**How do people evaluate movies? Insights from the Associative–Propositional
Evaluation Model**

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Abstract

Most people have one or more favorite pieces of media entertainment (e.g., movies, TV shows, novels, video games), and some personal candidates for the worst of them ever. But how exactly are such evaluative judgments formed? What are the underlying psychological processes of media entertainment evaluations? And why do we sometimes feel that the heart and mind are in conflict about those evaluations? To cover the whole complexity of individual media entertainment ratings, we apply the associative–propositional evaluation (APE) model (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006a, 2011) to the case of movie evaluation processes before, during and after exposure. After defining evaluation and introducing the APE model, we discuss its theoretical and methodological implications for movies and entertainment research. Moreover, we highlight similarities and differences concerning common related concepts (e.g., enjoyment).

Keywords: entertainment; movies; evaluative responses; information processing; associative–propositional evaluation model

“... evaluative responses play a significant role—if not *the* most significant role—for understanding social behavior.”

—Bertram Gawronski (2007a, p. 579)

Evaluation is something we do at all times. We evaluate persons, political parties, food, even abstract concepts such as liberty—the number of possible evaluation objects is infinite. Thus, it is an almost trivial conclusion that people also evaluate media and more specifically entertainment media content. Consequently, as entertainment researchers, we need to understand the role of evaluation in shaping individuals’ daily media diets. Our chapter focuses on movies as a specific entertainment medium but the theoretical rationale is equally applicable to other entertainment media such as novels or video games. We focus on movies as an example and as a specific object of evaluation for two reasons: First, movies are a significant part of individuals’ media use. People invest considerable time and money to watch films either in a theatre, on TV or DVD, or as video streams on the Internet. Second, given the dual nature of movies as works of art and entertainment, movie evaluations reflect the entire bandwidth of possible evaluative outcomes—from a spontaneous sense of liking or disliking to well-founded critique. For instance, on social media, individuals may express spontaneous positive evaluations by clicking the *Like* button, or they may elaborate their evaluations in online blogs, on shopping websites (e.g., Amazon), or on movie platforms (e.g., Rotten Tomatoes). At the same time, a growing number of audience members turn to this information for guidance concerning their own media choices. These examples show that evaluations can play multiple roles. But what exactly is evaluation? How can it help expanding our knowledge about and explanation of entertainment phenomena? How do we evaluate movies and related information?

To tackle such questions, we start with a brief discussion about how to define evaluation. We then introduce the associative–propositional evaluation (APE) model (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006a, 2007, 2011) and apply it to address the question *how* movies are evaluated. The APE model distinguishes between two mental processes: On the one hand, *associative processes* (i.e., the activation of associative patterns by feature similarity and spatio-temporal contiguity) can lead to spontaneous affective reactions that serve as a quick, intuitive response (*implicit evaluation*). On the other hand, the *propositional processing* of an associative pattern (i.e., the validation of activated information) can also lead to a parallel outcome of evaluative judgment (*explicit evaluation*). This model of mutually interacting associative and propositional processes provides an integrated framework that can help explain the complexities of evaluating media content. We discuss the APE model’s theoretical implications concerning specific phases of media use and its relevance for entertainment research in general. As we will argue, the APE model can offer an overarching framework to integrate several evaluation-related constructs in previous entertainment research. We conclude by using the model to address some open questions and provide an outlook for further research.

What Is Evaluation?

Evaluating an object means to determine how much we like that object: we judge something as good or bad, as pleasant or unpleasant (De Houwer, 2009). Evaluative judgments often seem to occur intuitively, but they are not as simple as it may seem at first sight. For example, considering the question how much you liked the last movie you have seen or the last episode of your favorite TV show may illustrate the multifaceted nature of evaluations, ranging from spontaneous gut feelings to well-deliberated judgments. All evaluative judgements seem to share a common objective, however, that is to inform individuals’ decisions to approach or avoid objects and behavioral options that they encounter

in daily life (e.g., De Houwer, 2009; Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2011; Tesser & Martin, 1996). For instance, if individuals evaluate the beginning of a movie or a pilot of a TV show negatively, they would probably stop watching it. At the most abstract level, evaluation can be defined in terms of this functional distinction between good and bad or approach and avoidance, but such a definition that focuses on the *goals* of evaluation remains unclear concerning the underlying low-level processes, the conditions under which these processes operate, or how these processes are translated into behavior (De Houwer, 2009, p. 37). It also remains unclear what features are taken into account when an object is evaluated and how overall evaluative judgments are formed. Depending on what features are considered and how they are processed, evaluative outcomes may differ substantially. This becomes evident in the case of movie or shopping platforms, where a variety of comments and ratings refer to the same movie but are highly polarized (for examples, see Chamorro-Premuzic, Kallias, & Hsu, 2014, p. 88, or Schneider, 2017, p. 49). Another difficulty lies in the fact that evaluation as determining the liking of an object (i.e., evaluation as a *process*) is not directly observable, whereas its outcomes—evaluative responses caused by an object (i.e., evaluation as an *effect*)—can be operationalized in various ways (e.g., Facebook *Likes*, Amazon stars, ratings on a Likert-scale, response latencies, or physiological indicators). As a result, defining evaluation as *responding* to an object in an evaluative manner (e.g., De Houwer, 2009, p. 37; Eagly & Chaiken, 2007, p. 583) or “as the effect of stimuli on evaluative responses” (De Houwer, Gawronski, & Barnes-Holmes, 2013, p. 253) has the advantage of making it easy to determine whether an object (e.g., a movie) has been evaluated. In short, we can observe the outcome but not the process. However, we can theorize how the presence of an evaluative response relates to the presence of a process that results in an evaluative response. Consequently, as De Houwer (2009, p. 38) put it, “independent of whether evaluation is

defined as a process or an effect, the study of evaluation boils down to the study of evaluative responding.”

