

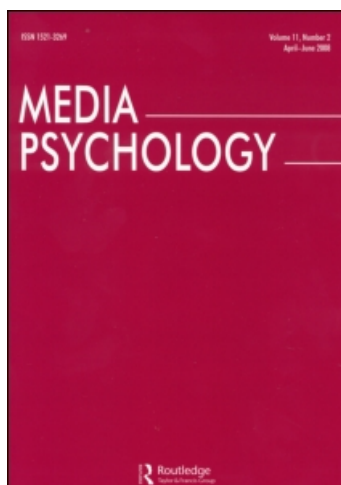
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Some Like It Bad: Testing a Model for Perceiving and Experiencing Fictional Characters

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We developed an encompassing theory that explains how readers of fiction and spectators of motion pictures establish affective relationships with fictional characters (FCs). The perceiving and experiencing fictional characters (PEFiC) theory is anchored in art perception, psychological aesthetics, and social and emotion psychology and addresses both the complexity and intrinsic affectivity involved in media exposure. In a between-subject design ($N = 312$), engagement and appreciation were measured as a function of the ethics (good vs. bad), aesthetics (beautiful vs. ugly), and epistemics (realistic vs. unrealistic) of eight protagonists in feature movies. The PEFiC model best fit the data with a unipolarity of factors and outperformed traditional theories (identification, empathy): The trade-off between involvement and distance explained the appreciation of FCs better than either distance or involvement alone. The mediators similarity, relevance, and valence exerted significant (interaction) effects, thus complicating the results. Furthermore, the effects of mediated bad persons differed strongly from ethically good ones.

Persons mediated through film, television, and the Internet fulfill basic functions and serve as information resources about the real world (e.g., Buck, 1999; Busselle, 2001; Oatley, 1999; Shapiro & McDonald, 1992). However, we know little about the cognitive and affective processes involved in engagement with such fictional characters (FCs) or mediated persons. Studies on fiction and the arts suggest that people apparently like to identify with their heroes. Aristotle (1968) proposed the concepts of catharsis and mimesis, which were often interpreted or mis-

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interpreted as imitation (Oatley, 1995, 1999) or confounded with identification (e.g., Freud, 1904/1942). Since then, the notion of identification has been used in different ways to explain the liking of a character (e.g., Cupchik, 1997, 2001; Hoffner & Cantor, 1991; Konijn, 1999; Kreitler & Kreitler, 1972; Lazowick, 1955; Mayne, 1993; Oatley, 1995; Smith, 1995; Tannenbaum & Gaer, 1965; Zillmann, 1980). As a result, unclear definitions of the concept circulate (see Oatley, 1995). Furthermore, identification falls short of explaining the complexity and intrinsic affectivity that is natural to media exposure, such as getting involved with nonexistent persons. Sometimes, the behavior and affective experiences of readers and spectators (observers) seem to reflect those of the hero, sometimes only vaguely and, at other times, not at all. Observers might well experience the reverse: antipathy, aversion, or ambiguity. Corliss (1980, as cited in Hoffner & Cantor, 1991) even reported that intense negative affect toward an FC (e.g., J. R. in *Dallas*) could promote enduring involvement. Moreover, empirical support for identification with FCs has rarely been found (e.g., Konijn, 1999; Zillmann, 1994).

Although people know they are watching a movie, we assume that the basic psychological processes of observing FCs have much in common with daily life encounters (cf. Levin & Simons, 2000). However, there must also be differences; otherwise, how could someone watch all those gun fights, serial killings, and massacres day in and day out without becoming insane? How can it be that observers feel attracted to fabricated adventures of people who do not exist? Our contribution was to integrate various existing theories with an extension of disposition-based theories (e.g., Raney & Bryant, 2002; Zillmann, 1994; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977) to arrive at a systematic psychological model of character engagement. We reviewed the applicable literature in social psychology, particularly with reference to interpersonal attraction, person perception, impression formation, and attitudinal ambivalence (e.g., Berscheid, 1985; Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994; Fiske, 1980; Klohnen & Mendelsohn, 1998; Priester & Petty, 2001; Skowronski & Carlston, 1989); emotion psychology (e.g., Ekman & Davidson, 1994; Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1982, 1991; Russell & Carroll, 1999); and aesthetics psychology (e.g., Berlyne, 1970; Cupchik, 1997, 2001; Martindale, 1988). This review revealed that similarity (on which identification is based) is only one of several factors contributing to one liking or disliking an FC. We integrated these factors into a model that specifies the underlying mechanisms of perceiving and experiencing fictional characters (PEFiC), which we then put to an empirical test.

The PEFiC model defines three phases in the establishment of a degree of appreciation of an FC: encoding, comparison, and response. During encoding, the observer assesses the stimulus qualities in terms of the ethic (moral goodness or badness; e.g., Albritton & Gerrig, 1991; Zillmann, 1996; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977), aesthetic (beauty or ugliness; e.g., Cupchik, 1997; Dion, Berscheid, & Walster, 1972; Iannucci, 1991), and epistemic features of an FC, including its situational context (perceived realism; e.g., Busselle, 2001; Frijda, 1988, 1989;

Ramachandran & Hirstein, 1999; Shapiro & Chock, 2003; Zeki, 1999). In the comparison phase, observers evaluate which specific features are relevant compared to their own goals and concerns (which might include those of the FC; Arnold, 1960; Frijda, 1986, 1993; Lazarus, 1991; Tesser & Collins, 1988). They estimate the similarity between the (situational) features of the FC and their own features and fortunes (e.g., Cupach & Metts, 1995; Hoffner & Cantor, 1991; Klohnen & Mendelsohn, 1998). Moreover, observers attribute their subjective valences to the specific features of the FC (Berscheid, 1985; Russell & Carroll, 1999). Our basic assumption is that in the response phase, involvement and distance are two co-occurring processes that do not exclude each other: Their parallel impact best predicts the appreciation of an FC (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994; Dollard & Miller, 1950; Koene & Vossen, 1994; Miller, 1944, 1961).

In this study, our aim was to experimentally test whether the PEFiC model fits the empirical data of observers watching FCs. Furthermore, the central premises of the PEFiC model and subsequent hypotheses were tested. In general, variation in the appraisal factors Ethics, Aesthetics, and Epistemics should have led to variation in the intensities of involvement and distance, consequently affecting appreciation of an FC. The trade-off between involvement and distance should have explained the appreciation of an FC better than either involvement or distance alone. However, the general effects of the appraisal factors may have been counteracted by the perceived similarity (or dissimilarity) with, relevance (or irrelevance) of, and valence (positive or negative) toward the FC. Before presenting the methodology and results of the experiment, we give an outline of the theoretical background of the PEFiC model (Hoorn & Konijn, 2003).

PARALLEL PROCESSING OF FCs

In psychology, it is a common approach to view approach–withdrawal processes, good–bad appraisals, or aversive and appetitive systems as bipolar (e.g., Lang, Bradley, & Cuthbert, 1990; Russell & Carroll, 1999). Cacioppo and Berntson (1994) stated that the assumed bipolarity is mainly due to the limited physical constraints ascribed to the affect system because these processes and appraisals are often described in behavioral terms. Studies into art appraisals, aesthetic judgments, and evaluations of FCs seem to follow the bipolar view. In liking an FC, observers apparently have empathized or identified, which are regarded as opposing feelings of distance (Cupchik, 1997; Hoffner & Cantor, 1991; Tan, 1996; Vorderer, 2000; Zillmann, 1994). Moreover, operationalizations of identification with characters are often confounded with liking (Konijn, 1999). However, recent research in attitudinal ambivalence has claimed that the affect system should better be conceived of as separate positive and negative substrates (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994; Cacioppo, Gardner, & Berntson, 1999; Kaplan, 1972; Priester & Petty, 2001).

These authors argue that consequently, the evaluative tension or ambivalence that might motivate an attitude cannot be assessed with the traditional bipolar approach. Cacioppo and Berntson presented ample evidence for the existence of multiple, parallel, and integrative modes of evaluative activation. Similarly, Carroll, Yik, Russell, and Feldman Barrett (1999) showed evidence that opposite valences do not always have strong negative correlations and concluded that negative valence circles around positive valence.

We assumed, therefore, that a unipolar conception of involving and distancing processes toward FCs is preferable to the common bipolarity. Particularly, works of fiction, art, and aesthetics are multilayered (Cupchik, 2001) and can be appraised simultaneously on seemingly opposite levels: A piece of art may be so ugly that it turns into beauty (cf. “camp”), or the evidently good guy shows a dark side (e.g., Batman). Apparent contradictions are quite common in art critiques and literary reviews: “Boccaccio uses lies in a way that the reader finds liars amusing rather than looking at the characters with a bad intent” (reader report in Thury & Friedlander, 1996, p. 432). Moreover, mixing the real with the unreal is almost a prerequisite of artistic endeavors. The differential effects of moral justice and affective dispositions toward FCs (e.g., Raney & Bryant, 2002; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977) can also be brought in line with a unipolar conception. We believe that characters deemed fascinating combine good and bad features, which for the observer, may evoke desirable inner conflicts, such as agreeable sensations of suspense. Accordingly, observers do not feel either at a distance or immersed, but both experiences run in parallel. In general, we suppose that most FCs stir mixed emotions and ambivalence.

With Zillmann (1991, 1994; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977), Konijn (1999), and Oatley (1999), we believe that affective responses of observers “are one’s own, not just pale reflections of the emotions of fictional characters” (Oatley, 1999, p. 115). Furthermore, with Raney and Bryant (2002), we assume that affective and cognitive processes underlie the observer’s appreciation. Therefore, we prefer to use the broader concept of involvement (including identification and empathy),¹ which co-occurs with a degree of distance. In our view, involvement covers a broad range of neutral to positive affects toward an FC (on a global level), reflecting a subjectively assessed and felt tendency to (psychologically) approach the FC, despite unpleasant feelings that might simultaneously exist on feature level. Involvement, therefore, merely indicates the level of psychological investment in another “person.” Note that even if the (situation of the) FC has negative features, in the observer’s eyes, approaching tendencies may exist. For example, revolting looks still can foster approach because the observer feels sorry for the FC (see Affective Selection: Relevance and Valence section). To cover a broad range of neutral to negative affects toward FCs (on a global level), we use the concept of distance, reflecting a felt tendency to (psychologically) avoid the FC, despite pleasant feelings that might simultaneously exist on feature level. For example, nice looks still can spark avoidance because the observer finds the FC too slick.

