

Emotions during fictional drama film

Audience's experiences and meanings

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ABSTRACT

Films are able to elicit emotions amongst the audiences, but not everyone experiences their emotions the same nor do they reflect on their emotions in the same way. So far in audience studies, empirical research on emotions amongst the audience was unexplored. This study's aim was to research how audiences experience and give meaning to their emotions during fictional drama film. In order to uncover these meanings and experiences, focus groups with Dutch university students were conducted. These audience members reflected differently towards their emotions. Most audience members were rather positive about their emotions, they communicated that they want to feel emotions during drama film. They experience emotions as enjoyable and sometimes purposefully look for it in films. They also said that feeling emotions during movies makes them feel human. Other respondents were less positive, they said that feeling emotions is tiresome and that they would prefer to not feel emotions during movies at all or they would avoid drama film in the first place. This is because according to those respondents, feeling emotions requires energy and sometimes there is not space for it or they are not in the mood to feel emotions. It was also found that the audience members tend to conform to the emotional norm when they are in a public space, they would hide or transform their emotions when for example in a cinema. When talking about their emotions, the notion of identification also came up. Most people said they would feel more emotional when there were characters they can identify with, this entails that they can relate to the characters and can imagine what they are going through. Film immersion also aids feeling emotions, but is not strictly necessary in order to feel emotions during drama film.

KEYWORDS: *Emotion, Audience reception, Character identification, Film immersion, Drama film*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introducing the topic

The ability to feel emotion is what makes us human. We experience emotion every day. We emotionally engage with the people around us, but also with the people we see on screen. Filmmakers widely use cues and conventions to elicit emotion amongst the audience. It is one of the factors that has the power to make a movie a success (Hart, Kerrigan & Vom Lehn, 2016), especially because emotion characterizes the film experience and is experienced differently by everyone (Cohen, 2001; Bartsch, Vorderer, Mangold & Viehoff, 2008). In some instances, at the same film event, some will laugh, some will cry and some will feel bored and indifferent (Gorton, 2009). The more the audiences feel involved with the film, the more likely they are to feel entertained, which is in essence one of the purposes of films (Cohen, 2006). Consequently, the possibility of feeling emotion through movies is also one of the key incentives and motivations of the audiences to watch film (Tan, 1996; Bartsch & Viehoff, 2010).

Related to emotion is empathy, which entails an imaginative process that requires the act of imagining and understanding another person's reality (Cohen, 2001a). This has the power for the audience members to relate to the fictional characters and as a result may even identify with the characters on screen (Smith, 1994). This all can lead to or is established by an immersive film experience, which entails an experience where one's sole attention is dedicated to the movie and one becomes unaware of their surroundings (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). These connections between emotion, identification and immersion are merely theoretical, hence this research will provide empirical research to further develop the connections between the three concepts.

1.2 Research question

In academia, there has been a lot of research on the content of film, much less so on the audiences. The few studies that have been conducted in this field on the audiences are mostly about their cognitive processes, which include audience's interpretation and recognition of the content of the film and audiences' memory (Livingstone & Das, 2013; Smith, 2003). This lack of academic study applies to the study of emotion in relation to films as well, hence the fact that there is little research on the emotional experiences the audiences endure when watching movies. Most research that studied experiences with emotional movies cover physical affective responses, they are often set in laboratories where they measure the physical and affective responses to emotional movies (Codispoti, Surcinelli & Baldaro, 2008).

Emotions itself has been studied by many scholars, such as for example by Tan (1996), nonetheless his study does not cover the scope that this study will explore, because Tan's study is

mostly theoretical and has little emphasis on the empirical aspects, specifically the experiences of the audience. Tan (1996) sets a theoretical background for film and emotion, one of the aspects he covers is whether the emotion the audiences feel is genuine and he discusses a variety of functional aspects of emotion. Therefore Tan's (1996) research does set a solid groundwork for the study of emotion, which is useful for theoretical framework. In addition to this, there has been extensive research on immersion into fictional content, but very few have done so in relation to the audience and emotion. Research have been conducted about this topic had a focus on other media content besides movies, such as literature done by for example Kuijpers, Hakemulder, Tan and Doicaru (2014) where they measured absorption into the narrative story world and concluded that enjoyment is an outcome of such absorption.

Furthermore, there have been a few studies that do make the connection between the audience and emotion, but those studies analyse the content itself and focus on how film narratives or other filmic aspects may evoke emotion or it discusses general theory about emotion and identification (Gross & Levenson 1995; Smith, 1985). This means that there is less empirical research on the audiences' experiences on how they process their elicitation of emotion. Most research on the audience in relation to this focused on motivations and gratifications of watching emotional films (Bartsch, Appel & Storch, 2010; Bartsch, 2012). Those studies have for example concluded that emotion is a gratification for watching movies. However, no further meanings of emotions had been explored in that study. So with regards to meaning making, there is no research on how audiences make sense of their emotions during movies. This is due to the fact that most meaning making research in relation to films has usually been about how audiences create meaning out of the movies and where the audiences are asked to decode the media text (Livingstone, 2013; Bordwell, 1991).

Thus, overall, there is very little research on audience's actual emotional experiences when watching films. But certainly some findings have been established, which will be discussed in the theoretical framework. This research wants to build on that existing research. This leads to the research question: "How do audiences experience and give meaning to their emotions when watching fictional drama film?" The aim of the research is to explore and uncover how audiences experience and give meaning to their emotions when they watch fictional drama films. Key concepts within this research are emotion, film immersion, character identification, drama film and audience reception. Now the academic and social relevance of this research will be made explicit.

1.3 Academic and social relevance

As aforementioned there is a severe knowledge gap in research on audience reception and the study of emotion. This research will add to academia by providing a new perspective on the study

of the audience and emotion and provide empirical data. It will establish an in-depth understanding on the experiences and meanings of the audiences regarding the topic of emotions during movies. This research will also make the connection between the theoretical concepts of identification, immersion and emotion, which does not exist in current academic audience research. Moreover, certain notions of emotions in relation to movies are debated by many different scholars, such as the genuineness of emotions felt during movies or the role of the audience's mood, but there is no set conclusion and consensus on this matter, this research will aid certain arguments by developing empirical data that can undermine or reinforce previous arguments.

Not only is this relevant for academia, but people who work in filmmaking and storytelling in general may also benefit from the insights provided by this study. When they know how audiences experience emotion and how they give meaning to it, they can alter their strategies regarding content and emotional cues with this knowledge when needed, in the hope of delivering optimal use of emotional cues in stories and media texts. When producing content, in the pre-production stages, audience research is often a step before creating content, it is important to know how audiences will react and respond to produced content. This study will also be of benefit to the audiences themselves. Understanding and interpreting emotions also has implications for the audiences because emotions are firmly grounded in the search for meaning in their everyday life (Cupchik, 2011). It is important for the audiences to talk about their emotions and reflect back on it afterwards, because it helps understanding one's own emotions better. And understanding one's own emotions help give meaning to their everyday lives and help understanding one's own behaviour better (Cupchik, 2011). Thus this research is important for audiences as well as it gives insights in how audiences give meaning to their emotions and reflect back on it.

1.4 Justification genre

This audience research is focussing on one specific film genre, which is drama. Drama is a film genre that is known for eliciting emotion (Visch & Tan, 2009; Zillman, 1995). The reason for choosing drama film, is that it is a popular genre that many people have watched. A lot of movies fall under this category, which ensures that people have undoubtedly seen movies from this genre and therefore have had previous experiences with a drama film. Besides this, because drama films are capable of eliciting emotion, I expect that the people will have plenty to say about emotion and this genre. This genre is also dependent on relational development with the fictional characters as the story of a drama revolves around the character (Moine, 2006). This is imperative for the study as people feel emotion in relation to other people. Additionally, as part of this study is about character identification, it is important that the fictional characters are developed well, which might lead to

people having more opinions about them and in turn making them easier to identify with. And it can be assured that the drama genre offers these various elements.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Framework Outline

In the following sections, previous research on the key concepts of this study will be discussed. These sections will be structured as follows, first an overarching groundwork of audience reception will be presented. Then film immersion will be introduced as a concept and the important link to the other concepts will be discussed in this section. Then there will be a thorough discussion of the concept of emotion in relation to film. Within this section, subsections on film narratives and meta-emotion will be included. Lastly, previous research on the concept of character identification will be discussed and analysed, and within this section there will be a subsection on empathy.

2.2 Audience reception

This research falls under the umbrella of audience reception, therefore it is important to cover this in the theoretical framework. This section will establish some thoughts on audience reception and cover some ground on it. First of all, a common ground on what is considered as audiences will be established. This research acknowledges the fact that drama film does not have one audience. On the contrary, it exist of many audiences and these audiences exist of many individual audience members from different social groups. The different audiences may behave and react differently to the media text because of their social and cultural background (Morley, 2003). It is important to continue studying audiences because they are crucial for understanding a whole range of social and cultural processes about the media (Livingstone, 2013).

Audience research has seen a shift in how researchers view the audience, namely from a passive to an active entity with agency (Ang, 2006). It used to be assumed that audiences are passively receptive to media content, who take over the intended message and meaning of the text, whilst now it is acknowledged in academia that people can interpret the media content differently than how it was intended (Livingstone, 2013). This research considers the audience as an active audience, where the people can oppose and negotiate the text (Hall, 2014). Consequently, audience researchers also had a tendency to see the text as static, and disregard the fact that the text is a dynamic construct, with varying meanings between producers and consumers (Livingstone, 2013). So the text used to be seen as a fixed given, independent of the context of the reading. But what is intended in the text does not necessarily have to be received in that same way by the audience. This is true for emotions as well, as previously mentioned, filmmakers widely use film conventions to elicit emotion, and usually a specific emotion, but this does not have to be experiences by the audience in the same way as it was intended.

Audience research is related to meaning making, meaning making practices are inevitable in audiences' regular life, people create and recreate meanings in their everyday lives all the time (Livingstone, 2013). It is a social practice where people construct meaning out of textual cues. In watching a film, meaning making is part of the film viewing experience, the spectator identifies the content which prompt a range of meanings (Bordwell, 1991). Meaning making is a practice to make sense of their surroundings, they are found by audiences, not made and fixed in the media text. In addition to this, Dirx (2001) states that emotions are also an integral part of how we interpret and understand the day-to-day events in our lives. So part of constructing meaning has to do with understanding our emotions. This is why it is important to talk with the audience about their emotions. And as aforementioned, most audience research with a focus on movies researches how audiences create meaning out of the media text. But is important to note here, that in this research, audiences are asked to construct meaning not of the media text, but of their emotions and emotional experiences in relation to the media text.

Within audience reception research, as previously mentioned in the introduction, it has often been about cognitive processes of the media audience. Within the study of emotion, there is still a lot of emphasis on what emotions mean for cognitive processes, which is why a lot of the research covered in this theoretical framework is done by cognitivists such as Plantinga and Smith. According to academics working in this cognitive perspective, emotions are functional action tendencies that motivate us towards certain goals (Smith, 1999). For example, the emotion of fear spurs us to the action of running away from a menacing situation. This research does not want to take such a functionalist assumption towards emotion, but wants to take a different angle by really uncovering the emotional experiences that audiences have themselves when watching drama film. That is, because emotions are much more complex and go beyond only serving as a function. Thus to understand emotions better researchers need to talk with the people who feel them, namely the audiences. The next section will cover one of the possible experiences audiences can have when watching film, namely immersion, which is tied with emotion.

2.3 Film immersion

Film has the potential to enhance audience's viewing experiences due to its immersive capacities (Visch, Tan & Molenaar, 2010). Film immersion is an experiential response to movies and can be experienced on many different levels. In general, it is this sensation of being lost in a story, being immersed into a narrative world, and in this case a film narrative (Cohen, 2006). It is the presence of losing track of time, failing to observe events going on around them in real life (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). According to Buselle & Bilandzic (2009), this loss of self-awareness combined with

the construction of an alternative world provides an explanatory mechanism for the sense of being present in the film narrative.