Evaluative Responses and Related Concepts

Evaluative responses are a long-standing research topic in the field of entertainment research. Conceptually related terms such as *liking*, *preferences*, *enjoyment*, and *appreciation* have been used to describe entertainment phenomena (for an overview, see e.g., Nabi & Krcmar, 2004). One prominent example is the *enjoyment-as-attitude* approach, which conceptualizes enjoyment as “an attitude with affective, cognitive, and behavioral antecedents and consequences” (Nabi & Krcmar, 2004, p. 305). Evaluative responses are a core defining element of attitude as “a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor” (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993, p. 1). Although the attitude concept can be useful as an integrative label (cf. Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2007), we suggest that evaluative responses to movies and underlying processes can be described more precisely by focusing on manifest evaluative responses. As several authors have noted (e.g., De Houwer et al., 2013; Fazio, 2007), the concept of attitude is fraught with conceptual ambiguity. Particularly, one problem that arises with equating manifest behavioral evaluative responses with latent mental representations like attitudes conflates the *explanandum* (i.e., the evaluative responses that need to be explained) and the *explanans* (i.e., the latent mental construct that should explain these responses). For instance, using evaluative responses to a specific movie as proxies for an attitude towards this movie and, at the same time, assuming that an attitude towards this movie causes these responses is conceptually circular (e.g., De Houwer et al., 2013; Fazio, 2007). Moreover, such an approach makes it conceptually difficult, if not impossible, to disentangle other factors that influence evaluative responses from attitudinal influence. Further, other controversies surround the questions how many attitudes a person holds, why evaluative responses to the

same attitude object differ, or why attitudes and behaviors are often not consistent (e.g., Gawronski, 2007b). Focusing on evaluative responses and their underlying processes may resolve some of these controversies (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006a, 2007). Following current approaches in social cognition research, we do not suggest that terms like attitude or liking should be abandoned completely. In fact, they may serve as integrative concepts if defined inclusively (e.g., Eagly & Chaiken, 2007) or if theoretical frameworks are applied that specify the levels of analysis (e.g., De Houwer et al., 2013; for a recent discussion concerning attitudinal media effects in general, see also Coenen & Van den Bulck, 2018). However, using the attitude concept without any theoretical specifications gives little insight into the underlying processes (i.e., *how* evaluative judgments are formed). We will return to these issues in the last part of this chapter, after we have introduced the APE model, which allows us to shed light on the related terms and processes from different angles.

The Associative–Propositional Evaluation (APE) Model

The APE model grew out of a line of theorizing in social and cognitive psychology that was strongly influenced by domain-specific dual-process models (cf. Payne & Gawronski, 2010). For instance, in the field of persuasive communication, one of the most prominent examples is the elaboration likelihood model (ELM; e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; for an overview of more domain-specific dual-process models, see Chaiken & Trope, 1999; Gawronski & Creighton, 2013). The ELM explains how different message features impact attitude formation and attitude change via different routes. Other domain-specific dual-process models deal with impression formation (e.g., Fiske, Lin, & Neuberg, 1999), attitude–behavior relations (e.g., Fazio, 1990), or, more recently in the realm of entertainment research, with the effects of entertainment media on political outcomes (e.g., Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; see also **Schneider, Bartsch, & Leonhard, this volume**). Several attempts have been made to integrate these domain-specific approaches into generalized dual-process

models, which distinguish between two types of processes that serve as building blocks of judgments and behavior (e.g., System 1 and System 2 processing, Kahneman, 2003; associative and rule-based processing, Smith & DeCoster, 2000; reflective and impulsive processing, Strack & Deutsch, 2004).¹

One of the most influential generalized dual-process models is Gawronski and Bodenhausen's APE model (e.g., Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006a, 2006b, 2007, 2011, 2014a), which assumes that two distinct, but mutually interacting processes—associative and propositional processes—lead to different behavioral outcomes, based on implicit and explicit evaluations, respectively. Associative processes are characterized as the activation of mental concepts in memory, leading to a first, process-specific evaluative response, namely an *implicit evaluation* (or affective reaction). Implicit evaluations are neither true nor false. For instance, in the case of a creature-feature horror movie, implicit evaluations can be reflected in viewers' biopsychological reactions (e.g., facial expression, skin conductance). In addition, propositional processes can be activated, through which individuals think about what is on their minds. For example, adult viewers are usually aware that their emotional response is unfounded, because the horror creatures are fictitious and only exist on the screen. If associatively activated patterns elicit propositions that are consistent with the implicit evaluation, the propositional processing of an activated pattern directly leads to a second kind of process-specific response, namely an *explicit evaluation* (or evaluative judgment). In this case, implicit and explicit evaluations are in line with each other. If, however, associatively activated propositions are judged as invalid, this inconsistency leads to an unpleasant feeling of dissonance (Festinger, 1957). In our example, this would be the case if a negative affective reaction toward the monster elicits the propositional belief "I'm afraid of the movie monster,"

