienation	-0.025	0.01	0.975	.011	
MSTAT-1	-0.01	0.01	0.99	.36	

Note. CSS-M = Criminal Sentiments Scale-Modified; Drug Sentiments Scale; BJWS = Belief in a Just World Scale; Alienation = Measure of Alienation; MSTAT-1 = Multiple Stimulus Types Ambiguity Tolerance scale.

IV. DISCUSSION

Discussion of Results and Theoretical Implications

Attraction

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships between demographic characteristics, personal attitude metrics, and reactions to a certain heroic archetype – in this case, the controversial archetype of the social bandit. A regression analysis indicated that personal attitude metrics and demographic characteristics successfully contributed to a predictive model of individual attraction for a social bandit, the depiction thereof taken directly from a primary source of narcocultural literature. Of the personal attitude metrics, only criminal sentiments showed the hypothesized relationship within the predictive model, with higher criminal sentiments linked significantly to greater attraction for the social bandit character.

However, it should be noted that, though criminal sentiments were the only personal attitude metric to contribute significantly to the model, significant correlations revealed that greater attraction for the social bandit was also associated with a lower BJW and greater alienation. These attitude metrics appear to capture overlapping attitudinal constructs. For example, greater feelings of alienation significantly correlate with higher criminal sentiments, as might be expected given that feelings of antipathy towards legitimate society and self-identification with lawbreakers might coincide and interact in meaningful ways, culminating, ultimately, in rejection of social and moral convention. Thus, these results suggest that, when combined in a predictive model, the criminal sentiments scale might subsume the elements of countercultural and extralegal

identification inherent in each of the other attitude constructs, such that the criminal sentiments scale becomes the only significant metric in the equation.

Finally, it appeared that being male significantly contributed to greater predicted attraction to the social bandit archetype. Although this was not a primary emphasis in the current study, it is a finding that might be of especial importance. For example, at least one study has shown that men, particularly those that have felt emasculated by recent socioeconomic changes, might create for themselves more masculine identities through the everyday consumption of "man-of-action heroes" (Holt & Thompson, 2004). However, how individuals chose to pursue heroic masculinity differed based on many personally relevant characteristics, including differences observed in qualitative data.

Although it is uncertain why the logistic regression was non-significant for the dichotomous variable of attraction, this might reflect an awkwardly phrased outcome variable. Participants were asked, "Do you like the character named the boss?" It is conceivable that participants misinterpreted the question to mean whether they liked the name of the character. Therefore, had the question been more directly phrased, results might have differed.

Regardless, the current multiple regression model explained a significant portion of the variance in participant attraction to the social bandit hero, though a great deal of variation remained unaccounted for. Considering the implications of the significance of masculinity in the model, this unaccounted-for variance might be found by examining personal history (particularly those experiences relevant to masculine identity), as well as by including metrics of personality in addition to personal attitudes.

Message Credibility

Unfortunately, message credibility was not significantly predicted by the model. Although it appeared that lower scores on alienation approached significance vis-à-vis higher message credibility, because the model itself was non-significant, it is challenging to make any definitive statement on the implications of this result. Similarly, logistic regression was also insignificant in this respect.

Strengths and Limitations

Although significance in predicting attraction based on demographics and personal attitudes was found, several caveats concerning the results must be made clear. First, given the use of a convenience sample consisting of a narrow range of demographic variability, it is not possible to confidently generalize these results to the broader population. Whether attitude metrics in general or criminal sentiments in particular will always be useful in predicting who will find a social bandit or narco-hero attractive remains a question to be resolved via a more inclusive version of this study.

Additionally, as shown by the results of the correlational analyses, the personal attitudes included in this study appear to share significant construct overlap. Thus, there is a need to include attitude metrics that are less intertwined to see how much personal attitudes can contribute to predictions of narcocultural appeal. Additionally, questionnaires might not provide enough insight into the subjective elements that potentially come into play when determining how attractive any given "hero" might appear.

Directions for Future Research

Much remains undiscovered concerning the appeal and spread of narcoculture and other insurgent, outlaw ideologies. However, in addition to expanding upon our understandings of the mechanisms whereby narco-heroes cultivate their appeal, which was the purpose of the present study, the impacts such heroes might have on those who imbibe of their stories deserve further scrutiny. Thus, a future study might examine whether criminal sentiments will increase after prolonged exposure to media in which such a character is framed as heroic. In this way, we will better understand not only who will choose to embrace a narco-hero, but what might be the potential ramifications of this sort of parasocial relationship. Clearly, the appeal exists, and this study helps further our understanding of it. However, given the importance of narcoculture within the context of the illicit drug trade, narco-insurgency, and narco-terrorism, further deconstructive work is imperative.

Conclusion

The present study indicates that personal attitudes are significant in determining how attractive an individual will find a social bandit hero, even one explicitly linked to illegal enterprises, violence, and the objectification of women. Knowing what we do about the relationships people have with their cultures and cultural heroes, it is essential to further elucidate on the methods and means whereby individuals choose their heroes. This study indicates that preexisting personal attitudes contribute significantly to this process. Moreover, it provides evidence that personal attitudes reflective of self-identification with lawbreakers and the rejection of legal norms, more so than general feelings of pervasive injustice or a sense of apartness from conventional society, appear

to influence how heroic an outlaw hero seems to any given individual. Although it is only a partial explanation, we now have further reason to believe that, in a given population, not only demographic characteristics but subjective beliefs, attitudes, and values will contribute to our perceptions of "heroic" others, even when these are flagrantly engaged in and even emblematic of anti-social behaviors.

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