Green, Brock and Kaufman (2004) argue that immersion is a prerequisite for identification. They state that identification is an adoption of a character's thoughts, goals, emotions and behaviours. Accordingly, they argue that such vicarious experience requires the reader or viewer to leave his or her own physical or social reality behind in favour of narrative world. Meaning that in order to identify with characters of the fictional world, they need to first immerse themselves into the narrative world. This process of identification will be discussed further in section 3.5.

A possible consequence of immersion is the increased sense of enjoyment and satisfaction of the movie amongst the viewer (Green, Brock & Kaufman, 2004; Fornerino, Helme-Guizon, & Gotteland, 2008). A bundle of reasons for this have to do with so called processes of the self (Green, 2005). One simple reason is the reduction of a negative state of the self, in a way it is escaping from their own identity and their worries. Besides this, on a more positive note, immersion can also open doors to explore and experiment with other possible selves. So the narrative world becomes an additional source of influence beyond the viewer's existing social world (Green, 2005). This relates to transportation, which is inevitably linked with immersion. In this transportation process, the viewer is transported into the fictional narrative world. Here they take on the role of the character and see the world through their eyes. Because of this extension of the self, the lessons learned in the narrative world may also become integrated into the viewer's actual self. This is actually another consequence of immersion, it may lead to attitude and belief changes (Green, 2005). These self-reflections have everything to do with meaning making, because in order to create meanings of media one must first understand oneself.

As this research focusses on emotional experiences and tries to link immersion with emotion and character identification, the following two sections will cover emotion in film and character identification. As aforementioned, scholars found that identification is a prerequisite to immersion, so a link between the identification and film immersion has been established. This link will be discussed more later on. First however, to establish a theoretical link between emotion and immersion, more theory on this is needed, which will be discussed now.

2.4 Emotion in film

As previously mentioned, film is a medium that is able to elicit emotions amongst the audience (Tan, 1996). To narrow down what is meant by emotion, this section will first cover general theory and understandings of emotion, to set a common ground. But it is good to keep in mind that this is not only a study on emotion per se, but a study on audience's experiences with the emotions that emerge when watching movies and their reflection on those after having watched drama film.

Therefore emotion will be discussed in relation to the experience of and reflection on movies afterwards. According to Plantinga (2010) and Tan (2008), emotion can be considered as mental states that are accompanied by subjective feelings, psychological arousal and action tendencies. Emotional states are a type of affect that involve a higher degree of cognitive processing. This entails that it is an unconscious and automatic effort that can be evoked by diverse stimuli. They occur in relation to these stimuli that matter to the individual (Oatley, 1995). In short, emotion is a response to and appraisal of stimuli, a reflection of events in terms of a person's own concerns and needs and lastly it can stimulate action.

Other scholars argue that emotion is not a state but a dynamic process (Bartsch et al., 2008). It starts with observing the depicted situation. Then the events are appraised in relation to personal concerns. After this, the events are judged according to these personal concerns, in this stage affective reactions such as spontaneous expression and feelings appear. And then finally an action can take place such as maintaining or changing the emotion eliciting situation. In essence it is the same as the above stated description, but this research acknowledges that it is a dynamic process and not a static entity. This research also sees emotion not as a state but as a dynamic process, where emotions can change over time. However, emotion is not as clear cut as this descriptions may portray, it is an unconscious and automatic process, which Plantinga (2010) does acknowledge.

Whether emotion is elicited amongst the film audience depends on both the content of the film and on the audience itself. In the following subsection about film narratives, more on the content will be discussed. Now there will be a focus on the influence and importance of the audience on what emotions are elicited. Past emotional experiences help viewers construe possible meanings of media texts (Cupchik, 2009), thus if viewers have experienced something similar in real life to what they see on screen, the audiences can experience and give different meanings to what they see. In relation to this, as aforementioned, emotion occurs to stimuli that matter to the individual. One of the key conditions whether or not these stimuli matter to the individual depends on the relevance of the actions and narratives in the movie to the spectator's own goals and concerns (Tan, 1996; Bartsch & Oliver, 2011). These relate to the involvement and closeness of the individual to the film and the value of it. In addition to this, it is dependent on the spectator's events in daily life. Films that address concerns for the individual evoke emotions by means of characteristics that relate to comparable events in their daily life (Tan, 1996). The feature film is made to magnify and concentrate on these daily problems. Films can address these concerns in many different ways, one of them being with narratives, which will be discussed in the following subsection. Having an immersive film viewing experience also influences feeling emotions and the

extent of the emotion. Immersion can account for having a more intense emotional experience (Fornerino, Helme-Guizon, & Gotteland, 2008).

In addition to this, what specific emotion is felt by the audience is also dependent on an audience factor, in this case, the audience's mood. A mood is a "preparatory state in which one is looking for an opportunity to express a particular emotion or emotion set" (Smith, 1999, p. 113). This means that a mood sets an expectancy of feeling a particular emotion, and because of the mood we will focus on cues that elicit those particular emotions. Thus, the audience evaluates the movie congruent to their mood. Moods are not particularly emotions, but they hold a tendency towards feeling certain emotions.

Besides this mood dependent evaluation of movies, mood also influences what movies the audiences choose. The mood can influence whether or not people choose to watch emotional drama films. Strizhakova and Krcmar (2007) found that sad people choose to watch drama films, because it is in line with their mood. But research have found mixed results on this, Greenwood (2010) found that audience members choose films that are opposite of their mood, so that the film is able to adjust the audience member's mood, to follow the same example of sad people, they would rather choose to watch comedies then.

To build on these differences of when they feel emotion, as aforementioned, when they do feel emotion, not everyone experiences these emotion in the same way. People evaluate and deal with emotions in substantially different ways. Some people easily feel overwhelmed with emotions, whilst others are more capable of regulating and expressing their emotions (Bartsch et al., 2008). When watching drama film, people can love experiencing sadness and others want to avoid feeling it.

Feeling emotions is in fact one of the reasons why people watch movies, it is a gratification that exists amongst the audience. It can give a sense of pleasure and excitement during film exposure (Bartsch, 2012). It can also be gratifying to feel poignant emotions, as it can be pleasant to "have a good cry". According to Bartsch (2012), these emotional gratifications can be on two levels, namely rewarding functions and psychological functions. The former relates to direct feelings such as positive affect, arousal and empathetic sadness, whilst the latter relates more to character engagement and self-reflection.

Many scholars have also tried to categorise emotions. Plantinga (2010) discusses some categories for emotion, he defined so called local emotions and global emotions. Films can elicit local emotions, which are emotions that last only a few seconds and global emotions, which are present during an extended period of time. Local emotions include disgust, surprise, exhilaration and terror, while global emotions are more like suspense, curiosity, fascination and anticipation. In addition to this, Tan (2004) distinguishes empathetic emotions and non-empathetic emotions.

Empathetic emotions are emotions that require a grasp of what the other is feeling. Some basic emotions in this category are sadness, contempt, fear, love, anger and anxiety. On the other hand there are non-empathetic emotions, these emotions do not require any level of imagination it just requires a consideration and appraisal of the environment. Some basic emotions in this category are surprise, disgust, exhilaration and joy. The non-empathetic emotions come into play as a response to the events and settings in a movie and the empathetic emotions are evoked in relation to the characters in the movie.

It is important to make distinctions between the emotions, because then it can become clear about what kind of emotions the audiences talk more about and maybe also understand better themselves. It is also important to be aware that this research is in part dependent on the memory of the audiences about their experiences. Without the memories of movie experiences, there is little to reflect on. Memories of emotional outings indicate that emotions can have a considerable longevity (Smith, 1999). However, certain memories of emotion can overshadow the memory of certain smaller emotions that were present. Especially because people can have difficulties with remembering their experiences. People usually remember a condensed version of the experience, an overarching emotion they can clearly label, but other emotions that were felt are forgotten. So it is very likely that they will not be able to recall the full experience. Nonetheless, the fact that audience members can recall certain emotions over others is a finding in itself, it can mean that those are more impactful for the audience.

Lastly, whether audiences can feel genuine emotions by watching films is a contested notion by many scholars (Tan, 1996). Gaut (2010) argues that the audience can feel genuine emotion in fictional and imagined situations, whilst other argue that because film is fictional the emotions the audience feel is an illusion as argued by Tan (1996). Tan states that this is because of the fact that the audience is aware that the story is fictional. For example when a fictional character is being attacked by a monster, the audience will not feel any real danger (Plantinga, 2010), but they might feel fear for that character. Thus, there is a certain asymmetry present in feeling emotions, one does not always feel the same the fictional character feels, for example a character may feel guilty but the audience can feel pity towards him or her (Gaut, 2010).

Tan (1996) also argues that there is a uniform reaction by the audiences to a feature film. All people respond to a death the same or laugh when a joke is made, the film is intended to evoke a homogeneous reaction amongst the audiences, so the personal concerns here are irrelevant. So what the audiences feel is not genuine, but made to appear by the film director according to Tan (1996). Regardless, despite there being an asymmetry present in emotions, the audience does feel an emotion whether it is the same or not as the fictional character. And regardless of the director's intention, this research stands by the argument that was made earlier, that audiences have

different responses and emotions to events in films so they will not all have experienced same emotions as intended by the director. Therefore this research assumes that audiences can feel genuine emotion when watching movies. It will be interesting to find out whether the audiences perceive their emotions as real during film viewing or if they would really consider and acknowledge the fact that the movie is fictional.

2.4.1 Film narratives

Now one of the influencers of emotion will be discussed, namely narratives. A narrative can be understood as a sequence of events, it is how a story in the movie is told, usually centred on one or more characters (Plantinga, 2010). Narratives have the power to affect the readers in many different ways (Green, 2005). The narrative within movies is one of the biggest forces that may ignite emotion (Plantinga, 2010; Smith, 1995; Tan, 1996), even though the spectators know that the events that are seen are fictional. Film holds many techniques that allow for us to feel emotion. Plantinga (2010) gives the example of the scene of empathy, where the filmmaker focusses on a character's face, which is typically shot in close-up, and during which the pace of the narrative slows down. In this case the character's interior emotional experience becomes the locus of attention, which is exactly what the filmmaker wants to make the audience feel an emotional connection to the character. Or filmmakers make use of the point-of-view shot, where the audience sees exactly the same as what the fictional character sees (Gaut, 2010), this allows for character identification.

Narratives are a universal construct, all cultures tell stories and most often they also have universal features. All narratives have at least one kind of conflict in the story, the protagonist is faced with a threat (Turner, 2002). These threats make sure that there is a plot and it serves as a function to elicit emotion. The narrative is important because emotion depends on narrative information, comprehension of the narratives ensure emotional experiences (Plantinga, 2010). Plot flaws, such as behaviour that is inconsistent with a character's motivations, or a portrayal on screen that is inconsistent with real world knowledge or familiar film genre conventions, can lead to a disruption of narrative comprehension and thus decrease the intensity of audience's emotional experiences (Buselle & Bilandzic, 2009). In contrast, when the narrative creates strong character engagement, the audience is invested in the story which can lead to strong connections to the narrative and the characters. Thus the audience becomes more emotionally invested in the film (Plantinga, 2010).

The narrative in films can ensure that the spectator leaves their own physical world loses self-awareness and enters a different fictional world and experience its events and complications (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2011). In turn, narratives provide a safe space for the viewer to explore their

emotional experiences. Narrative worlds have the unique benefit of providing space for alternative personalities, realities, and actions without any real cost to the individual (Green, Brock & Kaufman, 2004).