¹ Please note that the nomenclature is not always consistent, because the term *dual-process* sometimes refers to different processes, sometimes to different mental representations, and sometimes to different processing systems (cf. Gawronski, Sherman, & Trope, 2014).

but thinking about this also elicits propositions like “I dislike being afraid” and “In reality, such monsters do not exist,” which in sum creates a temporarily inconsistent belief system. To resolve such a dissonance, the viewer could reject one or more of the included propositions (e.g., invalidate the belief “I’m afraid of the movie monster”) or search for additional propositions to restore consistency (e.g., “It’s okay to be afraid of monsters in horror movies” or “I like it if a movie really scares me”). According to the APE model, if an affective reaction is rejected as a valid basis for propositional reasoning, explicit and implicit evaluations are dissociated. If consistency can be restored, however, explicit and implicit evaluations are in correspondence with each other. Ironically, if a proposition is negated (e.g., negating the belief that one is afraid of monsters), this can reinforce the mental association between “monster” and “being afraid,” resulting in higher dissociation between explicit and implicit evaluations. Conversely, seeking propositions that affirm the negative affective reaction to the monster (e.g., “I like it if a movie really scares me”) can increase the correspondence between implicit and explicit evaluations.

As should be clear from this example, implicit and explicit evaluations are not only conceptually different—they also need to be measured with different methods. Implicit evaluations that are elicited by associative processes might best be assessed by applying indirect measures (e.g., physiological indicators, response times). Explicit evaluations that result from propositional reasoning are usually assessed by applying direct measures (e.g., interviews, questionnaires). However, although conceptually different, both processes do not work independently from each other (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006a; Strack & Deutsch, 2004). Gawronski and Bodenhausen (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006a, 2011) discuss four basic cases in which direct influences on propositional processes are unrelated to or mediated by associative processes or vice versa. Moreover, combinations of these effects may occur. In this chapter, we focus on two basic and two combined cases that are of particular relevance

with regard to the evaluation of movies. For more examples, the reader is referred to the work of Gawronski and Bodenhausen (2006a, 2011).

In the default mode (bottom-up), propositional processes are fully mediated by associative processes (Figure 1A). This means, activated associations are affirmed and accepted as valid. For instance, discovering one's favorite song in a film score while watching a movie might elicit positive associations. If the soundtrack of a movie is an important criterion for one's evaluation of a movie (i.e., a salient propositional belief), such an activated association fits into the propositional processing of the quality of the film. Thus, implicit and explicit evaluations of the movie correspond with each other. To elicit associative patterns, the features appearing in the movie do not need to match pre-stored mental representations exactly; it is sufficient if stimuli are spatiotemporally contiguous to existing representations. This can be illustrated by analogy with the power of algorithmic recommendation systems that are based on previously watched (e.g., Netflix, YouTube) or evaluated movies (e.g., moviepilot.de). Such a recommendation system makes use of the similarity of previously encountered features. Although features in a previously seen and a newly recommended movie may not be identical, similarities in classified genres, featured actors or characters, story lines, etc. can elicit associative processes. Previously encountered features are more likely to be positively evaluated on an implicit level if they are encountered again. This is in line with the mere exposure effect (cf. Zajonc, 2001).

According to the APE model, changes in propositional processes can also influence associative processes (top-down; Figure 1B). For instance, if viewers have read film critiques (or have general background information) before actually watching a movie, such prior knowledge might directly influence propositional processes during exposure (e.g., they might pay special attention to the critically acclaimed status or exceptional thrill of the movie, or the authenticity of acting of an Oscar winner). These propositional processes can activate

associative patterns, thereby influencing associative processes and outcomes. Again, implicit and explicit evaluations are in line with each other, however associative activations did not elicit propositional processes, but the other way around.

In other cases, associative activation and propositional validation can lead to different outcomes—as illustrated by empirical findings on implicit social cognition (for more details, see Payne & Gawronski, 2010). With regard to movies, for example, in an unambitious social drama, erotic scenes involving attractive actors may be arousing and may elicit positive associations, even though these scenes are not essential to the story line. An indirect measurement of such activated associations would probably reveal positive implicit evaluations. However, these implicit evaluations may be unrelated to explicit evaluations. If asked to self-report their evaluations (e.g., via questionnaire), viewers would probably make negative explicit evaluations, for example, about the routine story or the unrealistic development of the plot in the movie. Thus, explicit and implicit evaluations are dissociated, although the same scene had elicited both—an example for a combined effect (Figure 1C).

