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entertainment-education television programmes

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Voor meter Chris en peter Maurits
Voor meter Greta en peter René

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If you see white men dressed in white cloaks
Don't panic, call me and I'll tell you a joke.

- Comedy, Bo Burnham (2021)
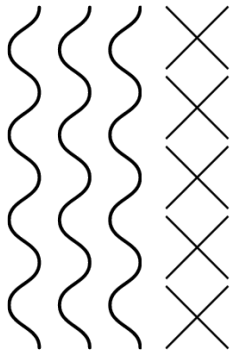
INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Near the end of the summer of 2021, Niels Destadsbader[1] announced that he had signed an exclusive contract with public service media (hereafter: PSM) institution VRT, thereby leaving his position at commercial broadcasting company VTM (Droeven, 2021). Press and popular opinion alike discussed this "transfer", often focussing the conversation on financial issues ("How much do you think they're paying him?") but also discussing what type of content he would bring to the public broadcaster. After all, Destadsbader is known as a popular figure and for some concerned citizens and media professionals, his focus on popular "entertainment" content seemed contradictory to VRT's public value mission (Michielsen, 2021). The attentive reader may understand where this is going, but allow me to draw a comparison between 2021 (the final year of my PhD project) and 2017 (one year before my PhD project began).

The last time a major Flemish celebrity "transferred" from commercial broadcasting to VRT, very similar discussions took place. In 2017 questions arose regarding ("taxpayers'!") money, and commercial policies versus public remit (Debackere, 2017; Raats, 2017). That major celebrity was Philippe Geubels. Not just a celebrity, but a stand-up comedian. The announcement of his new contract was paired with a teaser of what would be his first contribution to VRT's schedule: *Taboe*, a television programme about making fun of things we should not be laughing at. Eyebrows were raised. Questions were muttered, quietly and aloud. What was Geubels doing there? What were they paying him? Would there be a place for his sharp comedy at Reyerslaan, or would he have to dull his axe? Commercial broadcasters criticized VRT's newest talent acquisition (Debackere, 2017). According to them, VRT was acting as a commercial competitor in pursuit of higher ratings and foregoing its place as a public institution.

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[1] A Flemish all-round celebrity - Destadsbader is an actor, television host and popular singer with a large fan base.

Four years later, similar to the situation with Geubels (Evans, 2017), no financial details are shared about Destadsbader's new contract. And history repeats itself: not only is the financial side of the situation discussed, the question of content also arises again. Both in the case of Geubels and of Destadsbader, VRT spokespersons advocated for the position of these celebrity figures at the public media institution (Debackere, 2017; Droeven, 2021). Interestingly, at first sight the arguments to justify these transfers appear to occupy opposite ends of the PSM remit spectrum. Or do they?

Back in 2017, Oliver Goris (channel-manager at VRT's primary television channel één at that time) stressed that the new contract was kept well within monetary restraints, and that Geubels would contribute to the public assignment by opening the conversation regarding difficult topics (Debackere, 2017). This is interesting, considering that the argumentation of Destadsbader's new contract followed a different track. Early in the summer of 2021, before the news regarding Destadsbader's contract was announced, current VRT CEO Delaplace stated that the public broadcaster's television schedule had been lacking entertainment television. He mentioned comedy, game shows, even large studio show formats that have become the prerogative of commercial broadcasters over the past decade. The (still fairly new) executive shared that "live shows on television can strengthen the informative and educative assignment" and praised the potential of live show formats (e.g. *The Voice*) for the representation of on-screen diversity. He even compared that potential against "other interesting but less accessible programmes the public broadcaster makes" (de Leur, 2021). By the end of the summer, some would frame the new celebrity transfer within those earlier comments made by Delaplace, and his ideas to re-introduce shows and fun entertainment television at VRT (Droeven, 2021).

Over the past four years, I have been conducting a case study of *Taboe*, this first success that came out of Geubels' contract with VRT. It offered a rich and deep case study to a phenomenon I was unfamiliar with when I started my PhD in 2018: entertainment experiences and their

outcomes. Seeing these discussions in press today, I am still fascinated by the way that these executives approach their talents. I mostly look at the way that the level of "entertainment" a new on-screen persona brings with them, is considered as something to be defended, something that offers a challenge to fit within the PSM idea. Both the channel manager in 2017 and the CEO in 2021 argue for the value of entertainment for public service media institutions, embodied by their celebrity on-screen talent, but mostly due to their necessity for creating public value for a wide audience. With *Taboe*, Geubels already fulfilled what Delaplace now hopes to see in VRT's newest entertainment endeavours: a popular television format that includes diverse stories and connects audience members beyond their immediate social circles. In this dissertation, I conduct an in-depth case study of *Taboe*, and study audience experiences of the programme to establish what drove this success, and what it can teach us about the way that programmes combining entertainment and education can contribute to destigmatization.

In the introduction of her book on factual television, Hill (2007) quotes several heads of production from public broadcasters in discussing the way they search for good factual television that fits within the PSM logic. Most clearly, these persons begin their discussion from the idea that it should be qualitative documentary or non-fiction programmes, and while it is not their primary purpose to be entertaining, they should, in fact, still also be entertaining. According to the head of documentary from France 2 for example, PSM television should "make a buzz and appeal to a wide audience with dramatic storylines" (p. 7), while a representative from SBS (PSM institution in Australia) searches for television "that gets people talking" (p. 7). The vice president of UK production and development for Discovery US (a commercial broadcaster who has co-productions with the BBC) mentioned they do not want shows that are purely entertaining, but rather television that is engaging, intelligent and "adrenalized".

Hill (2007) follows Van Zoonen (2005) in arguing that entertainment has a place in public broadcasting, when discussed through the lens of cultural citizenship. She considers the use of entertainment in public

service media as a balancing act that was most clearly performed by PSM institutions near the end of the nineties. Ellis (2000) refers to this exercise as "popular public service", an introduction of entertainment in PSM strategies with the goal to reach popular (read: larger, wider) audiences. Press compared the talent acquisition of popular celebrity Geubels to tactics employed during this time period (Debackere, 2017). These articles (Debackere, 2017; Michielsen, 2021) still appeared to be following the idea of critical voices twenty years before: discounting popular television on so-called notions of quality, knowledge, and entertainment, foregoing the fact that many types and genres of media content can contribute to public value creation.

The pull to entertainment by PSM institutions made sense as an attempt to attract audiences that may potentially have gotten lost to commercial competitors and within the growing popularity of reality TV at the turn of the century (Hill, 2007). However, it also reopened the door for current forms of critique on PSM, coming mostly from people who consider the role of the PSM institutions from a market failure perspective: stating that it is not PSM's function or role to entertain its audience, but to inform and educate them (Hill, 2007). This paternalistic view on PSM appeared to hollow out the actual leeway that these institutions have, because an audience has to find its way to the channel to be informed or educated to begin with.

I also argue that such argumentations to steer PSM away from entertainment do not fully grasp current understandings of the way that individuals experience entertainment. Over the past three decades, researchers in the field of media psychology have argued to extend the framework of entertainment experiences beyond a hedonic focus, and rather consider them within a dual-process model. I will discuss those developments and their resulting framework further below, but in brief, entertainment media are no longer thought of as an instrument for pure fun, pleasure, or relaxation purposes. We now understand that people are also motivated to select entertainment content that they find meaningful, can move them, and will stimulate elaborative thought and reflection on the content. By extending our understanding of

entertainment beyond enjoyment alone, an additional argument for its position in PSM institution's schedules arises. Aside from attracting wider audiences (market logic), it can also contribute to the connective tissue and create public value (educational logic).

All of this brings us to one of the major questions that has to be cleared up, before we dive into theoretical frameworks or the empirical work presented in this dissertation. It is a question dreaded by entertainment researchers. When I told one of my PhD colleagues I was working on this section, his response was "well, that's enough to throw out the entire project, isn't it?"

The question is: what is entertainment? And from that question arises the subsequent question of what entertainment experiences are. This dissertation considered several definitions of entertainment. Bates and Ferri's (2010) approach to entertainment requires an objective definition, and "entails communication via external stimuli, which reaches a generally passive audience and gives some portion of that audience pleasure" (p. 16). I do not agree that entertainment audiences are passive, nor that entertainment experiences are limited to pleasure alone. From them it is taken that entertainment concerns a communication process and external stimuli, and that some portion of an audience will be entertained by its content while others are not, meaning that while their definition may aspire to be objective, experiences of entertainment certainly are not. McKee et al. (2014) discuss entertainment as audience-centered commercial culture. While I do not agree that entertainment is limited to commercial environments, as this would be far too limiting, I do take to heart that "entertainment is a system that consists of institutions, groups of people, and discourses" (p.117). Applied to media, this implies that entertaining texts are not produced, broadcast, or consumed in a vacuum, but are cultural texts that reflect power dynamics and several forms of capital, whether they aspire to be so or not. Throughout this dissertation, I will sometimes refer to entertainment content or entertaining texts, comedy texts or media texts. A broad conceptualization of the term "text" is used, following the tradition of media studies. The concept of text in media studies can refer to "a TV

program, film, video game, website, book, song, podcast, newspaper article, tweet, or app. Texts matter because they are bearers of communication and movers of meaning." (Gray, 2017, p. 196)

According to Vorderer, Steen and Chan (2006) a person in search of entertainment is looking for something positive. McKee et al. (2014) extend on that notion, emphasizing the positive experience, no matter how wide the category eliciting it may reach:

> For entertainment psychologists, everything that people choose to consume from which to obtain *any positive experience* falls under the category of entertainment including 'comedy, videogames, sporting contests, mystery novels, and the like' (Oliver and Bartsch 2010, 54) but also literary novels (Vorderer, Steen, and Chan 2006, 7), documentaries and 'history' (Oliver and Bartsch 2010, 53). Even films about emotionally tragic events such as the Holocaust as portrayed by Steven Spielberg in Schindler's List have become part of mainstream entertainment. (emphasis added, McKee et al., 2014, p. 117)

This broad description includes any positive experience of any form of "mainstream entertainment" as an entertainment experience. Different from this definition, this dissertation does not limit the understanding of entertainment experiences to "mainstream" content, nor to media that primarily focus on carrying entertainment texts. Additionally, this also does not necessarily mean that the text was produced for mainly entertaining purposes. I will use the term **entertainment (media) content** to refer to content with the potential to entertain (at least part of) its audience. While we include an analysis of the production practices that went into creating *Taboe*, and consider these within the PSM context, a deeper exploration of production in entertainment industries

falls outside of the scope of this dissertation. These entertaining texts certainly are conceptualized, purchased, produced, broadcast, and consumed in a specific media system and culture. Where possible and desirable this dissertation will reflect on these systems, but it is not the focus of the presented work. The question arises whether any form of media content can be entertainment media, including for example news or documentary content. The answer is difficult: I would argue that certain news segments can in fact be entertaining in nature (i.e. a light hearted feel good story with community value, or coverage of sport and cultural events), but that we do not conceive of them as entertainment media content due to convention and broadcast practices. This idea is supported by recent insights from journalism studies, which offer an understanding to *valuable* journalism through the lens of experiences rather than content alone, and includes considerations of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences of news and journalism (Costra Meijer, 2021). Therefore, I argue it makes more sense to approach a definition of entertainment through the lens of experiences, rather than on the level of content.

The **entertainment experience** itself, then, relies on the individual or the audience. In this dissertation, when discussing entertainment experiences I refer to the affective, cognitive, and immersive experiences that can be the result of an individuals' interaction with media content. This dissertation will not limit its understanding of media entertainment experiences to only hedonic enjoyment of entertainment. I do not consider it desirable to broach different concepts for experiences that actually overlap in nature, and in research practice. While other recent approaches have argued to do exactly that (see Vorderer's "Entertainment and Resonance", 2021), I will approach entertainment experiences as being both enjoyable and appreciative, both affective and cognitive. I will follow the focus on positivity. However, positivity should not be confused with a hedonic or eudaimonic perspective. Afterall, the concepts of hedonia and eudaimonia derive from well-being research and the search for a full life, an overall *positive* endeavour. A focus on positivity does not translate into a focus on hedonic experiences as

entertainment, rather it highlights the positive element to mixed affect and meaningfulness as elements of eudaimonic experiences, which may sometimes be linked to "sad content" but are more than that. More on this can be found in the first theoretical chapter of this dissertation.