2.4.2 Meta-emotion

Another important concept that is important in this research is meta-emotion. When audiences talk about emotions, it is possible that they will start talking about second-order emotions, an emotional reaction towards one's own emotion. This is, in essence, what meta-emotions are. Meta-emotions are emotions that the audiences feel about their direct emotions (Bartsch et al., 2008; Plantinga, 2010). So when audiences talk about their emotions they felt during a movie, which is an emotion they directly feel, they can have emotions towards the emotions they felt after that initial emotion. For example, when people are feeling sad for the protagonist, they might feel a sense of pride afterwards because of that felt emotion, as they then could judge themselves as a kind and moral person. That is because, in our society feeling concern and empathy for another is morally valued, and can therefore lead to self-enhancing thoughts (Bartsch, 2007). On the other hand, meta-emotions can also be negative, the audience can feel a slight disgust towards themselves when they for example have felt elevated during the movie when the antagonist succeeded.

In addition to this, some scholars argue that meta-emotions are not only the emotions one feels towards their own emotions, but also the evaluations of those emotions, or what people think of the emotions in general (Bartsch et al., 2008). And that last part especially is important for this research, as the research revolves about what audiences think of their emotions, the meanings the audience give to it. Thus, meta-emotions cover self-reflection by the audiences on emotion. Some questions within meta-emotions studies in relation to audio visual media that are asked are (Bartsch et al., 2008): Does the audience allow themselves to be touched by the emotional message of the media text or do they distance themselves? And do they then take it seriously or take them with humour? These self-reflective questions have usually been asked in quantitative scales, but this research will ask these questions in face-to-face conversations.

2.5 Character identification

When audiences are asked to talk about their emotions, they are also likely to appeal to the notion of identification (Gaut, 1999). That is why it is important in this study to discuss character identification as well, as it is highly related to emotions. Through identification, emotional feelings towards the characters may arise (Cohen, 2001a). In fact, according to Cohen (2001a) identification is an intense emotional experience. Identification with media characters is an imaginative process and response that occurs when spectators are viewing characters presented in mediated texts. In

this process, viewers may feel as if they are part of these fictional worlds, so much so that they are absorbed in the media text (Cohen, 2006). The audience member imagines him- or herself being that character and replaces his or her personal identity with the identity and role of the fictional character within the text with a heightened sense of emotional connections with a character (Cohen, 2001a). Therefore it is also state where one is feeling less of an audience member than when there is no identification present at all (Cohen, 2001a). This notion of being absorbed in the media text and losing a sense of self-awareness tie in closely with film immersion. And as a response to the media text, people can feel similar to the media character or feel an affinity and fondness to the character. Furthermore, the audience does not necessarily have to identify themselves with the main character in the film, despite the fact that the whole film revolves around them (Turner, 2006). They can also identify themselves with smaller characters at various points in the film.

Another important aspect to identification is the adoption of the fictional character's goals and comprehension of plot events (Cohen, 2001a). With identification, the audience member tends to adopt the character's goal, but they must first understand the film's plot events. When the audience member adopts the goal, plot events can influence the emotions of the audience, for example when the media character succeeds in one of their goals, the audience member can feel a sense of happiness whereas when the goal is threatened it can result in a surge of anxiety amongst the audience. Thus, the successes and failures of the fictional characters' pursuits may influence the audience's emotions (Green, 2005).

The phenomenon of identification has been studied by many different scholars and they all tackle it from different angles. According to Smith (1995) the audience can identify with the character in three different ways, recognition, alignment and allegiance. This structure has been discussed continuously and adapted by other scholars, which makes it worth noting here as well. First, recognition is solely the spectator's construction of the fictional character, noticing its existence. It comes from a set of verbal and visual components. This study will place less emphasis on this aspect and focus more on the other two, alignment and allegiance as they are more dubious and complex in the study of emotion and identification. Alignment is "the process by which spectators are placed in relation to characters in terms of access to their actions, and to what they know and feel" (Smith, 1995, p. 41). This entails the audience's ability to understand what a character is doing and how they are feeling. And lastly, allegiance entails the moral and ideological evaluation of the characters by the audience (Smith, 1995). Here, the viewers make an opinion about the character they see, based on for example the actions he or she has shown. This is also where audience members decide whether or not they are for or against this character. Thus, each of these aspects go on step further in the case of identification.

However, it is hard to tell when and why the viewers do identify with fictional characters and when they do not. There are certain criteria or circumstances for it to occur, because identification is influenced by one's own values, perspectives and interests as individuals (Cohen, 2006). Another factor that might influence one's identification with fictional characters is the relevance of the issues in the story that may resonate with the viewer's life. And as aforementioned, this conditional factor is also present to feeling emotion. It may also be contributed to the liking of the fictional characters, Chory (2013) found that with television programmes, viewers tend to identify more with characters they liked as opposed to characters they do not like or feel neutral towards.

The term identification has also received critique by different scholars. According to Plantinga (2010) the notion of becoming the fictional character is troublesome. It is misleading, because it diminishes the importance of the viewer's independent engagement with the narrative. While it is correct that one may share the character's goals and emotions, one is still viewing the film events from the outside as the viewer is negotiating the narrative. However, this research would argue that this is not true in the case of film immersion, as in that sensation one loses the sense of outside spectatorship. One other critique, by Gaut (2010), will be made in the following section of empathy, this critique is related to empathy, as identification and empathy are highly related and the following section will illustrate that.

2.5.1 Empathy

Identification is in close ties with empathy as it is construed in terms of imagining oneself in someone else's shoes (Gaut, 2010). Often, identification means that the knowledge of the audience is processed from the fictional character's perspective and is transformed into empathic emotions (Cohen, 2001a). This imaginative process requires the act of imagining and understanding another person's reality, not only the act of feeling something for the character and adopting that fictional character's reality. In a way, it is mirroring another's emotions or at least feeling something similar as to what the character is feeling. This is what makes it different from sympathy, as sympathy is the process of feeling for example sorry, embarrassed, or concerned for a character, but not particularly feeling the same as the character or imagining what they are feeling (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Coplan, 2004).

In the process of empathising with someone, one is imagining what the other is feeling (Coplan, 2004). However the viewer is still aware that it is not happening to them and is still aware of their own state and identity. So this is different from the process of immersion, where one loses complete self-awareness. Including empathy within the identification processes is important, but as aforementioned some scholars also argue that identification with fictional characters can be a

troublesome term. Gaut (2010) argues that what some scholars call identification should be noted as empathy. He states that identification is feeling the same as the fictional character, while in reality you feel what they are feeling while still feeling one's own emotions. That is, because the audience can have different attitudes than the fictional character and that you as film viewer have information about the situation and events that the character does not have. Besides, in this critique of identification, the scholar is neglecting the fact that the identification process is an imaginative process, so one is imagining the character's situation vividly while still retaining their own self, but it may be faded into the background.

This research considers identification as a separate entity, however, it does argue that empathy is related to identification, as one cannot identify with someone without having empathetic feelings. In contrast, Gaut (1999) does argue that identification can happen without empathy. One may imagine themselves in someone else's shoes and actively imagine their pain or sorrow, but they might not actually feel that pain and sorrow themselves. But this research deems this an exception case as most often it includes identification involves empathy because by adopting a character's perspective, which one does when identifying with a character, one also understands or mirrors their emotions (Cohen, 2001a; Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009).

In order to gain empathetic feelings towards fictional characters in drama films, the viewer must first be made to care about this character, either in a positive or in a negative way (Zillman, 1995). When the audience cares deeply for the character, the audience will also have deeper concerns for the unfolding of the narrative, and these deeper concerns lead to stronger emotions (Plantinga, 2010). Caring about characters is often developed by being confronted with dramatic events in the film, the emotional involvement of the audience becomes stronger and with it, their empathetic capabilities. In addition to this, the more the audience is touched by the movie, the more they experience the drama in a positive way. Therefore, good drama must develop their fictional characters well to enhance the identification and empathetic feelings of the audience. To refer back to allegiance, audiences evaluate the characters based on the character's actions. Drama viewers are likely to side with certain characters, most often the protagonists, and are likely to root against other characters, most often the antagonists (Raney, 2004; Zillman, 1995). This is because we come to like characters who we judge as morally correct in their actions and motivation and dislike the people we judge as immoral. Consequently, the stronger these positive feelings are, the stronger the empathetic reactions (Raney, 2004). In addition to this, empathetic feelings are more likely to arise to fictional characters who have attractive traits, such as wittiness and physically attractive appearance (Gaut, 1999). However, as much as films can stimulate empathy amongst the audience, it is still dependent on the individual movie viewer whether they are capable of feeling empathy or not. It will be interesting to discover whether the respondents in this research are likely

to feel empathy towards the film characters or if that is only directed towards real people only and how that may relate to their emotions.

In short, this audience research has now established all the relevant theory related to emotions and emotional experiences during film. Emotions are dynamic mental processes that are accompanied by subjective feelings. Film can elicit emotions amongst the audience when the events in the film narrative matter to the individual and they can relate to it. What specific emotions get elicited is partly dependent on the audience's mood. One part of this research wants to uncover how audiences give meaning to their emotions during movies, therefore another important concept that has been discussed is meta-emotion. Meta-emotions entail all thoughts and emotions audiences have towards their own emotions. Another part of this research is how the audiences experience their emotions. Therefore the concepts of immersion and identification were included to gather the relationship between emotion, immersion and identification. Immersion entails that the viewer experiences the sensation of being sucked in a movie and identification is an intense emotional experience where the viewer imagines him- or herself being the fictional character in the film narrative. The following chapter will discuss how the audience research will be conducted and how the audience's meanings and experiences will be explored.

3. Research Design

3.1 Methodology

This method section will provide an elaboration on how the research was conducted. To reiterate, the research question is: "How do audiences experience and give meaning to their emotions when watching fictional drama film? The chosen method for this research is focus groups. The reason for a qualitative approach is that it is needed to fully comprehend the experiences and meanings the audiences have (Silverman, 2013). The main objective is to get an in-depth understanding of the audience. And as emotion and meanings is such a subjective topic which needs in-depth examination to reveal them, one can only understand audience's experiences with emotion when having actual conversations with the audience members. Thus this research will rely heavily on the active discussions of the participants with each other and with the interviewer where they reflect on their emotions when watching movies.

Moreover, the advantage of focus groups for this particular research is that in daily life people often and naturally talk with their peers about movies that they have seen as film watching is often a collective experience (Hart, Kerrigen & vom Lehm, 2016). Therefore, to gather the experiences they would normally share, focus groups is the most suitable method. In the focus group sessions, respondents respond to each other in a naturalistic way. But this setting is not entirely created in a natural way, it is still a social setting, but a forced one. In focus groups, respondents also have the opportunity to build on already shared experiences, one may add comments on other responses, making it interactive in sharing ideas and experiences (Boeije, 2010; Finch & Lewis, 2003). The data is in part generated from these interactions. It is also valuable to hear consensus within a group, or even a lack thereof. At the same time, the disadvantage to focus group is that people may wish to withhold information in a certain group or in group formations in general, this may not happen on one-on-one interviews as then it is only the respondent and the interviewee. To counter this disadvantage, in the introduction it was made explicitly clear that it is a supportive and open environment and that all information will be dealt with in an anonymous and confidential matter. In addition to this, before the actual focus group starts, I will try to make the respondents as comfortable as possible by striking regular conversations with them beforehand and do a casual introduction round with them to familiarise them to each other as well.

Another disadvantage is the fact that in focus groups it is possible that the group influences certain respondents' answers, in this way the individual may conform to the group norm (Boeije, 2010). This is countered by having an individual section within the focus groups. After showing short clips of a movie, they have to write down 3 to 5 key words on a piece of paper of what they

felt during and thought of the clip. These individual accounts of the movie will then be discussed afterwards.

The unit of analysis for this research is the people who watch the aforementioned genre, namely drama film. And to narrow it down a bit more, the focus groups were conducted with Dutch students in the Netherlands. The reason to select students is that it has been found that adolescents are one of the groups that are very receptive to what they see on screen (Lee, Bichard, Irey, Walt & Carlson, 2009). In turn, this could mean that they are more receptive towards feeling emotion as well. And the reason for students specifically are because they are a big part of the adolescent group. Furthermore, the reason for Dutch students only is because this study is not focusing on cultural differences between audience members and how that can influence how audiences experience and give meaning to their emotions when watching drama film. The study is also conducted in the Netherlands, thus the respondents can then speak freely in their native language. And emotions can be a sensitive topic for some, so by speaking in their native language they can be more comfortable talking.

