

Individual differences in cinema audiences

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1. Introduction

"The ability to gauge someone's personality simply by examining their favorite films might be disconcerting to some, but it comes one step closer to answering the age-old question of whether we really are what we consume." (Note 1)

It is an obvious fact of life that people are different, in a great number of ways. Films, too, are vastly different. *Difference*, or, in other words, *variety*, is an essential feature of both natural and human life - what makes it both terribly complex and extremely fascinating. As part of this variety, it is easy to admit that different people like different kinds of films, which is to say that films cater for a range of individual preferences.

The fact that films are "consumed" in very different ways is reflected in viewers' individual and group reactions, so that the same movie can be considered not just as generically "good" or "bad", but also as "exciting" or "depressing", "beautifully shot" or "incoherent", and so on. For example, *Irréversible* (by Gaspar Noé, France 2002) garnered the following user reviews at IMDb (International Movie Database):

"One of the most disturbing and confronting movies ever made"

"Stick with it - not enjoyable, but admirable"

"Visceral, shocking, groundbreaking genius"

"Brilliant!"

"One of the most "fucked up" movies ever made"

"Difficult to watch, even if you take the most difficult scenes out"

As can be seen, viewers' reviews can refer to several features of the movie (its story as well as its formal or stylistic features), but also to the effects the movie has had on the viewer - offering an extremely wide range of opinions and testifying to the very different "hearts and minds" that make up an audience.

2. Ways to approach individual differences

Individual differences can be studied from several perspectives, starting from the psychological one; and films, too, can be differentiated, most notably by assigning them to a range of *film genres* (from comedy to drama, from western to musical). The relationship between individual differences and types of films is significant, and has accordingly been explored for a range of possible interactions, which can give rise to several interesting questions:

- a) perhaps the most common, and indeed the oldest, link is a purely commercial/financial one: *How can cinema cater to a variety of audiences? How can a movie appeal to as many viewers as possible, so as to provide the biggest possible box-office returns?* These commercial considerations have more recently been revamped and boosted by new marketing strategies, which employ relatively recent technologies (e.g. algorithms) to track the viewing habits of individuals in order both to create extensive information databases for production and distribution companies and to provide personalized feedback to viewers - the question then becoming, *how can individual preferences be matched with suitable viewing suggestions?*
- b) a related avenue of research, which extends beyond the "mere" marketing interest, is the way movie preferences can help explore human personality: *What can choices in entertainment media (more specifically, films) tell us about viewers' individual differences?* In this perspective, we start from film choices and arrive at the individual differences that they imply: *film preferences can help to understand individual profiles;*
- c. reversing this question, one can also research the ways personality affects film choice: *How can personality factors predict movie preferences?* In this case we start from individual differences and arrive at the choices that are made in terms of kinds of entertainment media (more specifically, films): *individual profiles can help to understand film preferences;*
- d) finally, the relationship between individual differences and cinema has for a long time been considered (mainly, if not exclusively) in terms of the *effects* that certain kinds of films, or rather, certain types of film content (e.g. violence. sex) can have on different kinds of audiences: *How are people affected by what they see and hear? Can film content cause or prompt some people (more than others) to change their beliefs, attitudes and, ultimately, behaviour?*

This paper is concerned mainly with the questions raised in b) and c) above, although the relevance of both these avenues of exploration to marketing strategies (i.e. a) above) is clearly very high (at times, indeed, becoming of overwhelming, even exclusive interest). In the same way, the (positive or negative) impact of movies on individuals (i.e. d) above) still remains an important effect of both traditional and newer kinds of entertainment media.

3. The "cinematic experience"

3.1. Different behavioural, psychological and social patterns

To provide concrete examples of individual differences, we may consider the nature of the "cinematic experience", i.e. what viewers bring to the vision of a film, how they structure this vision, and what kind of outcomes they expect to gain. The results of a survey (Note 2) highlighted how such an experience is multi-dimensional as several factors were identified, with useful and interesting insights into the different ways in which people experience their relationship with a movie. Such factors can be summarized as follows:

1. *specialty downloader*: downloading movies from the Internet has become a common behaviour among film buffs. This involves a very active disposition, which includes watching a wide range of movies, including foreign ones, activating subtitles if necessary, and also listening to movie soundtracks;
2. *loses plot line*: the degree of involvement in watching a movie can vary greatly, with some people having problems in following the film plot, which can lead to avoiding movies with elaborate plots;
3. *social media commentator*: with more and more films made available in different formats and through a variety of electronic devices, a large number of people find that the cinematic experience does not end with the film's end - they continue to discuss the movie, especially through social networks, blogs, chats. This does not necessarily imply an exclusive "home vision", since real film buffs are often keen to see movies in theatres, as soon as they are released;
4. *revisiting narrative*: the widespread availability of movies also means that they can be watched over and over again, perhaps changing the device (e.g. a laptop computer, a tablet, a smartphone); this can also imply a preference for fiction films rather than documentaries;
5. *personal reflection*: in connection with no. 3 above, some people are readier than others to enjoy films that can be used to reflect on the film's themes, relating them to their own experience and perhaps allowing the discovery of hidden aspects of their personality;
6. *style and dialogue*: some people are more interested than others in the style and techniques involved in producing a film (e.g. *mise-en-scène*, camera movements, editing) and/or in its narrative strategies, including the role of characters and the verbal part of narration (e.g. dialogues, first-person narration);
7. *evaluating film versus advertisements*: with the increasing amount of advertisements presented not just before or after a film, but even within it, it is only natural that people may differ in their reactions towards such a practice, which can also impact on the overall evaluation of the viewing experience once it is over;
8. *realistic stars*: a film's cast can be a strong motivation to choose a film, especially if stars feature prominently;

9. *controlling viewer*: this factor identifies people who like to control the flow of vision, e.g. by pausing the film, re-watching parts or stopping watching it altogether (all options that are available in the home vision but obviously not in theatres);

10. *mood immersion*: some viewers are particularly keen on choosing movies that match their own mood. The feeling of "total immersion" can be heightened in the theatrical experience of a movie, when being in a completely dark room and in relatively complete isolation can provide a different quality of the vision itself.

The results of this research (Note 3) are also noteworthy because they highlight, not only differences at audience level, but also the different aspects that viewers take into account when they refer to their film preferences. As a matter of fact, when people refer to "movies" they may be referring to one or more of the following film features: *film-inherent* (e.g. plot, characters, aspects of cinematography like camera movements lighting, editing, etc.), *film-external* (e.g. film reception, awards gained, critical appraisal) and the *effects of film use* (both in terms of the *resources* demanded of/activated by audiences, like the need for deeper cognitive efforts to understand and appreciate a film, and in terms of the *effects* that the film itself can have on its viewers, like entertainment, personal growth, social awareness or commitment). In other words, the relationship between movies and their audiences can be described by referring to the features of movies, to the viewing situation (e.g. in a theatre rather than through a streaming platform at home, all alone or with friends, which also impacts on the social aspect of movie-going) and finally to the realm of viewers' individual differences.