Regarding FCs, involvement and distance are rarely expressed in outward behavior. These tendencies do not represent stable endpoints but rather processes (Lazarus, 1991) that precede some endpoint (however momentarily). Scitovski (1976) stated that the consumer is in search of an optimal level of stimulation. Similarly, we believe that the observer of FCs is in search of an optimal balance between involvement and distance, evoking a pleasurable tension between approach and avoidance. Thus, a possibly bipolar liking or disliking of an FC as an endstate (at whatever moment in exposure time) is the result of varying degrees of unipolar involvement in conjunction with distance. What are the processes, then, that cause involvement and distance, which ultimately produce likes and dislikes?

COMPARING: SIMILARITY, RELEVANCE, AND VALENCE

Liking Similarities

The core concept in identification theory is similarity. Yet, although we believe that identification has low explanatory power, the subjectively perceived similarity between the self and the FC must be considered as one of several factors contributing to involvement. Perceived similarity has often been considered a central factor of FC engagement and is a strong motivator for liking a character (e.g., Hoffner & Cantor, 1991; Lazowick, 1955; Tannenbaum & Gaer, 1965). Similarly, Aristotle's (1968) theater mimics life, Freud's (1904/1942) inner community, and Cupchik's (1997) "feel what it is like to be that person" (p. 20) all refer to a notion of perceived similarity. Not only recognition of the self but also the cued recall of one's own vicissitudes and of situations one has seen or heard about may bring the observer closer to the FC (cf. Oatley, 1995). Studies in person perception and impression formation confirm that a fundamental mechanism for feeling sympathy and choosing friends is the perception of similarity (Aboud & Mendelson, 1998; Cupach & Metts, 1995; Dahlbäck, 1982; Duck, 1991; Festinger, 1954; Hallinan & Teixeira, 1987; Hansell, 1981; Kandel, 1978; O'Keefe, 1990; Prentice, 1990; Tuma & Hallinan, 1979). Apparently, observers feel attracted to or comfortable with the similarity they perceive in FCs, which supports involvement.

However, in particular cases, similarity may be disliked (e.g., a shared negative personality trait), or dissimilarity can be appreciated. Klohnen and Mendelsohn (1998) found evidence that people with low self-esteem search for complementarity and look for distinctive features in others who are attractive (see also Aboud & Mendelson, 1998; Ahern, Johnson, Wilson, McClearn, & Vandenberg, 1982). In an extensive review on interpersonal attraction, Berscheid (1985) concluded that apart from similarity, individuals with positive attributes who display positive behavior are generally liked, whereas those who are dissimilar are generally disliked unless they possess desirable attributes. Thus, when one relates to

FCs, the measure of (inner) similarity between the observer and the FC, including their respective situations, only partly mediates the measure of involvement. By the same token, dissimilarity partly mediates distance and, when judged positively, may contribute to involvement. In the Method section, we operationalize the concept of similarity or dissimilarity in terms of a subjectively judged (lack of) correspondence between the observer and the FC. Obviously, observers do not compare all of the available features but rather select a sample.

Affective Selection: Relevance and Valence

In serving adaptive and survival functions, the human perceptual system is embedded in emotional systems that help regulate behaviors (Ohman, Hamm, & Hugdahl, 2000). The perceptual system monitors the environment for stimuli that are relevant to the individual's concerns, motives, or goals. Therefore, relevance is a key factor of emotional reactions (Frijda, 1986, 1993; Lazarus, 1991). Selective perception affects the encoding phase of the processing of FCs (Frijda, 1986; see Encoding: Appraisal Dimensions in Art and Fiction section) and is guided by the relevance of particular features of the observed object to the observer's goals, motives, or concerns. Sometimes, when an observer takes over the FC's perspective, his or her goals and concerns might parallel those of the FC. However, in most cases, observers will tune in to several specific features that seem relevant to their own lives. For example, the FC's disease may inform the observer about a beloved relative's disease, whereas the hospitalization history may be judged as personally irrelevant.

Relevance has multiple meanings in communication and psychological studies. In persuasion studies, *relevance* is used almost interchangeably with *involvement*, where involvement usually is an independent variable (e.g., Johnson & Eagly, 1989; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schuman, 1983). However, we regard involvement as a dependent variable in the response phase (see PEFiC model section). Furthermore, relevance can be envisioned as an overarching concept for importance, familiarity, significance, and salience (e.g., Andersen, Glassman, & Gold, 1998; Ortony, 1979). Finally, in emotion psychology, relevance indicates that an object or feature in a particular (imagined) situation may potentially benefit or harm an individual's concerns. As such, relevance reflects the personal meaning attached to a feature (Frijda, 1986, 1988; cf. primary appraisal in Lazarus, 1991). We adhere to the latter use because it opens the possibility that a feature of an FC is relevant to the observer and still evokes distance (e.g., in case of a threat).

FCs can be relevant to observers because they fulfill basic psychological functions. They can be informative for encounters with real people, and their fictionality provides a safe haven for experimentation with personal affects and attitudes (Hoorn, Konijn, & Van der Veer, 2003; Tan, 1996). Aesthetic works and fiction are intended to be emotionally powerful and, at best, initiate a search for deeper mean-

ings (Cupchik, 2001; Oatley, 1999). We believe that emotional responses merely accompany the involvement and distance processes. Empirical studies of affective reactions to art and fiction mostly include various measures of involvement (e.g., identification, empathy), (hedonic) pleasure, suspense, arousal, and spectators' task emotions (Konijn, 1999). Tesser and Collins (1988) reported empirical evidence that relevance intensifies emotional responses, both positive and negative. *Irrelevance*, then, refers to a lack of threats and promises and, thus, induces a neutral state. Although relevance intensifies the affective reaction toward the FC, the direction (positive, neutral, or negative) largely evolves from what is called *valence*.

Valence is generally used as a concept to cover the direction of an attitude or subjective affective response (e.g., Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994; Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957). In cognitive emotion psychology, valence is defined as the implied outcome of an event; the intrinsic attractiveness or repulsiveness from the perspective of the individual's concerns (Frijda, 1986; Gendolla, 1997). This might be in terms of the positive or negative evaluation of one's opportunities to cope with a given situation (Lazarus, 1991). In art and psychophysiological studies, (hedonic) valence is often operationalized as increased arousal (e.g., Berlyne, 1970; Martindale, 1988; Zillmann, 1983), but arousal merely is an aspecific, physiological startle response (Sanders, 1998). Therefore, we follow the attitudinal and emotional view that valence reflects the direction of the affective response based on the implied outcome of the encountered event. Globally, positive valence stirs action tendencies of approach, and negative valence stirs avoidance tendencies (Frijda, Kuipers, & Ter Schure, 1989; Frijda & Tcherkassof, 1997), thereby supposedly enhancing involvement and distance, respectively.

Sometimes, however, a negatively valenced object or FC may stir approaching tendencies to remove or attack the obstacle, then more appropriately labeled *moving against* (De Rivera & Grinkis, 1986; Fischer, 1991). Certain features of the harmful object are negatively charged, but the outcome valence of the moving against will be positive, namely, the reaching of a desired goal state. In line with this reasoning, and the findings of Carroll et al. (1999), we suppose that valence should be conceptualized as unipolar instead of bipolar. That is, unipolar approach and avoidance can be functionally independent of unipolar pleasantness and unpleasantness. For instance, in sympathy (approach), the sufferings of Gorky's (1907/1974) *Mother* may fill the observer's eyes with tears. This may be pleasant to the observer as a form of relief and simultaneously unpleasant when this includes personal recognition. We assume, then, that the approach is in reaching a desired goal state at the global level of a temporary relationship between the observer and the FC (e.g., to be entertained). The avoidance is in something that (temporarily) obstructs reaching that goal at a local feature level (e.g., the sufferings). Again, this illustrates that a bipolar conception of positivity and negativity is insufficient to represent the evaluative processes (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994) that motivate involvement and distance in media exposure.

Generally, negative emotions can coincide with an approach tendency, and positive emotions can coincide with an avoidance tendency. However, opposing tendencies may simultaneously occur, which complicates the approach–avoidance pattern.

This leads us to another distinction between the concepts of valence and engagement (i.e., involvement and distance). Valence refers to the local or global levels of the FC. Observers wish for the FC to fail or succeed in the resolution of their problems (expectations in Zillmann, 1991). On the other hand, engagement is generated at the level of the observer's concerns. Finally, to assess the valence, relevance, and degree of similarity, the observer must determine what features the FC possesses. These are not objectively given. Therefore, we turn to the primary appraisal dimensions in art perception and psychological aesthetics.

ENCODING: APPRAISAL DIMENSIONS IN ART AND FICTION

Aesthetics

Products of fiction are commonly judged for their aesthetic qualities. FCs in paintings, graphics, and commercial advertisements are evaluated on the basis of appearance (Hofschire & Greenberg, 2002; Ward, 1995). Hollywood productions also tend to portray aesthetically pleasing FCs to increase the likeability of a character. In this respect, fiction makers follow trends that are observable in real life as well. In the early stages of making friends, for example, when other information is missing, physical attractiveness is crucial (Iannucci, 1991). Beautiful people are accredited with positive qualities, such as moral goodness (Dion et al., 1972) and superior biological functions (Carello, Grosfosky, Shaw, Pittenger, & Mark, 1989). They are supposed to make more appealing music (North & Hargreaves, 1997) and are allocated more social rewards (Berscheid, 1985; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Spitzer, Henderson, & Zivian, 1999). Therefore, we assume that features appraised as beautiful generally will add to involvement, whereas ugly features will add to distance. However, ugly features can stir involvement as well when they are regarded as funny, tragic (e.g., *Frankenstein*), or charming (e.g., the French *mouche*).

Ethics

The moral fiber of an FC is a general determinant of engagement and appreciation. Hollywood usually sticks to the traditional divide that handsome good guys (in white) fight ugly bad guys (in black). Zillmann (1996), Zillmann and Cantor (1977), Jose and Brewer (1984), and Albritton and Gerrig (1991) found evidence that ethics are a key factor for the valence of affect toward FCs. Accordingly, good

guys stir positive emotions and agreement, whereas bad guys stir negative emotions and disapproval (Zillmann & Bryant, 1975). Zillmann's disposition theory states that viewers' dispositions toward FCs (i.e., liking or disliking) mediate moral judgment and account for viewers' differential responses to FCs (i.e., "a bad person deserves punishment"). Many feature films reward viewers by meeting their outcome expectations by letting the hero win and the villain lose.