3.2 Operationalisation

This research builds on existing research, so for a substantial part of the focus groups, the questions that are asked in the focus groups are based on literature. So for these questions, previous literature on emotion, identification and immersion was used. Anne Bartsch has provided much research that was useful, therefore much of her research was used as a reference point in the topic list. As previously stated, meta-emotions are emotions that people have towards their emotions. So when audiences are asked to talk about their emotions, it is highly likely they will talk about meta-emotions, therefore certain questions in the topic list aimed to uncover meta-emotions, which is discussed by Bartsch et al. (2008) and Plantinga (2009). Bartsch (2007) also state that feeling empathy for others is morally valued in our society. In the topic list questions were asked about how they evaluate their emotions, to see if this statement are also defended in this research. In addition to this, in the method of Bartsch (2012), the respondents were asked to recall a scene where they felt emotions and whether they liked those emotions. In these focus groups they were also asked this, because asking people to recall an emotional experience when watching a movie, serves to further discuss that specific experience in a more in-depth manner. It also shows how respondents talk about the emotional experience and thus give meaning to those emotions they felt. And by remembering a specific scene and their experiences with it, it shows that the scene has made some form of an emotional impact on the audience.

Furthermore, the topic list is constructed in such a way that avoids leading the respondents with certain concepts and ideas. The aforementioned concepts in the theoretical framework, such

as mood and narratives are not mentioned in any of the question, these topic could only arise if the respondents brought them up. This is done to see whether or not these were important for the respondents. And concepts such as immersion and identification were discussed on a later stage in the focus group, leaving enough space for the respondents to bring those up themselves. And when asking questions about such theoretical concepts in the focus group, the interviewer described in more common language what those concepts entail, how this is done can be found in the topic list in Appendix A.

However, as this research also adds a lot of new data, some questions are added in the topic list that are based on open interpretation of this research topic. This includes, for example the questions that will cover the lingering of emotions and the specifics on the importance of emotions when watching films. There has been little research on this and this study will explore emotional film experiences in an open way. Moreover, as aforementioned, research has not made a solid connection between the three concepts of emotion, identification and immersion, so questions were created to cover this aspect. The topic list will be covered more in the next section.

3.3 Data collection

The data is derived from the transcripts of the focus groups. The topic list focus groups is set up in three main parts, this topic list can be found in appendix A. The first part covers general questions, covering the age and study programme of the respondents. Then two questions were asked about their general drama viewing habits and after that two questions were asked about whether or not they consider themselves as an emotional person. The second part of the focus groups covers in-depth questions about their emotions when watching drama film. To understand the meanings the audiences give to emotions, the respondents were asked to recall a movie scene where they have felt emotions, to see how they experience emotions. And there are questions asked on how they value feeling emotion when watching movies. Additionally, there were questions directed at them regarding situational conditions to feeling emotions. This means they were asked if they notice when they do feel emotions and when they do not and the reasons for this. Furthermore, the last section of the in-depth questions were questions that connect the three concepts of emotion, identification and immersion, with the aim to investigate what the connection is between the three.

In the third part of the focus groups, the groups were shown two short scenes from a chosen drama film, namely *the Pursuit of Happyness* (Muccino, 2006). This movie is chosen as it is representative of drama films, which could make them feel a variety of emotions. And when searching for “most emotional drama films” and “emotional drama scenes”, this is a film that kept popping up in the searches and is also covered in such lists on IMDB. The shown scenes cover close-

up shots on the protagonist's emotional face, which is typical for a drama film. It is also character driven. The two chosen scenes cover different emotions as the first one is sadder and the second one more joyful. The reason for two clips of the same movie is because in this way the respondents have a bit more context of the film, as opposed to seeing two clips of two separate movies.

The movie is about the hardships of a struggling father whose wife has just left him and was kicked out of his apartment. He gained total custody over his son, and together they are surviving in New York. He invested heavily in a medical machine, which is not delivering any profit. And he took a no paid traineeship at a stock company where he has the chance to become a full-time employee. The first scene that is shown to the respondents is the subway scene, where he is convincing his son his machine is a time travel machine, and they imagine themselves traveling to the prehistoric with dinosaurs. The father convinces the son that they must find a cave to reside in. The father ushers them into a subway bathroom, where they sleep in for the night (Movieclips, 2012a). The second scene, is the ending scene where the father receives the full-time job at the stock company. Where he then walks out on the streets of New York looking elated (Movieclips, 2012b).

Based on these two clips, questions were asked afterwards on how the respondents experienced the clip and if they can elaborate on their responses. They were also asked to discuss the clip, to find out how they give meaning to such scenes and compare it to similar experiences when they watched other drama films. The purpose of these visuals is to trigger discussions after the short clips to make the discussions more substantiated as they have a more concrete film scene in front of them instead of only reminiscing on film scenes. And as aforementioned, the individual account of the key words was present in this third part of the focus group. Thus the data of the research is derived from the responses of the participants during the focus groups, where the participants talked about and reflected on their individual experiences, as people regularly do so when watching movies with their friends (Hart, Kerrigan, vom Lehn, 2016).

In short, the first two parts of the focus group were solely be question based, while the third part used fragments from drama film as a trigger for discussion. The reason for this order is to first establish the respondent's general attitude to emotions and connect it to the in-depth information on their emotional experiences when watching movies. And by the end they would be more warmed up so they are possibly more able to think of examples of their emotional experiences.

Regarding research ethics, before the focus groups were conducted, anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed. It was made clear to the respondents that their names will never be revealed, in the research pseudonyms will be used. So full anonymity was guaranteed. In addition to this, full confidentiality was communicated, as all the data was for research purposes only and would never be distributed to other parties. Informed consent was also present, this

entails that the respondents know they are being researched, have the right to know what the research is about and they are aware that they can withdraw at any time (Silverman, 2006).

3.3.1 Sampling

This research consisted of four focus groups with five to six participants each. In order to get in-depth answers, it is important to not have too many participants in the focus groups. In this way, each participant has enough time and space to answer fully. In total there were by twenty-one participants, this was not too little as focus groups do not require a large support for each statement (Ritchie, Lewis & El am, 2003). And it was enough to get a diverse range of answers. The focus groups were mixed, with Dutch students who were both male and female. Inclusion criteria for the respondents are that they have to be Dutch and currently enrolled in a Bachelor's or Master's programme in a university in the Netherlands. This research does not have specific exclusion criteria, because it aims to have a relatively heterogeneous group of respondents in order to get a wide range of experiences and meanings. Of course the respondents are all Dutch students, so in that sense they are homogeneous, but within this population a heterogeneous sample was chosen (Ritchie, Lewis & El am, 2003). So it includes students from all kinds of different study programmes. Not all students are film fanatics either, so some might not be used to be talking about their film experiences in such a matter which can lead to interesting results as well as they are encouraged to think about something they do not often give mind to.

Therefore, these respondents were gathered according to a stratified purposive sampling method, because the purpose was to gather students from a wide variety of studies (Ritchie, Lewis & El am, 2003). More specifically, within stratified purposive sampling, snowball sampling was implemented. A request was sent out to the researcher's peers if they know any willing Dutch students to participate in the focus group. The disadvantage of this is however that usually they will ask people within their same study programme, but an additional request was sent out to the researcher's peers to ask for participants from different study courses to get an as diverse range of studies possible. Besides this, the respondents who participated in the focus groups were also asked if they could ask their peers for willing respondents to participate in this research. The reasons to ask for peers of peers is so that in the focus groups there would almost always be someone who the respondent already knows. With this I hope to achieve a more comfortable setting for the respondents, which would make them more open to talk about what could be a sensitive topic for them, namely emotions.

The sample description is as follows. In total there were 21 students who participated, 7 males, and 15 females. Their ages ranged between 20 and 25. The students were from different universities in the Netherlands, these include, Erasmus University Rotterdam, Utrecht University,

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, Leiden University and Maastricht University. The students are from a range of different study courses, both Bachelor and Master courses, including politics, economics, business, languages, literature, psychology, management, philosophy, public administration and communications. The sample also consisted of respondents with different ethnic backgrounds, all the interviewee's nationality was Dutch, but there were also students who were of Chinese, Vietnamese, Turkish and Curacao background. A complete overview of the sample can be found in Appendix C.

3.4 Data analysis

All the focus groups were 55 to 65 minutes, each transcript being around 13 pages. The transcripts are analysed according to thematic analysis. This is a method that allows the researcher to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes within data (Boyatzis, 1998). A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). One of the benefits of thematic analysis is that it is flexible and offer the research space for interpretation, it allows for identifying and making sense of experiences and meanings of the respondents (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Braun and Clarke (2006) present instructions on how thematic analysis can be done, this was used in the analysis of the data as a guide. Thematic analysis includes three steps within coding, these were followed to create a coding scheme, and these steps are open coding, axial coding and selective coding.

The first step in the data analysis was familiarizing oneself with the data, continuously reading and re-reading the transcripts of the focus groups. Afterwards the open coding began, everything that was said by the respondents that was relevant for the research questions was coded. The first coding process is open coding, this is a way to generate initial codes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The coding procedure is done on Atlas.ti. The first round of coding led to 215 codes. This list of codes was then refined afterwards for the first time, all the codes that were unclear and redundant were renamed, codes that overlap were grouped together. This process eliminated initial 9 codes, meaning that there are 206 codes remaining. After this, all the transcripts were read again, to see if some codes fit at some other passages of the transcript, this to make sure there is no important data left without a fitting code. These codes were then grouped into axial codes, which are subcategories. Then these axial codes were categorised into five potential themes. In this process it became apparent that many codes do not quite fit in the five themes and do not serve the research question. These were deleted, which led to a final count of 128 codes categorised in fifteen axial codes. Then a final review of the themes and the codes took place. The themes were worded slightly different, for example, the initial theme for *“Indifferent towards their own*

emotions”, was *“Neutral reflection on own emotions”*. After this process, the five final themes were established. These themes will be introduced in the following chapter. All these themes and codes can be found in the codebook in Appendix B.

Lastly, the validity and reliability of this research will be discussed. For qualitative research, the validity refers to the transparency of the interpretation of data (Silverman, 2006). To ensure that the research can be issued as valid, a codebook of the research is present in the appendix (Appendix B), this is to show that the five themes that have emerged from the data are credible and justified. Besides this, in the results all important findings are illustrated with quotes, this is done to illustrate to the readers how the researcher interpreted that specific data. Moreover, regarding the reliability of the research, which means the consistency of the research if it were to be done by different researchers, is ensured by a transparent methodology (Silverman, 2006). The operationalization is thoroughly described, including the concepts that were used and how they were implemented in the topic list. This topic list can be found in Appendix A. The analysis method is thoroughly described, namely the thematic analysis, and the study includes the code book, which can be found in the appendix.

4. Results

4.1 Outline

After the coding process, five themes have emerged. These themes cover the meanings and experiences audiences have towards and with their emotions when they watch drama film. The results will be presented according to these themes. The five themes are: People want to feel emotions during movies, Emotions during movies are experienced as tiresome, Indifferent towards own emotions, Change in behaviour because of emotion in films and Emotion, identification and immersion are connected. Firstly, the three themes that encompass the three meanings audiences give to their emotions when watching drama film will be presented. And then after that the two themes that cover audience's emotional experiences will be presented. This chapter will describe and interpret what is found in the data. It will make some initial connections with literature already, but for the most part the relationship with literature will be left for the discussion. Before we start with the themes, there were some general findings that do not necessarily fit in one of the themes.