In addition, we must take into account the obvious fact that movie evaluation can take place

a. *before* exposure (i.e. before viewing), when choice of a movie can be affected by, e.g. critical acclaim, box-office success, nominations and awards, or simply word-of-mouth recommendations;

b. *during* exposure (i.e. while watching a movie), when positive and negative involvement can be affected by prior expectations: if we watch violent scenes in a film which we did not expect to show violence, we may decrease our level of involvement or even stop watching, especially if we dislike violent films in general and/or consider them as morally unacceptable; or, to give another example, we may start watching a movie mainly with a view to gather information on a topic but find ourselves moved or excited by what we see, thus changing the quality of our involvement and evaluation;

c. *after* exposure, when the overall evaluation of a movie depends on a host of factors, which have to do with the features of the movie itself but also, and most importantly, with our *attitudes* towards specific film genres and specific film features. For example, if a movie is congruent with our prior attitudes and expectations, we are likely to evaluate it in more positive terms than if it does not meet what we consider to be important movie features (like ways of acting, shooting, editing, etc.). In this respect, *film genres* are important factors to consider, since they provide viewers with rather specific expectations (towards, e.g. what can be expected from a western or a comedy) which provide the benchmark for subsequent evaluation: "This is not what I expected from a horror movie" or "This is not what I expected from a Jim Carrey film" are common judgments which betray a clash between what movies can offer viewers and what viewers themselves bring to the watching situation. In particular, *film expertise*, or the individual viewer's knowledge and experience of movies and movie-

making, can greatly impact on the comprehension and appreciation of movies, especially if a movie is challenging because, e.g. it requires the processing of complex information or greater aesthetic skills for artistic appreciation.

3.2. Various aspects of a movie impact different viewer reactions

From the start, our discussion of individual differences in film preferences must take into account the various aspects of a movie which viewers may find more or less important when evaluating a movie. A research survey (Note 4) isolated eight main factors which viewers may find useful when providing an evaluation of a movie. You will notice that some of these factors concern the *content* of a movie (e.g. plot, characters) while others concern its *form* or *style* (e.g. use of film language like shooting and editing) as well as *external aspects* (like the information concerning a particular movie and the effects movies can have on audiences):

1. *Story verisimilitude* or degree of realism, i.e. the fact that the movie reflects (contemporary) reality;
2. *Story innovation*, or the degree to which the story can be considered new or original;
3. *Cinematography*, or the cinematic techniques used to produce a film (like framing, camera movements, editing);
4. *Special effects*, which are really part of cinematography but, with the advent of digital technologies, are impacting in ever increasing or pervasive ways on film production;
5. *Recommendations*, or, more generally, external resources, like film criticism, used to evaluate a movie;
6. *Innocuousness*, or the absence of unpleasant features (e.g. with respect to sex or violence);
7. *Light-heartedness*, or the degree to which a movie can provide entertainment and also act as a way to escape boredom or monotony;
8. *Cognitive stimulation*, or the degree to which a movie can provide "food for thought", i.e. opportunities for learning and reflecting.

3.3. Film genres and their cognitive and emotional appeal

Another important set of considerations regarding the "cinematic experience" concerns the fact that a *film genre* can be one of the strongest factors affecting the choice (or rejection) of a particular movie by particular people. People like or dislike certain genres and can therefore base their decision to watch a movie on their genre preferences. We will address the relationship between film genres and personal preferences in a later section, but, by way of preliminary remarks, it is interesting to report the results of a study (Note 5) which attempted to find out if some general factors could explain the specific attractiveness of different media genres (not just films but also music, books and television). The results point to some fascinating aspects of genres which we will take up again later. Five major factors were identified which were common to several music, book, television and movie genres, which we list below with their specific reference to (very general) film genres:

- a. *Communal* (romance, family): lighthearted, uncomplicated, popular, focussing on people and relationships;
- b. *Aesthetic* (foreign, classic): creative, abstract, cultural, challenging;
- c. *Dark* (horror, cult): intensity, edginess, hedonism;
- d. *Thrilling* (action, science fiction): adventure, suspense, fantasy;
- e. *Cerebral* (documentary): factual information about people, places and other aspects of the real world.

These factors were correlated with various *demographic variables*: *gender* was most strongly related to the factors, followed by intelligence, education, age and ethnicity. Some of the most interesting results can be summarized as follows: females and people with low levels of education scored high on the *Communal* factor; people with high education levels, abstract reasoning ability and females scored high on *Aesthetic*; young people, males and Hispanics scored high on *Dark*; men more than women and less educated people scored high on *Thrilling*; older people and males scored high on *Cerebral*.

When correlated with *personality variables* (examined in more detail below), the most intriguing results can be summarized as follows: *Communal* was found related to psychological characteristics like pleasant, light-hearted, unadventurous, uncomplicated and relationship-oriented; *Aesthetic* to creative, calm, introspective and in touch with emotion; *Dark* to defiant, reckless and immodest; *Cerebral* to enterprising, innovative, intellectual, self-assured and detail oriented.

These results are mentioned here only as a preliminary example of how *specific* features of movie genres can cater for and appeal to some *specific* groups of people on the basis of *individual differences*.

3.4. Other aspects of the "cinematic experience"

Individual differences, however, cannot be reduced to demographic and personality variables only, although these factors are of the utmost importance. Other variables are worth taking into consideration. *Situational* variables may greatly affect entertainment preferences: for example, being in a certain *mood*, like being tired or stressed rather than relaxed, may favour the choice of light-hearted entertainment not requiring high levels of attention or cognitive effort; boredom or restlessness may favour the choice of thrilling, exciting media; the need for information on a specific topic may favour the choice of documentaries or factual media; and, generally speaking, certain media can be chosen because they offer emotional stimulation when needed. This means that, alongside personality traits, which are relatively stable over time and for a certain individual, we need to consider mental *states*, i.e. temporary moods which can change over time and point to differences not just *between* and *among* individuals but also, importantly, *within* a single individual.

In the same vein, the demands of *social contexts* can affect media preferences. For example, some social groups are defined mainly in terms of their preferred media (music, movies, etc.), and people who share such preferences have been found to share psychological characteristics, too - not to mention the fact that media preference can be used to define one's own personality and communicate it to others (with social media offering powerful opportunities to do so), with the additional remark that sharing media preferences can affect the quality of interpersonal relationships (e.g. within a family or between friends or romantic partners).

3.5. Viewers as active agents, not passive recipients

The concepts expressed so far point to a major feature of film audiences, i.e. that fact that viewers are not simply receiving what they see and hear as *passive entities*, but are instead *active agents* in choosing (or rejecting), comprehending, appreciating and evaluating the content and form of the screen images and sounds. As we will explore in more depth in the next section, it is important to go beyond considering just how media affect people (e.g. in

terms of violent behaviour) to explore which kinds of individual differences affect the choice (or rejection) of media - or in simpler terms, *study what people do with the media instead of what the media do to people*.

4. Differences in processing a film

4.1. The viewing process

Before considering the various ways in which individual differences in movie preferences can be identified and discussed, it is useful to briefly describe the process involved in viewing a film (Fig. 1 below)(Note 6).