This simple classification could easily seduce one into assuming that good guys raise involvement and appreciation and bad guys raise distance and disliking. Several studies have reported, however, that in fiction, evil characters can evoke high appreciation as well (Anderson & Dill, 2000; Paik & Comstock, 1994; Zillmann, 1998). Given the admiration for horror and crime idols (e.g., Hannibal the Cannibal, *The Godfather*), evoking negative valence may coincide with involvement and distance and is not necessarily translated into a low appreciation of the FC. Thus, we assume that bad FCs can cause viewer involvement–distance conflicts, or observers can be subjected to attitudinal ambivalence (Priester & Petty, 2001). In fiction, it is easier to allow FCs to go too far morally because there are no real-life consequences attached. Observers may be interested in bad FCs for the purpose of assessing their own level of tolerance or out of curiosity about possible consequences of bad behavior. They may disapprove of the behavior itself (evoking distance and disliking) but also see their social goals served (i.e., ethical standards enforced), which triggers involvement and liking.

In general, however, good features will elicit involvement, and bad features will elicit distance, but bad features can also generate involvement if they serve an observer's goal. In that case, relevance and positive valence function as mediators. The goal must be important enough (it must have enough relevance) to allow the crossing of moral lines, and the observer must expect a beneficial outcome from that transgression (positive valence) as well. In the same vein, distance can be elicited by good features that jeopardize an observer's goal.

Epistemics

A general recommendation to filmmakers has been to base their stories on facts to evoke stronger emotions (Atkin, 1983; Berkowitz & Alioto, 1973). Reality TV heightens viewer involvement by showing things that really happen. On the other hand, a plethora of genres exist that capitalize on the opposite of realism. Fantasy, science fiction, horror, cartoons, animation, video games, modern avant-garde theater, humor, satire, and the absurd are relished for their deviance from reality and for setting up impossible situations. In other words, an unrealistic (situation of the) FC can engender involvement as well.

Similarly, genres such as soap opera, fake documentary, docudrama, and reality TV play with the degree to which they reflect reality. Observers judge the epistemic quality of (features of) FCs, that is, whether they might possibly exist in

real life and how informative they are about real life (see information reality in Shapiro & McDonald, 1992; also Levin & Simons, 2000; Shapiro & Chock, 2003). For that matter, even a cartoon figure that does not look human may realistically perform a surgery and, thus, can be informative (Swann, 1987).² By and large, realistic features enhance involvement because they deliver more reality information than unrealistic ones. Unrealistic features may also enhance involvement because they serve as entertainment. If a completely realistic FC, as perceived by the observer, does not add to what is already known, the outcome may be distance rather than involvement. On the other hand, an FC that is too odd may not connect to the observer's prior knowledge, which will cause withdrawal. The parallel occurrence of realistic and unrealistic features of FCs feed parallel involvement and distance processes, thus increasing appreciation more than either realistic or unrealistic FCs and situations.

Interactions among appraisal dimensions may further complicate predictions. For example, if an extreme number of good features are appraised as unrealistic, ethics interacts with epistemics. Also, a science-fiction creature may be disliked for its highly unnatural peculiarities but may raise strong involvement because of its good behavior. Mixing the three appraisal dimensions can lead to simultaneous tendencies to avoid FCs (e.g., "Boccaccio's liars are bad") and to approach them ("Boccaccio's liars are funny"). Thus, a complicated picture may emerge from apparently contrasting evaluations in the three appraisal domains of ethics, aesthetics, and epistemics. The same feature may be judged as morally bad but also as beautiful and realistic. Therefore, we suppose that features partially participate in several (fuzzy) sets (Zadeh, 1977; Zimmermann, 1994) and that they can contribute to both involvement and distance. This yields different involvement–distance conflicts at different levels of analysis from local features to global multifactorial levels.

PEFiC MODEL

Figure 1 depicts the integration of the factors in the PEFiC model. The PEFiC model shows how involvement and distance evolve and how their interrelationship determines the appreciation of an FC. It should be kept in mind that as the drama unfolds, any preliminary appreciation may change with a change in the values of the underlying factors. Therefore, appreciation in the model reflects the moment at which appreciation is assessed.

Cacioppo et al. (1999) stated that affective and nonaffective appraisals rely on a number of common information processing operations. Therefore, affective and nonaffective processing of FCs will be closely intertwined. Yet, in the graphic representation of the PEFiC model in Figure 1, a certain distinction is made between nonaffective, cognitive perception (encoding) and more affective experiential processing (cf. Raney & Bryant, 2002). We envision the perceptual processing of an

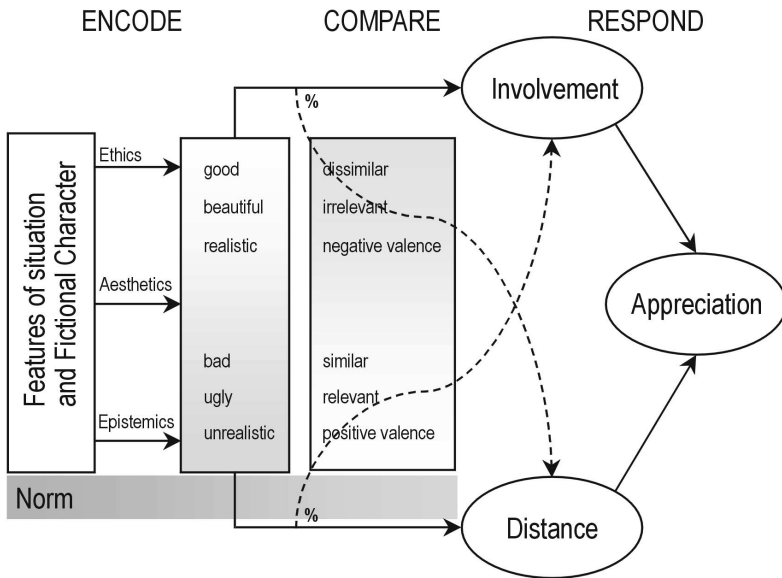


FIGURE 1 Graphic representation of the PEFiC model. The dashed lines with the % symbols indicate partial mediation by similarity, relevance, and valence in the comparison phase. Norms can add another layer to the process when individual norms are assessed in comparison with group norms.

FC as primarily devoted to a more or less nonaffective encoding process in which the subjective appraisal of the ethic (good vs. bad), aesthetic (beautiful vs. ugly), and epistemic (realistic vs. unrealistic) features of the FC in its situation takes place. Thus, in the encoding phase, observers determine the specific stimulus features as they perceive them.

Experiential, affective processing occurs in the comparison phase and includes the subjective evaluation of the FC with respect to the observer's self. We consider the experiential processing of FCs affective because it includes the inner self. When individual goals and concerns are touched on by relevant features, emotions will arise, according to emotion psychology (e.g., Frijda, 1986; Lazarus, 1991). Thus, the relevance of a FC's features, in the comparison phase of the PEFiC model, may be defined as the observer's personal meaning attached to FC's features relating to the observer's own goals and concerns (which may be triggered by those of the FC). Furthermore, the degree of similarity between the FC and the observer is assessed in the comparison phase, which also includes the self. The same holds for the direction of the observer's valence toward the FC.

Therefore, the encoding of the FC's ethics, aesthetics, and epistemics may in fact happen without reference to personal significance, as a nonaffective cognitive appraisal (e.g., "Gandhi is a good man"), whereas the assessment of the FC's relevance, similarity, and valence implies the inclusion of the self within an affective comparison between the FC and "me" (e.g., "but meaningless to me"; also see Method section). As stated, however, affective and nonaffective processing cannot be separated strictly.

In the response phase, the outcome of the perceptual and experiential processes is reflected in the degrees to which an observer feels involved with or distanced from an FC. We assume that involvement and distance occur in parallel and together best predict some evaluative endstate, however momentarily. The global liking or disliking of a character is expressed as the appreciation of an FC (see Method section). Generally, PEFiC assumes that involvement with the FC is supported by positive appraisals, that is, by good, beautiful, and realistic features. Getting involved, however, is, in our view, compensated by co-occurring distance, which is based on negative appraisals of bad, ugly, and unrealistic features. Such general effects will further be mediated by relevance or irrelevance, similarity or dissimilarity, and positive or negative valence. To an extent, these mediators will enhance the expected or opposite tendencies (dashed lines in Figure 1). As said, irrelevance may not add to distance, but it may decrease involvement.

To complicate things even further, appraisals in the PEFiC model have a dual nature: Each item is appraised on the basis of both personal norms and the norms of significant peers. The personal norms and values that one maintains are influenced by and may occasionally deviate from those of important others (e.g., Platow, Mills, & Morrison, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Terry & Hogg, 1996). Thus, the observer's individual appraisals of a FC may deviate from the observer's appraisals that comply with significant (peer) group norms. For feasibility reasons, we considered in our experiment only the observer's personal norms.

In this study, we tested important underlying propositions of the PEFiC model: Observers will process FCs and fictional situations in terms of subjective appraisals of ethics, aesthetics, epistemics, similarity, relevance, and valence (P1). This implies that all FCs will be evaluated along all these features, and that no factor is redundant. Features of the FCs will be experienced simultaneously as positive and negative (e.g., good and ugly, good and bad). Factors are unipolar rather than bipolar (P2). Involvement and distance are assumed to be parallel processes and, therefore, will function as relatively separate, unipolar factors (P3).

In addition, we tested several central PEFiC hypotheses: FCs who are positive on ethics, aesthetics, and epistemics will evoke higher involvement and lower distance than FCs who are negative on these factors (H1). FCs who are positive on ethics, aesthetics, and epistemics will cause higher appreciation than FCs who are negative on these factors (H2). However, mixed evaluations in the appraisal domains (e.g., bad, beautiful, and unrealistic) will counteract those general tenden-

cies and lead to significant interactions between ethics, aesthetics, and epistemics and a higher appreciation of the FC than in the case of nonmixed positive or negative appraisals (H3). The mediators, perceived similarity, relevance, and valence will cause significant interaction effects (the direction of the interaction effects could not be formulated on the basis of the available literature; H4). Finally, involvement and distance together will explain the appreciation of an FC better than either involvement or distance alone in a regression analysis (H5).