4.2 General findings

Generally, it seemed that the respondents have a somewhat limited understanding of their emotions when they watch movies, because in the discussion about emotion they spoke mostly about a limited range of emotions, namely joy, happiness and sadness and crying. Only occasionally other emotions came up, such as irritation and fascination. In addition to this, a few people also had a tendency to give answers based on what they believe other people could have instead of what they personally experienced themselves. They would for example say "I believe this could happen to others, I am not saying it happens to me, but it could happen to others" (Julia, Literary studies). Because of this, it was at times a challenge to get a complete understanding of their emotional experiences. Still, it tells a lot about what meanings they give towards their emotions, namely that they give answers that abide by logical reasoning, not personal experiences with emotions during movies.

Furthermore, overall it was very hard for the audiences to think of examples, especially examples of when they had identified with fictional characters but also of other emotional experiences, this illustrated the fact that they generally do not give much thought to their emotions in everyday life, which they also explicitly made clear. And some respondents only really reflect on emotions, when the emotions are really intense. This also demonstrates certain difficulties the audiences have with reflecting on their emotions that were elicited during drama film.

Regarding the chosen genre of this study, these audience members clearly communicated that they find genre relatively unimportant. The majority of the respondents said they will not

actively search for specific genres to watch. However, the respondents do expect certain things from drama film specifically, namely the elicitation of emotions amongst the audience members. Because of this, most respondents judge a drama film more negatively when they do not feel emotions. Also because of the common knowledge that drama film elicits emotions, some respondents change their behaviour, more on this in section 4.6.

Lastly, this research was not aiming to explore what factors may influence how audiences experience and give meaning to their emotions. But it was noticeable that gender did not play a role in this study, as most findings ring true for both males and females. Another differentiation within this sample was study course, no significant results derived from this either.

4.3 People want to feel emotions during movies

For the most part, people were rather positive about the emotions they feel when they watch drama film. This theme will discuss all the positive responses the respondents had to their emotions, this includes all the positive traits they said emotions to have, all positive meta-emotions they communicated and the fact they said they feel some kind of need to feel emotions. From the data it can be concluded that generally there was a rather positive reflection on emotion, this counts for both the positive emotions the respondents had discussed such as happiness, but also for the negative emotions such as sadness.

Firstly, several positive traits of emotion were communicated. Two students had said that emotion makes them feel human. Being touched by movies is good because it notifies you that: "You are human" (Lily, Communication and information sciences). And in the focus group, others had also affirmed this. Another respondent said that feeling emotions during movies is important because: "You just feel human, and I believe at the core that is what people are looking for. You live, you feel and I guess that is important" (Dennis, Communication sciences). Thus these people gave a positive meaning to their emotions when watching drama films, because they view it as human. One person had said that feeling emotions can help you escape from your day for a little while, which is in line with what Green (2005) found.

Two people had said that feeling emotion is a way of social connection and can create a bond. Cecile (French Language and Culture) for example said:

"From the film Prince of Egypt, we both watched it in our childhoods. And we knew the movie by heart, creates many nostalgic feelings. That felt very special to the both of us. It created a bond. And it certainly is one of the most important films in my childhood"

This illustrates that the emotions they feel during a movie, can be shared by another and makes them feel closer to each other. It also made the movie more important, because of the shared emotions.

Several people had said that they perceive the quality of films to be better when they felt emotions. At the same time, if they felt no emotions they deemed the drama film as bad. Lily (Spanish Language and Culture said: "Often you find a movie better if it touches you, whether the emotion is sad or happy". One person even said that: "The power of films lies in igniting emotion amongst the audience" (Julia, Literary Sciences). Additionally, another person also said that when a movie touches you, the quality of the movie is higher. However, there are also findings that contradict this, as some respondents stated that a movie where they felt emotions can still be bad and that when a movie does not elicit emotion it can still be good. This will be discussed in more detail in the following theme.

Furthermore, several people communicated that they want to feel emotions when they watch movies. This finding is congruent with what Bartsch (2012) found about movie gratification, that one of the reasons people watch movies is to feel emotions. Two respondents purposefully look for emotions when they watch movies. For one respondent, one particular movie even has a specific function, namely to make her to cry. She said:

" I do have, really funny, if I do not feel so well and I want to cry basically, and want to be loosened up. Then I watch the intro of Up, it is so very sad, with that grandpa and grandma. And the woman dies and then I always have to bawl my eyes out. So yea, it is kind of functional, some kind of catalyst. Yea, just a moment of crying." (Cecile, French Language and Culture).

So the respondent purposefully watches that film to feel emotions. Another girl said that emotion is also something she looks for in a movie. Nina (Business Intelligence and Smart services said: "I think do choose a film on emotions, because yea, if I watch a trailer I do want to get invested in the story, but if I feel nothing during the trailer, then I think never mind. Then I won't watch it". This illustrates that feeling emotion is something audiences look for in movies. Some might even get disappointed when they felt no emotions during a movie. This is very different from what another respondent had said. Hanna (Marketing Management) said: "It is not that I want to feel emotions so I will watch a movie."

One thing that was not said by many respondents, but one respondent did mention explicitly is the fact that for some people crying about movies does not have to be negative. Dennis (Communication sciences) said: "I also think, sometimes I watch movies and it is good to I don't know cry or something, about a good movie, you know just crying for a bit, but it is just good." He said it in a relative hesitant manner, but he said it anyway. This is in line with what Bartsch (2012)

found, that for some spectators it can be pleasant to have a good cry. So some audience members can experience their emotions, even negative ones, as pleasant.

Consequently, this positive view on emotions also relates to the fact that several respondents had said that feeling emotions results in a better movie experience. Specifically positive emotions can make the audience feel positive for days, and respondents generally find it pleasant when this happens. Feeling emotions also helps with remembering the movie and the experience better. Kim (Business Information Management) said that: "It then makes it more memorable". One respondent said that at times she would forget the movie and what happened in it, but that she would still remember very well the emotions that she felt. She said: "It really made an impact on me. So the emotions I had, I remembered strongly, those also lingered for a while. I have really thought about that movie for days" (Lily, Spanish Language and Culture).

Lastly, within this theme a few positive meta-emotions appeared present. As discussed in the theoretical framework, meta-emotions are feelings and thoughts audiences have towards their emotions. Shame is one possible occurring meta-emotion. Generally there is no shame when it comes to their emotions and watching movies. Petra (Psychology) says there is no shame because: "Films are made to make you feel emotions". Lisa said that she finds her own emotions funny at times, she can get frustrated with movies and she finds this frustration funny. She says it is not shame she feels towards the frustration, but she finds it funny how she can respond strongly towards something small and insignificant in a movie. In addition to this, she looks at this in a different way, a more negative way and this will be discussed in the next section.

Furthermore regarding positive meta-emotions, from the first clip that is shown in the focus group, several people said that they had goosebumps watching it and were really moved by it. Overall, these respondents give a positive meaning to the goosebumps. Lily (Spanish Language and Culture) said: "It is a good sign, that you are touched by it, even though it is a very short clip, I think like oh yea, I feel something." The human aspect that was discussed before also applies here, she says that the goosebumps and thus feeling emotion, is human, which is good. And most others in the focus group also agreed, the respondents said that the emotional experience was enjoyable.

Lastly, most people get emotional because of the events that happen in a movie. Emily and Cecile mention that they can get very happy when the construction of the movie is very good. Emily (Film and Theatre Studies) said: "... the movie was about people who follow their dreams. And I saw how the film was put together, and I was like wow that was done beautifully. And because of that I became very happy." Cecile also noticed that her emotions are weaker when she pays more attention to the construction of the movie.

4.4 Emotions during movies are experienced as tiresome

The respondents reflected on their emotions in different ways, while some people had very positive experiences with their emotions when watching movies, they were not shared by all. There were also many negative meanings that came to the surface. This section will include all kinds of negative responses the respondents had to their emotions, this includes the fact that respondents deemed there being a negative external perception on emotions, the fact that emotions were seen as tiresome and several negative meta-emotions. When the respondents spoke negatively about their emotions, they spoke mostly about feeling emotion in general, but also about some negative emotions such as sadness which leads them to talk about crying.

A few respondents also talked about a certain pressure from the outside to not feel emotion or at least show the emotion when watching a film. For example in a cinema, with many others, one girl in that situation does not want to be vulnerable and show her emotions. Lily (Spanish Language and Culture) said:

I have that in the cinema I cry less, for example with the movie *The Fault in Our Stars*, with the book I cried for three days straight. But in the cinema, with all the strangers and you can hear everyone cry, but me myself I was like hmmm.. I did not want to be touched by the film, maybe also because I did not want to be so vulnerable in a public space.”

Another boy also said that he does not want to show the emotions in the cinema, because they are his emotions and the others don't have to see that. Another respondent, says that it can also be stereotypical to feel and show emotions, she says: “As a woman, it is also a bit stereotypical when I am sitting there crying in the cinema with just another romantic comedy” (Nora, philosophy). So they judge their emotions in a negative way. However, the respondent who said this also said that it is not particularly shame that she feels and several others also said this. In contrast, Madeline (Communication and Information Sciences) said that precisely in such a context, she can feel emotions freely because it is dark and she does not know the people anyway. So not wanting to cry in the context of the cinema depends on the person as well.

Interestingly, a finding that is in contrast to this outside pressure to not feel emotion, is that two girls sometimes feel a light social pressure to cry. Lisa (Marketing management) mentioned that with a movie where all her friends cried, she felt a certain pressure to cry when watching the movie as well. Eline (Fiscal Economics) had a similar experience, but then in the cinema itself with several people around her. She said that she never cries with movies, but when she watched the *titanic* in 3D with her class, she really felt like she had to cry because everyone around her was sobbing. She said: “Well if it has to happen once, now is the time” (Eline, Fiscal Economics).

As aforementioned, people deem the quality of film to be better if it elicits emotions amongst the audience, Eline (Fiscal Economics) also agrees with this, but immediately after this she says: "On the other hand it is also tiring, so then I avoid it. I will watch a movie only with half my attention, because I just do not really feel the need to feel the emotions of a movie". And this notion, that emotion is experienced as tiring, is supported by many other respondents. Dennis (Communication sciences) said:

"I do think, by the way, that when I choose a movie, I do avoid certain emotions. Because sometimes you are just tired, and then you want to put on a movie, where you do not need to pay attention. In that case you do not want to watch a tear-jerker, because that is really tiring. Sometimes you really are tired after a very emotional movie."

Both these quotes illustrate that sometimes respondent avoid feeling emotion when watching movies, because it can be tiring to watch emotional movies. Eline also said that drama film in general is quite tiring, because of all the emotional rollercoasters that happen during. So this respondent does not value feeling emotion in drama film and will thus avoid drama film in the first place. Several others also acknowledged the fact that feeling emotions can be tiring and that they definitely need at least some kind of energy in order to feel emotions.

In relation to this, several people had said that there is a certain need for mental space to feel emotions. Nora (Philosophy) said:

"It really depends, on how much mental space I have. If I do not have a lot of thing going on in my head, like today, I have no deadlines, if I were to watch a movie now in the cinema it would be really easy to get invested in the movie. Whilst yesterday, I knew I had two deadlines at 12 pm, really no way I could have felt emotions".

She did not particularly say that feeling emotion is tiresome, but that she definitely needs a certain head capacity in order to feel things. She confirmed this several more times throughout the interview, so it is something she thinks strongly.

4.4.1 Negative meta-emotions

Furthermore, several negative meta-emotions appeared present. Because this theme is getting quite extended, section will have his own subsection. A few respondents said that feeling or at least talking about emotions can be awkward. For Cecile and Madeline, watching an emotional movie with their parents can be really awkward, whilst for example for Lily and Julia it is the opposite. Marco said that he feels shame when he feels emotional over a bad drama film. He proceeded to say: "I do think, no Marco what is this. Sometimes I have a certain pride, I actually only want to feel emotion with a good movie. Otherwise it is like ah fuck I fell for a cheap movie" (Marco,

International Relations). This also relates to the fact that a movie can be bad despite it eliciting emotions amongst the audience.