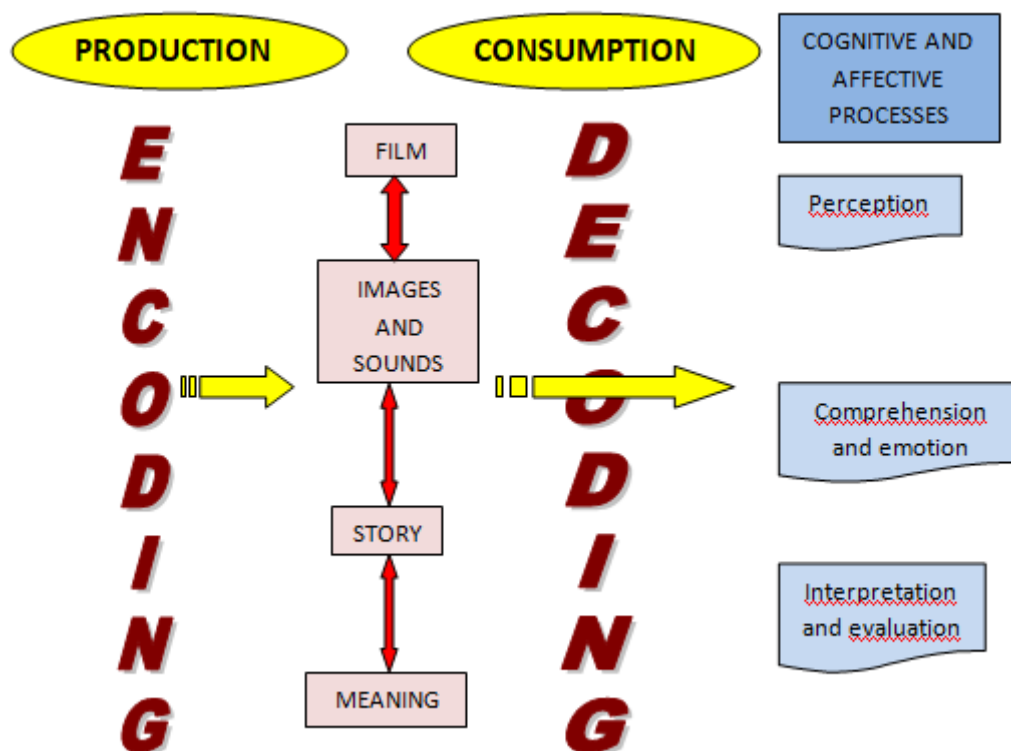


Fig. 1

This process starts with a film's production by, e.g. a studio, when the people responsible for creating the movie *encode*, i.e. convey, the film's meaning through a particular use of film language. The product is the film itself, which must then be *decoded* by viewers - viewers need to retrieve the meaning which was originally encoded. This is not a mechanical or automatic activity, since viewers do not simply produce a mirror image of the original meaning: they bring with them beliefs, attitudes, past experiences, motivations and other personal attributes which do not necessarily match those of the original "creators" of the film. In other words, the meaning of the film *as decoded by its viewers* may be (and in most cases actually is) different in a variety of ways from the "original, intended meaning". The film consists of *images and sound*, which give form and structure to a *story*, which is imbued with *meaning(s)*. Viewers are not passive recipients of all this - indeed, they are actively involved (even if at possibly different degrees of consciousness) in a process which starts with their *perception* of the images and sound. Watching a movie means using and elaborating the input

from the screen, and in so doing viewers set in motion both cognitive mechanisms (to *understand* what they see and hear: story, characters, etc.) and emotional mechanisms (which trigger their *emotional* reactions). Through comprehension and emotion, viewers are able to *interpret* what they now perceive as the film's meaning and eventually *evaluate* the viewing experience (e.g. as an enjoyable and/or meaningful one). It goes without saying that the outcome of this process may not be what the original creators had envisaged, because people who produce the film (*encoders*) are different from the people who view it (*decoders*): viewers have their own world views, and will therefore produce different meanings in accordance with such views. What is most interesting for our discussion is that viewers themselves are different in a variety of ways, so that there will be *as many final interpretations and evaluations of a film as there are viewers*.

4.2. Case study: *Thelma & Louise - and a touch of cultural differences*

To illustrate how different viewers interpret and evaluate a film's meanings as a result of the process described in Fig. 1, we can consider audience reactions to a film that has sparked off considerable debate, *Thelma and Louise* (by Ridley Scott, USA 1991).

Reactions, mainly based on the themes of gender and violence towards women, were broadly divided into three groups (Note 7). One group, who positively evaluated the film, liked the female characters (played by Geena Davis and Susan Sarandon) who were perceived as both funny and disturbing, and, while not directly quoting feminist issues, were sympathetic with the plight suffered by them. Another group, who evaluated the film negatively, found that, faced with irresponsible and stupid males, the two women were led to criminal acts. However, contrary to the legitimate expectation that women would like the film while men wouldn't, many male critics appreciated the film and several female critics didn't. The most negative reaction was from male critics who found that the picture of male characters was flawed and biased beyond reasonable limits. A third group also judged the film negatively, but on different grounds. They saw the movie as a bad example of false feminism, whereby women, while reacting to men's violence, actually took up typically masculine roles in order to carry out their revenge. In other words, the female characters were accused of using traditional masculine weapons (like the use of guns) instead of relying on (again traditional but also stereotyped) feminine means (like reflecting and discussing the relevant issues).

Different viewer interpretations were also found in the years following the initial release of the film. A year later, for example, there was not much difference between women and men who liked the film - men in particular thought that the film conveyed negative images of male characters but still enjoyed other features of the movie, like the drama behind the events, the action sequences and the beautiful settings. A couple of decades later, by the end of the 2000s, there was no noticeable difference between the film's appreciation by women and men, with the latter now ceasing to find male characters negatively portrayed: this was also a response to the changes in time towards the roles of women in action films, with heroines now appearing nearly as often as men as determined, even ruthless characters.

All in all, women still seem to like the film slightly more than men, but the most interesting difference concerns the process of *viewer identification* with characters. While women usually identify strongly with the female characters, men, although not feeling threatened by the female violence portrayed in the film, do not readily identify with Thelma and Louise, but can definitely identify with the "positive" male characters (mainly the sympathetic ones like the detective played by Harvey Keitel or Louise's boyfriend played by Michael Madsen).

Women identifying with the female characters often quote two dramatic sequences from the movie, the one where Thelma shoots the man trying to rape Louise in a parking lot towards the beginning of the film (see Video 1 below) and the heartbreaking finale, with the two women consciously refusing to surrender to the police and driving off a cliff (see Video 2). Here we have an interesting example of the interaction between (cognitive) comprehension and (affective) emotion in determining the overall interpretation and evaluation of a film's meanings (see Fig. 1 above): although some viewers perceive a clear link between these two scenes (the ending as a result of the sexual assault), many female viewers report feeling angry during the first sequence but feeling "free" during the ending, which is not felt as a suicidal decision but as a way to "break free" from an oppressive (male) society and a refusal "to give in" by reaffirming the value of friendship.



Video 1

Video 2

A final note may serve as a reminder that individual differences are not just psychological constructs but are also affected by a *cultural* dimension. The TV soap opera *Dallas* (created by David Jacobs - see the trailer of Season 1 in Video 3 below) ran for years and was a huge worldwide success, suggesting that the "values" and "messages" conveyed by the series had a sort of "universal" appeal. However, this was not the case. Surveys (Note 7) showed that Arabs and Moroccan Jews appreciated the story events, and particularly the strong emphasis on family relationships, from a moral standpoint. Americans and Israelis liked the psychological motivations and strong feelings driving the actions of individual characters. Russians, on the other hand, were particularly critical of the consumerist messages conveyed by the story, characters and overall production of the series.