METHOD

Participants and Design

University students from various faculties ($N = 318$, ages 17–61) at the Free University (Vrije Universiteit), Amsterdam, served as paid volunteers (12 Euros) and were randomly assigned to eight experimental conditions of a 2 (ethics: good vs. bad) \times 2 (aesthetics: beautiful vs. ugly) \times 2 (epistemics: realistic vs. unrealistic) between-subject design (Table 1). The eight treatment groups were split, and the experiment was conducted in 16 sessions on 2 consecutive days. Six participants failed to follow instructions for the questionnaire completion (over 70% of the items were skipped), and their responses were discarded from the analyses, which were performed on 312 cases.

Stimuli

Eight protagonists were selected from contemporary feature films. The protagonists were chosen to represent extreme poles of the crossed factors Ethics (good vs. bad), Aesthetics (beautiful vs. ugly), and Epistemics (realistic vs. unrealistic); for example *Gandhi* (Attenborough, 1982) represented a good, beautiful, and realistic FC; Count Vlad Dracul (*Bram Stoker's Dracula*, Coppola, 1992) a bad, ugly, and unrealistic FC; and Bridget Gregory (*The Last Seduction*, Dahl, 1994) a bad, beautiful, and realistic FC (see Appendix A). Equally long trailers were composed of

TABLE 1
Design, Stimuli, and Participants

	<i>Good</i>		<i>Bad</i>	
	<i>Beautiful</i>	<i>Ugly</i>	<i>Beautiful</i>	<i>Ugly</i>
Realistic	Gandhi	Rocky Dennis	Bridget Gregory	Johnny Handsome
<i>n</i>	39	42	40	39
Unrealistic	Superman	Edward Scissorhands	Cruella de Vil	Vlad Dracul
<i>n</i>	36	38	37	41

shots from leading roles in traditional Hollywood-like productions on video. The exposure time was approximately 20 min. Shots that focused on something other than the protagonist were included only when indispensable for the understanding of the narrative. Shots including other characters were avoided as much as possible to prevent interference with protagonist assessments. The trailers did not summarize the movie as such but rather depicted the FC in key situations. The trailers were subtitled in Dutch, which in The Netherlands is the usual and unproblematic way to watch foreign films. Studio DC10 Plus (Pinnacle, 1998) was used to edit the treatment material. We made VHS copies (resolution = 720×540 pixels, cropping on; 25 images/sec at a data rate of 3,011 kilobytes/sec; sound, type PCM, was sampled at a rate of 11.025 kHz from eight-bit mono channels).

Procedure

Seated in a dimly lit room, the participants viewed the motion pictures in groups of about 10 to 20 persons, as in a small theater. The participants were instructed to turn off their cellular phones and to focus on the leading role in an excerpt from a Hollywood movie. Each participant was exposed to a 20-min clip. The eight treatment clips were shown on a Panasonic VCR connected to a Digital Multistandard videodecoder (Liesegang ddv 820; resolution = 800×600 pixels; 270-Watt lamp; 650 lm; projection distance = 2.16 m from the screen; projection diagonal = 1.24–1.85 m). Two 10-Watt surround-sound speakers provided speech and music. Immediately after exposure, the participants received a questionnaire, which they filled in anonymously (approximate time = 15 min). On completion, the participants were debriefed and dismissed.

Measurements

On the basis of the theoretical factors of the PEFiC model (Relevance, Similarity, Ethics, Aesthetics, Epistemics, Valence, Engagement [involvement–distance], and Appreciation), we constructed 16 unipolar scales (6 statements per scale, except for involvement and distance, which had 10 items each). The questionnaire included a total of 130 items. The scales were used by the participants to express agreement or disagreement with the statements, ranging from 0 (*I fully disagree*) to 5 (*I fully agree*). In case of bipolarity, the items could be considered indicative or contraindicative for the factor in question (the instrument was in Dutch):

1. Ethics: The statements used to assess the FC's ethics were phrased in such a way as to avoid possible ambiguities arising from overlap with Appreciation (e.g., "I find FC trustworthy" and "I find FC a liar").

2. Aesthetics: The same concerns guided the construction of the aesthetics scale (e.g., “To me FC looks pretty” and “FC has a distasteful appearance”).
3. Epistemics: The assessment of the FC’s reality level posed the problem of avoiding overlap with the evaluation of the artistic performance (e.g., “FC could exist in daily life” and “I find FC fake”).
4. Similarity: The degree of similarity or dissimilarity between the observer and the FC was assessed in terms of personality, behavior, attitudes, and appearance (e.g., “I am just like FC” and “My personality is different from that of FC”).
5. Relevance: The relevance of particular FCs was assessed in terms of importance and significance of the FC to one’s own concerns, context, circumstances, and specific features (e.g., “I find FC meaningful to me” and “FC is a redundant figure to me”).
6. Valence: The direction of the participants’ subjective affective response to the implied outcome of an event for the FC was assessed in terms of hopes and wishes related to the FC’s goal state (e.g., “I hoped that FC would succeed” and “I wanted FC to fail”).
7. Engagement was assessed in terms of involvement and distance, which were operationalized as self-perceived tendencies to approach or avoid the FC (e.g., “I want to be friends with FC,” “I feel close to FC,” “I prefer to stay away from FC,” and “FC leaves me with cold feelings;” the Involvement scale included items that could be labeled as *identification* or *empathy*).
8. Appreciation was assessed in terms of great versus boring.

Additional rating scales were included for the participant’s overall appreciation of the FC, trailer, and story, his or her willingness to watch the entire film, and story comprehensibility. The questionnaire also collected information about the participant’s sex, age, familiarity with the film, and genre preferences.

The questionnaire was pretested with paid graduate university students and other volunteers ($N = 55$) at the Free University in Amsterdam. In several sessions, the video clips were shown to respondents, with the number gradually increased in subsequent sessions. After watching the clip and completing the questionnaire, the respondents were interviewed about the movie and questionnaire afterward. When indicated by the respondents, particularly when criticized for ambiguity or lack of comprehensibility, items were repaired or replaced for the next session. In a final session, we had 10 respondents, which allowed for preliminary psychometric analyses. The statement selection and replacement criteria were (a) optimal contribution to Cronbach’s alpha by showing no increased alpha level when the item was deleted, (b) a minimal interitem total correlation of .20, (c) no cause for skewedness, and (d) equal numbers of indicative and contraindicative statements regarding the scale’s contents. Items that failed on any of these criteria were adjusted or replaced, and we retained statements that presented no problems.

RESULTS

The most important findings of our study, reflecting the tests with respect to the model fit, the propositions and hypotheses, are presented in this section. For further details, refer to Hoorn and Konijn (2001).

Respondents and FCs

The participants (136 men and 175 women; M age = 22.4, SD = 5.74, range = 17–61) were randomly assigned to the eight experimental conditions ($36 < n < 41$, Table 1). Eighty-eight of 312 respondents had seen (at least parts of) their film before. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was run for sex (male vs. female) by involvement, distance, and appreciation for the FC with age, time of measurement, whether the participant had seen the film (yes vs. no), prior knowledge about the film or character (yes vs. no), the participant's desire to see the entire film, the participant's appreciation of the entire film (the 20-min excerpt as a whole), and story appreciation as covariates.³ No significant (covariate) effects were found for sex, age, time of measurement, whether the participant had seen the film, and prior knowledge about film or character on the dependent variables involvement, distance, and appreciation, all $F(1, 211) < .10$, $\alpha = .001$. Two significant effects showed up for "appreciation of film," and "want to see the entire film" on the final appreciation of the FC. With partial eta-square (η_p^2) as the measure of effect size (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989), both effects accounted for no more than 16% of the total variability in the appreciation score ($\eta_p^2 < .16$). These effects were understandable and could be viewed as partly indicative for the appreciation of the FC. All in all, we concluded that specific features of the respondents did not severely contaminate the results.

Psychometric Quality of the PEFic Scales

The questionnaire had excellent psychometric qualities. Table 2 shows the high reliability measures for the scales: Cronbach's alpha varied between .82 for the Irrelevant and Dissimilar scales and .97 for the Positive Valence and Negative Valence scales. No skewedness was found, and the reliability could not be improved by the deletion of items. Interitem correlations within scales were all greater than .40. Psychometric analyses were also done for separate FCs, where Cronbach's alpha dropped to about .60 for only four subscales out of 8×16 .

Manipulation Check

To assess the effectiveness of our manipulation, we performed a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ MANOVA on the observers' appraisals of the ethic, aesthetic, and epistemic mea-

TABLE 2
Reliabilities, Means, and Standard Deviations of the Scales Across
Eight Fictional Characters

	α	M	SD	Items
Ethics good	.95	2.78	1.57	6
Ethics bad	.96	1.92	1.67	6
Aesthetics beautiful	.94	1.57	1.33	6
Aesthetics ugly	.94	2.35	1.55	6
Epistemics realistic	.86	1.92	1.11	6
Epistemics unrealistic	.91	2.32	1.20	6
Similarity similar	.86	1.14	0.88	6
Similarity dissimilar	.82	3.60	0.90	6
Valence positive	.97	2.87	1.57	6
Valence negative	.97	1.72	1.57	6
Relevance relevant	.85	1.88	1.01	6
Relevance irrelevant	.82	2.06	1.03	6
Involvement	.90	1.79	0.97	10
Distance	.94	2.58	1.22	10
Appreciation positive	.89	2.56	1.15	6
Appreciation negative	.86	1.66	1.09	6

Note. $N = 312$. The missing values were replaced by the scale mean. The minimum was 0 (*fully disagree*), and the maximum was 5 (*fully agree*).

sures of the FCs. We found three main effects of the various FC types on the appraisal dimensions; for FC_{Ethics} , $F(6, 299) = 249.31$, $p < .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .83$; for $FC_{\text{Aesthetics}}$, $F(6, 299) = 100.33$, $p < .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .67$; and for $FC_{\text{Epistemics}}$, $F(6, 299) = 21.19$, $p < .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .30$. FCs that were intended to be on the positive poles were attributed more positive than negative features. FCs manipulated for negative poles were attributed more negative than positive features. Good FCs were evaluated as significantly better ($M = 4.03$) than bad FCs ($M = 1.54$), and bad FCs were rated as worse ($M = 3.30$) than the good FCs ($M = 0.52$). Beautiful FCs were judged as more beautiful ($M = 2.34$) than ugly ($M = 0.85$), and ugly FCs were judged more ugly ($M = 3.42$) than beautiful ($M = 1.23$). Realistic FCs were considered more realistic ($M = 2.43$) than the unrealistic FCs ($M = 1.38$) and vice versa (for unrealistic FCs, $M_{[\text{unreal}]} = 2.70$, $M_{[\text{real}]} = 1.99$). Thus, the manipulation of the ethics, aesthetics, and epistemics of the FCs worked out quite well, but the three dimensions of appraisal were not independent.