Moreover, a significant amount of respondents also question the emotions they have. Nina (Business Intelligence and Smart Services) for example said: 'Yea sometimes I do have, like wow I feel such an intense emotions right now, like why am I crying for someone who just plays in a movie'. She is in a way confused about her own emotions and belittles her emotions by saying that is just because of an actor. Lisa (Data Science and Society) also had a similar experience, but in this case the emotion is frustration. She questions why she can become frustrated over something so small and insignificant. So here she also questions why she feels that emotion because of a movie. Jesse also sometimes questions his emotions, but he immediately also judges it negatively. He said: "Then I think, when I watch a movie, why am I getting emotional over this? So then I wonder a bit. And I judge those emotions negatively" (Jesse, Philosophy).

According to the respondents, emotions can also become too much or be too fierce. Previously it was shown that Lily said that feeling emotion after such a short clip that was shown in the focus group is good. However, not everyone agrees with that, Cecile (French Language and Culture) said:

"I do think it is too severe, like after two minutes already, yea I think that is too much, that I already feel so much emotion, if I saw the scene for a bit longer I would have definitely cried, and then I think, nah act normal. I find it too intense that I find this so intense."

In this case the fact that she feels the emotions so strongly after a short clip is a bit intense for her. This quote also illustrates the fact that she can find it abnormal to feel so strongly. This belief is shared by another respondent as well. Emily sometimes holds her emotions back. When asked why, she said:

"Yea I don't know, maybe because I think that others do not have this. I will sit with a big grin on my face and then I think oh wait I have to go back to my normal state. It is not shame, more like okay I am abnormal in this case and I have to go back to the normal state. Whilst I know it is not bad at all to feel happy. But at that moment, I did believe it was abnormal for a short while. I though, okay dim it down for a sec" (Emily, Film and Theatre Studies).

This means that she holds her emotions back because she believes she must go back to her normal state and because others are not like her at that moment. The fact that respondents sometimes holds their emotions back, which is a change in action, will be discussed further in section 4.5.

Before, it was shortly mentioned that respondents avoid feeling emotion. A significant amount of people said that they do this sometimes. Denise (Economics) said:

I also had that with A Star is Born, but with that one, I did not even watch the ending. I thought, I know I am going to be emotional because of the scene, so I am not even going to watch it. So yea I avoid it sometimes, but in this case because I did not feel like getting emotional.”

This quote illustrates that audiences can purposefully avoid feeling emotions by skipping certain scenes. In addition to this, here again it becomes clear that sometimes people are not in the mood to feel emotions at all, which is slightly different from what Smith (1999) found, he found that what specific emotion one feels is dependent on mood, but he did not argue that wanting to feel emotion at all is also dependent on it.

4.5 Indifferent towards own emotions

An also rather prominent theme that was found amongst the data is that people were also rather indifferent towards their emotions. In this section it will be made clear that generally audiences do not really think about and reflect on their emotions after the film viewing. This section will also shortly discuss a somewhat neutral stance on audience's emotions. And lastly this theme will cover the fact that many respondents do not mind not feeling emotions during movies.

From the focus groups it became clear that generally, the respondents do not reflect on their emotions after they have watched drama film. This became clear due to two things, first of all it was hard for them to think of examples where they felt emotional or felt identification towards a fictional character. This indicates, that generally they do not give a lot of thought towards their emotions after having watched a movie. It was also apparent in the specific emotions they talked about, the discussed emotions were mostly sadness and happiness. At times other emotions would come up, but not often. This limited range of emotions that were brought up illustrates that they do not often reflect on their emotions after having watched a film. The more obvious indication is the fact that many respondents explicitly said they do not think about this in their daily lives. Cecile (French Language and Culture) said: “Yea it is not really something I do consciously, evaluating my emotions. I don't really do that when I watch movies.” Another respondent specifically said that she believes it is not necessary either to always do so. Nora (Philosophy) said: “I also think that you do not always have to evaluate your own emotions. Like sometimes, an emotion can just be there and that you feel it at that moment, and you do not need to think about it.” Thus here it becomes clear that she does not always value reflecting back on her emotions.

Lastly, it became clear that there is not always a need to feel emotions. Some respondents do not mind to not feel any emotions or that they do not want to feel any emotions at all when

watching movies. For Cecile it depends on why she watches the movie, when she is watching a classic film, she will pay more attention to the construction of the movie and she then does not mind whether she feels emotion or not. For Hanna it can depend on the situation. She said: "It depends on why I watch the movie, if it is a true story and I want to know something about that person's life, because it was a dramatic life, then I do not mind not feeling emotions" (Hanna, Marketing Management). On the other hand she says that she does get disappointed if she does not feel emotions, when she watches a movie to get carried away.

For Tom it is almost never the case to want to get carried away in a movie. He most often prefers to not feel emotions during movies. He says:

"I do not want to feel emotions. No, I watch movies most often when I am tired, then I think nah fine. I do not actively go sit to feel emotions. I just want to lean back, I find it fine to just let the film wash over me. If I get the choice to feel emotion or not during a movie, I choose not to.

This makes clear that he does not particularly value feeling emotion with movies. He also said that in general he is not a very emotional person.

Another person was explicitly indifferent to their emotions, when asked what they thought of their emotions, Jesse (Philosophy) said: "Well, not so much". He then proceeds to say that he agrees wholeheartedly with what Nora stated above, that there is no need to evaluate one's own emotions. This is interesting because Jesse also said that he almost always feels emotions when he watches movies. So despite the fact that he feels emotions during movies quite often, he does not give them much thought or cares about reflecting on his emotions.

According to one respondent, what emotional movies do to someone can depend on their personality. Eline (Fiscal Economics) stated in the focus group that she never cries with movies, and the reason why this is: "I think I am surely too down to earth for it". She stays neutral when it comes to emotional scenes. She also had said in the beginning that she does not particularly like emotional movies and that drama films are usually a lot to handle.

Lastly, some respondents also have control over their feelings. Mark (Economics) had said:

"I think I can like choose, here I want to empathise I am in to mood for that, I can handle it, but I can also think, oh I need to separate myself from it now. When I read Een Klein Leven, which is a very awful book, but I did not have that much problems reading it. I could separate myself from it."

So for him it is possible to not let emotions get the best of him, he can choose whether he feels emotions or not when consuming fiction. This supports the argument of Bartsch et al., (2008), where they argued that some people are more capable of regulating their emotions and that some

people are more overwhelmed with emotions, of which this latter group is also present in this study.

4.6 Change in behaviour because of emotions in film

This theme covers the relationship between audience's emotions and behaviour. The first change is because of mood. The audience's mood came up in every focus group. Drama is a very emotionally-laden film, because of this, the respondents choose or do not choose to watch this due to different moods. Several respondent choose drama when they are not in a good mood, if they are they would not choose to watch a drama. One respondent said that when she is in a pitiful mood, she also wants to see pitiful characters on screen. Overall, they tend to watch movies that fit their mood, which is in line with what Strizhakova and Krcmar (2007) found. However, the respondents also use movies to balance out their mood, so when they are in a bad mood, they tend to watch something light to change their feelings. And this latter is in line with what Greenwood (2010) found, this means that both Strizhakova and Krcmar's (2007) and Greenwood's (2010) findings are true for film audiences. Thus, the behaviour, in this instance what film the audience members choose, changes because of the mood they have at that time.

The second change in behaviour in relation to emotion in movies is the act of purposefully evading emotions, it was already touched upon previously in section 4.3, but this will section will discuss it further. A significant amount of respondents have said that they at times avoid feeling emotions or at least certain emotions, here they talk about negative emotions such as disgust or sadness. There are several reasons for this, as aforementioned, emotions are tiresome, and so for a few people this is a reason they would avoid it. Another reason is to protect themselves from gruesome scenes to avoid feeling disgust. That respondent said: "I actually just skipped a lot of the scene, because it was so gross, and I thought I really do not need to see this" (Eline, Fiscal Economics). Here again, a spectator skips certain scenes. Another girl, does not watch movies that can make her cry. She said: 'No, I think those crying movies, I purposefully just don't watch them, because yea you do need some kind of happy feeling when you finish a movie' (Julia, Literary studies). This shows, that for her movies need to leave her with at least a positive feeling, which means she would try to avoid movies that could give her a different feeling.

Dennis and Denise acknowledged the fact that feeling emotions during movies is mood dependent, and they know that sometimes they just do not want to. Another respondent said more specifically that when she is down, she does not want to feel empathy towards another because at that point she just does not want to.

Two respondents also mentioned the fact that sometimes they try to limit their emotions, try to hold it back. One respondent said it was because she would not want to let them flow freely

when she is with others if she sees that they are not crying. Another respondent said that it was because otherwise she will get overwhelmed with emotions if she does not try to limit them. She says specifically: "When a situation is highly relevant to me, I hold back my emotions because otherwise they become too much" (Petra, Psychology). She then also said that certain situations in movies make her think about emotional experiences in real life, and she then does not want to let the emotions get her down. Here it is not that they are avoiding feeling emotions all together, but trying to contain it to a certain level.

And lastly in this theme it was noticeable that there were changes in action and thought after they have seen a particular movie. This means that the respondents will do something else or follow certain thought patterns after being exposed to emotional movie content. Specifically, a common thought pattern they had was to relate emotional events of a movie to real life and the world. Many respondents had said that whenever something sad and unfair happens, they will have a momentary negative outlook on the world. However, this also occurs the other way around, whenever something good happens in a movie they will have a short positive feeling. Nora (Philosophy) said: "Yea then you come out of the cinema with a fuzzy warm feeling, like oh the world is maybe not so bad after all." Depending on the person, this feeling can linger on for several days, and for others it can linger for a couple of hours maximum.

Furthermore, as aforementioned, some respondents need some kind of happy feeling after they have watched a film. This relates to the change in action because of emotional movies that some respondents have. Two respondents had said that once they have seen a sad movie, they will likely watch something happy after that, to take away the sad feeling of that moment. To illustrate this, someone said:

"I don't think I have ever cried with a movie, of course I have felt sad after a film, but in that instance I immediately go distract myself with other things. If I feel bad, I will do something fun after, to kind of compensate. I do not like it to hold on to the negative feelings. Then I can go watch an episode of Modern Family, then I at least end the day on a positive note" (Eline, Fiscal Economics).

So there is a certain change in her behaviour because of the emotions she had felt during a film.

4.7 Emotion, identification and immersion are connected

In the theoretical framework, the concepts of emotion, identification and immersion have been discussed extensively. This theme will illustrate that for the audiences, emotion, identification and immersion are connected. It will discuss that there is no particular order in which the three different experiences emerge. These concepts are connected in a way that is iterative. This theme

also discusses the fact that fictional character identification amongst the audience group in this study does not occur often. For these respondents it is mostly an empathetic feeling that the movie can evoke.

For most of the respondents, relatability of the events in the movie to their life aids feeling emotion when watching movies. Kim (Business information management) said "Something that is close to my life, I would feel emotions sooner than when it was not". And many others said similar things, this is congruent to what Oatley (1995) and Tan (1996) argued. However, it is not strictly necessary that something in a film is relatable for the viewer in order to feel emotions. Dennis noted that there are certain classic scenarios that always get him, like a certain pay-off in a movie, which always makes him happy, or the death of a beloved, things that always get him. Nina also noted that things that stand super far away from her can also make her emotional, she gave the example of something happening in an entirely different country. Besides this, film events also need to be somewhat realistic in order to feel emotions, one respondent said "You need to be able to imagine that it can happen to you, or that it has happened to you" (Jasper, Marketing Management).

Many respondents also pointed out the importance of the film narrative. Interesting and good narratives help the audience get immersed in the movie and also to feel emotions more. For Petra it is only possible if the narrative is interesting to feel emotions, she said: Yes, when the story is interesting, only then it happens" (Petra, Psychology). She also said that when she cannot empathise with the characters, she cannot get invested in the story. However, for one respondent a narrative does not need to be very good in order to be immersed in a movie, he described a scene after which he said:

"That was so bad and annoying, but yea I was kind of in it. And well, I found it amazing, I really went for it. And I think that is a really easy emotion, and you do not need to be emotionally invested for that" (Tom, Public relations).