Concerning movies, combined direct and indirect effects of film stimuli on associative and propositional processes may appear most frequently (Figure 1D). For example, a movie like *Dead Man Walking* may directly elicit propositional processes by revealing new arguments for and against the death penalty. In addition, it may also elicit associative processes (e.g., if parents in the audience empathize with the victims' parents in the movie). Furthermore, propositional processes may activate associations (e.g., of past trials and convictions). Finally, associative processes may elicit propositional reasoning (e.g., comparing scenes of the film to personal beliefs about death penalty).

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Implications of the APE Model for Research on Movie Entertainment

As explained in the last section, the APE model provides a differentiated framework for analyzing possible direct, indirect and combined effects of associative and propositional evaluation processes in the case of movies. However, compared to traditional experiments in social cognition research, one challenge of applying the APE model to movie evaluations lies in the complexity of the stimulus. Films are complex, dynamic, audiovisual stimuli with a specific run time that can be divided into different nested units. For instance, a movie can be divided into sequences, comprising different scenes, which consist of different shots, and even shots can be composed of different elements. Consequently, every unit can be an object of evaluation, and can thus elicit processes that produce evaluative outcomes (see Fahr & Früh, this volume). Segmenting a movie into meaningful sequences requires criteria based on film analysis. This has been rarely done in media psychology research so far (for remarkable exceptions, see Suckfüll, 2000, 2010). To date, entertainment research has focused on complete movies, although sometimes excerpts, trailers, or written descriptions about the content have been used as substitutes.

To complicate matters further, a movie does not only elicit evaluative responses related to the content, as described in the examples above. Movies as objects of evaluation can be categorized into at least three broad dimensions: (a) film-inherent features such as story or cinematography, (b) film-external features such as awards or film critiques, and (c) (anticipated) effects of the film on the viewer, including emotions or cognitive effort for example (cf. Schneider, 2017). Additionally, all three dimensions of evaluation can elicit associative and propositional processes and resulting evaluative responses before, during, and after movie exposure.

Although these challenges are interwoven, it is useful to distinguish between evaluative responses before, during, and after movie exposure for two reasons. First, evaluative responses before, during and after exposure are mostly based on different types of

information. For instance, movie trailers, awards, critiques, and word of mouth serve as film-external input stimuli, and thus can elicit associative and propositional processes already before exposure to a movie. During exposure, movie viewers have first-hand cognitive and affective experiences and can further consider the film-inherent features (e.g., story, cinematography, etc.). After exposure, social and communicative activities such as talking with others about the movie, commenting about the movie online, or seeking additional information about the content or the actors, can build on previously formed evaluative representations and confront them with additional film-external cues.

Second, evaluative responses can be linked to different psychological constructs, depending on the different phases. For example, research on evaluative responses before exposure has focused on individuals' *motivations* for viewing a movie (e.g., gratifications sought), whereas evaluative responses during and after exposure have been linked to individuals' *experiences* of a movie (e.g., gratifications obtained). Besides these psychological constructs, additional factors that can inform evaluative responses have been investigated from a media economics perspective (e.g., word of mouth, reviews, and advertisements).

Evaluation Before Exposure

Evaluative responses before exposure are usually formed in the absence of knowledge about film-inherent features (except in the case of repeated viewing, or film segments included in trailers). However, film-external stimuli and anticipated effects of use can activate mental representations and processes, and can stimulate evaluative responses. Given that evaluations help to decide whether to approach or avoid the object of evaluation, it seems important to elucidate associative and propositional processes that result in movie choices and selective exposure as major behavioral outcomes of evaluation. Concerning film-external sources, the movie marketing literature has extensively researched factors that can influence

evaluative responses to movies (for overviews, see e.g., Hadida, 2009; Simonton, 2009). Especially, prior aggregated evaluative information about movies such as critical acclaim and word of mouth recommendations have been found to influence individual-level responses to movies (e.g., Burzynski & Bayer, 1977; d'Astous & Touil, 1999; Jacobs, Heuvelman, ben Allouch, & Peters, 2015; Wyatt & Badger, 1984, 1990). This illustrates that explicit evaluations of movies can manifest themselves as film-external stimuli (e.g., film critiques) that in turn can elicit associative and propositional processes and evaluative responses in potential viewers already before exposure. Thus, the evaluative output of some viewers can serve as evaluative input for others.

With regard to anticipated effects of use, individuals may choose movies that fit their personal characteristics (cf. disposition–content congruency hypothesis, Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). This has been addressed in theoretical models of media choice (e.g., uses and gratifications, gratifications sought and obtained [GSGO], and selective exposure; for overviews, see e.g., Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015; Krcmar, 2009). These approaches share the common assumption that trait-like individual characteristics are shaped by accumulated prior implicit and explicit evaluative responses to media exposure, which are stored as mental representations in memory. Most notably, movie genre preferences and subjective movie evaluation criteria have been described as accumulations of such evaluative responses to movies across the life span (cf. Valkenburg & Cantor, 2000; for a discussion, see Schneider, 2012). Likewise, more general entertainment preferences such as hedonic and eudaimonic motivations (Oliver & Raney, 2011) seem to include valence components that are linked to mental representations of prior accumulated evaluative responses. Generally speaking, most of the models and constructs mentioned above focus on evaluative representations with either positive valence (associated with approach motivation), or negative valence (associated with

avoidance motivation) based on prior accumulated evaluative responses to similar movies (e.g., Fahr & Böcking, 2009; Palmgreen, Cook, Harvill, & Helm, 1988).