All of the interaction effects were significant. Three two-way interactions occurred; for $FC_{\text{Ethics}} \times FC_{\text{Aesthetics}}$, $F(6, 299) = 35.85$, $p < .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .42$; for $FC_{\text{Ethics}} \times FC_{\text{Epistemics}}$, $F(6, 299) = 18.23$, $p < .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .27$; and for $FC_{\text{Aesthetics}} \times FC_{\text{Epistemics}}$, $F(6, 299) = 11.70$, $p < .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .19$. One three-way interaction occurred; for $FC_{\text{Ethics}} \times FC_{\text{Aesthetics}} \times FC_{\text{Epistemics}}$, $F(6, 299) = 12.71$, $p < .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .20$.⁴ The tests of between-subject effects show how these interactions could be in-

terpreted. For example, the good and bad FCs differed in ugliness, but they were judged as almost equally beautiful and comparably realistic and unrealistic. Similarly, the beautiful and ugly FCs differed on the judgment of ethics but did not differ on the degree of perceived epistemics. The main effects appeared to support our manipulation aims. The significant interactions revealed synergic effects.

Structure and Model Fit

We conducted confirmatory LISREL (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1988) analyses. According to the PEFiC model, the 104 items could be categorized in either 16 unipolar scales (16-factor solution) or 7 bipolar and 2 unipolar scales, Involvement and Distance (9-factor solution). The options of allowing the items to load on only one factor (rigid) or allowing them to load on several factors (free) resulted in four models. Consequently, the number of parameters to be estimated was larger than the number of respondents in the sample, which caused power problems for the model fit. Nevertheless, on the basis of the LISREL findings for the various models (see Table 3), we could draw tentative conclusions.

Because we dealt with measures of misfit, the p value for chi-square should have been greater than .05 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1988). However, when n exceeds 200, chi-square will almost always be significant and is also affected by the size of the correlations (Bollen & Long, 1993; Kline, 1998). Moreover, for complex models, a goodness of fit index is not sufficient. Browne and Cudeck (1993) suggested alternative ways of assessing model fit by means of an Akaike information criterion (AIC) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), both with correction for model complexity. AIC and RMSEA give better estimates of fit for more complex models only if the fit of a more complex model is good enough to justify its additional complexity (Myung & Pitt, 1998). Although AIC and RMSEA should ideally approach zero (Myung & Pitt, 1998), Browne and Cudeck (also Kline, 1998) argued that a value of RMSEA of about .05 or even of about .08 indicates a close fit of the model when the degrees of freedom are considered. They

TABLE 3
Chi-Square, Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) for Four Variants of the Perceiving and Experiencing Fictional Characters Model on Item Level

<i>Variant</i>	<i>df</i>	χ^2	<i>AIC</i>	<i>RMSEA</i>
16 factors rigid	5,132	10739.50	12567.27	0.065
16 factors free	4,902	9639.80	10755.80	0.056
9 factors rigid	5,216	12764.36	17476.07	0.085
9 factors free	5,128	12309.64	16336.39	0.081

Note. For all chi squares, $p = .00$, $df = \{[(\text{Number of Items} - 104) \times (\text{Number of Items} - 1)] / 2\} - \text{Number of Parameters to Be Estimated}$, which differed for each model. Boldface indicates the result of the best fit.

regard this approach as more reasonable than the requirement of exact fit with the RMSEA = .00. From this perspective, the misfit of the PEFiC model on item level was within tolerable limits (RMSEA = .056 for 16 factors free), and the empirical data seemed to support our theoretical model.

The analysis (on an item level) further indicated that a 16-factor solution was clearly better than a 9-factor solution (both AIC and RMSEA were lower for these models). Subsequent confirmatory factor analyses on the 16 scales showed that those scales did not fit into a 9-factor (free) model (RMSEA = .15). Thus, we maintained a free interpretation of the 16 factors instead of a fixed solution. This means that items could load on several factors, which was consistent with the assumed fuzziness of the feature sets. In all, the results supported our claim of the unipolarity of the measurement scales.

On the basis of covariance data and betas and *t* values for all of the scales (which represented factor levels) in the estimates for the most restricted linear model,⁵ all of the factors in the PEFiC model appeared important for the explanation of the spectators' evaluations of the FCs, with some FCs eliciting stronger reactions to particular features. Similarity and valence appeared to be the weakest factors. No submodels emerged. In general, the results supported our propositions: (P1) Observers did assess the FCs in terms of similarity or dissimilarity, relevance, valence, and ethic (good vs. bad), aesthetic (beautiful vs. ugly), and epistemic (realistic vs. unrealistic) features. With regard to the second proposition (P2), PEFiC was supported by the data because a 16-factor solution was clearly better than a 9-factor solution (Table 3). An FC was experienced simultaneously as positive and negative (e.g., good and ugly but also good and bad). Thus, the scales were considered unipolar rather than bipolar, which supported assumption P3. Hence, involvement and distance can be considered parallel processes.

Effects of Ethics, Aesthetics, and Epistemics on Involvement, Distance, and Appreciation

Table 4 displays the means and standard deviations of involvement, distance, and appreciation for the crossed factors Ethics, Aesthetics, and Epistemics. The overall multivariate tests revealed that all main effects of Ethics, Aesthetics, and Epistemics on involvement, distance, and appreciation were significant; for FC_{Ethics} , $F(3, 299) = 128.5$, $p < .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .56$; for $FC_{\text{Aesthetics}}$, $F(3, 299) = 8.63$, $p < .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .08$; and for $FC_{\text{Epistemics}}$, $F(3, 299) = 12.02$, $p < .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$, respectively), although the effect sizes for $FC_{\text{Aesthetics}}$ and $FC_{\text{Epistemics}}$ were relatively small. All of the interaction effects were significant: the 3-way interaction, $F(6, 299) = 12.71$, $p < .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .20$, and two significant 2-way interactions; for $FC_{\text{Ethics}} \times FC_{\text{Aesthetics}}$, $F(3, 299) = 10.76$, $p < .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .10$, and for $FC_{\text{Ethics}} \times FC_{\text{Epistemics}}$, $F(3, 299) = 12.02$, $p < .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .11$. The only exception was $FC_{\text{Aesthetics}} \times FC_{\text{Epistemics}}$, $F(3, 299) = 1.28$, $p = .28$.

TABLE 4
Means and Standard Deviations for Observers' Involvement (I), Distance (D),
and Appreciation (A) per Crossed Fictional Character Factor

	<i>Good</i>				<i>Bad</i>			
	<i>Beautiful</i>		<i>Ugly</i>		<i>Beautiful</i>		<i>Ugly</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Realistic	Gandhi		Rocky Dennis		Bridget Gregory		Johnny Handsome	
I	2.62	0.93	2.35	0.66	1.09	0.77	1.80	0.71
D	1.08	0.55	1.82	0.75	3.72	0.83	2.69	0.72
A	3.92	0.66	3.26	0.87	2.35	1.09	2.47	0.68
Unrealistic	Superman		Edward Scissorhands		Cruella de Vil		Vlad Dracul	
I	1.81	0.96	2.25	0.75	0.98	0.74	1.44	0.90
D	1.96	0.78	2.00	0.76	3.76	0.76	3.56	0.97
A	2.91	1.03	2.89	0.94	2.84	1.03	2.91	1.04

Note. The minimum was 0 (*fully disagree*), the maximum was 5 (*fully agree*).

The tests of between-subject effects (for all F , $df = 1, 301$) showed a number of interesting main effects and a few significant interaction effects. In general, good FCs elicited significantly more involvement and appreciation and less distance than bad FCs, $F_{(\text{involvement})} = 103.40$, $F_{(\text{distance})} = 377.02$, $F_{(\text{appreciation})} = 32.33$, all $ps < .000$ (for mean values, see Table 4). Beautiful FCs evoked significantly more involvement than ugly FCs, $F = 12.74$, $p < .000$, but did not differ in distance, $F = 1.59$, $p = .20$, and appreciation, $F = 1.33$, $p = .24$. Realistic FCs differed in their effects on involvement, $F = 14.67$, $p < .000$, and distance, $F = 30.80$, $p < .000$: The realistic FCs elicited stronger involvement and lower distance than the unrealistic FCs, but appreciation was not affected by realism, $F = 1.12$, $p = .29$.

The $FC_{\text{Ethics}} \times FC_{\text{Aesthetics}}$ interaction appeared significant for all three of the scales, $F_{(\text{involvement})} = 6.86$, $F_{(\text{distance})} = 32.16$, both $ps < .000$, and $F_{(\text{appreciation})} = 4.30$, $p < .03$. The $FC_{\text{Ethics}} \times FC_{\text{Epistemics}}$ interaction was significant only for appreciation, $F = 29.63$, $p < .000$. Finally, the 3-way interaction was significant only for involvement and distance, $F_{(\text{involvement})} = 7.49$, $F_{(\text{distance})} = 18.92$, both $ps < .000$, and $F_{(\text{appreciation})} = 2.66$, $p = .10$.

The interaction effects, graphically represented in Figure 2, showed that the Ethics FC factor in particular caused opposite effects on the respondents' involvement, distance, and appreciation. Such effects tended to cancel out or enhance one another. Goodness appeared to compensate for ugliness (Rocky Dennis), and ugliness appeared to compensate for badness (Johnny Handsome, Vlad Dracul). Specifically, the ugliness of bad FCs moderated the effects on distance and increased involvement but did not affect appreciation. By contrast, the beauty of bad FCs had a reverse effect: It increased distance and reduced involvement (see the data for Bridget Gregory and Cruella de Vil).