By conducting a case study of *Taboe*, we chose a television programme that combined more "traditional" entertaining storytelling about minorities (human-interest) with the unexpected, being comedy. While this combination in a television programme about minorities was new for Flemish television, comedy and minorities are certainly not strangers to each other. In Anglo-Saxon traditions in particular, stand-up comedy has always had a place in providing a (critical and subversive) voice to those who lack representation by mass media (Dahl, 2021). Due to its playful nature and lack of severity, comedy and joking provide an inroad to offer different and new perspectives on difficult topics such as the position of minority groups in society. How these mechanisms work, whether this can lead to destigmatizing outcomes and under what circumstances, is discussed in the third chapter of the dissertation.

Starting off this discussion with a focus on PSM, may have given a false impression of the topic of this dissertation. This dissertation is not primarily situated in the field of PSM studies or television studies. While its original conception started in the field of media studies, it evolved over time to adopt a media psychology perspective. It draws heavily on research on entertainment, narrative persuasion, and comedy. The main theoretical and empirical contributions from this project will be in the field of media psychology, but it will also contribute to media studies overall, and the subfields of PSM, television and audience studies in particular. More on this can be found in the methodological framework, as presented in chapter four.

The main purpose of this dissertation was not to study an optimal tool to represent minority stories in television programmes. Rather, the purpose was to study the role that entertainment experiences of humour and human-interest play in achieving destigmatizing outcomes. The starting point of this dissertation was a case study of a television programme with unique potential to contribute to PSM's merit. The

findings of that first production and textual analysis led us to identify a unique interaction between two genres and the topics that were covered. Conversations with producers, participants of *Taboe* and (later, in the second study) audience members highlighted its "one of a kind" voice and unique perspective, being entertaining while also sensitive and moving. From there on, I became fascinated with understanding more about these entertainment experiences. In search of new insights, the research of Mary Beth Oliver and colleagues crossed my path, and contained several routes that could not only explain the phenomenon of *Taboe*, but also contained questions that this research could contribute to. As will be evidenced in the first theoretical chapter, the field of entertainment studies has evolved through several phases, many of which researchers are still working on today. Our research contributes to this field by applying the concepts in the context of comedy, minorities, and public service media considerations (and tribulations, in the case of entertainment specifically).

Overview Figure 1 *Dissertation framework*

	Before text	**During text**		**After text**
Level of production	Production and PSM culture	Stimulate conversation and interaction with text		
	Motivation or intention			
Level of the text	Genre conventions	Host	Human-interest	
		Comedian	Comedy	
			Comedy type	
Level of the individual	Motivation for selection or gratification sought	Selective exposure	Eudaimonic entertainment experiences	Social sharing activities	Changed attitudes
	Genre schemata		Hedonic entertainment experiences	Counterarguing and trivialization	Self-efficacy
			Source liking		Willingness to engage in future intergroup contact
			Parasocial relationships		
Level of society					Destigmatization

This figure, which will be included at the start of each empirical chapter, provides an overview of the key concepts in this dissertation. The main focus of this dissertation is on the individual during and after their consumption of the media text. We include this figure to illustrate the context within which this consumption takes place, and how we suggest this may create public value by providing destigmatizing outcomes on a societal level. Not all elements included in the figure will be discussed in similar depth, nor is it possible to include every element that plays a role in entertainment consumption and responses to those experiences in one dissertation or overview figure. The empirical work of this dissertation starts with an analysis of the production and resulting text, a study that spans phases and decisions before and during production of the case study *Taboe*. This study has its roots in PSM research and reflects on how this shapes a television programme during its production and after. On the level of the text, the study identifies the hybrid of comedy and human-interest as a unique way to discuss minority topics for a large audience, but also reflects on the types of comedy and the functions they fulfil throughout the programme. Then, we step to the level of the individual audience members and include quantitative and qualitative audience research. These chapters address not only entertainment experiences, but also motivations to watch the programme, and reflections after their viewing experiences. By including interviews conducted one year after the broadcast, chapter six provides a unique look at how people continue to interact with televised content about minorities. The latter two empirical chapters test findings of the former studies, focussing on the hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences that appeared central to both production stakeholders and the audience members' discussion of the programme and its impact. In the end, each of these chapters will reflect on the societal value that the results contribute, as will the conclusion in chapter ten.

For now, this dissertation will begin with four introductory chapters. The first three chapters are theoretical in nature and offer an overview of all the concepts used in the empirical work, but often dig deeper than the empirical research papers were able to do. They cover

the theoretical background of entertainment experiences, entertainment-education, and comedy. Because the overarching purpose of this dissertation is to study the way that entertainment experiences play a role in prosocial and destigmatizing outcomes, the first theoretical chapter covers the research on entertainment and experiences thereof. Next, the second chapter considers the idea of educating an audience through entertainment media texts, and looks closer at the work done on entertainment-education and narrative persuasion. In a third theoretical chapter, I discuss the specific potential that comedy has, not only as a persuasive communication tool, but also how it is linked to entertainment experiences and can be a way to introduce new perspectives to known issues. The fourth chapter includes an overview of the methodological framework, a discussion of our case study (*Taboe*), and the research aims and questions. Most importantly, it shows how the key concepts from the theoretical framework relate to each of the presented studies, what methods were used, and how these studies complement each other.

That concludes the introductory chapters, and the dissertation will move on to its empirical work. In five studies (chapters five – nine), I will discuss the way that hybrid entertainment-education television programmes combining comedy and human-interest can lead to combined entertainment experiences, and how these play a role in overcoming resistance to persuasion for prosocial and destigmatizing outcomes. As will become apparent, the research focusses mostly on the added value that comedy brings to the case study. While human-interest television does not necessarily lack in entertainment value, most of the research on human-interest is tied to news and journalism studies, as discussed in chapter six of this dissertation. Human-interest television is the more common (Dhoest, te Walvaart & Panis, 2021; Vertoont, 2019) and more serious form of approaching topics about minorities on Flemish public broadcasting television. Throughout the dissertation, I will often discuss what comedy adds to human-interest, or how human-interest is a necessary building block to balance comedy about difficult topics. However, the focus of the dissertation is on what makes the case study

unique and impactful, which is human-interest's combination with comedy. This combination will often be referred to as humour interest, a portmanteau meant to reflect the format it refers to. The tenth and closing chapter will conclude this dissertation with a discussion of the most important findings and relate them to the current challenges in the research fields. This section will also formulate advice for all production stakeholders involved in the creation and realization of entertainment-education with prosocial potential.

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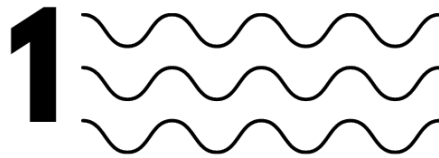
ENTERTAINMENT EXPERIENCES

Entertainment has been of research interest ever since Aristotle and Plato considered why people enjoy stories, and in the case of Plato, even specifically why comedy amuses us (Vorderer et al., 2021; Oliver & Raney, 2014). Quite a bit closer to the current moment, Zillmann and his research group committed themselves to the research on entertainment and enjoyment, and their work still echoes throughout the current conceptions and understandings of entertainment experiences (Vorderer et al., 2021).

The following section will begin by addressing a paradigmatic shift that occurred in media psychology's approach to entertainment studies over the past three decades, which introduced the idea of dual entertainment experiences, based on the different underlying processes for need gratification. Then, I will provide a definition of hedonic enjoyment and eudaimonic appreciation, including a look at the origins of the concepts of hedonia and eudaimonia, and how they fit in entertainment research. That subsection will also include a discussion of the cyclical way in which affective and cognitive components are intertwined in these experiences, and what this implies regarding their outcomes. Next, I will focus on eudaimonic experiences, and shortly discuss predictors, including individual characteristics and contexts that have been linked to eudaimonic entertainment experiences in the past. That section will zoom in on two components of eudaimonic experiences, namely elevation and elaborative thought. Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of the prosocial outcomes that have been related to eudaimonic entertainment experiences.

1   The evolution of entertainment research

This section provides an overview of steps taken in the paradigmatic shift from entertainment research's one-sided focus on enjoyment experiences to a more well-rounded understanding based on a dual-process framework. While this paradigmatic shift (Janicke & Oliver, 2017; Vorderer & Reinecke, 2015) has often been simplified as going from "entertainment as pleasurable" to "entertainment for gratification purposes beyond pleasure", I would like to extend on that idea by

discussing the progress step by step, moving through five phases. Phase one is the classical view from where the shift begins: a hedonic focus. The following sections will discuss each shift with its underlying works and theories. I will end with a discussion of what we call the fifth phase: a re-introduction of an ecological perspective into entertainment studies.

1.1 Phase one: A classical view

Foundational theories in media psychology (Bryant & Vorderer, 2006; Zillmann, 1985; Zillmann & Vorderer, 2000) focussed on the pleasurable aspects of entertainment, assuming enjoyment as the only motivation to select entertainment and the only outcome related to the experience (Oliver & Raney, 2011; Oliver et al., 2019). This led to an understanding of entertainment through the lens of hedonic perspectives (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Oliver & Raney, 2011; Rieger, Reinecke, Frischlich & Bente, 2014; Vorderer, Klimmt & Ritterfeld, 2004; Wirth, Hofer & Schramm, 2012). These theories considered media users as basically passive (Bartsch & Hartmann, 2017) or as selecting entertainment purely for distraction and diversion purposes, or to uplift moods (Oliver & Raney, 2014), exposing themselves only to enjoyment in search of maximized positive affect (Bartsch & Hartmann, 2017; Knobloch-Westerwick, 2006). As such, in spite of entertaining experiences' crucial role in our lives, and in spite of reflections about their purpose dating back as far as 4th century BCE, the discipline of media psychology was left with a notion of entertainment as a distraction, an empty experience that takes up time that could have been spent in a more meaningful or productive way (Oliver & Raney, 2014; Vorderer & Reinecke, 2015).

1.2 Phase two: Entertainment renaissance

This focus on enjoyment as the sole motivation to consume entertainment media content left researchers with the question of why people sought out sad and tragic content (Bartsch & Hartmann, 2017; Wirth et al., 2012), willingly exposing themselves to negative affective states during their "relaxation time", and why they kept doing so regularly. Throughout the research literature, this question is known as the "sad movie paradox" (Bartsch et al., 2014; Oliver, 1993). The

conceptualization of entertainment as purely for pleasure and enjoyment did not seem to cover experiences shared by people watching "other" entertainment (Zillmann, 1988; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010), or those who shared entertainment experiences of "beauty" (Katz et al., 1973). In other examples, people discussed how they used entertainment to understand more about the emotions of others (Tesser, 1988), to gain access to information or for status enhancement purposes (Conway & Rubin, 1991). Others discussed how somber entertainment appealed to them when they were sad or lonely (Mares & Cantor, 1992). So, while it was clear that entertainment offered experiences beyond pleasure alone, the question remained: why do people seek out these experiences in their selection of entertainment content?