A prominent example in this context is the GSGO model. Drawing on expectancy–value theories (e.g., Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), it combines prior beliefs that a medium (e.g., a movie) possesses a specific attribute with evaluations of this attribute to predict gratifications sought and media choice (e.g., Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1982). From the perspective of the APE model, film-external information (e.g., advertisement, trailer, word of mouth) can elicit associative and propositional processes directly, indirectly, or in combination. Goals and intentions to seek such information make it likely that new propositional information is encountered and propositional processes are directly influenced. In addition, to validate such information and to arrive at an evaluative judgment, individuals may retrieve prior information from memory. This direct influence on propositional processes is also represented in the GSGO model (i.e., novel or stored propositional beliefs and evaluative representations). GSGO research traditionally uses questionnaires to assess these beliefs and evaluations, meaning that only explicit evaluations and propositional processes are investigated. From an APE model perspective, the assumptions of two mutually interacting processes, associative and propositional, and two corresponding evaluative responses, explicit and implicit evaluations, would enrich theories and models that, like the GSGO model, mainly focus on propositional processes and explicit evaluations.

Another example is the mood management theory (see Luong & Knobloch-Westerwick, this volume). According to Knobloch-Westerwick (2015, pp. 214–216), mood management shares some similarities with expectancy–value models (e.g., the anticipated effect of choosing a movie to enhance mood as a positive goal). In contrast to the GSGO model, however, “mood management theory does not dedicate much attention to the interplay of beliefs and evaluations but focuses on the perceived situation with regard to mood

experience and its impact on media selection” (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015, p. 214). Thus, MMT emphasizes the affective state (in terms of the APE model: a temporarily activated associative pattern; Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006a, p. 700) that serves as a basis for an explicit evaluation or media choice. However, MMT makes no assumption that propositional processes may also be at work (see e.g., Smith & Neumann, 2005, pp. 301–303, who discuss Russell’s [2003] *core affect theory* through the lens of dual-process theories). Such propositional processes may be necessary to validate activated associative patterns. Moreover, MMT draws on Festinger’s (1957) notion of dissonance reduction (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015, p. 216; Zillmann, 1988). However, determining cognitive inconsistency and dissonance reduction are exclusively related to propositional reasoning (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006a, 2011; Gawronski & Strack, 2004; Gawronski, Strack, & Bodenhausen, 2008). Thus, the APE model can offer a novel, more fine-grained look at how achieving hedonically pleasant states is related to propositional reasoning.

Although evaluative responses are part of the theoretical core of the GSGO model and MMT, little is known about *how* these (accumulated) evaluative responses emerge. Moreover, it seems important to better understand the interplay of associative processes (e.g., affective responses) and propositional processes (e.g., validating beliefs, expectations, motivations). This may not only be helpful to explain how explicit and implicit evaluation are formed based on external stimuli before movie exposure; associative patterns elicited by external stimuli may still be active and exert their influence during exposure. Moreover, even if previously learned associations (via associative or propositional learning)² are not activated

² Associative learning is defined as “as the formation of associative links between mental concepts on the basis of observed spatiotemporal contiguities,” whereas propositional learning “as the formation of evaluative representations on the basis of propositional information that is regarded as valid,” (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2014b, p. 191). The APE model assumes no separate storage system for propositions. Both associative links and propositional information are stored in the form of associations (e.g., Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2011, p. 66).

anymore, they can easily be reactivated later and then influence explicit and implicit movie evaluations during or after exposure.

Evaluation During Exposure

During movie exposure, several processes related to evaluative responses unfold in mutual and continuous interaction. For example, cognitive theories of emotions assume that appraisal processes are critically involved in eliciting emotions (e.g., Scherer, 2013), which, in turn, can be reappraised in the form of meta-emotions (e.g., Bartsch, Vorderer, Mangold, & Viehoff, 2008; Schramm & Wirth, 2010). Appraisal processes are conceptualized as processes with evaluative outcomes—as evident in the definition of appraisal processes “whose function is to evaluate the implications of stimuli for wellbeing” (Moors & Scherer, 2013, p. 136) or in the so-called stimulus evaluation checks and their outcomes (e.g., Scherer, 2013, p. 154). Through the lens of the APE model, stimulus evaluation checks can be described as both associative and propositional processes (Scherer, 2001, p. 103). This is not explicitly stated in the literature on the APE model so far, but several scholars elaborated on the importance of emotions in dual-process theories (e.g., Deutsch, 2017; Smith & Neumann, 2005) and discussed the connection between affective, associative, propositional, and appraisal processes (for a recent discussion, see e.g., Deutsch, 2017, pp. 58–61). Generally, empirical evidence suggests (cf. Ellsworth & Scherer, 2003) that some emotions may be predominantly driven by associative processes (e.g., disgust, fear), whereas others include high-order knowledge and propositional processes (e.g., shame, pride). Likewise, appraisals in general might differ along a continuum of predominantly associative vs. predominantly propositional processing. This conclusion is subject to different interpretations, however, depending on which theoretical perspective is preferred and how broad appraisals are conceptualized (e.g., Dalgleish, 2003; Moors & Scherer, 2013). Emotions have been described as both activated associative patterns (Bower, 1981) or propositions (e.g., Smith