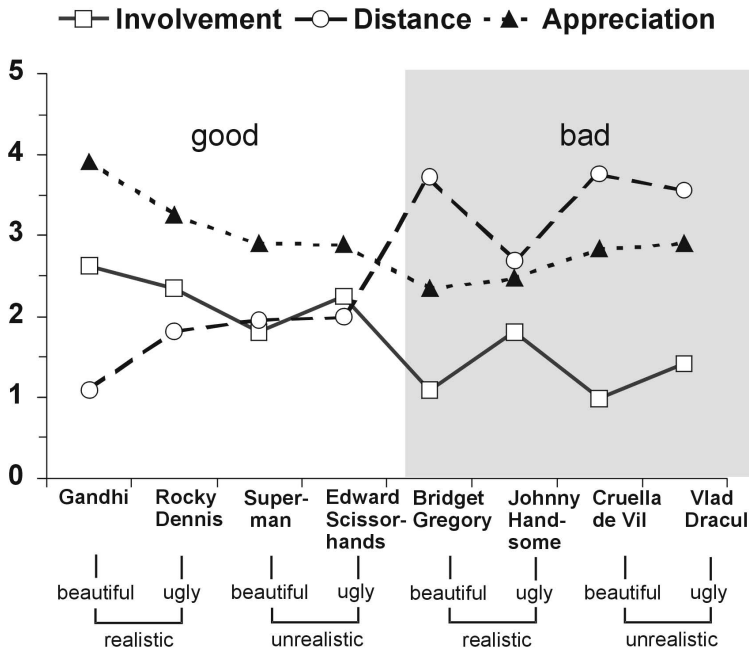


FIGURE 2 Means of involvement, distance, and appreciation per crossed FC factor (Ethics, Aesthetics, and Epistemics). The minimum was 0 (*fully disagree*), and the maximum was 5 (*fully agree*).

The degrees of represented realism appeared to attenuate the effects of FC Ethics on the respondents' appreciation but not on their involvement or distance. Thus, the realistic side of FCs as such did not affect appreciation, but in interaction with their good side, appreciation went into the expected direction (realistic and good FCs were liked better than unrealistic and good FCs). Conversely, bad FCs who were also unrealistic were appreciated more than bad FCs who were realistic.

FC Epistemics and FC Aesthetics did not significantly interact. However, in combination with FC Ethics, they did (a 3-way interaction), particularly for the bad FCs: Being bad, beautiful, and realistic had a strong distancing effect on the viewer, who resisted being seduced by mere looks.

To conclude, the positive poles of the appraisal dimensions generally increased involvement (H1) and appreciation (H2) for the FCs compared to the negative poles, except for Aesthetics (the beautiful pole). Particularly, ethically good and bad FCs elicited contrasting involvement and appreciation: The negative poles generally enhanced distance (H1). Aesthetics (beautiful) also increased distance. However, all kinds of significant interactions counteracted any straightforward

predictions based on H1 and H2, as was suggested by H3. For example, good, ugly, and realistic and bad, ugly, and realistic FCs seemed to promote involvement, whereas bad, beautiful, and realistic FCs increased distance.

Effects of Mediating the Covariates Similarity, Relevance, and Valence

Similarity, relevance, and valence were included as covariates in $2 \times 2 \times 2$ (Ethics \times Aesthetics \times Epistemics) univariate ANOVAs to explore possible confounding effects on involvement, distance, and appreciation; for all covariate analyses, $F(1, 302)$. Given the exploratory nature, the complexity of results, and the risk of low sample size per cell, we adopted the stepwise procedure, including in the analysis one covariate with two unipolar scales at a time. Insignificant covariates were excluded from the model to protect the effects of significant factors. The means and standard deviations for the covariates are shown in Table 5.

The results of univariate tests with the two unipolar scales of Similarity as covariates showed that both dissimilarity and similarity had significant effects on involvement, $F_{(\text{dissimilarity})} = 109.90, p < .000$; $F_{(\text{similarity})} = 4.72, p = .031$. Similarity did not significantly affect distance, $F = 3.30, p = .07$, or appreciation, $F = 3.39, p = .07$. Dissimilarity had a significant effect on distance, $F = 56.80, p < .000$. By in-

TABLE 5
Means and Standard Deviations for Observers' Similarity (S), Dissimilarity (Ds), Relevance (R), Irrelevance (Ir), Positive Valence (V+), and Negative Valence (V-) per Crossed Fictional Character Factor

	<i>Good</i>				<i>Bad</i>			
	<i>Beautiful</i>		<i>Ugly</i>		<i>Beautiful</i>		<i>Ugly</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Realistic	Gandhi		Rocky Dennis		Bridget Gregory		Johnny Handsome	
S	1.64	0.95	1.52	0.67	0.75	0.67	1.02	0.71
Ds	2.88	0.80	2.91	0.69	4.33	0.64	3.71	0.81
R	2.95	0.94	2.46	0.69	1.18	0.75	1.78	0.78
Ir	1.06	0.77	1.62	0.79	2.72	0.90	2.22	0.93
V+	4.36	0.57	3.99	0.69	1.47	1.47	3.38	0.87
V-	0.32	0.38	0.51	0.46	3.12	1.30	0.82	0.72
Unrealistic	Superman		Edward Scissorhands		Cruella de Vil		Vlad Dracul	
S	1.24	0.99	1.29	0.86	0.66	0.79	0.96	0.89
Ds	3.36	0.83	3.40	0.74	4.34	0.68	3.92	0.67
R	1.68	1.04	2.11	0.89	1.35	0.79	1.50	0.88
Ir	2.28	0.97	2.02	0.94	2.30	0.91	2.28	1.11
V+	3.38	1.15	3.90	0.82	0.71	0.72	1.73	1.15
V-	1.23	1.25	0.68	0.69	3.79	0.76	1.86	1.50

Note. The minimum was 0 (*fully disagree*), and the maximum was 5 (*fully agree*).

cluding Dissimilarity as a covariate, the earlier significant main effects of FC type on appreciation disappeared, $F_{(FC-Ethics)} = 1.54, p = .22$; $F_{(FC-Aesthetics)} = 5.90, p = .02$; $F_{(FC-Epistemics)} = .10, p = .75$. Earlier, we found main effects showing that good, beautiful, and realistic FCs were appreciated more than bad, ugly, and unrealistic FCs. Dissimilarity between the observer and FC, however, erased those effects and failed to support H2.

In general, bad FCs were perceived by the respondents as more dissimilar to oneself than good FCs. Unrealistic FCs were perceived as more dissimilar to oneself than realistic FCs, although realistic FCs were still perceived as more dissimilar than similar. If the viewers consider themselves as more or less beautiful or ugly than the FC, the FC's beauty did not influence their appreciation. In conclusion, although dissimilarity does not lower involvement, it did increase distance and decrease appreciation. In addition, although similarity increased involvement for every FC type, it did not affect final appreciation.

The results of univariate tests with the two unipolar scales of Relevance as covariates showed that both had a significant impact on all of the dependent variables; for involvement, $F_{(relevant)} = 202.57, F_{(irrelevant)} = 15.72$; for distance, $F_{(relevant)} = 18.44, F_{(irrelevant)} = 63.24$; and for appreciation, $F_{(relevant)} = 19.35, F_{(irrelevant)} = 68.79$; all $ps < .000$. The tests for between-subject effects showed that almost all previously found effects on appreciation disappeared with relevance as a covariate. Even the effect of the good versus bad contrast lost significance ($p = .35$). Thus, relevance had a stronger influence on appreciation than FC type.

The same held for the reported effects of FC Epistemics on involvement ($p = .47$) and for the effects of FC Aesthetics on distance ($p = .43$). Overall, unrealistic FCs were evaluated as more irrelevant than realistic FCs, and good FCs were considered more relevant than bad ones (particularly the realistic ones). Thus, if good and realistic FCs were deemed irrelevant, observer remained uninvolved. When relevance was included, the positive effects of the positive poles of Ethics, Aesthetics, and Epistemics on involvement and appreciation disappeared, which disconfirmed H1 and H2.

The results of univariate tests with the two unipolar scales of Valence as covariates showed that only positive valence had a significant impact on involvement, $F = 82.09, p < .000$; distance, $F = 23.32, p < .000$; and appreciation, $F = 51.97, p < .000$. Positive valence canceled out the effects of FC type on involvement and distance, and rendered insignificant the earlier reported effects of Ethics, Aesthetics, and Epistemics on involvement and distance. Positive valence did not affect appreciation in a direct way. Its impact on appreciation as a covariate of FC type was as follows: $F_{(FC-Ethics)} = 8.53, p = .004$; $F_{(FC-Aesthetics)} = 24.66, p < .000$; and $F_{(FC-Epistemics)} = 9.16, p = .003$.

Compared to bad FCs, good FCs received higher positive valences whether the FCs were beautiful or ugly or realistic or unrealistic, with one exception: The bad, ugly, and realistic Johnny Handsome also received positive valence (see Table 5c).

Involvement increased without affecting appreciation. The bad and beautiful FCs (both realistic and unrealistic) received high negative valences (i.e., were wished bad luck and failure), which as expected, decreased involvement without affecting appreciation.

To conclude, the results indicate that the mediating variables of similarity or dissimilarity, relevance or irrelevance, and positive valence significantly contributed to the explanation of the effects of FC type on the dependent variables. In general, the effects of the covariates were such that positive scales (similar, relevant, and positive valence) increased involvement, even when the FC type was negative. For example, bad but similar FCs engendered higher involvement than bad but dissimilar FCs. The negative poles (dissimilar, irrelevant) increased distance, even for positive FC types. For instance, good but irrelevant FCs fostered higher distance than good but relevant FCs. The covarying effects on appreciation were not always significant. The findings about the mediating variables provided only partial support for H3.

Appreciation Explained by Involvement and Distance

Finally, we conducted a regression analysis (method Enter) to test the hypothesis that the trade-off between involvement and distance determined the appreciation of a FC better than either involvement or distance alone. The results show that involvement and distance together explained 36% of the variance in appreciation, $R^2 = .36$, $F(2, 306) = 84.98$, $p < .000$. The standardized regression coefficients revealed that involvement had the strongest impact on appreciation ($\beta = .45$, $p < .01$), followed by distance ($\beta = -.19$, $p < .01$). Because good versus bad FCs appeared to differ substantially in their effects on the observers, we ran separate regressions for the two conditions.

For good FCs, involvement and distance together explained a substantial part of the variance in appreciation, $R^2 = .46$, $F(2, 150) = 62.74$, $p < .000$. The standardized regression coefficients (β) were $-.44$ for distance and $.34$ for involvement (both $ps < .01$). For bad FCs, the best and only predictor was involvement, $R^2 = .24$, $F(2, 153) = 23.95$, $p < .000$ ($\beta = .52$, $p < .01$), whereas for distance, beta was $.06$ and was not significant.

To conclude, different aspects of engagement determined the final appreciation of the FC: distance for the good FCs and involvement for the bad FCs.