The lack of a framework to understand these experiences became increasingly apparent in the early 1990's (Vorderer & Reinecke, 2015). Following a call for research placed by Oliver (1993), researchers flocked to apply existing frameworks to the problem (Bartsch et al., 2014; Oliver, 1993). One explanation came from social comparison theory, stating that pleasure is derived from watching others in worse conditions than your own, which would result in a sense of relief (Mares & Cantor, 1992). Another considered entertainment as a form of "play", providing opportunities to practice for emotional experiences not (yet) encountered in real life. In this explanation, the individual rehearses for potentially threatening or dangerous situations, going through affective, cognitive, and potentially even behavioural scenarios under safe circumstances (Vorderer, 2001). This concept would later be linked to the gratification of higher-order needs such as senses of mastery or autonomy (see below). Others looked into well-being research and proposed that entertainment content could be used for catharsis (Koopman, 2015) or coping with stress and problems (Nabi et al., 2006). We refer to this moment as the first shift, from phase one to phase two, including the first notions that entertainment experiences may extend beyond the hedonic perspective, but lacking understanding of what such a reconceptualization should look like.

Most notably, the concept of meta-emotions (Bartsch, Vorderer, Mangold & Reinhold, 2008; Vorderer & Hartmann, 2009) or meta-appraisals (Schramm & Wirth, 2010), which addressed attitudes or reflections about emotions, was offered as an explanation. Based on cognitive reappraisals of emotions felt, the idea was that audience members would perform a valence transformation: negative emotions experienced in response to somber content are reappraised, and rather than remaining in their negative affective states, the audience members assign positive values to the experience. In spite of its theoretical appeal, this framework had two significant issues. First, it failed to explain why people would first expose themselves to negative experiences to then reappraise them, rather than opt for more straightforward positive affective experiences from less complex forms of entertainment (Bartsch & Hartmann, 2017). Secondly, by relying on meta-appraisals the focus remains on the idea of entertainment experiences as positively valenced and hedonically enjoyable, which still limits understanding (Oliver & Raney, 2011; Oliver et al., 2019). However, what is especially interesting about this idea of meta-emotions, is the way it already linked cognitive appraisals and affective experiences, a characteristic of entertainment experiences which is discussed below. As such, the proposed model of meta-emotions is not necessarily considered as *wrong*, but rather incomplete, and a fundamental cornerstone of the resulting two-factor model within which entertainment experiences are understood today.

1.3 Phase three: Extending enjoyment to include non-hedonic experiences

By attempting to find an answer to the sad movie paradox, this line of research provided substantial insight in other entertainment experiences and their potential for need gratification (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010). By building on foundational theories, entertainment studies rooted in motivational, emotional, and positive (media) psychology found their place in media studies (Vorderer et al., 2021). Oliver et al. (2018) refer to this process as a renaissance, developing a new area of "meaningful

entertainment experiences", a concept which can, and will, take many shapes and forms.

Several scholars (Vorderer, Tamborini, Oliver, Bartsch, and colleagues) worked separately and collaboratively in moving the research along. I will continue this overview by addressing the contributions made by these authors, and how they built on and inspired each other. This third phase is characterized by an extension of the enjoyment concept, beyond a hedonic focus. The idea of intrinsic motivation in media selection is introduced, especially the notion that those motivations can intentionally (Raney et al., 2019) extend beyond pleasure (Oliver & Raney, 2011). For the first time, a second dimension of experiences will be identified and discussed, a step that according to Vorderer and Reinecke (2015) changed the view of the discipline of entertainment audience research and the study of the effects of media entertainment consumption.

While enjoyment remained the focal point of research on entertainment experiences (Tamborini et al., 2011; Wirth et al., 2012), a clear understanding of the concept was turning out to be more complicated than first expected. Nabi and Krcmar (2004) conceptualized enjoyment as an attitude with emotional, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions. In the same year, Vorderer, Klimmt and Ritterfeld (2004) thought of it as an experiential state, defined by physiological, affective, and cognitive involvement, and including potential for gratifications of needs such as self-enhancement and personal growth. Two things became apparent: one, enjoyment can be considered a multi-construct, and two, the word "enjoyment" could no longer cover all the elements attributed to such a single experience. Tamborini et al. (2010) proposed to consider enjoyment as a process of need satisfaction but did not extend their understanding to include non-hedonic needs. In 2011, Tamborini et al. built on Vorderer and Ritterfeld (2009) and Vorderer (2011) to include non-hedonic needs in their framework, which marks the third phase of thinking about entertainment.

1.4 Phase four: Two-factor and dual process models of entertainment experiences

This fourth phase will be discussed over three sections: a first section describing the work on the dual-process framework, a second about hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences, which is the focus of this dissertation, and a third section on entertainment experiences as emotional and cognitive need gratification. All the discussed approaches to understanding entertainment experiences were made popular around the same time, and all contribute essential insights to the way we understand entertainment's influence on its audience today.

1.4.1 Two-factor and dual process models: A phenomenological vs. process approach

Vorderer (2011) described entertainment experiences in a two-factor model, characterized by a combination of a pleasure-seeking aspect and more elaborate appreciations of the content. In this model, hedonic enjoyment is considered a lower-order factor, where lower order needs are satisfied in an immediate way. Additionally, Vorderer (2011) introduced a second, higher order factor called "appreciation", related to needs which are explicated by Self-Determination Theory (SDT, Deci & Ryan, 2000). As a theory of human motivation, SDT links the pursuit of intrinsically rewarding experiences to basic psychological need satisfactions, resulting in positive experiences and wellness (Rigby & Ryan, 2016). Earlier, SDT had been proven to be applicable to the selection of entertainment media content (Ryan et al., 2006), linking three factors of psychological well-being to entertainment experiences: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. While first attributed to an extended understanding of enjoyment (see phase three), Vorderer and Ritterfeld (2009) explained how these needs seemed to be more in line with the use of entertainment for appreciation purposes. According to Lewis et al. (2014) this distinction between enjoyment and appreciation was based on the type of needs being satisfied, while the work done by Tamborini et al. (2010) and Tamborini et al. (2011) focussed more on the cognitive processes that underlie media appraisals.

The work by Tamborini et al. (2011) continued building the new dual-process framework by addressing two issues in the suggested models. A first issue was addressed by overruling the notion of a need hierarchy (enjoyment as lower order vs. appreciation as higher order) and introducing need satisfaction through entertainment as a dual-process model, emphasizing the underlying functional processes rather than the phenomenological terms. A second issue the work by Tamborini et al. (2011) addressed was the conflict of needs. In their new model, both enjoyment and appreciation were considered positive experiences that can satisfy needs, but differ in the way they are processed. On the one hand, enjoyment relies on quick, intuitive processing, occurring when instinctive needs are satisfied (Lewis et al., 2014). On the other hand, appreciation is what occurs through a slower, more deliberate processing (Lewis et al., 2014), based on controlled appraisals that allow a person to weigh conflicting needs that have been made salient, which can occur either consciously or unconsciously (Tamborini et al., 2011). In the end, certain needs will be resolved and others sacrificed, resulting in a sense of appreciation for those that did get resolved.

Overall, in an attempt to better understand entertainment experiences beyond pleasure, the authors looked at the research on psychological well-being and processes underlying need satisfaction. Oliver and Raney (2011) provided an overview of all the ways well-being research contributed to the research on entertainment experiences. A first way has been discussed above. I will now discuss a second major influence, Waterman's (1993) conceptualization of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being and their entertainment experience counterparts (Raney et al., 2019).

1.4.2 Hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences

In their search for an explanation of the sad movie paradox (Oliver, 1993) and the discussion regarding meta-emotions (Bartsch et al., 2008), Oliver and Bartsch (2010) introduced a set of studies that show that audiences select movies in search of gratifications that go beyond a hedonic search for pleasure alone. In the end, they suggested that media enjoyment

should be split in three concepts, but also that the word enjoyment is only applicable to one of those types of experiences. In their proposal, enjoyment refers to the experience of fun and positively valenced emotions. The authors called for a second concept that refers to thrill and suspense, which are characterized by emotional arousal and negative valence. While I would argue that thrill and suspense can also be positive in nature, the research by Oliver & Bartsch (2010) differentiates thrill and suspense from hedonic enjoyment based on its negative valence, often occurring while watching thrillers or action genre content. Finally, and for our purposes, most importantly, they identified a third, distinct motivating factor for entertainment consumption: appreciation. The concept of appreciation is defined as "An experience characterized by the perception of deeper meaning, the feeling of being moved, and the motivation to elaborate on thoughts and feelings inspired by the experience" (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010, p. 76).

Rather than negate all the work done before, the authors stressed that the concept of appreciation was merely meant as an extension to the existing frameworks, a way to conceptualize what was already known: enjoyment could no longer cover all entertainment experiences. The authors pointed out that these experiences of appreciation seemed to rely on a unique blend of positive and negative affect, which they called "mixed affect experiences" or "tender" emotions, and cognitive responses. From then on, enjoyment was linked to purely positive affective reactions, while appreciation was associated with more serious and pensive experiences. Following the same line of thought, in 2011, Oliver and Raney mirrored the distinction of gratifications related to pleasure and more serious "other" gratifications with the way that well-being researchers had discussed and conceptualized this issue: through the lens of hedonic and eudaimonic motivations.

The introduction of hedonia and eudaimonia in well-being research is widely attributed to Waterman (1993), while Deci and Ryan (2000) are responsible for the wide spread of the concepts by shaping their review paper of the literature on well-being studies around this distinction (Huta & Waterman, 2014). Historically, the concepts of

hedonia and eudaimonia date all the way back to Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics in 4th Century BCE (Huta, 2016). Hedonic happiness refers to happiness derived from pleasure, while eudaimonic happiness comes from meaning and insight, conceptualized in terms of personal expressiveness, self-realization, and personal development. Rather than being a purpose or goal, philosophers who follow Aristotle's conception consider hedonia and eudaimonia as two ways of "being" in life, pursuing the best life possible. In the field of social psychology and wellbeing, most researchers believe that a "full life" is the product of a combination of the two (Huta & Waterman, 2014).

Huta (2016)[2] gave an overview of concepts used throughout research literature that can be related to either hedonic or eudaimonic experiences. For hedonic experiences, this included positive affect, satisfaction, carefreeness, low negative affect. For eudaimonic experiences, this included meaning experience, elevation, feeling integrated, personal expressiveness and feeling of accomplishment. For experiences that are both hedonic and eudaimonic, Huta (2016) included life satisfaction and domain satisfaction, happiness, and vitality.

Oliver et al. (2019) explained how the concepts of hedonia and eudaimonia appeal to the pleasure- and meaning seeking components represented in the distinctive dimensions of media selection. Because the concepts of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences are essential to the research represented in this dissertation, they will be more extensively discussed in the following section ("Defining hedonic and eudaimonic experiences"). For now, let us move on further in the third stage of the development of entertainment research, and consider Bartsch's work on intrinsic need gratification.

1.4.3 Emotional and cognitive gratifications

A final research effort worth discussing in light of our understanding of entertainment experiences, comes from the work done on the emotional and cognitive gratifications they evoke. In essence, Bartsch (2012)

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[2] For those interested in a more extensive background regarding the concepts of hedonia and eudaimonia and their history, we refer to Huta's 2016 overview of the concepts throughout the research literature.

proposed that aside from affective experiences that are gratifying per se, such as pleasure or sentimentality, entertainment experiences can also be indirectly gratifying by contributing to the gratification of cognitive and social needs. Experiencing emotions then becomes gratifying because it catalyses another level of gratifications, satisfying intrinsic needs that "contribute to wellbeing in more complex, more sustainable ways" (Bartsch et al., 2014, p. 126). Aside from this extension of our understanding regarding gratifying experiences, the research also first conceptualized the link between the experience of being moved and reflectiveness. Together with the work done by Das et al. (2017), these studies confirmed a mutually reinforcing, self-sustaining model of emotion and cognition in eudaimonic entertainment experiences. The entertainment process is considered self-sustaining because thoughts stimulate emotions and emotions stimulate thoughts, catalysing a circle of being moved and reflecting, allowing one to contemplate the content even after exposure has ended. We will later discuss the role this plays in the extending entertainment experiences through social television practices, and the function this has in the potential of entertainment-education.