So even a bad scene can make a spectator immersed. He also describes an easy emotion, which does not need much in order to be evoked. For most respondents, however, there are certain conditions to feeling emotions, as said before narrative and relatability helps, but film immersion also helps. Several respondents have confirmed that they would need to be immersed in movies first in order to feel emotions.

But for others, immersion is not strictly necessary in order to feel emotions. Dennis pointed out that it makes the emotions more meaningful but that you can still feel emotions without being immersed in the film. Julia (Literary Studies) also said "It can happen with a short scene without much context, but deep emotions you only feel once you are really in the movie".

Others had also pointed out that for small emotions, which for them are emotions such as irritation, immersion is not necessary. And for others, feeling emotion is something that aids becoming immersed in movies or makes the emotions stronger. Film immersion for some people is also a requirement when they watch films, for instance Eva and Cecile go watch a movie with the expectation to be immersed otherwise they are disappointed. Whilst for others, immersion is not really an expected given. For those respondents, there are many other conditions in order to be immersed, such as being in the dark or not being on the phone.

Lastly, it has become clear that character identification in a way that scholars such as Cohen (2001a) have described it rarely happened. When talking about emotions, respondents did have a tendency to involve the notion of identification, this is in line with what Gaut (1999) found. This concept was raised by the respondents themselves in the focus groups before questions about it were asked by the interviewer. But the respondents used identification in a different manner than the scholars had described it. The focus groups made clear that for them it means being able to imagine a fictional character's situation, but there is no internal taking over of the character's goals or seeing events happen through their eyes. This differs to how Cohen (2001a) had described identification. Most respondents had said they watch movies as a bystander, an outsider. One person gave a reason for this, she said: .. because I know that I do not have any control in the film, so I do not feel like the main character" (Lisa, Data Science and Society). When asked about examples of identification Petra said:

"No that actually rarely happens, so I cannot remember. For me personally, empathising with someone is enough, being able to feel their emotions, but it is not that I am becoming upset because it supposedly happened to me. That is of course not the case" (Petra, Psychology).

So this illustrates that character identification in a way that some scholars had described it does not particularly happen amongst the respondents in this study. This last quote also raises the fact that empathy is possibly a better term to describe the imaginative process audiences have of identifying with a fictional character. Petra also prefers this because in that way she can feel the character's emotions, without it upsetting herself. But relating what happened to the fictional characters to their own life, and in that way identifying with that, does occur amongst the respondents. Mark had said after he watched the first clip of the focus group: "I felt the responsibility that he had over his son, I can relate to that, that made me emotional [...] I can put myself in his shoes, because I also feel a responsibility over my sister and mother right now." So he felt the emotions the main character felt and he could also put himself in that character's shoes. This is what empathy entails according to Coplan (2004) and Gaut (2010), thus empathy is a term that fits better than identification as described by Cohen (2001a) when it comes to these respondents. This also shows

again that relatability to a fictional character aids feeling emotion, but also feeling empathy towards the character.

Lastly, it can also be concluded from these respondents that most people who identify with fictional character align themselves with the characters, meaning that they can understand what the characters know and feel. But none of these audience members undergo the process of allegiance, as described by Smith (1995), as none of them morally judged fictional characters from movies in the focus groups. While his conceptualisation of identification with the three different structures of recognition, alignment and allegiance is rather outdated, it still holds truth for today. Namely, it indicates various levels of engagement audiences endure during the processes of identification.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of findings

In this summary of all the findings, a complete answer to the research question will be given. To reiterate, the aim of this study was to explore how audiences experience and give meaning to their emotions when watching drama film. As shown by the different themes that have emerged from the data, audience members give different meanings to their emotions and experience emotions in different ways when they watch drama films. The results have shown that there were many audience members whom consider feeling emotions during movies to be very valuable. Those audience members reflect positively on their emotions when they watch drama film. They stated that they enjoy feeling emotions during movies and some purposefully look for emotions in films. Many audience members viewed their emotions as human. And for some feeling emotions when watching film is a way to connect with other people. Overall, for most, feeling emotions during films made the film viewing experience better, it makes the movie more memorable and can improve the perception of the quality of the movie.

On the other hand, the audience members do not always give a significant meaning to their emotions, they do not always value feeling emotions and are at times even indifferent to their emotions. A few audience members have said that they prefer to not feel any emotions during movies at all. One of the reasons for this is that experiencing emotions during films is tiresome and that sometimes they are not in the mood to feel emotions. Consequently, the audience members will then tend to avoid watching movies that can evoke emotions, or they will skip certain scenes where they think they will feel emotions. In addition to this, there are also some negative connotations for the audiences to their emotions when watching film. They are conscious about showing their own emotions to others, for examples in cinemas. In that public space, they wish to contain their emotions so that other cannot see what they feel. Audience members have also said that they sometimes deem feeling emotions as abnormal, because they think that others are not feeling what they are feeling. Another sign that points out that audiences are relatively indifferent to their own emotions is that they disregarded a wide variety of different emotions. When thinking of emotions they feel during movies, most audience members usually referred to a limited range of emotions, mostly consisting of sadness or happiness. There were a handful of people who recognized other emotions such as irritations, fascination and disgust. But overall, they did not pay attention to a wide variety of other emotions.

Furthermore, feeling emotions during movies and film immersion are mostly tied together. But there is no linear way in which the two are connected. For different audience members, film immersion enhances emotion and vice versa. So it is not concluded that one comes before the

other. Conversely, for a few audience members, they said that they do not need to be immersed in a film to feel emotions. Thus immersion can help feeling emotions, but is not strictly necessary. This was also illustrated by the fact that several respondents felt emotional during the short clip that was shown to them in the focus group. Besides this, the concept of identification has a separate role next to this, no respondent said that character identification leads to film immersion, but also not the other way around. At the same time, identification and emotions are mostly tied together, because for most of the respondents, when they are able to identify with the characters in the movie, they also feel more emotions during the movie. This also relates to relevant narratives; when audience deem the narrative as personally relevant, they would also feel more emotional during the film.

Lastly, the context of the film viewing situation is really important to audience's emotions. This came up in all focus groups, that the situation can have many effects on their emotions. Who they are watching the film with and where. For example, for some audience members, parents are people who they are not comfortable with to show their emotions, as emotions can be experienced as awkward. On the other hand for some audience members parents are people they can be very emotional with. And for some, cinemas are the place to feel emotional and for some they are not. But for most, the mood in which they watch the movie is very important for wanting to feel emotions. In other words, feeling emotions during movies is highly context-specific and can change from person to person.

5.2 Discussion

In the results some initial connections of this study's findings and existing theory have been set. All in all, there are many relevant results that have emerged from this study, which can contribute to already existing literature on the topic of emotion and movies. Certain findings give previous research some empirical evidence to support their arguments, but there are also findings that are in contrast to existing theories. This discussion will go more in-depth in few of the theoretical connections.

One contribution this study makes is regarding the concept of identification and empathy. Cohen (2001a) argued that in the process of identification, the audience member imagines him- or herself being that character and replaces his or her personal identity with the identity and role of the fictional character within the film with a heightened sense of emotional connections with a character. In this case, identification involves becoming the character and seeing the events happening through that character's eyes. Cohen (2006) also argues that in the process of identification, the audience members becomes part of the fictional world.

This study would deem this description of identification to be too direct and narrow. This study has shown that the audience members rarely feel as if they are part of that fictional world or feel as if they are becoming that character during the movie. The audience members have said that they do sometimes identify with characters, but what they mean with it is different as stated above. When audience members identify with fictional characters, they can relate to the character's experiences and can imagine what they are going through, it is possible for them to imagine being in the character's shoes. To go one step further, some audience members also feel what those characters are feeling. But this happens without actually seeing the events happen through the character's eyes, stepping in their shoes or becoming that character, because most respondents said they watch movies as a bystander. Therefore this study would emphasize the importance of empathy as how audiences describe identification is essentially what empathy is according to Gaut (2010). The study of Duits and van Ramondt Vis (2014) a somewhat looser definition of identification is implemented, in their study identification entails recognizing oneself in another, and connecting it to one's own world. This applied to these respondents as well. What is missing however, is the connection with emotion, as the people who identify with people, often also feel emotion towards the characters. Thus this study would like to propose a different definition of identification, which should be closer to empathy.

Furthermore, the next point that this research contributes is in contrast with several notions about feeling emotions when watching movies. According to Tan (1996) and Bartsch & Viehoff (2010) feeling emotions is one of the key incentives to watch movies. This study would argue that the word key does not belong in that statement, as this study had shown that there were quite some audience members that did not specifically wish to feel emotions when watching film. However, some people had indeed said that they do want to feel emotions when watching film. Therefore, it can be concluded that feeling emotions is one of the incentives to watch movies, but not the key incentive.

Moreover, according to Bartsch (2007), in our society feeling concern and empathy for another is morally valued, because of that feeling concern and empathy could lead to self-enhancing thoughts. In this study, no respondents mentioned anything about self-enhancing thoughts. They had said feeling emotions is human, but no respondent had said it made them a better person, or more humane or more moral. The respondents did not reflect more positively on themselves because they felt emotions. Audience members did relate actions in a movie to the morality of the world, so when sad things happened, they would have a momentarily negative outlook on the world, and when good things happened they would look more positively towards the world.

Another theoretical contribution of this research has to do with the importance of mood for the audiences. Prior research have argued that mood is a big influence in what movies they choose. This research has shown that both the findings of Strizhakova and Krcmar (2007) and Greenwood (2010) were correct, audiences choose films that are able to adjust their mood but they also choose films that are congruent to their mood. Previous research such as the research of Smith (1999) found that what specific emotions the audiences feel is dependent on their mood. What is missing however is that this previous research has not found that mood is also dependent on audiences feeling emotions at all. This study showed that for these audience members the mood they are in is especially important whether or not they feel emotions or want to feel emotions, as sometimes they do not have enough space in their heads to feel anything. So not only does the mood influence what emotions audiences feel, but it also impacts feeling emotions in the first place.

In addition to this, another finding this research contributes to academic is the fact that these audience members have shown that feeling and showing emotions is also a social phenomenon. The fact that that audiences feel a certain social pressure regarding their emotions from external factors when watching movies is rather unapproached in prior research. However, it has been researched outside the study of films. It has been concluded that often people wish to conform to the majority of the group and space they are in, because people wish to avoid sanctions and seek approval (Thoits, 2004). She also found that this applies to people's emotions, she called it emotion norms. Individuals transform and hide their emotions to fit of those of others when they expect their actual emotions to be deviant of emotional expectations.

This research found that this is true for these respondents as well. Audience members feel that they should conform their emotions they feel during movies to others, whether this means limiting their emotions or actually outing their emotions. In this study it was shown that different audience members can wish to contain their emotions, because for instance they do not want to be vulnerable in a public space or they deem their emotions as abnormal as others are not feeling what there are feeling. Whilst other audience members want to conform to the emotional norm of for example crying during a movie when others are crying. This conforming to others had a big impact on the audience members, because quite a few brought it up. It also shows that not every audience member is comfortable showing their emotions to others, which is also reflected by the fact that certain audience members called feeling emotions awkward at times. Thus these audience members communicated that showing emotions or not showing emotions in certain contexts is socially unacceptable.

Overall, the findings show that the audiences are very heterogeneous. There is more than one audience to media texts, all of which give different meanings to their emotions and have

different emotional experiences. Therefore, research should reflect more critically on the diversity of the audiences, and the audiences should be studied more in-depth.