DISCUSSION

The claims of the theoretical model about the ways in which FCs are perceived were generally supported in an experimental design with observers watching eight considerably different FCs in contemporary feature films. A successful model fit

was established at item level (the severest test possible), which also supported the assumption of the unipolarity of the factors. The PEFiC hypothesis was corroborated by multivariate tests, which showed that variation in the appraisal dimensions Ethics, Aesthetics, and Epistemics led to variation in the intensities of involvement, distance, and appreciation. Regression analyses showed that a crucial claim of the PEFiC model held: The trade-off between involvement and distance explained the appreciation of an FC better than either involvement or distance alone.

Because of the complexity of the PEFiC model, we used an alternative estimate of fit (RMSEA) that reflected a close fit in relation to the degrees of freedom (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). The results indicate that none of the factors considered in the PEFiC model were redundant. As expected, viewers assessed FCs in terms of ethics (good vs. bad), aesthetics (beautiful vs. ugly), epistemics (realistic vs. unrealistic), similarity (similar vs. dissimilar), relevance (relevant vs. irrelevant), valence (positive vs. negative), involvement, distance, and appreciation. As predicted, the unipolar solution was better than the bipolar solution. Thus, the processing of FCs occurred in a parallel way, and characters could be assessed simultaneously as positive and negative along various criteria. This hinted at partial membership of a character's features in multiple fuzzy sets (Zadeh, 1977; Zimmermann, 1994). Our results disconfirm the traditional bipolar approach—withdrawal conceptualization of public responses to media characters. Our findings were in line with Cacioppo et al. (1999) on daily life affective responses, who viewed that an approach—withdrawal response is the consequence of multiple operations, such as the activation of positivity (appetition) and the activation of negativity (aversion) at an early stage of affective processing. In developing our PEFiC model, we specified those early processing stages in the response to “mediated persons,” as required by Prentice and Gerrig (1999).

We identified two general tendencies: Positive appraisals enhanced involvement and appreciation, whereas negative appraisals enhanced distance. Mixed evaluations of FCs (e.g., bad, beautiful, and realistic) counteracted the general tendencies, sometimes as expected and sometimes not, but their effects on appreciation were not unidirectional. Overall, the mixed FCs were not appreciated more than the two pure FCs (i.e., Gandhi and Vlad Dracul). Perhaps because Ethics was the main factor in the determination of engagement and appreciation, mixed good and bad features made an interesting exception: The mixed good and bad FCs were more likable than purely good or bad guys. Furthermore, different FC types produced more involvement and distance variance than appreciation did. We may conceive of appreciation as a baseline where involvement and distance mutually compensate their increasing and decreasing effects. For those doing media polls and single-item appreciation measurements, it may be advisable to focus not so much on one general appreciation rating but on its interaction with involvement and distance.

The results suggest that the appraisal of an FC may include involvement–distance conflicts. What we found for fiction corresponds to what Priester and Petty (2001) called *subjective ambivalence*, that is, a conflict in real life between simultaneously occurring positive and negative attitudes toward an object or person (also called *evaluative tension* or *attitudinal ambivalence*). It is interesting that feelings of ambivalence or imbalance, which are assumed to cause discomfort in real life (Priester & Petty, 2001), can be used in fiction to enhance pleasure.

Our results reconfirm the affective disposition theory (Raney & Bryant, 2002; Zillmann, 1994; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977) in that the findings for ethically good FCs differed from viewers' responses to bad characters. Across all eight FCs, distance provided a significant contribution in the prediction of appreciation, but involvement had the strongest overall impact. However, when we separated the analyses of the good and bad FCs, we found that in the explanation of the appreciation of the good FCs, distance had a stronger impact than involvement. For the bad FCs, on the other hand, distance hardly contributed to appreciation, but involvement was the best predictor. Although counterintuitive, this result was in line with Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, and Vohs (2001), who reviewed evidence for a consistent response pattern of bad being stronger than good. This positive–negative asymmetry effect has been repeatedly confirmed in the field of impression formation (e.g., Skowronski & Carlston, 1989). Similarly, our results were consistent with the positivity bias and the negativity bias for which Cacioppo et al. (1999) reported robust effects in the literature on impression formation. Initial involvement with the FC will have had its onset already when, for instance, the film just started, which might be explained as a result of an innate curiosity to explore novel stimuli (defined as a universal concern by Frijda, 1988). This means that the level of involvement toward an (unknown) FC will initially be higher than the level of experienced distance. However, as the exposure to the FC continues, possible distancing effects will have a stronger impact than involvement effects. This results of this study suggest that such an apparent perceptual bias (Wright, 1991, as cited in Baumeister et al., 2001) also occurs in fiction. Because of the clear differences found for good versus bad FCs, an appropriate question for a meta-analysis might be how much daily life impression management and attitude formation studies are based on ethically good versus bad persons, situations, or events as stimuli. Our results indicate that perhaps good and bad characters should be analyzed separately and that it is easier to predict appreciation of good FCs than of bad FCs.

However, when a good FC appeared irrelevant, its positive effect on the observers' liking was erased. Thus, relevance had a stronger effect on appreciation than FC type. Relevance also overruled realism in its effects on involvement and appreciation, which is contrary to general ideas in the fields of film and television (e.g., regarding the popularity of reality TV). In persuasion studies (e.g., Petty et al., 1983) and in cognitive emotion theory (e.g., Frijda, 1986; Tesser & Collins, 1988), the strong impact of the relevance or irrelevance of someone or something to the

observers' attitudes, goals, and concerns is generally acknowledged and may turn out to be among the most important of all of the PEFiC factors: Relevance is stronger than goodness, and relevance is stronger than realism (Hoorn et al., 2003).

The similarity-based predictions of the identification hypothesis (e.g., Cupchik, 1997; Jose & Brewer, 1984; Oatley, 1995) were contested by this study because observers rated all of the FCs as dissimilar rather than similar, whereas their appreciation was above average. Similarity only contributed slightly to the observer's involvement but did not significantly affect appreciation. The liking of dissimilar others was in line with Von Feilitzen and Linné (1975), who reported evidence that viewers felt attracted to superhuman attractive (fantasy) characters such as Superman. These authors referred to the desire to be like an FC as *wishful identification*. The desire to be like an admired other also is important in Bandura's (1977) influential modeling theory (also Hoffner & Cantor, 1991; Hofschire & Greenberg, 2002).

The empathy principle (e.g., Tan, 1996; Zillmann, 1991) could not explain our results either. For bad FCs, the observers reported more distance than involvement, whereas appreciation did not strongly suffer. Likewise, studies in affective disposition theory (e.g., Bryant & Miron, 2002; Raney & Bryant, 2002; Zillmann, 1991; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977) reported that not all affective responses to FCs could be explained by empathetic theories. Different from the empathy hypothesis, then, FCs can be appreciated despite antipathy and cold feelings. The trade-off between involvement and distance explained the appreciation of an FC better than either involvement or distance alone. In the PEFiC theory, viewers' responses to both good and bad FCs can be explained within the same model and can be compared relative to the differential weights of the factors in the process of liking or disliking. It seems that traditional approaches are too straightforward to account for the complicated relationships that observers build up with FCs: Some like it bad.

Surprisingly, bad FCs evoked less distance and more involvement when they were ugly (Johnny Handsome, Vlad Dracul). When they were beautiful (Bridget Gregory, Cruella de Vil), distance increased, and involvement decreased. It might be that observers felt that beautiful people are in a socially privileged position. Beautiful people already receive more social reward and are not supposed to go beyond that by ruthlessly exploiting their looks to their own benefits. Ugly people, however, are in a socially weaker position, which makes their misbehavior more understandable: How else would they get what they need?

In itself, realistic portrayals of FCs did not affect appreciation. However, realistic FCs that also were good (Gandhi, Rocky Dennis) were appreciated more than unrealistic good FCs (Superman, Edward Scissorhands). Conversely, unrealistic baddies (Cruella de Vil, Vlad Dracul) were appreciated more than realistic bad characters. This might support the assumption that FCs are attributed a modeling function in a socially desirable direction. In situations that resemble reality, goodness is the norm of behavior. On the other hand, the exploration of the boundaries

of badness is associated with unrealistic features that mark bad behavior to show they are abnormal and, therefore, inappropriate to imitate.

On the basis of these findings, Bridget Gregory should have been the most dangerous FC: Being bad, beautiful, and realistic appears to be a deadly combination. Beauty has a strong positive social impact and can be brutally exploited at the cost of others, and the movie suggests that all of this may happen in real life. Bridget Gregory, then, received high negative valence and the lowest appreciation. Observers wished her bad luck and failure in her set-up. Nevertheless, good and realistic FCs were seen as more relevant than bad and realistic FCs. People may think that evil beauties do harm in reality but that such misfortune will never happen to them. To improve the external validity of the previous generalizations, replication is needed.

Although the PEFiC model was empirically supported, it is unclear how the factors relate to each other or what submodels can be defined. We are inclined to define submodels according to the implicit processes involved in the evaluation of FCs along the PEFiC factors, that is, the encoding, comparison, and response phases (see Figure 1). We stipulate that judgment of FCs in the appraisal dimensions Ethics, Aesthetics, and Epistemics (the encoding phase) can actually be made without reference to the self. For example, judging that Gandhi is a good person does not necessarily mean that Gandhi is relevant to one's personal life or that the observer likes him. As such, the judgment may pertain primarily to perceptual processes. On the other hand, evaluations of the FC in terms of similarity, relevance, and outcome valence do imply a relationship with the self: Similarity ensures comparisons between the FC and the self, relevance concerns assessing personal meaning of the FC to the self, and valence involves taking a position for or against the FC. Therefore, we suppose that the latter judgments mainly pertain to the experiential side of the underlying processes of involvement, distance, and appreciation in the response phase. In including the experiential variables (similarity, relevance, and valence) as covariates in the ANOVAs, we showed that these variables could moderate or erase the significant main effects of the FC types. Therefore, additional studies are needed to gain more insight into the interrelationships and possible submodels of the PEFiC model. In future experimental research and statistical analyses, therefore, it seems plausible to discern the subsets of variables belonging to the respective phases in the PEFiC model as submodels.

This study focused on the tenets of the PEFiC model with little concern about the details of noise interpretation. The ANOVA revealed that the three appraisal dimensions were significantly different so that the effects could not be attributed to flawed experimental assignment. However, certain improvements may be suggested with regard to the selection of FCs and the manipulation of the stimulus materials. Ideally, the seven factors Ethics, Aesthetics, Epistemics, Relevance, Similarity, Valence, and Norm should be crossed, and each cell should be filled with a (sufficiently large) number of identical FCs. In the design of this study, this was

obviously not the case. In real movies, it may be hard to find a collection of FCs that are equally representative for the respective factors. This design, therefore, suffers from possible incomparability on factor levels other than those manipulated (e.g., similarity). Perhaps it is advisable to artificially create a range of FCs that are equal within cells and systematically vary between cells (e.g., via manipulation of computer-rendered animation agents in identical situations). Another difficulty is the manipulation of an FC's relevance to viewers. Another issue to address in future research is the relevance of an FC's sex to a male or female viewer. An FC's sex should be held constant or should be included in the experimental design. It is not clear, for instance, whether the bad and beautiful were despised so much because they were women.