Video 3

5. Individual differences, movie differences and the problems in identifying and describing them

"Given the seemingly infinite number of factors affecting viewers' responses, it is clearly a very difficult task to explain why one viewer screams in terror during a horror film while the next shrugs in indifference, or why one viewer sobs uncontrollably during a tear-jerker while another yawns from boredom." (Note 8)

People can be different in a very wide variety of ways (Fig. 2 below) and one of the main problems in studying individual differences is how to approach such variety and which factors to concentrate on. Some factors have to do with biological aspects (e.g. age, sex), others with social and cultural aspects (e.g. sociocultural background, ethnic origin). Generally speaking, the basic concept used to start identifying differences is often a

psychological one - *personality*, which in most cases can be considered an "umbrella" term, i.e. a complex structure of factors which are defined in different terms according to different personality theories. Indeed, several factors highlighted in Fig. 2 could be assumed to be part of an overall picture of personality: however, several of such factors (e.g. intelligence(s), motivation, beliefs and attitudes, aptitudes) have also been explored as independent concepts - a fact which will be reflected in the following discussion about film preferences. This preliminary "map" of individual differences, however, runs the risk of underestimating the basic fact that an individual's *profile* as a person is a sum of all the interactions that constantly take place between and among all the "mapped" factors; or, in other words, that biological, psychological, social and cultural factors can and should be considered separately only temporarily, and for purposes of easier study - always keeping in mind the structural unity of each individual human being.

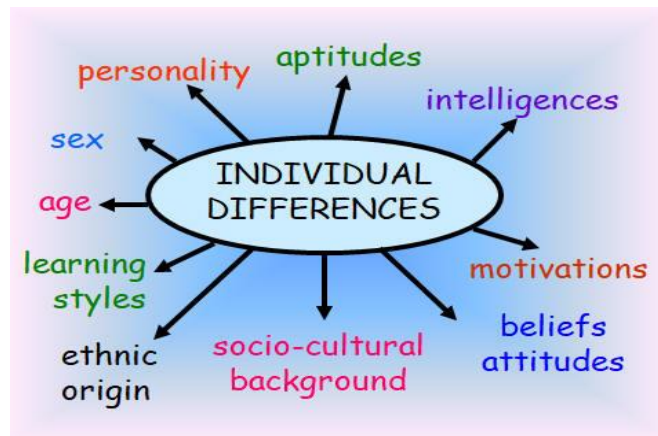


Fig. 2

Another preliminary observation which needs to be mentioned is the fact that differences can be detected not just *between* and *among* individuals, but also *within* each person according to different times and circumstances: for example, personality studies often establish a difference between *traits* (*stable* characteristics of an individual) and *states* (*changing* moods or *temporary* conditions). This is an important fact to keep in mind, since it points to the *relative*, and not *absolute*, character of the choices that people make when deciding to watch a movie - decisions that are the results of both *stable* personality traits and *contingent*, changing circumstances.

A similar question arises when trying to identify how to differentiate films, although in this case we can rely on the well-established tradition of classifying films into *genres*. Indeed, most studies dealing with individual movie preferences assume film genres as the reference variable: the assumption here is that people can choose an action rather than a sci-fi or musical film for reasons that have to do with their personality traits, and conversely, that a personality trait can predict the preferences in film genres. Genres are thus convenient, and relatively easy-to-use, labels to identify the differences between movies, but even in this case a word of warning is in order, for at least three reasons. First, although one can easily detect and describe the ways in which, e.g. a thriller is different from a comedy, a single movie can exhibit features of different genres: "action" scenes are not just the exclusive domain of action movies, and romantic tones are not confined to "sentimental" movies or melodramas. Second, genres have never been watertight compartments: if on the one hand they tend to ensure stability and coherence, for example in their themes and stylistic choices, on the other

hand they undergo changes to meet changing audience expectations: this happened, for instance, with westerns in the "New Hollywood" of the '60s and '70s and with musicals all along their history. Third, traditional distinctions between and among movies, which in the past have greatly helped to relate a particular film to a rather specific audience (like "women's films" in the Hollywood tradition), have in more recent times become blurred, as movies tend to incorporate aspects of different genres: thus today we can talk of *dramedies* to refer to the blending of comedy and drama. This poses an important question when trying to decide what features of a particular film can motivate an individual person's choice. If genres are still the basic concept to be taken into consideration when discussing film preferences, the choice of particular movies can depend on factors that go beyond "genre", thus complicating the issue.

All in all, both personality descriptions and film genre identification are not exempt from critical aspects, which suggest care in the interpretation and evaluation of results from research on individual differences and film preferences.

6. Personality

6.1. The "Big Five" model

"In mainstream personality research, personality is broadly conceptualized in terms of largely stable and biologically influenced individual differences that characterize an individual's typical patterns of behavior across different situations." (Note 9)

The value of personality as a concept expressed in these terms is its *predictive* value, i.e. the fact that it implies how a person will *probably* behave under certain circumstances - in our case, what her/his movie preferences will be. Among the various models which attempt to describe personality structure, the most widely used for the purpose of investigating individual differences in movie choice is the so-called *Big Five Model* (Note 10), which posits five main traits: *Neuroticism*, *Extraversion*, *Openness*, *Agreeableness*, and *Conscientiousness*. These terms need some clarification, since they refer to meanings that may not always coincide with their usual, everyday uses; besides, these terms refer to *tendencies* rather than absolute values. *Neuroticism*, for example, does not refer to a pathological condition but to a propensity to a low emotional stability, which leads to the experience of negative emotions like anxiety, stress, pessimism (conversely, people with a low value of neuroticism are more emotionally stable). *Extraversion* refers to a tendency to enjoy the company of others and to be confident and outgoing, while introverts are shy, passive, reserved and likely to enjoy being alone or with a few selected friends. *Openness* denotes people who are intellectually curious, open to new experiences and creative, while people low in this trait prefer to remain within the boundaries of their knowledge and experience and are less prone to try out novelties. *Agreeableness* identifies people who are open to others, sensitive to others' feelings and ready to open up, while the opposite is true for disagreeable people, who may be arrogant and not so ready to consider other people's needs and emotions. Finally, people high on the *Conscientiousness* trait are responsible, reliable, capable of self-management and even ambitious; conversely, people low on this trait are less-focused on plans and initiative, may be disorganized and with less ambition and self-control.

These five traits can be investigated through self-report questionnaires, which are made up of a number of statements to which respondents are asked to react by choosing the degree to which they agree or disagree (this obviously assumes that people are consistent and can be

trusted to provide accurate information, and that reported behaviours can predict future ones). An example for the *Extraversion* trait (and its reverse, *Intraversion*) might be:

	Disagree strongly 1	Disagree moderately 2	Disagree a little 3	Neither agree nor disagree 4	Agree a little 5	Agree moderately 6	Agree strongly 7
1. I enjoy going to parties.							
2. I like to be on my own in my free time.							