1.5   Phase five: Including the ecological perspective

The fifth phase concerns the position of the ecological approach within an evolving perspective on entertainment studies. It is mostly based on recent studies that can offer insights regarding this approach, and discussions by Vorderer and Hartmann (2009) and Vorderer et al. (2021).

Already in 2009, Vorderer and Hartmann suggested that entertainment research should take into account the environment wherein entertainment is experienced, considering that entertainment does not happen in a vacuum. They proposed that the individual's position in their real and mediated environment influences their media consumption, and therefore should be taken into account (Vorderer et al., 2021). Building on that insight, Vorderer et al. (2021) argued for a stronger (re-)integration of critical perspectives in entertainment research. Most importantly, this idea encourages media psychologists to

reintroduce context in the analysis of entertainment experiences. Including rich readings and more precise observations of media texts can stimulate entertainment researchers to better understand their results in a more nuanced way. In this dissertation this ecological perspective is applied mostly through the integration of entertainment research in a broader case study context, more on which can be found in the methodological framework in chapter four. By selecting a case study that was analysed from production to reception, a more complete understanding of the phenomenon and its accompanying media psychology can be provided. While is it outside the scope of our research to address the many ways in which entertainment research has been working to include more nuanced and contextualized insights, I include some key examples here to discuss the different forms such an ecological perspective can take. The presented work is unable to address all (valid) questions of culture, but contributes by combining insights from entertainment research with narrative persuasion (chapter two), applied to comedy (chapter three) and by studying this in a Flemish context (chapter three, and beyond).

For example, the bulk of the defining research in the evolution of the field of entertainment studies was conducted in a USA centric setting. While the work offers fundamental insights that have been proven to be applicable beyond the USA and other Western contexts, a more in-depth approach to understanding the role of culture and context in entertainment experiences seems to be on the rise.

First, it may help researchers to consider other media experiences outside the westernized perspective (Vorderer et al., 2021), or to integrate richer cultural contexts of both production and reception of entertainment media content (Odağ, 2021). For example, Moore et al. (2021) found that changing the narrative frame of a story from an individual frame to a social responsibility frame negatively influenced enjoyment of the narrative, which is indicative of the importance of considering production practices in the study of entertainment experiences. Kim et al. (2014) showed how eudaimonic experiences occurred differently in panels in South Korea and the USA, based on

cultural understandings and attitudes regarding mixed affect experiences. Closer to home, Strick (2021) found different results regarding entertainment experiences of "moving comedy" (comedy videos which also included a moving, touching element) during the COVID-19 pandemic, comparing a sample of Dutch, USA, and UK participants. In a cultural (maybe even political) twist, Strick takes into account the pandemic situations wherein each nation found itself at the time of writing, explaining how "the depressing situation in the US and UK may have caused a preference for soberness" (p. 172). While these insights may appear natural to those who are familiar with critical entertainment research, it is only recently that media psychologists have included these perspectives in their quantitative work (Vorderer et al., 2021).

Second, researchers are encouraged to consider the role of social circumstances and consumption contexts in entertainment experiences (Zillich, 2014; Cohen & Lancaster, 2014). Whereas Zillich (2014) found that the presence of others did not influence hedonic enjoyment, Cohen and Lancaster (2014) provided evidence that college students who watched entertainment media content together reported higher emotional arousal and enjoyment, when compared to people who watched alone. In that same study, Zillich (2014) found that conversations indicating involvement intensified empathy, alerting to the prosocial potential of conversation regarding entertainment content (Slater & Rouner, 2002). Chapter six and seven of the dissertation include reflections about circumstances of viewing, as does the final chapter ten.

Aside from interpersonal contexts, a new digital turn also requires researchers to take into account an additional mediated layer to entertainment experiences. Evidence was found that reading negative comments while watching television can reduce enjoyment thereof (Möller & Kühne, 2019; Waddell & Sundar, 2017), while positive comments can increase enjoyment (Winter et al., 2018). In this latter study, the control clip included a fragment of an opera singer who moves the judge to tears and receives a standing ovation, which participants enjoyed more than a negative clip. Unfortunately, Winter et al. (2018) did

not take into account the dual-process model of entertainment experiences, and therefore can not draw any conclusions regarding the influence of reading online comments on eudaimonic experiences. Möller and Kühne (2019) did include an appreciation measure, but no influence of reading user comments on appreciation was found. All these studies focus on the influence of reading comments on entertainment experiences but overlook the interactive process of participating in such behaviour. Raney and Ji (2017) suggest that conversations about television on social media can be considered not only a complement to those experiences, but often include entertainment experiences in their own right. While those mediated conversations happen, a cognitive process occurs where a person engages with the experiences just stimulated by the entertainment media consumption on another level, leading to "more intense information processing including elaboration and recall" (Ji, 2015, p. 41). These multimedial entertainment experiences may also play a role in conversations and outcomes surrounding the influence of entertainment-education (El-Khoury, 2020). This dissertation includes this multimedial perspective to entertainment experiences and takes into account how social television interactions can help shape not only what individuals experience, but also considers what "moves" them to share their thoughts and feelings, offering a more integrated perspective on this phenomenon. I would suggest that this ecological perspective on media psychology introduces a fifth phase of entertainment experiences research. Similar to earlier theoretical contributions, the suggestion is made to extend rather than replace former work and frameworks.

Overall, entertainment research evolved significantly over the past thirty years, and extended our knowledge about the motivations and practices of entertainment consumption. In the end, all discussed phases contributed to the current position of entertainment research today and have each added to the studies presented in this dissertation. Table 1 gives an overview of all phases and their most important characteristics.

Table 1 *Conceptualizations of entertainment experiences in five phases of entertainment research*

Phase	Description
Phase 1	Entertainment experiences focussed on fun and pleasure, hedonic striving, mood optimization, relaxation, characterized by positive affect and arousal. No other experiences are included in the framework.
Phase 2	Entertainment in search of enjoyment, striving for hedonic purposes, pleasure, fun, and relaxation. Frameworks attempt to include other experiences, but despite efforts to explain those "other" experiences, positive affective outcomes remain the focal point.
Phase 3	Entertainment in search of enjoyment experiences, but the concept of enjoyment itself is extended to include non-hedonic purposes.
Phase 4	Entertainment experiences can take the form of enjoyment, eudaimonic appreciation or thrill and suspense: Entertainment gratifications steer selection through a dual-process model that consists of mutually enforcing affective and cognitive components and can explain entertainment's role in personal and social wellbeing.
Phase 5	Entertainment experiences as a combination of affective experiences, cognitive effort and need fulfilment based on a dual-processing model, within an ecological perspective that encompasses the real and mediated environment and an integration with critical approaches.

2 Hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences

The work done on entertainment research is the groundwork of the current dissertation. In what follows, the presented works focus on integrating the framework of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences in entertainment-education for prosocial outcomes, which is why I will continue with a more in-depth look at that framework and end this chapter with a discussion about its prosocial potential. More about the integration of entertainment experiences in entertainment-education can be found in chapter two ("Entertainment-education"). In this section I will focus on eudaimonic entertainment experiences, explain how and when they occur, for whom, in response to which types of entertainment content, what they entail and what (prosocial) outcomes have been linked to them in the past.

Building on the idea that entertainment experiences can appeal to both hedonic and non-hedonic needs, the idea of conceptualizing entertainment experiences as hedonic and eudaimonic was introduced (Oliver & Raney, 2011). Oliver and Bartsch (2010) had earlier discussed the experience of "appreciation" as an additional concept to describe entertainment experiences, referring to experiences that are considered more meaningful, beyond pleasure and enjoyment. In short, the process of entertainment consumption gratifying hedonic needs through fun, pleasure and positive affective experiences is referred to as (hedonic) enjoyment (Raney & Bryant, 2019). Additionally, (eudaimonic) appreciation of entertainment is the process of entertainment content stimulating mixed emotional experiences that then contribute to complex cognitive and social needs gratifications, including social relationship functions, emotional engagement with characters and self-reflection. Let us take a closer look at how such eudaimonic entertainment experiences have been defined throughout the literature, and which dimensions and experiences have most often been included in the explanation of their prosocial potential, which is what this dissertation is ultimately interested in.

Interestingly, while they may appear to be so at first sight, hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences are not mutually exclusive but rather orthogonal, i.e. unrelated in their outcome, but conceptually connected (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Oliver & Raney, 2011; Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017; Vittersø & Søholt, 2011). While certain genres have been linked more often to certain experiences, they do not exclude each other: a poignant moment in a comedy movie can move a person, and a funny moment in a dramatic documentary can still be pleasurable (Raney et al., 2019; Möller & Kühne, 2019). Both entertainment experiences can co-occur in one media "consumption" (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Hall & Zwarun, 2012). However, there are clear differences between the responses, mostly seen in their affective and cognitive components and processes (Das et al., 2017). Oliver and Bartsch (2010) explained that rather than considering hedonic and eudaimonic gratifications and experiences as opposite ends of a spectrum, it is better to think of them as a set of gratifications, that can and will co-occur throughout entertainment experiences.

It is important to note that is it difficult to find consistency in the definition and conceptualization of eudaimonic experiences (Daneels, Bowman et al., 2021; Landman, 2021). While well aware of the current difficulties in this research area, for the time being, this section will discuss the conceptualization of eudaimonic entertainment as it has been applied in this dissertation. For a discussion regarding the need to better conceptualize and understand the processes and their dimensions, we refer to Landman (2021), Vorderer et al. (2021), and the conclusion of this dissertation regarding the influence of such issues on the research presented in this dissertation.

As stated by Raney et al. (2019) "Eudaimonic media experiences are characterized by numerous affective and cognitive components, many of which can simultaneously be thought of as responses to and effects of the content" (p. 261). Hall (2015) proposed that hedonic enjoyment and eudaimonic appreciation have "different emotional footprints", referring to the fact that hedonic enjoyment is characterized

by positive emotions and a lack of negative ones, while appreciation is defined by mixed affect: a blend of positive and negative emotions and a meaningful component. Oliver and Bartsch (2010) labelled this emotional component of appreciation as "being moved", which Bartsch et al. (2014) in turn defined as "a socially oriented affective state with negative and mixed affective valence", characterized by its involvement with thought-provoking experiences. This latter, cognitive component is an additional marker of eudaimonic experiences.

Next, I will first give an overview of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences along their affective and cognitive dimensions. Second, I will discuss predictors of eudaimonic experiences, on the level of the content and individual traits and states. Third, I will address the components of eudaimonic experiences, focussing mostly on the experience of elevation and thought and reflection. These will be crucial in the closing section on the prosocial outcomes of entertainment experiences.

2.1 Affective and cognitive dimensions of entertainment experiences

As discussed above, dual-process models of entertainment experiences have often discussed how these experiences can gratify both affective and cognitive needs, and even showed that these processes are cyclical in nature. This section considers this relation to hedonic and eudaimonic experiences more in depth.

Bartsch and Hartmann (2017) discussed enjoyment, suspense, and appreciation (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010) through the perspective of affective and cognitive challenge[3] as they relate to each of the experiences. Bartsch and Oliver (2011) already suggested that immediate, reactive processes would be associated with enjoyment and arousal, while more reflective processes (Cupchik, 1995) would occur more in the case of appreciation, which requires slower, more deliberate processing. According to Bartsch and Hartmann (2017), fun is low on

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[3] This study relies on the framework by Hartmann (2013) and considers challenges as "demands that require self-regulatory behaviour" (Bartsch & Hartmann, 2017, p. 33)

both affective and cognitive challenge, while suspense is a form of mastery of affective challenges, occurring purely on that level. Eudaimonic appreciation is defined as a growth-oriented type of entertainment experience that is both cognitively and affectively challenging. The cognitive effort is required to deal with complex issues and to resolve affective challenges that cannot be solved on the affective level alone.