5.3 Limitations and suggestions for further research

When covering audience's emotions, there are certain gaps that remain. One of the limitations of this research is that the research is dependent on the extensive answers of the audiences. While these conversations with the audiences is also the strength, as the researcher can truly uncover what the audiences experience and how they give meaning to the emotions during movies, at times it was noticeable that the full experience was not communicated. It is rather difficult for audiences to vividly recall the specifics of their experiences (Smith, 1999), and in this case specifically, their emotional experiences. So all the information that is given is limited to what the audiences can remember, while in reality it is possible that the answers are more intricate. At times, one emotion can overshadow the other emotions that were present (Smith, 1999), therefore it is possible that not all emotions are recalled by the audience in the focus group. This is also experienced as difficult by many of the respondents, as they experienced some difficulties with giving specific examples when they were asked to. However, it is not necessarily the case that there were other emotions present during the movie. In fact, the emotion that is remembered by the audience would also be most important for the discussion as that is what they are reflecting back on. Of course, this research tried to trigger the discussion by the video clips, but those are only short clips without the full story and context. So for further research I would suggest to watch a drama film right before the focus groups take place and immediately let them write down their thoughts and to discuss it afterwards to gain an understanding of their emotions and meanings directly after a movie so they can vividly recall and discuss it. Besides this, it provides the opportunity to be with the audience members to explore their emotional experiences when the film is actually screening.

Furthermore, this research is not exploring specific factors that can influence how audiences experience and give meaning to their emotions when watching drama film. As aforementioned, audience's gender and study programme had no influence in this study. But what was not explored in this study either is how cultural differences can influence the way audiences experience and give meaning to their emotions. This research included people all from the same nation, with similar cultural backgrounds. While in reality, it is possible that the culture the audience members come from may affect how they give meaning to their emotions and how they experience their emotions. Therefore, for further research I suggest to explore how cultural differences can influence the way that audiences experience and give meaning to their emotions, as according to Morley (2003) audience's cultures can affect how they interpret media texts and react to it.

Besides these limitations and suggestions for further research, another limitation of this research has to do with the methodology, specifically the sampling method. For this study a snowball sampling method was implemented, one of the reasons for this is because the respondents would be more comfortable when there was someone else present in the focus group that they knew beforehand. But because of the snowball sampling method, the sample did not go beyond the circles of peers of my peers. Therefore, for future research I would suggest using a wider sample with different connection points to different kinds of audience members.

Lastly, this research found that feeling emotions during movies is also a social phenomenon, due to audience members conforming to a social norm, as briefly touched upon by (Thoits, 2004). This view on emotions in film studies has been rather unexplored till now in academic research. For future research it would be interesting to see how audiences behave differently when watching movies in public spaces or alone. It would also be valuable to explore to what extent they conform to other audience members and to what specific norms they conform. In addition to this, social norms like all kinds of norms are dependent on the culture it takes place in (Thoits, 2004). So for this suggestion for future research regarding emotional norms it will be interesting to explore how audiences conform differently across cultures, both in a sense of finding out what specific norms exist across cultures, but also how people then conform to those norms.

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Appendix A Topic list

How do audiences experience and give meaning to their emotions when watching fictional drama film?

Part 1 General questions

Introduction

Please state your first name, age and what you currently study.

General questions about drama film

1. When do you decide to watch drama film?
2. Why do you watch drama film?

General questions about emotion

3. Do you consider yourself an emotional person?
4. Do you consider yourself an empathetic person? So do you easily feel what others are feeling?

Part 2 In-depth questions

Emotion and movies

5. Do you often feel emotional when watching drama film?
 - a. When does it occur, could you give me examples?
 - b. Can you vividly recall a movie scene, where you felt emotions? Could you tell me about that experience?
 - c. Do you feel the emotions strongly or are they not so intense? Can you tell me why you feel it more strongly and sometimes weaker?
6. Do you find it important that you feel emotion whilst watching drama film?
 - a. Why/ why not?
 - b. What is gratifying about it?
7. When you watch a movie are you easily invested in the movie plot? So for instance that you care about what happens in the movie and that you care what happens to the characters?
 - a. Do you feel disappointed in a movie when it does not happen, so you are not emotionally connected to the characters and story / or immersed?
8. How do you evaluate feeling emotions when you watch movies? Do you take them seriously?
 - a. Do you feel that you need to experience strong emotions regularly or do you tend to avoid them?
 - b. Do you ever feel ashamed about your emotions you feel during a movie? When does this happen? Can you think of an example?
9. When you are done watching the film, do you still feel the emotions or have they past? So do they linger even after the movie has ended?

Identification and immersion

10. When you watch a movie, are you easily immersed or not?
 - a. When does it happen and when not?
 - b. What do you think about film immersion, do you like it or do you like to be more aware of your surroundings?

- c. Do you need to be immersed in a movie in order to feel emotions? Why/ why not?
11. When you watch a drama film, do you imagine yourself being the main character, or do you watch the events happen as an outsider?
- a. How come?
 - b. Can you name instances where you identified with fictional characters? So when you are watching a movie, you can imagine yourself being that person.
 - c. Do you find identifying with a character pleasant? Why?
 - d. Do you need to be immersed in a movie in order to identify with fictional characters? Why/why not?

Part 3 Movie clips

Movie clip 1 Pursuit of Happyness: time machine scene

Short description of the movie and context of the clip.

- 12. Please write down 3 to 5 key words of what you felt during the clip towards the characters and the situation.
- 13. Could you please tell me in your own words what you saw in this clip?
- 14. How does this clip make you feel?
- 15. What do you feel towards the characters?
- 16. Can you give me an example of another but similar film experience where you felt these emotions?

Movie clip 2 Pursuit of Happyness: Getting job scene

Short description of the movie and context of the clip.

- 17. Please write down 3 to 5 key words of what you felt during the clip towards the characters and the situation.
- 18. Could you please tell me in your own words what you saw in this clip?
- 19. How does this clip make you feel?
- 20. What do you feel towards the characters?
- 21. Can you give me an example of another film experience where you felt these emotions?

Part 4 Conclusion

- 22. Are there any questions you have for me? Or things you still want to say that you have not had the chance for yet?

Thank you very much for your participation

Appendix B Codebook

Themes	Axial codes	Open codes	
Change in behaviour because of emotions in films	Changing choice of film because of mood	Mood to watch a particular kind of movie	
		Chooses drama when not happy	
		Choosing film that does not fit mood	
		Having a good day means not choosing for sad movie	
		Choosing film that fits mood	
		When in good mood, no drama	
		When in bad mood, watches something light	
		When feeling pitiful, wants to see pitiful characters	
		Evading emotion	Avoids feeling emotion
			Evading certain emotions
			Holding back tears when with others
			Holding back emotions otherwise too much
			When down, does not want to feel empathy
			Avoids movies that make you cry
Change in actions and thought	Change in actions and thought	Crying depends on how you're feeling that day	
		Doing something fun after feeling negative emotions	
		A need for some kind of happy feeling after a film	
		Relates fiction to reality	
		Relates to own experiences	
		Relates to the world	
		Positive outlook on the world for a short while	
		Taking over goals of fictional character	
		Thinking what they would have done in the situation	
		When intense emotion, self-reflection	
Positive reflection on own emotions	Wanting to feel emotion	Wanting to cry	
		Purposefully seeking feeling emotion	
		Wanting to feel emotion but does not	
		Disappointed when not feeling emotion	
		Underwhelmed if no emotion	

	Good traits of emotion	Quality of films better because of emotions
		Emotion as a power of films
		Emotion as a social connection
		Emotion creates a bond
		Emotion to ground oneself
		Emotions can be relieving
		Emotions important for the film experience
		Emotional cleansing
		Escaping your day
		Feeling emotions is human
		Feeling real happiness
		Good emotions equals better movie experience
		Strong emotions makes experience more memorable
		Remembering the emotions that were felt
		No emotion equals bad drama
		Admiration towards fictional characters
	Positive meta-emotions	Finds own emotion funny
		Good feeling after happy ending
		Good to cry
		Goosebumps is a good sign
		Happy moments in film makes happy
		Being happy with the construction of the movie
		Not necessary that film is relatable to feel emotion
		No embarrassment because scenes are made to make you feel emotion
		Pleasant when a movie has a positive impact on the person
		No exaggeration of emotion cues is special
		Taking own emotions serious
		Understanding own emotion
Negative reflection on own emotions	External perception of emotion	Wanting to be less vulnerable in a public space
		Light social pressure to cry
		Not wanting others to see you cry
		Feeling like a stereotype when crying in the cinema
	Emotions as tiresome	Needs energy for feeling emotion
		Enough emotions in real life
		Watching drama film is tiresome

		Tear-jerkers are tiring
		Feeling emotions is tiresome
		Watching drama film is tiresome
		Needs headspace for feeling emotions
		Handling drama
	Negative meta-emotions	Avoids feeling emotion
		Awkward
		Cliché emotional scenes
		Emotion as an awkward subject with parents
		Emotions as too much
		Exaggeration of emotion cues causes detachment
		Feeling bad after watching drama
		Feeling emotions as not normal
		Frustrated with bad ending
		Questioning one's own emotions
		Questioning why am I crying
		Shame when feeling emotional over a bad drama
Indifferent towards own emotions	No reflection on emotions	Not necessary to evaluate one's own emotion
		Usually no self-reflecting on own emotions
		Not active in considering one's own emotions
		Hard to think of examples
		When thinking of emotion, only happiness and sadness
	Neutral stance on emotion	Cannot distance oneself of feeling emotions
		Control over feeling empathy
		Too down to earth to feel emotions
		Surprise of intensity of crying
		Presence of emotion, but still bad film
	No need for feeling emotions	Does not mind not feeling emotion
		Feeling emotions is not the purpose of watching films
		Indifferent to one's own emotions
		No desire to feel emotion when watching film
		No desire to feel sad
		No presence of emotion, but still good film
		Wanting to be less touched by a movie

Emotions, identification and immersion are connected	Conditions of immersion	Connection to character leads to immersion
		Good narrative aids being immersed
		Bad narrative, but still immersed
		Being invested in a story depends on identification
		Immersion when the narrative is interesting
		Need for calmness in head to feel immersion
		Less immersed when watching movie with other people
		Small emotions don't need immersion
		Needs empathy for film immersion
		Relevant narrative aids being immersed
		More emotions more invested in story
		Connections with narrative leads to immersion
	Emotions amplifiers	Film immersion aids feeling emotion
		Realistic aspects aid feeling emotion
		Relatability to life aids feeling emotion
		Imagining it can happen to you aids feeling emotion
		Needs film immersion to feel emotion
		Film immersion makes emotions stronger
		Film immersion leads to more meaningful emotion
		Good narrative aid feeling emotions
		Connection with character of the film aids feeling emotions
		When not immersed, feeling negative emotions more easily
		Empathy aids feeling emotion
		Strong emotions despite short clip
		Immersion not strictly necessary for feeling emotions
	Role of empathy	Empathy aids identification
		Empathy is enough, identification not necessary
		Desiring to be like a character aids identification

		More often empathy than identification
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Appendix C Overview of respondents

Name	Age	Study	University
Adam	21	B Political Sciences	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Cecile	22	B French Language and Culture	Utrecht University
Denise	21	B Political Sciences	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Dennis	23	B Communication Sciences	University of Amsterdam
Eline	22	Pre-Master Fiscal Economics	Erasmus University
Ellen	22	B Economics	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Emily	21	B Film and Theatre sciences	Utrecht University
Hanna	21	M Marketing Management	Erasmus University Rotterdam
Jasper	22	M Marketing Management	Erasmus University Rotterdam
Jesse	20	B Philosophy	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Julia	21	B Literary sciences	Utrecht University
Kim	23	M Business Information Management	Erasmus University
Lily	22	B Spanish Language and Culture	Utrecht University
Lisa	22	M Data Science and Society	Tilburg University
Madeline	21	B Communication and Information Sciences	Utrecht University
Marco	24	M International Relations	Leiden University
Mark	20	B Economics	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Nina	22	M Business intelligence and Smart Services	Maastricht University
Nora	20	B Philosophy	Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
Petra	21	B Psychology	Erasmus University Rotterdam
Tom	25	M Public administration	Erasmus University Rotterdam