Sometimes statements are replaced by adjectives describing the trait (or its reverse), e.g. (Note 11):

I see myself as ...
1. extraverted, enthusiastic
2. reserved, quiet

or by a *continuum* between two opposites, where an individual profile can be established by choosing a position along this continuum, e.g. (Note 12):

(for Neuroticism) secure/calm <-----> unconfident/nervous
(for Extraversion) solitary/reserved <-----> outgoing/energetic
(for Openness) cautious/consistent <-----> curious/inventive
(for Agreeableness) cold/unkind <-----> friendly/compassionate
(for Conscientiousness) careless/easy going <-----> organized/efficient

6.2. Personality traits and film genres

Several studies report findings that point to a link between personality traits, as described by the "Big Five" model and film genres. For example (Note 13), *Extraversion* seems to be related for a preference for comedy and romance, and this is understandable, since extraverts like what these two genres usually abound in, i.e. meaningful connections with other people, with comedies providing the "lighter side" of these connections through dialogues, jokes, witty exchanges, etc.; *Agreeableness*, too, can point to a preference for romance, with its predominant focus on relationships, empathy and compassion (keeping in mind that women usually score higher in *Agreeableness* as well as *Conscientiousness*, a fact that will be taken up again in the section on *sex and gender* below); agreeable people, with their warm, kind approach, are also found to dislike horror movies. The link between *Openness* and documentaries and science fiction films comes as no surprise, since these are two genres that cater for intellectual curiosity, information seeking and processing, adventure and new experiences. *Openness* has also been found to be related to a preference for comedies, which may contain non-predictable, unconventional plots, and stimulating characters - a feature

which is at least in part shared by fantasy films. Action films were also found to be chosen by people high on *Conscientiousness*, probably because such films are based on rather predictable plots and therefore appeal to people who prefer familiarity over novelty; this is also true for romantic films, which, by usually carrying positive, optimistic feelings can also appeal to people high on *Neuroticism*.

Another example of research results provided these links (Note 14):

	<i>High</i>	<i>Low</i>
<i>Openness</i>	tragedy, neo-noir, independent, cult, foreign	war, romance, action, comedy
<i>Conscientiousness</i>	independent, adventure, science fiction	cult, animation, cartoons
<i>Extraversion</i>	drama, romance, comedy, action	animation, tragedy, neo-noir, science fiction
<i>Agreeableness</i>	adventure, romance, comedy, drama	parody, animation, neo-noir, cult, horror
<i>Neuroticism</i>	cult, tragedy, animation	adventure, independent, war

Notice that while some links are intuitive, confirming what one would expect from people sharing the same personality traits, others are less obvious and are usually worthy of further research. Also notice that there is no one-to-one link between traits and film genres, as the latter can appeal to more than one trait.

This kind of research makes use of questionnaires designed to explore genre preferences (where people are asked to declare their preferences on a scale, e.g. between the two extremes of *Dislike extremely* to *Like extremely*), also by inviting them to quote one or more movies that they have enjoyed and asking them to assign these movies to a particular film genre from a list. A deeper insight can be gained by asking people to select what they consider the most important aspects of movies, choosing from a list (e.g. cinematography, score, acting, favourite actors, story/plot, humour, love, gore/violence, mystery/suspense, characters, positive and negative emotional impact, action, information/learning benefit), thus moving beyond the simple (and sometimes ambiguous) labels of "genres" (Note 15).

7. From personality to needs and motives to use films

Personality traits are assumed to influence behaviours (in our case, film choice) through complex psychological mechanisms. When people experience a particular *mood* (which, by definition, is transient and changeable), this gives rise to certain *needs*, which in turn activate corresponding *goals*, i.e. *motives* for the subsequent *choices*. This process is affected by *personality traits* (which, contrary to moods, are stable and persistent), which activate the *evaluation* of the available choices (e.g. "I like/dislike this" or "This is good/bad for me") and create the *expectations* that the final choice will provide the gratification, i.e. the satisfaction of the perceived need. For example, I may be bored and feel the need for some sort of novelty and excitement by watching a movie - my goal then becomes to find a suitable one. If I tend to be high on Extraversion, I will probably look for a movie that I know I might like (or that I assess as good for me) because it will provide me with positive sensations of excitement and fun - and that I expect will satisfy my need. Crucially, I now have a *motive* to choose a

particular *film use*, for example "to seek sensation", which in turn will orient me to select a corresponding *film genre* (maybe an action movie, a thriller or a horror film). We can summarize this complex process by saying that *personality traits predispose individuals to choose media (film genres) that are congruent with their transient moods*.

In a nutshell, people use films to satisfy a *need* and reach a *goal*, which gives rise to a *motive* for watching, i.e. one (or more) *film use(s)* - activating the *choice* of a *film genre*. The whole process is affected by their *personality traits*.

Film uses cater for a wide range of motives, which can be classified into three main areas of human activity: *emotional* (catering for the need to experience and manage emotions); *cognitive* (catering for the need to find out and process information); and *social* (catering for the need to relate to others). Fig. 3 below summarizes the relationships between personality traits, film uses and film genres.

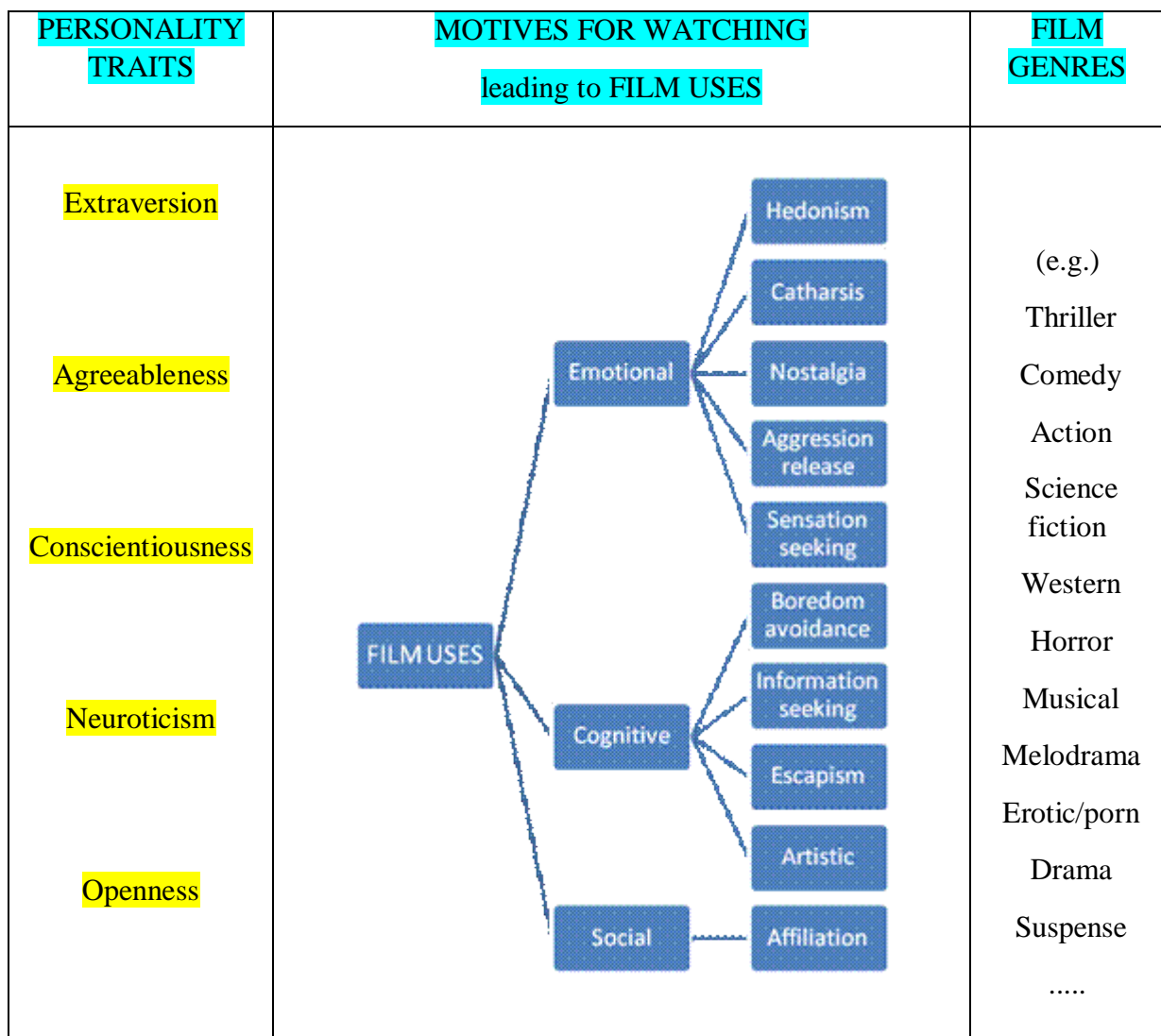


Fig. 3

Let us provide a few examples of how personality traits can affect film uses and, ultimately, the choice of a film genre. A number of research projects provide *evidence* (if sometimes