& Neumann, 2005), and seem to play an important role for evaluative outcomes in both roles. Thus, despite the ongoing controversy about the causal role of appraisals (Moors, 2010, 2013), it seems safe to conclude that—especially during movie exposure—processes that elicit evaluative outcomes are conceptually similar, if not equivalent, to appraisal processes and that these evaluative outcomes can include emotional responses. In addition, such reactions can contribute to more deliberate, overall judgments after movie exposure.

Other examples of evaluative processes that occur during movie exposure include moral judgments as articulated in affective disposition theory (e.g., Raney, 2004; Raney & Bryant, 2002), parasocial interaction (e.g., Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; Tukachinsky & Stever, 2018; also see Brown, this volume), and identification (e.g., Igartua, 2010; Klimmt, Hefner, & Vorderer, 2009; also see Cohen & Klimmt, this volume). These approaches share a common theoretical focus on media figures as objects of evaluation, and a methodological focus on self-report measures. For instance, affective dispositions towards characters are based on moral evaluations of those characters' motives and behaviors. However, it remains unclear, which underlying processes lead to what kind of evaluative responses. Addressing this research problem from the perspective of the APE model can help to clarify and extend these previous theoretical approaches based on domain-specific dual-process perspectives (e.g., the continuum model by Fiske et al., 1999, as applied in Sanders, 2010).

Concerning identification with media figures—"defined as *a temporary alteration* of media users' *self-concept* through adoption of perceived characteristics of a media person" (Klimmt et al., 2009, p. 356, emphasis in original), Klimmt et al. (2009) suggest the use of indirect measures to assess the temporary shift in activated associative patterns of the self-concept. More specifically, Klimmt, Hefner, Vorderer, Roth, and Blake (2010) created an implicit association test (cf. Greenwald, McGhee, & Schwartz, 1998) to measure identification with video game characters on an associative level. Again, such an approach

can benefit from applying the APE model as a theoretical framework because it allows specifying hypotheses about the interplay of underlying evaluative processes and responses. With regard to Klimmt et al. (2010), who measured both implicit and explicit evaluative responses to assess identification with video game characters, the APE model can help provide testable assumptions about the underlying processes, conditions, and moderators (e.g., why implicit and explicit evaluations were not associated).

Evaluation After Exposure

Movie evaluations have often been investigated from a media effects perspective. Accordingly, evaluative responses to movies have been operationalized as post-hoc judgments after exposure. As outlined above, these judgments are not only related to film-inherent features (e.g., story or cinematography) but also to the (anticipated) effects of film viewing (e.g., the viewers' expectations or experiences). For instance, Oliver and Bartsch (2010) explored how well specific dimensions of audience responses (e.g., fun, suspense, and moving/thought-provoking) predicted more general movie evaluations (e.g., liking, appreciation, and enjoyment) using self-report measures after watching a movie. Their approach has stimulated a growing line of research (cf. Schneider, Bartsch, & Oliver, 2019, Table A1) that focuses on propositional processes and explicit evaluations of inherent features of the entertainment media products and of (anticipated) entertainment experiences. From an APE model perspective, this line of research needs to integrate associative processes and implicit evaluations. Moreover, given the nature of self-report measures after exposure and the lack of theoretical assumptions about the mental representations and processes, we can only speculate posthoc about *how* the evaluative responses emerged. Reframing concepts like appreciation and enjoyment with the help of the APE model could provide valuable insights. We suggest that all entertainment experiences imply propositional *and* associative processes. Preliminary evidence comes from a study of Bartsch, Kalch and Oliver (2014)

who found that affective responses (being moved) stimulated propositional responses (reflective thoughts), and that both predicted positive evaluations of the movie. However, from an APE model perspective, the assessment of affective responses using self-report measures after exposure needs to be complemented with implicit measures to cross-validate these findings.

Some studies dealing with entertainment phenomena have applied indirect measures. For instance, Lewis, Tamborini, and Weber (2014) used response latencies to measure appreciation and enjoyment as evaluative responses to endings of narratives. Building on Tamborini's (2011; see also this volume) model of intuitive morality and exemplars, they suggested that "enjoyment is a positive response that results from quick, intuitive processing" and "appreciation is a positive response characterized by the type of slower, controlled appraisals necessary for weighing the salience of conflicting needs" (Lewis et al., 2014, p. 399). Such an approach could benefit from applying the APE model as a theoretical framework that specifies possible patterns of how implicit evaluations can result from underlying associative and propositional processes (e.g., direct, indirect or combined effects). The inclusion of instruments to measure both implicit and explicit evaluations in combination with a priori hypotheses can give insights into the underlying processes because of the resulting pattern of evaluative responses. To address the methodological challenge of disentangling viewers' responses to different movie-related objects of evaluation (e.g., film-inherent features and entertainment experiences), it is important to arrive at a deeper understanding of the dynamic evaluative processes, and to move beyond post-exposure measurement.