Overall, hedonic entertainment experiences are associated with fun and pleasure (Oliver & Raney, 2011). Eudaimonic experiences are associated with insight in the meaning of life (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Oliver & Raney, 2011), understanding, reflection and awareness of the human condition and life (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Bartsch et al., 2014; Oliver & Raney, 2011; Tamborini et al., 2011) and in particular vulnerabilities and fragilities of life (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010). Wirth et al. (2012) conceptualized the contributions of eudaimonic experiences along five dimensions of well-being: (1) self-acceptance and purpose in life, (2) autonomy, (3) competence and personal growth, (4) relatedness, and (5) activation of central values. Overall, it becomes clear that eudaimonic appreciation is defined by mixed affect experiences and a stimulation to think about the content, leading to a meaningful experience (Oliver et al., 2016; Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017). Vorderer and Reinecke (2015) added that these experiences are the result of an entertainment consumption in search of meaning and personal growth.

As evidenced in this discussion, a focus on affective experiences alone would seriously underestimate the cognitive aspect of entertainment and its contribution to attitudes, beliefs, and maybe even behavioural change (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Bartsch & Hartmann, 2017; Das et al., 2017). Research has shown that the cognitive and emotional elements of the eudaimonic experience sustain and strengthen each other (Das et al., 2017), indicating that the eudaimonic experience is a cyclical process characterized by thought-provoking and mixed affect experiences (Bartsch, 2012; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Bartsch et al., 2014). Specifically, evidence has been found that being moved

stimulates thought (Bartsch et al., 2014), which eventually also stimulates behavioural action (Das et al., 2017).

Throughout this dissertation, entertainment experiences will mostly be defined as hedonic enjoyment and eudaimonic appreciation experiences of entertainment. We rarely address the third factor of suspense, aside from chapter six, where it is mentioned in the discussion of the results. While studies have shown that this third factor can be uniquely defined both throughout genre preferences (Hall, 2005) and the differences in affective and cognitive processing of entertainment (Bartsch & Hartmann, 2017), this dissertation will move forward with the concepts of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences.

2.2 Predictors of eudaimonic entertainment experiences

Let us go back a few pages in this dissertation, to the sad movie paradox, which we identified as the starting point of a renaissance in the research on entertainment experiences. Everything that led us here began from the problem of not being able to link hedonic experiences to certain stories or genres. The appeal of sad or tragic films, and the resulting negative affective experience, was difficult to explain in hedonic-focussed frameworks. After dual-process and two-factor models had been introduced, some were quick to link these genres to meaning-seeking or eudaimonic motivations for entertainment selection. Entertainment experiences occur as a response to several types of mediated and non-mediated exposure (Igartua and Barrios, 2013; Weinmann et al., 2016) including books (Koopman, 2015), sports (Hall, 2015), digital games (Daneels, Malliet et al., 2021), online video (Schneider et al., 2016), political talk shows (Roth et al., 2014), social media (Reinecke et al., 2014) and fan community experiences (Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017). This dissertation is focussed on the television context and experiences thereof, thus we will limit our discussion to studies focussing on audiovisual media such as television, but also on experiences of film and video. From here on, this chapter will focus on the lesser known eudaimonic entertainment experience and argue its value in studying the social potential of entertainment texts on television.

Several authors (Oliver, 2008; Oliver & Hartmann, 2010; Hartmann & Bartsch, 2017; Dale et al., 2017) have identified which elements in entertainment content are related to eudaimonic experiences. Some examples include fragility of the human condition and hardship, but also how people overcome adversity. Others are more general displays of the human condition, connection, moral conflict, and conflict being resolved with displays of moral virtues. For non-fiction television specifically, Tsay-Vogel and Krakowiak (2016) studied entertainment experiences of reality TV, comparing game shows and lifestyle transformation shows. They found no difference regarding happy affect, but lifestyle transformation television stimulated more elevation and sad affect, and stronger eudaimonic experiences, including warmth, understanding and tenderness. This indicates how certain subgenres or narrative elements of reality television appeal more or less to eudaimonic experiences. The authors proposed that included themes such as compassion, integrity, diligence, and sacrifice may have contributed to these outcomes.

However, genre alone does not immediately lead to certain entertainment experiences (Reinecke, 2016; Zillmann, Hezel & Medoff, 1980). Raney et al. (2019) gave an overview of the way that individual differences predict eudaimonic entertainment experiences. Of course, eudaimonic motivation on its own is an individual preference, steered by "demographic characteristics, life experiences and traits" (p. 260). Research has shown that older adults are more interested in meaningful experiences, and that associations between fun and mixed affect were higher while watching eudaimonically stimulating content (Mares & Bonus, 2021). While some studies have found links between genre preferences, motivations for experiences and gratifications, and gender, it is now more commonly believed that these gender differences are more related to socialization processes than sex differences (Raney & Bryant, 2019). Some have called for the inclusion of gender identity and the use of psychometric gender measures rather than the binary sex measurement that is often still applied in entertainment studies (Reich, 2021).

On a trait level, eudaimonic experiences are predicted by higher levels of reflectiveness, need for cognition (Hall & Zwarun, 2012; Igartua and Barrios, 2013), search for meaning in life and need for affect. Hedonic motivations are associated with optimism, fun, and playfulness (Oliver & Raney, 2011). Interestingly, at the time, such orientations were considered as trait-like preferences, but Oliver and Raney (2011) also discuss that these orientations and media preferences are flexible over time and context. On an individual state level, rather than drawing a direct connection from mood to media selection, Vandebosch and Poels (2021) suggest that mood and content type selection are better explained by taking into account which mood regulation strategies an individual applies, which are also flexible over time, content, and context.

In summary, what a person eventually experiences while consuming an entertainment media text, is influenced by characteristics of the text, trait- and state characteristics of the individual, and motivations for exposure. None of these elements have a singular, bound influence on the experience, and a same entertaining text can hedonically entertainment me, eudaimonically entertain you, and maybe not even slightly entertain a third individual.

2.3 Components of eudaimonic experiences: elevation and cognitive elaboration

The literature on eudaimonic entertainment experiences has contributed many different concepts which can be used to describe processes, effects, outcomes, gratifications sought and found etc. However, we will limit our discussion to two elements: first elevation, which we will explain as a self-transcendent experience to highlight its prosocial potential. Second, we will discuss the thought-provoking elements of eudaimonic entertainment experiences, also referred to as elaboration and involvement.

Several authors have attempted to summarize the components of eudaimonic experiences and seem to encounter the same difficulties (Landmann, 2021): the concepts used to describe experiences, outcomes, and effects, are used interchangeably. Landmann (2021)

included a framework that positions eudaimonic emotions as being either feeling-specific or elicitor-specific. The feeling-specific emotions include elevation, being moved, awe and tenderness. As mentioned in the introduction of this section, Raney et al. (2019) stated that the components of entertainment experiences can be thought of both as responses and as effects. Components are split in affective components (empathy, elevation, and awe) and cognitive components (meaning-making, cognitive emotion regulation, cognitive challenge and elaboration and involvement). The outcomes are connectedness and social perceptions, prosocial behaviours, and political engagement. This section will discuss elevation as well as elaboration in more detail, considering these are the elements covered in our fourth study.

2.3.1 Elevation

A recent concept that has been used to discuss eudaimonic entertainment experiences, are so-called self-transcendent experiences (Oliver et al., 2018). These self-transcendent experiences are characterized by mixed affect, greater cognitive effort (when compared to hedonic entertainment experiences) and enhanced prosociality (Clayton et al., 2019; Oliver et al., 2018; Schnall et al., 2010). These experiences occur in response to seeing displays of shared humanity, moral beauty, hope and courage (Oliver et al., 2018) and result in an increased sense of interconnectedness (Janicke & Oliver, 2017) with others, the surroundings and causes beyond the self. As described in Oliver et al. (2018), the characteristics used to describe eudaimonic experiences up until that point were mixed affect, more cognitive effort, and a fulfilment of intrinsic needs. What sets a self-transcendent experience apart from a "regular" eudaimonic experience is the outward- or other-focused element (Janicke & Oliver, 2017). As evidenced by Janicke-Bowles (2020), not only do films with self-transcendent portrayals have the potential to stimulate a sense of self-transcendence, they also lead to lower perceptions of self-centeredness.

One of the most studied self-transcendent emotions in the context of eudaimonic entertainment experiences is a sense of elevation (Janicke

& Oliver, 2017, Janicke-Bowles, 2020). Elevation is usually experienced in response to displays of human or moral virtue, or beauty (Haidt, 2003). Oliver, Hartmann and Woolley (2012) found that many of the films that viewers described as "meaningful" included such portrayals of moral virtues and stimulated such a sense of elevation. Since then, it has become one of the most used indicators for eudaimonic entertainment experiences. Regarding its elicitors, research has identified portrayals of altruism, connectedness, love, and kindness (Janicke & Oliver, 2017). It has been described both as a positive (Haidt., 2000) and a mixed affect experience (Oliver, Hartmann & Woolley, 2012). On a physical level, it can be marked by tears, warm feelings in the chest, or a lump in the throat (Silvers & Haidt, 2008) or an increased heart rate (Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017). As an emotion, it has been described as inspiring (Oliver, Hartmann & Woolley, 2012) and warm and uplifting (Bailey & Wojdysnki, 2015). Bartsch et al. (2018) described elevation as a subtype of empathic, other-oriented feelings. Several definitions of elevation include a discussion of outcomes related to the experience, most notably positive social functioning (Haidt, 2003) and willingness to emulate the witnessed morally virtuous behaviour (Algoe & Haidt, 2009; Janicke & Oliver, 2017), resulting in desires to "be a better person" or willingness to help others (Oliver, Hartmann & Woolley, 2012). Overall, self-transcendent emotions in general have often been connected to prosocial outcomes such as increased altruism and prosocial behavioural intent (Clayton et al., 2019).

2.3.2 Elaboration

Several researchers have highlighted the cognitive processes that underlie eudaimonic entertainment experiences (Bartsch et al., 2014; Das et al., 2017; Bartsch & Hartmann, 2017; Igartua & Barrios, 2013; Schramm & Wirth, 2010; Wulf et al., 2019). As discussed above, the research on eudaimonic entertainment experiences has clearly identified the connection between the affective and cognitive elements in the experience (Bartsch & Oliver, 2011; Bartsch et al., 2014; Das et al. 2017). According to Bartsch et al. (2018), it is the cognitive component of

eudaimonic experiences that leads to increased reflection, attitude change and information seeking behaviour.

For example, Knobloch-Westerwick et al. (2012) found that tragic content that stimulates reflection and thought, also leads to stronger appreciation of the content. Bartsch and Hartmann (2017) observed how eudaimonic experiences were associated with higher levels of cognitive processing. Clayton et al. (2019) contributed that content which includes self-transcendence inducing elements also leads to more cognitive resources being allocated to its decoding. This thought-provoking element becomes crucial when studying eudaimonic experiences' potential to stimulate prosocial attitudes, beliefs, and even behavioural change (Raney et al., 2019). Das et al. (2017) found that mixed affect experiences stimulated reflective thought, which then positively influenced actual behaviour. Bartsch et al. (2018) found that reflective thought mediated the influence of empathic feelings on destigmatizing outcomes. Several studies have identified this role and emphasized the importance of reflection and thought as a mediator of the effect of "meaningful entertainment" on prosocial outcomes. More on stigma and the process of (de)stigmatization is discussed in the methodological framework in chapter four. For now, we focus on the contribution of eudaimonic entertainment in such a process.

2.4   Prosocial outcomes of entertainment experiences

The sections above discussed how entertainment research evolved over the years and how the introduced concepts can be defined. More importantly, I discussed the processes through which researchers believe that these types of experiences can influence audiences. Now, it is time to take a look at the outcomes that have been connected to eudaimonic experiences, focussing on prosocial outcomes. As mentioned by Raney et al. (2019) the outcomes related to eudaimonic entertainment experiences have been listed as beneficial towards connectedness and social perceptions, prosocial behaviours, and political engagement. The work presented in this dissertation is most interested in destigmatizing outcomes of entertainment experiences.