contradictory) of these relationships, which in other cases can rather be the subject of informed speculation, i.e. the *expectation* that a certain personality type will be attracted by one or more motives/film uses (Note 16). As we go through the following examples, please note that an individual can experience several types of motives, also belonging to different areas, at the same time: for instance, one can perceive a need for boredom avoidance (an emotional use) while experiencing a need for information seeking (a cognitive use); and a film genre can cater for a variety of uses: a versatile film genre like documentary can cater for uses like, e.g. sensation seeking and/or information seeking and/or artistic experience. Dealing with individual differences cannot lead to pigeonholing people into straightjackets, but should rather alert us to the complex network of personality traits, needs and motives that makes up the personal, unique profile of each and every individual.

Within the *emotional* realm, one clear film use is to provide pleasurable experiences (*Hedonism*), e.g. in leisure time pursuits, leading to the choice of "light" entertainment like comedies and perhaps the rejection of a more "demanding" genre like documentaries. In the same way, and more specifically, people high in Extraversion and Agreeableness may choose to watch movies that provide fun and positive feelings (the reverse would be true for people high in Neuroticism).

Catharsis, or the experience of negative feelings, may be considered the opposite of Hedonism, but this statement is in a way problematic, since experiencing pain and suffering through the mediation of film characters and events, e.g. in drama and melodrama, can also provide feelings of relief by putting the viewer in a position to cope with her/his own problems and plights. People high in Neuroticism, more likely to perceive negative feelings, may choose film genres that cater for their "unhappy" moods. These same people may also be attracted by film genres that provide the pleasurable feeling of remembering past people and events (*Nostalgia*).

Aggression release can be catered for through watching violent films, and this obviously is linked to the effects that media can have on specific individuals: for example, levels of aggression may be increased by watching violence on the screen by people who are already more aggressive. Conversely, people whose personality traits tend to exclude or greatly limit aggression (like people high on Extraversion and Agreeableness) would be expected to avoid violent films.

Sensation seeking is another ambiguous film use, since it involves searching for excitement and arousal (e.g. through violent or sexual films or horror movies), which, however, may be experienced in different ways and at different levels by the same person over time - this is to say that each individual tries to achieve her/his own personal *optimal* level of arousal. People low in Extraversion and high in Neuroticism may find that stimulation, rather than relaxation, suits them best (but notice that Openness, too, may lead people to seek high levels of sensation). To further complicate the issue, we know that negative feelings generated by, e.g. a horror or suspense movie, can eventually lead to positive emotions once the fearful events give way to a happy ending (Note 17).

Turning to *cognitive* film uses, *Boredom avoidance* is certainly a common need, and can be experienced together with sensation seeking - evidence of the fact that a human experience is always complex, involving both emotional (i.e. Sensation seeking) and cognitive (i.e. Boredom avoidance) aspects at the same time (not to mention that Escapism, too, can be involved). More specifically, people high in Openness may be expected to need this film use.

Information seeking, too, or the need to find out information and process it, thus activating thought, reflection and discussion, can be related to both an emotional use (like Sensation seeking) and a cognitive use (like Boredom avoidance), and can lead to choose film genres like documentaries, but also biographical films (*biopics*) and movies mixing reality and fiction (*docufiction*). People high in Openness, ready to accept the challenge of new information, but also open to find out about other people's thoughts and feelings, may thus be found to need this film use (although people high in Neuroticism have also been found to use media like film, but also TV and the Internet, to satisfy a similar need).

Escapism allows people to forget about their daily concerns by having recourse to easily available media like TV (and, increasingly Internet uses), and even, beyond this, to avoid negative feelings about themselves by accessing media content that allows more positive personal views. Specifically, both Openness and Neuroticism seem to be related to this film use.

Artistic film use, which provides opportunities for aesthetic appreciation, easily correlates with other uses, like Sensation/Information seeking as well as Escapism or Boredom avoidance, and can again be expected to appeal to people high in Openness.

Social uses of film promote *Affiliation*, which caters for the need to relate to others, share experiences and, generally speaking, provide opportunities for interpersonal experiences, like watching movies with friends, discussing them and be part of social networks. Notice that the affiliation motive does not refer only to contacts with other people, but also, interestingly, with a film's characters, thus raising important issues like the identification with movie characters (and the actresses/actors playing them). People high in Openness and Extraversion are the obvious reference groups for this film use, but even people high in Neuroticism and low in Extraversion may be expected to find "solace" in the company of others, thus escaping negative feelings of loneliness and isolation.

One final remark for this section points to the relative difficulty of using a label like "film genres" for this discussion. As already mentioned, a movie can exhibit a variety of content, leading to different film uses: some genres, in particular, like comedies or drama, can activate various thoughts (a cognitive aspect) and feelings (an emotional aspect), which can appeal to different individuals. Thus, it would be interesting to explore in more depth the psychological appeal of a genre, i.e. the reasons why a particular movie can be attractive to some people through the expectations it promotes ("watch this film and you will feel happy/sad").

6. Other dimensions: empathy and beliefs/attitudes

6.1. Empathy

The dimensions which can be taken into consideration to identify and describe individual differences are countless, and each can provide information that can usefully be integrated into an individual's *personal profile*. We are still dealing with the issues raised in Section 4 (*Differences in processing a film*), i.e. *with what the audience brings to the viewing situation* as well as *what the audience takes away with them after viewing*.

For example, when considering viewers' *emotional* responses to film, *empathy*, or the concern for others' feelings and well-being and a disposition to "mirror" others' situations, can be used to predict such responses. Highly empathic people can thus be expected to experience a high

level of emotion when faced with films that convey suffering and plights, leading to feelings of sadness. Although this can be supposed to be related to less enjoyment of a film, this has not always proved to be the case - in other words, sad or negative feelings cannot prevent a person from enjoying a movie. This contradiction points to the meaning usually associated with the term "enjoyment", and to the complex nature of emotional reactions in different movie experiences: a feeling of distress can be associated with greater enjoyment (faced with a tear-jerker) but with lesser enjoyment (faced with a horror movie)(Note 18; see also Note 17).