Although all of the FCs were rated higher than average, one may not draw any conclusions regarding the appreciation of the entire film. For example, Gandhi is probably highly appreciated as a historic person, but the entire film might be considered rather lengthy. Particularly with Gandhi as a person, the historical known facts about him may have influenced the observers' evaluations in a social desirable direction. Appreciation as used in this study relates to liking or disliking the FC, whereas enjoyment and entertainment mostly relate to the film as such, the genre, or the narrative (e.g., Raney & Bryant, 2002). Despite the breadth of our model, it is limited to FCs only. Furthermore, due to experimental practicalities, the factor Norm (individual vs. group norm) was not taken into account, which would have doubled the process. It is beyond the scope of this article to further discuss how the plot, genre, story line, or individual predispositions of the observers should be integrated with the processing of FCs. Nevertheless, such an endeavor should be undertaken to acquire a fuller insight into the more general engagement with cultural products.

Another issue to be addressed in future research is the emotional impact of bad FCs. In this study, we confined ourselves to the engagement process, which is accompanied by emotions. In future studies, one could include explicit questions for specific, discrete emotions to get more insight into the contents of the experienced emotions in relation to involvement, distance, and appreciation. We suspect that the attractiveness of bad characters can be grasped better via the emotions evoked in the observers than via the relatively undifferentiating measure of appreciation (cf. Zillmann, 1998). For instance, the good, ugly, and realistic Rocky Dennis seemed to be compensated for his ugliness through the attribution of more moral goodness. The same occurred for the bad, ugly, and realistic Johnny Handsome, who elicited relatively high involvement, appreciation, and positive valence. An explanation might be that empathic feelings, such as compassion, sympathy, or pity (Tan, 1996; Zillmann, 1991, 1998), for the small-time crook with a difficult youth or the viewers' task emotions (e.g., fascination, admiration, challenge; see Konijn, 1999) for the FC's struggle ultimately mitigated or cancelled out negative tendencies.

All in all, this study investigated how people perceive FCs, in particular regarding the mixed appraisals of bad characters. The PEFiC model proved appropriate and useful for reviewing and systematizing a wide array of research findings and complex responses to nonexistent persons. Although we believe that perceiving and experiencing other people in daily life versus people represented via a medium include comparable processes, we admit that the unique features of fictionality deserve to be examined as possible mediating factors (cf. Oatley, 1999). For example, bad characters may be less appreciated in real life than in fiction. After all, real evil may have real-life consequences. In the real world, it is harder to disqualify a person you meet as irrelevant than in the conventional media, because in the latter, real interpersonal interaction is missing, and a button is present to switch them off. In fiction, higher degrees of artificiality allow moral boundaries to be flexible. When things become threatening, the unrealistic elements can be discarded as irrelevant. It would be interesting to see whether interactive robots or intelligent adaptive agents styled according to PEFiC principles could activate processes that are similar to person perception and impression formation in real life.

The empirical support we found for the PEFiC model illustrates the productivity of interdisciplinary frameworks, in which different views from sometimes unrelated fields are integrated. However, the disadvantage associated with the PEFiC model is that it is inherently more complex than the consideration of an FC's features and situations independently. A factorial experimental design that covers the full PEFiC model would be hard to conduct. However, we believe that the benefits to be gained from this approach may outweigh the costs. We believe that to understand the ways in which people perceive and experience characters, we need to target the whole of underlying processes of getting involved and keeping a distance so to account for the apparent attractiveness of bad characters, violence, and aggression in various media.

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NOTES

¹In the same vein, Rosengren and Windahl (1972) analyzed the concept of parasocial interaction not as a separate variable but as part of involvement, in which “being captured” is the highest state. However, the concepts of involvement, identification, and empathy have such divergent uses that a thorough discussion is beyond the scope of this article (e.g., see Johnson & Eagly, 1989; Oatley, 1995, 1999; Zillmann, 1991, 1994). At several places in this text, we address the definition problem, for instance, in the section Comparing: Similarity, Relevance, and Valence.

²The issue of perceived realism is problematic and complicated. For more detailed discussions, refer to Shapiro and McDonald (1992), Busselle (2001), Shrum (2002), Hoorn et al. (2003), and Shapiro and Chock (2003). For the purposes of this study, we confine ourselves to arguing that at least two levels should be taken into account: (a) Readers and viewers will attribute realism to a media product at a contextual level such as genre or program type (e.g., a news item, science fiction), and (b) they will attribute a perceived degree of realism of the features presented within that context, which we refer to as *epistemic appraisals* (e.g., “this character is like reality itself”).

³For a stronger test, the PEFiC factors were not analyzed as independent factors but rather as parameters of the theoretical model so that a more conservative alpha level could be maintained for their respective contrasts. Thus, all F and t values were tested at $\alpha = .05$, except for t values relating to contrasts within PEFiC factors ($\alpha = .05/28 \approx .0018$; Bonferroni in Neter, Wasserman, & Kutner, 1990: pp. 160–62, 579–89). Although it was recommended by Clark (1973), F^2 was not calculated because respondents received only one stimulus. In a conventional analysis of variance (ANOVA), good is tested against bad, beautiful against ugly, and so on. Such an analysis neglects an implicit but powerful overall factor of answering bias rooted in indicative versus contraindicative poles. As an overall check, we added this factor in the analysis (Poles), which was crossed with the undifferentiated PEFiC factors (e.g., Ethics, Aesthetics) to obtain single-factor levels of good, bad, beautiful, and so on. We examined interactions between Poles and the PEFiC factors. To overcome overly complex and uninterpretable results, we conducted separate (M)ANOVAs for specific hypotheses. The results were checked with the overall $2 \times 8 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ MANOVA. For the complete tabulation of significant effects, see Hoorn and Konijn (2001).

⁴Comparable results were found in the overall MANOVA (Hoorn & Konijn, 2001).

⁵Maximum likelihood estimates were calculated based on 16 scales to fit the PEFiC model with factors reduced to look for a better fit. The model was fit several times. After each fit, the element that contributed least to the model, on the basis of its t value and role within the model, was removed until there were no more elements that had a t value smaller than 1. With each element that is removed, one gains a degree of freedom, and as the element is nonsignificant, one increases the fit of the model. After all parameters that differed less than one standard-error from zero in the regression weights were constrained, the most restricted linear PEFiC model still contained 16 factors. Similarity did not load on the six poles of the Ethics, Aesthetics, and Epistemics factors, which in their turns, did not all load on the valence factors. The final model came close to a fit in the conservative area and fit in the more liberal area, $\chi^2(43, N = 312) = 101.82, p = .00; RMSEA = .06$.

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APPENDIX A

<i>Fictional Character</i>	<i>Performer</i>	<i>Film</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Director</i>	<i>Factor Levels</i>	<i>Minutes: Seconds</i>	<i>n</i>
Mahatma Gandhi	Ben Kingsley	<i>Gandhi</i>	1982	Richard Attenborough	Good, beautiful, realistic	20:36	39
Bridget Gregory	Linda Fiorentino	<i>The Last Seduction</i>	1994	John Dahl	Bad, beautiful, realistic	22:02	40
Rocky Dennis	Eric Stoltz	<i>Mask</i>	1985	Peter Bogdanovich	Good, ugly, realistic	21:15	42
John Sedley	Mickey Rourke	<i>Johnny Handsome</i>	1989	Walter Hill	Bad, ugly, realistic	18:38	39
Superman	Christopher Reeve	<i>Superman</i>	1978	Richard Donner	Good, beautiful, unrealistic	22:53	36
Cruella de Vil	Glenn Close	<i>101 Dalmatians</i>	1996	Stephen Herek	Bad, beautiful, unrealistic	21:10	37
Edward Scissorhands	Johnny Depp	<i>Edward Scissorhands</i>	1990	Tim Burton	Good, ugly, unrealistic	21:47	38
Count Vlad Dracul	Gary Oldman	<i>Bram Stoker's Dracula</i>	1992	Francis Ford Coppola	Bad, ugly, unrealistic	18:12	41

Note. Mohandas K. Gandhi is at first a lawyer in South Africa and then becomes India's leader of nonviolent resistance against British oppression. He is now a worldwide symbol of peace and understanding. Bridget Gregory is an extremely attractive woman who deceives her husband, runs off with the money from a drug deal they set up, lands at a small town where she seduces a boyish lover to kill her avenge-seeking husband, and fakes a rape to turn the boy in to the police. Rocky Dennis is an adolescent boy who suffers from craniodiaphyseal dyaplasia, a disease that causes the disfigurement of his face. He succeeds at doing the right thing in a world of Hell's Angels, drug abuse, and misdemeanors. He finds love in the arms of a blind girl who sees his inner beauty. John Sedley is a small-time criminal with a skull forced out of shape (nicknamed Johnny Handsome) who is imprisoned after his fellow lowlifes desert him. A plastic surgeon proposes to help him prove the theory that normal looks will normalize behavior. The doctor is proven wrong. Superman is a supernatural mister righteous who stays modest and polite while flying around arresting criminals, fixing cracks in the earth, and preventing the flooding of a town. His love for Lois Lane brings him to break his vow not to interfere with Earth's history, but this is all for the best. He says he is for "truth, justice, and the American Way." Cruella de Vil runs a fashion house with extravagance and wickedness. Her latest craze is to have a coat of dalmatian puppy fur. All of the dalmatian doggies of London are kidnapped, but the spectacular fashion witch bites the dust after all due to the willful scheming of animated animals. Edward Scissorhands is feeble and unadapted to normal life, but the Frankenstein-like boy with scissors for hands is adopted by a kindhearted "Avon lady," who wants him to look beautiful again. American suburbia thinks differently and scams him into burglary but he survives social abandonment and keeps straight. Count Vlad Dracul is an old Romanian warlord who rises from the dead to defy Christ and avenge the death of his wife. He finds her mirror image in Victorian London, a lovely young woman who cannot resist his seductive shrewdness. The gruesome vampire wants her living blood to take her with him into eternal doom.