Therefore, I will focus on outcomes regarding connectedness as well as prosocial attitudes and behavioural intentions.

Already in 1997, Batson et al. found evidence that portrayals of morally virtuous acts increased a sense of being moved, which in turn predicted prosocial motivations. Since then, several authors have contributed evidence of eudaimonic entertainment experiences stimulating altruistic behaviour and prosocial motivations (Bailey & Wojdynski, 2015; Ellithorpe et al., 2015; Neubaum et al., 2020; Oliver, Hartmann & Woolley, 2012; Schnall et al., 2010). The influence of the content on these outcomes is most often mediated by elevation (Oliver, Hartmann & Woolley, 2012; Neubaum, 2020; Schnall & Roper, 2012) or mixed affect experiences (Bailey & Wojdysnki, 2015; Bennett, 2015).

When discussing the influence of eudaimonic entertainment experiences on connectedness, I look beyond the specific "other" (Janicke & Oliver, 2017) as evidenced in our discussion regarding self-transcendent emotions. This approach has also inspired other researchers to look at prosocial outcomes that can result from these experiences and the potential of entertainment in destigmatization and the reduction of prejudice (Neubaum et al., 2020; Raney et al., 2019). Oliver et al. (2015) showed how inspiring videos led to a heightened sense of connection via elevation, including a greater feeling of connection with people from other ethnic or racial groups, which was in turn associated with more favourable attitudes toward those groups. Bartsch et al. (2018) showed how feelings of empathy for disabled athletes carried over into better perceptions of disabled persons in general. The influence of empathy on destigmatizing outcomes was mediated by (among others) elevation and reflective thoughts. Neubaum et al. (2020) contributed that elevation can help to stimulate prosocial motivations over the long term through repeated exposure.

Zhao (2018) found that enjoyment and elevation together stimulated helping behaviour. While there was no direct relation between hedonic enjoyment and helping behaviour, enjoyment had a positive effect on elevation, which did positively influence helping. Therefore, the authors suggested that hedonic experiences contributed to eudaimonic
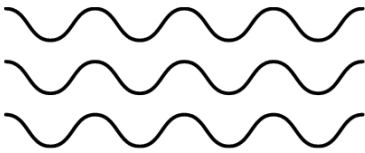
experiences' prosocial potential. As discussed above, entertainment experiences do not happen in a vacuum, but can and do co-occur. Based on these findings, content which appeals to a "fuller" entertainment experience, covering both hedonic and eudaimonic elements, may embolden the prosocial outcomes as discussed above. Regarding enjoyment and appreciation, Schneider et al. (2016) found that while enjoyment stimulated both objective and subjective knowledge, appreciation was positively related to behavioural intentions. This makes sense in relation to the results presented by Das et al. (2017): the thought component to eudaimonic experiences is crucial to actually stimulating action or behaviour. Jang et al. (2019) contributed that online videos with meaningful elements were more likely to be shared and stimulated individuals to search for more information on the included topics, compared to more "hedonic-appeal" videos.

3   Conclusion

In this first section of the theoretical framework, I provided an overview of the extensive work that has been done in research on entertainment experiences over the past decades, based on the five phases identified in this evolution. Presenting the work of such a field in development is challenging, and always a product of its time. Overall, the most important takeaway at this time is the working understanding of entertainment experiences as it has been applied in this dissertation: stimulating affective and cognitive cyclical dual-processes that result in experiences of enjoyment and appreciation, which are distinct, but orthogonal and multifaceted concepts, and in the case of eudaimonic appreciation experiences, have been proven to stimulate prosocial motivations and outcomes. In their 2018 study on the destigmatizing potential of the Paralympics for the general disabled community, Bartsch et al. (2018) concluded that "some types of elevating narratives can be harnessed for the dual goal of attracting audience interest and promoting (the) destigmatization (of persons)" (p. 547). In this dissertation, and over the past four years of research, I have been guided by a similar idea. One element that has not been discussed in this section but is crucial to

success in such a purpose, is the "carryover" of entertainment experiences to real-life outcomes, influences on attitudes and behaviour that then translate to the "real world". I will address this in the following section, when discussing entertainment-education and its underlying frameworks.

2

ENTERTAINMENT - EDUCATION

This chapter explains how entertainment-education can contribute to facilitating intergroup contact and reducing prejudice. I will do so by discussing the parasocial contact hypothesis and the theory of mediated intergroup contact. But to begin this section, I will provide an overview of the theoretical background of entertainment-education and the frameworks that explain its practice and results. This is followed by a discussion of concepts that have been used to explain the inner workings of entertainment-education, being narrative persuasion's two key elements: transportation and identification. While these elements are not the focus of our dissertation, it is important to understand *why* exactly these two dimensions were raised as the explanatory mechanisms, as I will use the same arguments to introduce entertainment experiences as alternatives. That is exactly what we do in the third section of this chapter: discuss how current narrative persuasion research suggests that entertainment overcomes resistance, followed by an argumentation that both hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences can play a key role in overcoming resistance to persuasion, as demonstrated through our understanding of affective and cognitive experiences of entertainment. To end this chapter, as promised, I will explain the current state of the art regarding entertainment-education for destigmatizing outcomes and the processes that have led us to consider its potential to stimulate future intergroup contact.

Before we continue this chapter, allow me to clear up a specific distinction: narratives and entertainment media (texts) are not synonymous to each other. An entertaining television programme will most often include a narrative, but this is not necessarily so, as the experience of entertainment is not dependent on the text (alone) but rather on the affective and cognitive experience thereof. Alternatively, a narrative format does not necessarily mean that every person exposed will be entertained. If a sad, solemn narrative fails to stimulate positive or mixed affective experiences, I do not consider this narrative to be entertaining. Nevertheless, a lot of the research discussed in this chapter will treat these differentiations a bit more loosely. I will make a conscious effort to clear up the necessary distinctions where possible.

1   What is entertainment-education?

In this section, I will discuss what entertainment-education is and how it evolved. This will include an explanation of why and how entertainment-education research no longer limits the concept to "strategized" entertainment-education, meaning entertainment interventions which were designed, produced, and broadcast (in the case of television) with a specific impact objective. Next, I will give a brief overview of topics that have been addressed in both designed entertainment-education campaigns, and through entertainment television with persuasive potential. Throughout all of this, I will focus on entertainment-education on television, but we should be aware of the fact that entertainment-education is not limited to one medium (Singhal & Rogers, 2002, 2004). After that, I will move on to the frameworks that have been applied to explain how entertainment-education and "accidentally" persuasive narratives influence their audience.

Entertainment-education (hereafter: E-E) is the practice of integrating health, educational, or prosocial and destigmatizing messages in entertainment media with the intent to influence awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and even behaviour in a prosocial direction (Singhal, Cody & Rogers, 2004), all while increasing the potential reach of such messages (Brown & Singhal, 1999). It is sometimes also referred to as edutainment or infotainment (Usdin et al., 2004; Sood et al., 2004), but it seems that entertainment-education encapsulates more than simply the genre, also including the strategic efforts included in its traditional approach.

E-E research has studied narratives, both designed as E-E campaigns and non-strategic media content on topics such as driving under the influence of alcohol (Dejong & Winsten, 1990), the AIDS pandemic of the 1980's (Lozano & Singhal, 1993), breast cancer screenings (McQueen, 2011), safe sex intentions (Moyer-Gusé, Chung & Jain, 2011; Moyer-Gusé, Mahood & Brookes, 2011) and many more. As is evidenced in this brief list of studies and their topics, entertainment-education often follows society's concerns of the time. Chapter five of this dissertation includes a reflection on public service media's public

value assignment, and how diversity is integrated as part of not only its normative values, but also a way to address a concern that is palpable in Flanders and beyond. Therefore, it makes sense that questions of diversity and inclusion often take centre stage in entertainment-education programmes at this time. E-E has a long research tradition that goes back to the 1970's, due to the unique position it holds between the academic and television production landscape. This discussion of what is widely considered the first entertainment-education television programme, illustrates this relation:

> After the broadcast of Simplemente María in Mexico, Miguel Sabido carefully deconstructed this telenovela in order to understand its theoretical basis. He then produced a series of six E-E television programs for Televisa, which were evaluated as to their impacts (Nariman, 1993; Singhal & Rogers, 1999). In designing his E-E telenovelas, Sabido drew especially on Albert Bandura's (1977, 1997) social learning theory (which later evolved into social cognitive theory). (Singhal & Rogers, 2002, p. 117)

This shows not only how research was at the basis of the development of entertainment-education, but also how fundamental theories regarding the influence of entertainment media informed the way producers thought about how to approach the narratives in which they would "wrap" their message. By introducing the audience to role models who display behaviour clearly signified as desirable or undesirable through reward and punishment (Bandura, 2004), these role models functioned as an example for one's own future challenges and choices.

Brown and Singhal (1999) identified nine characteristics of entertainment which are significant to its potential for spreading educative and prosocial messages. Five of these characteristics are related to a production and broadcasting logic: entertainment as perennial, pervasive, popular, profitable, and practical. The remaining four are better categorized on the experiential side, related to the

audience's reception and processing of entertainment. These characteristics are entertainment as personal, pleasurable, passionate, and persuasive. First, the "personal" characteristic is understood by the authors as the way in which entertainment narratives introduce difficult topics in an accessible manner and stimulate conversation under the guise of discussion of the programme, rather than directly broaching sensitivities within one's personal life. Rather than "personal", a more suitable description could be entertainment as "accessible", or "lowering a (sensitivity) threshold". "Pleasurable" is simply described as a way to release or escape, even a form of play, clearly mirroring the hedonic understanding discussed in the previous section. Nevertheless, in their description of "entertainment as passionate", the authors refer to the "strong emotions" that entertainment texts can entice, discussing an example of a soap opera that addresses the AIDS crisis by personalizing the topic through a beloved character who is suffering from the illness. It seems that this experience would be more in line with eudaimonic appreciation, connecting the dramatic and tragic appeal of stories to its prosocial potential. This is interesting, especially considering the fact that most studies on the educational potential of entertainment media also remained focussed on their hedonic appeal, and only after 2010 began to even consider these "other" entertainment experiences for their prosocial potential (Bartsch & Hartmann, 2017). Finally, entertainment content is considered "persuasive", but this will be discussed more in depth below. Overall, on the level of the audience, entertainment texts are considered a valuable tool in educative communication because they are accessible, appeal to different entertainment experiences and are persuasive in their storytelling.

Interestingly, while earlier definitions of entertainment-education refer to strategic narratives designed with specific persuasive outcomes in mind, more recent definitions were updated to reflect the reality of the practice and field of study. Especially in competitive media environments low on government control, such E-E narratives are often less strategized or planned but come in the form of a dramatic storyline or plot point, with their educative potential simply related to the topic (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi,

2010). Slater and Rouner (2002) remark that "the distinctions […] are […] a matter of degree rather than of kind" (p. 175), meaning that the way these narratives are processed in the audience's experience are not different whether they were designed to be persuasive or not. On top of that, the potential of entertainment-education is not limited to a specific genre (Singhal & Brown, 1996) or fictional narratives alone. As evidenced by Green and Brock (2000), the persuasive effects of a narrative do not change whether respondents think of the story as factual or fiction. In short: the study of the effect of a narrative or entertaining programme can be considered as separate from the creator's intent to persuade. Klein (2013) referred to entertainment producers in the UK and other media-saturated countries who seemed hesitant to discuss their program's educative potential, let alone intent. Whether the producers intended to create a television programme with the specific purpose to persuade or not, does not determine the suitability of entertainment-education and the narrative persuasive framework for the study of its audience's experiences and the resulting outcomes.