6.2. The ambiguous nature of the concept of "enjoyment"

From the observation of viewers' reactions to movies and their emotional impact, one cannot fail to realize that enjoyment is not always a synonym of "pleasure" - in other words, we can experience feelings of sadness or distress and at the same time "enjoy" the movie we are watching. If we choose a movie that is supposed to make us feel happy or relaxed (say, a comedy, musical or action film), why do we choose movies, like horror or highly dramatic films, that are likely to make us feel sad or depressed? And in the latter case, why can we still feel gratified by the movie and eventually judge it as "enjoyable"?

Clearly, the term *enjoyment* includes a number of different meanings, well beyond the mere experience of *pleasure* - a "negative" feeling can coexist with a feeling of being emotionally involved and even excited, and this points to another dimension of "enjoyment", which could be identified with *meaningfulness*: we can thus posit that people are motivated to watch a movie not only to derive positive feelings of amusement but also to satisfy other needs, for example the need to gain more knowledge, to investigate complex issues, even to ponder the meaning of life and the human condition. This *alternative motivation* could also explain why we might choose to watch a movie arousing sad feelings when we ourselves feel "sad and blue" - as if to see our own plights "mirrored" on the screen and thus, in a way, shared with the film's story (and perhaps with the people sitting next to us in a dark movie theatre). Not to mention the fact that even when, as in a horror movie, we feel threatened in our own physical and psychological well-being, we can still confront our fears in the safety and comfort of a theatre (or our home)(Note 19).

The concept of "catharsis" turns useful here, i.e. entertainment which is tragic in nature can help "purge" our own negative emotions, and the very act of watching fictional characters experience situations close to our own (or even worse) can make us feel "better", and can even help us by showing ways in which such problems can be faced and perhaps solved. Empathy is clearly at the core of such (superficially paradoxical) entertainment experiences, since we share our feelings with others which are presumably facing the same or similar situations as our own, "repairing", so to say, our negative mood and providing us with some additional benefit.

In summary, enjoyment of a movie does not necessarily imply gratification only in terms of "pleasure", but also in terms of "meaningfulness", by allowing viewers to access feelings of self-awareness, self-realization and opportunities for personal improvement through introspection and gaining insights (not only about ourselves but also about our fellow human beings). Individual differences play a major role in this case too, since entertainment as "meaningfulness" has been found to be associated with character traits like reflectivity, need for affect, search for meaning, while entertainment as "pleasure" seems to be associated with higher levels of optimism, humour and playfulness (Note 20)

6.3. Identification with characters

In similar terms, empathy is also directly called into question to explain the identification that viewers can feel, at various levels, with a movie *characters* and the fate that awaits them in the film's story: for example, when characters *perceived* as "good" end up with a positive outcome, or, conversely, when characters perceived as "bad" end up with some sort of "punishment", enjoyment of the movie is increased. The key word here is *perceived*: not everybody experiences a certain character as "good" or "bad", variations are possible and this is another interesting measure of individual differences. Besides, a movie can portray a morally "bad" character in ways that prompt viewers' sympathy, so that if, on the one hand, they accept her/his final "punishment", on the other hand they cannot avoid feeling "sorry" and even admire her/him - proving, once again, that a movie allows for *multiple* interpretations and emotional reactions.

Finally, a rather frequent feature of many (especially "modern") movies is that they do not portray some characters as definitely good or bad, which can make viewers react in more nuanced, less extreme ways - not to mention stereotypes associated with cultural and ethnic differences, whereby viewers' positive or negative reactions may differ if, for instance in an American context, the character is of African American rather than Caucasian origin.

6.4. Case studies: *They live by night* and *Scarface*

They live by night (by Nicholas Ray, USA 1948) is the tragic story of a 23-year-old man, Bowie (Farley Granger), who, during the difficult times of the Great Depression in 1930s America, has been sentenced for a murder he committed at the age of 16. He escapes from prison with two older criminals, who involve him in a bank robbery. As he falls in love with a girl, Bowie desperately tries to escape from both his ex-fellow prisoners and the police, but is finally tracked down and shot in front of his girlfriend (see Video 4 below). Is Bowie an inherently "bad" character? Hardly - the movie describes him as the victim of injustice, as a man who would be ready to lead a "normal" life but is in fact doomed to a violent, inescapable fate, and also as a young lover who develops a tender, moving, but, again, doomed relationship with a girl he passionately loves. Granted, he is on the wrong side of the law, and must eventually pay for his choices, but his whole story resonates with the audience who cannot help feeling sorry for him and sympathise with his plight. Most viewers will thus "enjoy" the movie and its unhappy ending, obviously not in the same way as they would enjoy a light-hearted comedy - activating a highly emotional identification with the tragedy of these two vulnerable lovers.



Video 4

Another example of the way a movie can offer a powerful portrait of an ambivalent character is *Scarface* (by Brian De Palma, USA 1983). Once again, the main character is a criminal, a Cuban refugee, Tony Montana (Al Pacino), who arrives in Miami with the ambition to pursue the American dream through money and personal success. He actually becomes a powerful and notorious drug lord, but his obsessive jealousy for his younger sister and his own cocaine addiction will eventually prove fatal - the final scene (see Video 5 below) is indeed an

extreme explosion of violence as Tony is tracked down by a competing gang of drug dealers. When he is finally shot down, his body falls off a balcony and into a pool near the base of a statue displaying the motto "The world is yours". There is no doubt that Tony is, in a number of ways, a "negative" character who eventually deserves to be "punished" - however, the movie gradually builds an impressive image of a powerful, doomed man who achieves a sort of "tragic stature" and can be seen as the victim of his own obsessions. Once again, most viewers may be moved by the fate that awaits Tony: they can be said to "enjoy" the movie (and even its violent, sad ending) not in terms of the "pleasure" that the story affords, but, perhaps more ambiguously, in terms of the emotional involvement provided by the identification with a basically tragic character - with the final motto adding to the impression of a character "bigger than life".



Video 5

6.4. Beliefs and attitudes

People come to the movie experience with a baggage of personal beliefs, attitudes, motivations and previous knowledge and experience - a baggage which can be shared by groups of people but which, nevertheless, still very much describe each individual's profile. *Beliefs*, in particular, are *cognitive* clusters of information concerning people and things (e.g. "crime films encourage violence"), which, when used as a means of evaluation, give rise to *attitudes*, or *emotional* reactions ("crime films are bad") that act as predispositions to certain behavioural choices ("I don't want to see crime movies"). People thus tend to choose media content that are congruent with their beliefs and attitudes, and to refuse content that, not being in line with their views, could make them experience a feeling of *cognitive dissonance* - a negative feeling that leads them to "close the gap" by avoiding the content perceived as inconsistent or incongruous. However, this process is not as mechanic and automatic as it might seem at a first glance: once again, people are different in their *degree of acceptance* or *tolerance* of content that is not consistent with their beliefs and attitudes, and might even choose inconsistent content (e.g. a film that does not fit into their world view) in order to refute or challenge its message, especially if this message is easy to refute.

Beliefs and attitudes can thus predispose viewers to judge a movie character in positive or negative ways, and information sources, including film, as more or less credible. In similar ways, the *memory* of characters and events is affected by the same kind of process. People are notoriously unreliable when reporting about past events, as legal films have often shown in describing the evidence provided by witnesses during a trial. Once again, all kinds of biases and prejudices, including cultural and racial ones, can be at work here, so that people can vary, e.g., in their identification of a suspect in an American context, ending up confirming it if the person is African American but denying it if the person is Caucasian.