Discussion

Evaluative responses are pervasive and vital for daily life. All kinds of objects can elicit evaluative responses, including entertainment media and movies in particular, as

illustrated in this chapter. By applying the associative–propositional evaluation (APE) model, we propose an overarching theoretical framework that integrates different entertainment phenomena in the context of movies before, during, and after exposure. In the remainder of this chapter, we highlight the benefits of such an approach and address some related questions.

Why Study Evaluation?

What is the advantage of studying the evaluative responses to entertainment content such as movies over traditional approaches such as enjoyment (e.g., Oliver & Nabi, 2004)? First, it is important to note that the APE model does not substitute established concepts in entertainment research. Rather, it provides an overarching framework for analyzing the common building blocks of entertainment phenomena and common underlying processes. Entertainment research has a long tradition of borrowing theories and models from social psychology, including a number of domain-specific dual-process models. In this context, the APE model can provide an updated and generalized version of a dual process model that allows for a more fine-grained theoretical and empirical analysis of various entertainment phenomena before, during, or after exposure. For example, the APE model offers innovative research perspectives on processes of entertainment media selection and purchase (Hartmann, 2009), experiential-affective dynamics during message exposure (Fahr & Früh, this volume), motivational processes of repeated and prolonged “binge” consumption of entertainment (Halfmann & Reinecke, this volume; Tannenbaum, 1985), and insights into the seemingly paradoxical nature of ambivalent evaluations such as guilty pleasures (Panek, 2014; Reinecke, Hartmann, & Eden, 2014) or appreciation of unpleasant content (Bartsch, 2012). It can be particularly useful if the focus is on underlying processes, that is, *how* evaluative responses emerge. Moreover, it may provide a framework for deriving precise hypotheses but also developing new research questions based on theoretical assumptions about underlying

evaluative processes and their complex interactions. In addition to explicit evaluations, we assume that implicit evaluations can be powerful predictors of social behavior in general (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006a; Strack & Deutsch, 2004) and of entertainment consumption in particular (e.g., movie choice, Yeh, 2012). The particular strengths of the APE model apply in cases where movie viewers are undecided or have no previous information about the movie (cf. Galdi, Arcuri, & Gawronski, 2008; Galdi, Gawronski, Arcuri, & Friese, 2012). Given the predominant focus of entertainment research on self-report measures, implicit evaluations have remained under-researched so far. The additional use of indirect measures can reveal findings in which explicit and implicit evaluations diverge due to different underlying processes. Identifying and investigating such cases can provide important insights into entertainment experiences.

How Should Implicit Evaluations Be Measured?

Indirect methods and measures such as implicit association tests (e.g., Greenwald et al., 1998), affect misattribution procedures (e.g., Payne, Cheng, Govorun, & Stewart, 2005), Facial Action Coding System (e.g., Ekman, Friesen, & Ancoli, 1980), or psychophysiological measures (e.g., Weber, 2015), are possible options to measure implicit evaluations. A number of additional approaches have been extensively described elsewhere (e.g., Wittenbrink & Schwarz, 2007), some of which have already been applied and tested in media psychological studies (for an overview on indirect measures in media effects research, see Hefner, Rothmund, Klimmt, & Gollwitzer, 2011).

What Is the Conceptual Relationship Between Evaluative Responses and Attitudes?

The APE model represents recent advances in social cognition and attitude research, thus, we see our approach as an update and extension of Nabi and Krcmar's (2004) theoretical elaboration on enjoyment as an attitude. We agree with Nabi and Krcmar's (2004) discussion of enjoyment and related terms (i.e., liking, attraction, appreciation, preference,

entertainment) and their interpretation of media enjoyment as an attitude. What the APE model can add is an updated approach to explain attitudinal phenomena based on recent social psychological research (e.g., De Houwer, 2009; De Houwer et al., 2013). In particular, the APE model does not equate attitudes (or their mental representations) with the evaluative responses caused by attitudes. Rather, evaluation is defined as the effect of different stimuli on evaluative responses. Recently, Coenen and van den Bulck (2018, pp. 42–43, Principle 3) have put the same argument forward in the general context of attitudinal media effects. Such a distinction allows specifying questions about the causes and moderators of evaluative responses and the role of mental processes and representations as mediating mechanisms without conflating explanans and explanandum. For more details on how evaluative responses and the APE model relate to conceptualizations of attitudes, see Gawronski and Bodenhausen (2007).

Are Associative and Propositional Processes Just Synonyms for Other Dual Processes?