2 Entertainment-education's theoretical framework

Several frameworks have attempted to summarize and explain the ways in which entertainment-education appeals to its audience and manages to have considerable influence. These frameworks approached E-E through the lens of narrative persuasion (de Graaf et al., 2012), which is the study of how narratives can influence beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours by reducing resistance to persuasion (Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010). Narratives were defined as "any cohesive or coherent story with an identifiable beginning, middle, and end, that provides information about scene, characters, and conflict; raises unanswered questions or unresolved conflict; and provides resolution" (Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007, p. 778). Noticeably, such definition did not include any reference to a medium or genre, meaning that narratives, and therefore also the study of narrative persuasion and by extension E-E, were not limited to televised soap-operas or entertainment texts alone. Most importantly, both frameworks discussed below relied on the fact

that narratives are processed differently than non-narrative ways of presenting information (Bullock et al., 2020).

Most commonly, Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2004, see above) is considered the foundation upon which E-E was built (Slater & Rouner, 2002). In an effort to provide a more extensive framework to understand how persuasive narratives influence audiences' beliefs and attitudes, Slater and Rouner (2002) introduced their conception of an extended elaboration likelihood model (hereafter: E-ELM). Later, Moyer-Gusé (2008) would build on the E-ELM and introduce the entertainment overcoming resistance model (hereafter: EORM). Both models focussed on the fact that entertainment-education is used to reach resistant audiences (Moyer-Gusé, Chung & Jain, 2011), and therefore considered how such resistance can be tackled through the use of narratives.

2.1 The extended elaboration likelihood model and entertainment overcoming resistance model

The extended elaboration likelihood model was built on an argumentation of differences between the ways that people process conventionally persuasive messages versus (persuasive) narratives. In the E-ELM, Slater et al. (2002) discussed absorption in the narrative (also referred to as: involvement, transportation, story engagement) and identification with the characters as the explanatory mechanisms. In that process, absorption is a vitally important (Green & Brock, 2000) prerequisite for persuasion. Slater and Rouner (2002) explained how absorption can be understood as an affective and cognitive investment in a narrative. More simply put, absorption is the process of being immersed in the story, forgetting one's own position in the real world but fully experiencing the story-world, forgetting surroundings and being present in the mediated environment instead (Green & Brock, 2000). Identification in part relies on absorption, but is specifically focussed on the characters in the narrative, and according to Slater and Rouner (2002) is "the experienced similarity to those characters, or even parasocial relationship(s) with those characters" (p.178). Together, the model suggests that those responses would lead to a vicarious experience of

the narrative, reduced capacity for message discounting, and result in message-consistent beliefs.

Building on the E-ELM, Moyer-Gusé (2008) introduced the entertainment overcoming resistance model (hereafter: EORM). Whereas the E-ELM was focussed most on overcoming resistance in the form of counterarguing and scrutiny, the EORM considers the role of entertainment in overcoming multiple forms of resistance (Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010). Similar to the E-ELM, the EORM puts forward absorption and identification as the keys to persuasion, even in overcoming several other forms of resistance. The forms of resistance included in this model are reactance, counterarguing, selective avoidance, perceived vulnerability, perceived norms, self-efficacy[4], and outcome expectancies. The authors then explain how several features of entertainment help overcome each type of resistance on the road to achieving story-consistent outcomes (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010). Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) discuss how distinctive features in the narrative stimulate certain experiences. For example: masking persuasive intent and stimulating parasocial interaction can aid in reducing reactance, and narratives that stimulate empathy and perspective-taking are suitable to increase perceived vulnerability. I will address the processes of overcoming resistance more in depth below. The EORM has not yet been tested in its entirety, which Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) attributed to the fact that it is difficult for one E-E intervention to contain all types of features relevant to the resistance discussed in the model. It was not the purpose of this dissertation to test the EORM model, but I turn to it to explain the forms of resistance that were included throughout the work presented, and why I think the features presented in this framework show significant overlap with the features of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences.

Throughout the studies in this dissertation, the concepts of absorption and identification are addressed, but never the focal point of

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[4] Whereas the EORM included self-efficacy as a form of resistance to be increased via entertainment, we included perceptions of self-efficacy as an outcome with prosocial potential, as discussed in the eight chapter of this dissertation.

the research. A discussion of this limitation and what this implies, can be found in the conclusion of this dissertation. Therefore, a full exploration of the concepts of absorption and identification would bring us too far from the research represented in this dissertation. However, it is worth mentioning that while these concepts are considered the key to successful narrative persuasion, they are complicated in their definition and conceptualization[5]. It is important to understand that there are unique forms of feeling connected with on-screen characters (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010) depending on the depth of perspective taking: parasocial interactions, perceived similarity and identification are empirically distinct concepts, but are often used interchangeably.

This then raises the question of the relevance of including these concepts in the current chapter. This choice was made because the arguments for including absorption and identification as drivers of narrative persuasion in the E-ELM can also explain the value of integrating the entertainment experiences framework in entertainment-education. For example, consider the position of absorption as the cognitive and affective investment in the narrative, two ways of processing content which have also been related to eudaimonic entertainment experiences (Bartsch & Hartmann, 2017). In the same way, think about how identification is described as connecting with an on-screen character, and compare this concept to the description of self-transcendent and elevating experiences. Crucial overlap seems to exist across these understandings, which makes eudaimonic entertainment experiences worth studying as a complementary explanatory mechanism of entertainment-education's potential for prosocial change, especially in the case of stimulating intergroup contact. Slater and Rouner (2002) already suggested that in an effort to better understand the way in which entertainment-education is processed, it makes sense to look at "theory that attempts to explain why people are so drawn to

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[5] For a more in-depth look at the concept of identification and the many forms parasocial relations with on-screen characters can take, we refer to Cohen (2001)'s discussion on the many concepts related to identification, and Hoeken et al. (2016)'s paper on the way that story perspective and character similarity influence identification and therefor narrative persuasion.

entertainment narratives" (p. 176). Two such models have now been discussed, but I believe that hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences hold unexplored potential that can help us to understand more about the way that entertainment media play a role in changing beliefs and attitudes.

2.2   Entertaining narratives overcoming resistance to persuasion

When studying the way that entertainment and narratives can help communicate health and prosocial messages in a persuasive manner, and the models discussed above, the focal point is overcoming hurdles or resistance to persuasion. Throughout this dissertation, these hurdles will be addressed by approaching them with an entertainment experiences perspective, especially by combining the potential of hedonic and eudaimonic experiences. This dissertation focusses on two specific forms of resistance to persuasion, namely counterarguing and trivialization. In this section I would like to include two additional forms of resistance which are rarely addressed throughout the empirical work but will be relevant to the final conclusion: selective avoidance and reactance. I focus on explaining how these elements of resistance work and why they are considered hurdles to persuasion. One of the key objectives of this dissertation was to study how comedy interacts with resistance, which will be addressed further in the third chapter. For now, the focus is limited to the way that (entertaining) narratives can help overcome these forms of resistance.

2.2.1   Counterarguing

Counterarguing is defined as the generation of thoughts that go against the presented arguments (Slater & Rouner, 2002; Moyer-Gusé, 2008), and is considered one of the key obstacles to overcome on the road to persuasion. It is also the most studied form of resistance throughout the literature (Ma, 2020). Because absorption was hypothesized to reduce motivation and ability to counterargue (Green & Brock, 2000), Slater and Rouner (2002) concluded that counterarguing would be non-compatible with absorption, causing those who are fully immersed in the narrative to be more open to being persuaded into story-consistent outcomes. Up to

that point, the literature explained how narratives could be used to limit counterarguing in two ways (Hoeken & Fikkers, 2014). The first suggested that the audience does not want to counterargue (Slater & Rouner, 2002) because that would ruin their hedonic entertainment experience (more on this below). A second way in which narratives could limit counterarguing, is because the audience is simply unable to counterargue, either due to its cognitive capacity resources being taken up in processing the narrative, or because it is unclear what exactly they should be arguing against (Dal Cin et al., 2004).

This second option may appear indicative of a larger problem with the concept. The exact position of counterarguing in overcoming resistance remained unclear. Several authors found difficulty with the way the counterarguing concept actually interacted with absorption, identification, and persuasion. Evidence was even found for a positive relation between transportation and counterarguing (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010). Based on the work by Fisch (2000) and Niederdeppe et al. (2012), Hoeken and Fikkers (2014) suggested that counterarguing is simply one form of issue-relevant thoughts that reflect "the extent to which participants engage in systematic processing of the message's persuasive issue" (p. 89) in response to a persuasive narrative such as E-E. According to them, researchers who study persuasive narratives should extend their measurements beyond simple self-reporting items of counterarguing, but also include ways to measure other (neutral and positive) thoughts, which may be more valuable to consider when the intent is to achieve story-consistent outcomes.

Additionally, while several studies produced results that showed the relation between narratives and changes in attitudes and behavioural intention (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010), and others found evidence for the relation between narratives and reduced counterarguing (Green & Brock, 2000; Nabi et al., 2007; Young, 2008), studies that actually linked the influence of narratives on attitudes or behaviours through reduced counterarguing are rare. One notable exception came from Moyer-Gusé et al. (2011), who found that rather than absorption, identification with

the characters reduced counterarguing, which resulted in a positive influence on behavioural intention.

The relation between absorption, issue-relevant thoughts and their resulting outcomes may be more complex than was initially theorized in the E-ELM and even EORM (Hoeken & Fikkers, 2014; Igartua & Vega Casanova, 2016). Throughout this dissertation, I also consider counterarguing as simply one step to be overcome when discussing the potential of entertainment-education (Moyer-Gusé, Mahood & Brookes, 2011), making it a (counter-effective) part of the cognitive reflections that occur during entertainment experiences, but not the only cognitive response. Researchers have continued studying counterarguing, including considering whether humour and comedy can lower such counterarguing responses (Nabi et al., 2007), through hedonic enjoyment and reduced cognitive capacity (Igartua & Vega Casanova, 2016). More on this topic can be found in chapter three.

2.2.2 Trivialization

Trivialization occurs when an audience member does not engage with content on a cognitive level, because they think that is not meant to be taken seriously (Nabi et al., 2007; Moyer-Gusé, Chung, and Jain, 2011). This concept has mostly been used to explain why certain styles of entertainment (mostly comedy) have failed to achieve story-consistent outcomes. The explanation then is that because the severity of the topic is lost on the spectator, no additional reflection or attitude change will occur. Moyer-Gusé et al. (2011) suggested that this may be explained by the fact that humorous content is processed in a way that does not include a serious component, comparable to the intuitive processing of hedonic experiences as discussed in the first chapter. Nabi et al. (2007) proposed that discounting has to be limited to achieve persuasion, through what they called "restoration of gravity", meant to remind the audience of the severity at hand. According to them, "[t]his would short-circuit the minimizing effect of discounting while still maintaining the benefit of the close information processing generated by entertaining messages" (Nabi et al., 2007, p. 51). Creating the right context may help

the audience to give pause to the subject matter, rather than discounting it outright (Campo et al., 2013).

2.2.3 Reactance

Reactance is a form of resistance that occurs when people feel they are being persuaded into change and are too overtly aware that this is happening (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). This has been suggested to lead to a "boomerang effect" (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010), where people engage in even more of the thought or behaviour they were meant to be persuaded away from. The EORM suggested that reactance can be lowered through narrative structures hiding persuasive intent, parasocial interactions and likeable characters. Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010) later confirmed that parasocial interaction can lower reactance and contribute to persuasive outcomes.

2.2.4 Selective avoidance

Selective avoidance is different from counterarguing, because it happens even before an audience member interacts with an entertainment narrative. The willing avoidance of a certain type of content can have several causes, but Moyer-Gusé (2008) related it to the idea of inertia: the idea that people do not want to change their attitudes, behaviours, or beliefs, and all things being equal, they would rather hang on to their current situations (Knowles & Linn, 2004). This is due to the fact that people want to avoid dissonance, the confrontation with arguments that go against their current understandings, beliefs, and attitudes. The EORM proposed that identification with a character in an enjoyed entertainment-education programme may limit this avoidance (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). In other words: drawing the audience into the narrative and the characters before introducing the educational aspect into the entertainment content should overcome this. Most of this depends on "masking" the persuasive intent of a programme or narrative (Moyer-Gusé, 2008). Considering that E-E is not limited (anymore) to programmes designed with persuasive intent, it can be interesting to study such successful examples that "accidentally" persuaded their audience in a certain direction.