Finally, a word of warning, once again, is in order when dealing with people's reactions to media content:

"It is important to remember that viewers do not always have control over their media

exposure, and that media content is not always sufficiently ambiguous as to allow for multiple interpretations or selective memory. In addition, individual differences may well play a role in reinforcement in some circumstances, but in other instances they can serve to allow for or can intensify media influences." (Note 21)

Algorithms and A.I. for movie user profiling

Much research into the connections between personality and film uses has been of a commercial, rather than of an academic, origin. This comes as no surprise, since the information gathered with such research is of great use to film studios and streaming platforms, in their efforts to produce and distribute movies that cater for specific audiences, by discovering audiences' viewing patterns and customizing and personalizing the products on offer. Once correlations have been found between certain film uses/film choices and personality traits, this information can be used as predictive of similarity in movie preferences, greatly enhancing the precision of "suggestions" offered to viewers for further viewing experiences. This audience profiling powered by "recommendation engines" has been implemented for a considerable time, and high-tech companies are well aware of the issues at stake, as Steve Job happened to say a few years ago:

"What the studios need to do is start embracing the front end of the business...to start knowing who their customers are, and to start building mechanisms to communicate with them, and tell them when their new product is coming out...[selling films] is going to get a lot more interesting, more precise, cheaper, [and] efficient." (Note 22)

Algorithms are widely used to assist researchers in this enterprise, and Artificial Intelligence is already making such efforts more and more productive.

6. Sex, gender and age

"It is important that researchers also consider the role of viewers' responses to and enjoyment of the content [of gender-stereotyped portrayals] because (1) entertainment fare is often targeted specifically to male vs. female audiences; and (2) differential viewing of media entertainment may serve to exacerbate sex role stereotyping and behavior differences." (Note 23)

Research has consistently proved that there are differences in film preferences between women and men (Note 24). However, the issues at stake here are complex, starting from the basic fact that *biological sex* (with opposition between male and female) interacts with *gender* (a socio-cultural construct, which allows more space for non-binary descriptions).

Some studies have shown that males *definitely* prefer action, crime and sex films over females, and the reverse is true for romantic, dramatic and historical films, with comedies, horror and fantasy films being slightly preferred by males over females: this reduced difference for comedies and fantasy movies can partly be explained by the "hybrid" nature of such films, which often show common features that do not focus so clearly on violence and relationships (Note 25). This points, once again, to the ambiguous nature of several film genres: action, crime and horror movies can differ widely with regard to the *measure* of violence shown, just as dramatic films can differ with regard to the *measure* of pathos, leading to variations *within* the same genre, and not just *between* or *among* different genres.

Some answers were also provided to the question whether females and males enjoying the same film genres also have similar personality traits. This appears to be the case (Note 25, with the exception of *Openness*: females (who do not generally favour action movies), were more open than males when found to like this film genre, and the reverse was true for romantic films (male fans were more open than females). This points to an interesting relationship between gender and personality.

However, it is even more interesting to examine the reasons why viewers expressed such preferences. For example, early research found that

"Generally, men responded that it was very "natural" for them to prefer action-packed films over romantic ones simply because they were of the "masculine" gender. In contrast, women responded that they preferred love stories because such films touched and moved their hearts, thus bringing out their "feminine" traits. Similarly, other studies have reported that females evidence greater fear and less enjoyment of frightening films than do males ... On the other hand, males report less involvement, interest, emotional responsiveness, and enjoyment of sad films or tear-jerkers than do females." (Note 26)

This is of the utmost importance because it points to the fact that people hold stereotypical views about male and female personalities (e.g. "females are more emotional, empathic and caring than males"), and also report different reactions (sadness, fear and sometimes joy for females, pointing to "affiliation" and "social contact"; anger for males, pointing to "competition" and "self-assertion"). These stereotypes should also make us alert to the fact that there are differences, not just *between* people of the opposite sexes, but also *within* each sex: in other words, *within a group*, some women may be found to be, e.g. less "sympathetic" than some men, and, conversely, some men may be found less "competitive" than some women. These *between sex* and *within sex* variations highlight the role of *beliefs* and *attitudes* in shaping *expectations* as to the appropriate *social behaviour* that women and men are supposed to exhibit; these expectations are internalized and are consistent with the *gender roles* that they are expected to perform - with the crucial consequence that, under some circumstances, *gender* (and its stereotypes) may influence film preferences more or better than simply *biological sex*. This means that some individuals will be particularly sensitive (in positive and negative ways), e.g. to horror movies or tear-jerkers, quite apart from their sex. The *self-perception of gender roles* is therefore a most important factor in explaining people's emotional reactions to movies, and consequently their stated film preferences. These considerations add significant meaning and help to better understand the already reported differences in film preferences (with the notable finding that "gender roles have essentially no influence on females, but have a very strong influence on males" - Note 27).

As a general rule, when considering research results, one must also consider the possible impact of other variables, for instance *age* and *cultural/ethnic origin*, which may considerably have a mediation effect on the relationship between personality and film preferences. For example (Note 28), when considering three age groups (young - 25 and younger; middle - 26-49; older - 50 and above), interesting differences were observed regarding several film genres: dramatic films were chosen in much more significant ways by the Young compared to the other groups, while horror movies were least appreciated by the Older group; action and adventure films were definitely more a "Young" genre, but romantic films were chosen more by young females than by young males. Also, the Young group preferred recently released movie compared with the other groups. This has been tentatively explained in several ways: more recent movies exhibit more violence and special effects,

which would make them more popular with young people; young viewers have not been exposed to different film styles and changes over the years (as older groups have); however, it is not simply that older viewers may be "nostalgic":

"A key determinant may be the continuous reactivation of the aesthetic filter that was operating at the time a movie was initially seen. This flexibility in stylistic shifts, leading to an appreciation of films from earlier film eras, would simply be unavailable to most younger filmgoers." (Note 29)

Changes in time were also noted: as male viewers age, they cite romantic films (an all-age preference for female viewers) as a favourite genre - and, more generally, the middle and older groups gradually show a decreased measure of difference between males and females.

7. Conclusion

As the previous paragraphs have shown, individual differences can be identified and described in several different ways, having recourse to a variety of psychological theories and to countless variables. This may give the impression that research is following such diverse approaches that comparison and, ultimately, synthesis is almost impossible. However, this also points to the very nature of individual differences: personal profiles are made up of a very complex network of relationships, and each profile is unique to a single individual. This does not mean that generalizations, i.e. descriptive trends and tendencies, cannot be realized, but it alerts us to the fact that, in the case of movie preferences as well as in most other cases, we need to rely on a variety of different, and in some cases alternative, ways of describing the way that individuals respond to their need for (and appreciation of) movies. In other words, the extremely wide range of research results outlined in this paper should be taken not as a sign of confusion, but rather as evidence that human behaviour defies simple explanations and calls for an open, critical and comprehensive approach.

Appendix

Two alternative ways of describing individual differences, which are not taken into consideration by the literature reviewed in this paper, are based on *learning styles* (i.e. ways of processing information) and *multiple intelligences* (as opposed to the concept of a single general measure of intelligence). These two alternative approaches can be used in the exploration of movie preferences, adding a fascinating, if complex, perspective to the ones outlined above. Movie preferences can thus help in understanding yet other aspects of personality. The paper [Movie preferences as a key to individual differences: Thinking styles and multiple intelligences](#) provides a preliminary examination of the topic and offers pathways for future research.

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