Gawronski and Bodenhausen (2006a, 2006b) provide an in-depth discussion of the relationship between the APE model and traditional domain-specific dual-process theories that are well-known in communication science (e.g., the ELM, Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Two points are of particular relevance here. A first crucial difference is that associative and propositional processes are orthogonal to the influence of central and peripheral cues, respectively (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006a, pp. 710–711), that is, both central and peripheral cues can be processed associatively or propositionally or in combination. Secondly, central to the ELM (and also to the heuristic–systematic model, e.g., Chen & Chaiken, 1999) is the assumption of influences of central/systematic or peripheral/heuristic features under conditions of high or low cognitive elaboration, respectively. In contrast, the APE model assumes that cognitive elaboration is only one of several determinants of propositional reasoning (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006a, 2011).

Are Associative and Propositional Processes Just Synonyms for Automatic or Controlled Processes?

Gawronski and Bodenhausen (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2011, 2014b) extensively discuss the distinction between *operating principles* and *operating conditions*. Operating principles define *what* a particular process is doing. Associative processes are defined as the activation of associative patterns by feature similarity and spatio-temporal contiguity. Propositional processes are defined as the validation of activated information concerning its consistency (e.g., Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2014b, p. 189). In contrast, operating conditions define *when* such processes are operating. Following Bargh (1994), the four operating conditions of automaticity are awareness, intentionality, efficiency, and controllability. Associative and propositional processes can operate on all of those conditions. For instance, going back to our example for Figure 1C above (i.e., watching an erotic scene), viewers may or may not be aware of activated associations (i.e., their affective gut responses).

How Is the APE Model Represented in Contemporary Entertainment Research?

Although the 2006 article (Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2006a) introducing the APE model has been cited over 2,000 times in the last ten years, surprisingly little research in communication research or media psychology has built on it. A brief glimpse at the relevant papers in these fields shows that they only refer to the 2006 paper either to elaborate on the implicit–explicit distinction or as an example for current dual-process theories. The notable exceptions mainly focus on attitude change (e.g., with regard to stereotypes, smoking, or specific products in a movie). However, these attitudinal outcomes are not directly related to entertainment; rather, they are typical outcome variables of research addressing persuasive media effects (for a brief overview, see e.g., Payne & Dal Cin, 2015). Thus, although the

APE model has been applied to media-related topics occasionally, to our knowledge, media entertainment experiences or movie evaluations have not been among them yet.

What Should Entertainment Research Focus on When Considering Movie Evaluations?

Above, we outlined ideas about the role of movie evaluations before, during, and after exposure of a movie. Following De Houwer et al. (2013, p. 283), two general questions can be asked with regard to every phase: 1) “Which elements in the environment moderate evaluation?” and 2) “What mental processes and representations mediate evaluation?” Whereas the first question addresses the functional relations between environment and behavior, the second refers to the cognitive or mental level of analysis.

Concerning the first question, environmental factors that moderate the stimulus–response relation have not been systematically investigated with regard to movie evaluation so far. For instance, if the focus is on the complete movie as an entity or on specific film-inherent features, other (film-external) stimuli such as recommendations or location of viewing can moderate evaluative responses. Additionally, individual differences in motivations or past experiences can moderate the interplay of evaluative processes (e.g., if a specific criterion like story innovation is important for evaluating a movie, Schneider, 2017).

With regard to the second question, given that mediational representations and processes are hard to measure, manipulating and examining them in a series of experiments can be a helpful alternative (cf. Bullock, Green, & Ha, 2010; Spencer, Zanna, & Fong, 2005). Especially, cognitive research on films (e.g., Bordwell, 1985; Ohler, 1994; Schwan, 2001) can be more strongly connected to emotion-focused entertainment research and give insights into how film-related information is mentally represented and thus can be used to alter such representations. Moreover, recent concepts like eudaimonic or self-transcendent entertainment experiences (e.g., Oliver et al., 2018) heavily rely on evaluative representations and processes. Thus, revisiting such concepts through the lens of associative and

propositional processes and appropriate ways of measuring implicit and explicit evaluation could enrich theorizing about eudaimonic and self-transcendent entertainment experiences.

Alternatively, entertainment phenomena can be used to challenge and test general dual-process theories like the APE model if entertainment theories highlight their additional value in explaining evaluative responses above and beyond general dual-process models.

Concluding Remarks

The question at the core of this chapter was *how* people evaluate movies. According to the APE model, the answer is via associative and propositional processes, which are assumed to be the underlying processes for implicit and explicit evaluations, respectively. These qualitatively distinct but mutually interacting processes can be directly or indirectly influenced by the features of a movie. Based on the way they interact and the conditions under which they operate, the same movie stimulus can produce response patterns, which result in changes in implicit but not explicit evaluations, explicit but not implicit evaluations, or corresponding changes in both kind of evaluations. Although we predominantly used evaluative processes concerning movies to illustrate our reasoning, the APE model as a generalized dual-process model can be applied to any other entertainment medium (e.g., video games or novels) as well. Such a perspective may open new avenues for entertainment research by delineating the underlying processes of established constructs that have been predominantly examined as explicit evaluations so far.

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Potential direct and indirect influences of a film stimulus on associative and propositional processes and their corresponding evaluative responses (A, B) and potential combined direct and indirect influences (C, D). Adapted from Gawronski & Bodenhausen, 2011; A, B see Figure 2.3, p. 80; C, D see Figure 2.5, p. 91, reprinted with permission.