3 Introducing entertainment experiences as an alternative to overcome resistance to persuasion

Now that we have discussed the different forms of resistance that narratives have been theorized to overcome, the time has come to discuss the role that entertainment experiences can play in leading to similar outcomes. Most of the literature discussed above, even though it can be applied to all types of narratives, has assumed that it was the explicit intent of a health- or social-related narrative to persuade its audience in a certain direction. While eudaimonic experiences have been studied in relation to prosocial outcomes (see above), we do not want to assume that producers or programme creators have this intent. However, what appeals to a person as entertainment, may capture the imagination and influence them anyway. In this section, I will once again go over the four types of resistance I discussed above and how the E-ELM and EORM have suggested that narratives can overcome them. This time I will also detail how hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences are an additional explanation to the way that entertainment-education narratives overcome these hurdles.

3.1 Combined experiences overcome counterarguing and trivialization

As we have discussed above, counterarguing is a form of resistance where people actively go against the message included in the narrative. However, several problems have surfaced surrounding the concept. One explanation was that people might consider going against the content of the message, but steer themselves away from this reflection (consciously or unconsciously) in an attempt to not interrupt their fun or pleasure of the entertainment presented "around" the message. This argument is simply countered within the framework of eudaimonic experiences, which states that people select entertainment not only for hedonic purposes, but also in search of affective and cognitive challenges and meaning. Therefore, the idea that counterarguing would not occur due to a need to "hang on to" enjoyment alone, does not seem universally applicable to entertainment experiences. Especially not in the case of the

classic telenovelas or soap operas that inspired the development of E-E campaigns and research, which were filled with dramatic and sometimes tragic storylines, covering topics such as AIDS, unplanned pregnancy, etc.

Another, more problematic challenge in the theoretical frameworks suggested that absorption in narratives would reduce or diminish *all* types of cognitive elaboration, including but not limited to counterarguing. But as Hoeken and Fikkers (2014) stated, counterarguing is only one aspect of thoughts that can occur in response to entertaining narratives. Research on eudaimonic motivations and experiences has shown that people also select entertainment in search of cognitive challenge, reflection and thought, and also achieve such experiences while watching. Even more so, research has shown that the affective and cognitive experiences of entertainment are a cyclical process which contributes to achieving prosocial outcomes and can encourage changes in behavioural intentions (Bartsch et al., 2014; Das et al., 2017).

Eudaimonic experiences' affective and cognitive mix also seems a perfect solution to create the required context to limit trivialization responses to entertainment texts. If trivialization occurs as a response by missing sensitivities or complexity of the message (Nabi et al., 2007), this seems to be nearly incompatible with eudaimonic entertainment experiences. By including elements that appeal to meaningfulness or a sense of elevation, a context can be created by combining the fun of hedonic enjoyment with the more serious reflection of appreciation experiences. More on this can be found in the third chapter on comedy. In short, I would state that eudaimonic experiences encourage the type of elaborative thought that is especially suited in the case of entertainment-education with prosocial and intergroup contact intentions.

3.2 Eudaimonic experiences overcome reactance

Reactance, the response that occurs when a person feels pressured into change and that can even lead to boomerang-effects, has been

suggested to be overcome through the "masking" of persuasive intent in narrative structures. This could be done by introducing an audience to likeable characters with whom they can form parasocial relations, before the educative message becomes apparent. This perspective again seems to come from a rather hedonic vision on entertainment experiences, assuming that people seek entertainment for enjoyment purposes alone. A look beyond quickly shows that eudaimonic experiences will leave a person more open to the emotional and cognitive appeals included in these narratives (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Feldman & Borum-Chattoo, 2018), and that "masking" educative messages can be done with other experiences than enjoyment alone. On top of that, these experiences might cancel out the need to mask – after all, gratifications sought in entertainment can include elements of human connection, reflection, personal growth and so on. As such, the intended reflection on the topic simply becomes a part of the entertainment experience, occurring before reactance has a chance to take hold.

3.3 Combined experiences overcome selective avoidance

Of course, not everyone considers their entertainment media consumption with this eudaimonic motivation in mind. Entertainment preferences are personal and flexible, and there is no "wrong" way to experience entertainment texts, whether that be hedonically or eudaimonically motivated. However, to maximize an E-E programme's reach, it can be a solution to create programmes that offer experiences of enjoyment and appreciation at the same time. For those in search of appreciation, enjoyment will simply be a more light-hearted part of the entertainment experience. For those more hedonically motivated, the enjoyment can offer a safe space wherein the appreciation experience can take place.

This dissertation contributes evidence to the claims I made in this section. An overview of the existing models on entertainment and narrative persuasion can be seen in Table 1. This table also includes an overview of the elements discussed in this section, showing how the work of this dissertation relates to existing models and frameworks.

Table 1 *Comparing the E-ELM, EORM and the hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences framework as models to understand how entertainment helps to overcome resistance to persuasion*

Resistance	E-ELM suggests	EORM suggests	Hedonic and eudaimonic framework suggests
Counterarguing	Absorption and identification	Parasocial interaction (PSI)	Cognitive need gratification and search for meaning
Trivialization	/	/	Restoration of enjoyment through appreciation
Reactance	/	Narrative structure, PSI and liking of characters /source	Combined appreciation and enjoyment to limit "manipulated" feeling and mask persuasive intent
Selective avoidance	/	Identification and enjoyment	Combined experiences for more universal appeal

4   Entertainment-education with the prosocial intent to stimulate intergroup contact

As Slater and Rouner (2002) mentioned in their introduction of the E-ELM, the behavioural outcomes of entertainment-education often paled in comparison to the outcomes found regarding changes in attitudes and beliefs, which also precede any behaviour changes. While several

studies have focused on the outcomes of persuasive narratives and entertainment-education about health-related topics (Banerjee & Greene, 2012; Collins et al., 2004; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010; Murphy et al., 2011; Wilkin et al., 2007), E-E is not limited to health education alone. Scholars in the field of narrative persuasion and E-E have also considered how television entertainment can play a role in reducing prejudice towards minorities both on- and off-screen (Schiappa et al., 2006; Oliver, Dillard et al., 2012; Hoffner & Cohen, 2012; Stevens, 2016; McQueen et al., 2011; Moyer-Gusé, Dale & Ortiz, 2019). Past research has shown that gratifying entertainment experiences – both hedonic and eudaimonic – encouraged engagement with the content and the topics (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Borum-Chattoo & Feldman, 2017; Feldman & Borum-Chattoo, 2018; Schneider et al., 2016) and that eudaimonic entertainment experiences led to destigmatizing or altruistic outcomes (Oliver, Dillard, et al., 2012; Oliver, Hartmann & Woolley, 2012).

I will first discuss how exposure to entertainment can aid in stimulating future intergroup contact through parasocial interactions and mediated intergroup contact. Then I will discuss existing research on entertainment-education with destigmatizing outcomes.

4.1 Parasocial interactions

One element I only briefly discussed but is valuable to understanding how entertainment can stimulate intergroup behaviour, is the notion of a **parasocial interaction**. Parasocial interactions are a type of one-way pseudo relationship which can form between a viewer and an on-screen person/character (Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985). This type of relationship has characteristics similar to traditional interpersonal relationships, aside from their lack of reciprocation (Giles, 2002 as referred to in Moyer-Gusé, 2008). It is different from other concepts related to identification due to its lack of role taking (imagining oneself as *being* the on-screen character) and does not require a sense of similarity to the on-screen persona. Such parasocial interactions can happen in response to dramatic and comedic storylines alike, and can be formed with multiple

on-screen persona's at once, similar to an actual friend group (El-Khoury, 2020).

As a persuasive tool, these parasocial interactions have been shown to lower reactance and counterarguing responses to narratives (El-Khoury, 2020; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010). These so-called "one sided friendships" (Moyer-Gusé, 2008) can temporarily appear to be part of a person's social circle and influence attitudes in a way similar to the way an actual friend might. As stressed by Moyer-Gusé, Dale and Ortiz (2019) and El-Khoury (2020), these parasocial relationships can also influence a person's **perception of self-efficacy,** which is considered an important precursor to changing behavioural norms (Borrayo et al., 2017), and plays a crucial role in encouraging future intergroup contact.

4.2   Mediated vicarious intergroup contact

While it has been proven difficult for narrative persuasion research to find evidence of a direct influence of narratives and entertainment texts on behaviour specifically (Green, 2021), successful outcomes have been noted regarding the influence of E-E on precursors to behavioural change, such as self-efficacy or behavioural intentions (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010; Walther-Martin, 2017). This dissertation is specifically interested in the reduction of prejudice through the encouraging of intergroup contact. While a full exploration of prejudice is outside the scope of this dissertation, we understand prejudice as negative attitudes toward individuals based on those individuals' belonging to a certain group (Dovidio, Kawakami, Smoak, & Gaertner, 2009 as referenced in Igartua & Frutos, 2017).

The **intergroup contact hypothesis** states that positive intergroup interactions can improve attitudes toward outgroups by reducing prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Looking for a way to overcome some of the challenges in facilitating these interactions, researchers considered the potential of extended intergroup contact and vicarious intergroup contact (Joyce & Harwood, 2012; Igartua et al., 2019a; Igartua et al., 2019b). Simply put, seeing a peer (from your own ingroup) engage in a successful interaction with an outgroup member,

can still improve attitudes toward that group and lower intergroup anxiety, without having to engage in the interaction yourself. The positive experience is lived through vicariously and has similar effects as experiencing it yourself. Other studies found evidence that this also works in a mediated setting (Ortiz & Harwood, 2007; Moyer-Gusé, Dale et al., 2019; see Park, 2012 for a discussion). These studies all rely on the work done by Schiappa, Gregg and Hewes (2005; 2006) whose idea of the **parasocial contact hypothesis** stated that "exposure to positive portrayals of minority group members that produce parasocial interaction will be associated with a decrease in prejudicial attitudes" (Schiappa et al., 2006, p. 22).

This ends the discussion regarding parasocial relationships and intergroup contact and allows us to return to the work on entertainment-education and narrative persuasion. By combining insights from these research branches with the study of entertainment experiences, this dissertation manages to contribute new perspectives to all three research fields.

4.3 Destigmatizing outcomes of entertainment-education and narrative persuasion

At the end of the previous chapter on entertainment experiences, we discussed the way that eudaimonic entertainment experiences can contribute to prosocial outcomes. This section will echo that one, but focusses on the influence of entertainment texts on destigmatizing outcomes and intergroup contact, as seen through the lens of E-E and narrative persuasion. More on the concept of stigma and destigmatization, and how this links to our case study, can be found in chapter four. Having explained how E-E can be used to overcome resistance to persuasion, and the way that mediated intergroup contact is theorized to lead to reduced prejudice and improved attitudes, I will now provide a brief overview of current research efforts that have explored narrative persuasion for destigmatizing outcomes. Most of these studies have centered around absorption and identification as explanatory mechanisms, as discussed above.

One of the few studies which considered the position that counterarguing can take in the relation between narratives and prosocial attitudes toward stigmatized groups, aside from humour studies (see following chapter), was conducted as part of a larger study by Igartua and Vega Casanova (2016). They found that exposure to an entertainment narrative including a coming out story contributed to more favourable attitudes toward gay men's right to come out openly, and that this relation was mediated through cognitive elaboration. However, while the study included a counterarguing measure, it did not play a significant role. This also lends support to our previous discussion regarding the importance of differentiating between cognitive thought and counterarguing when considering the mechanics of the effects of entertainment-education.

Oliver et al. (2012) found that narrative news stories led to changes in emotions, attitudes, intentions, and behaviour regarding stigmatized groups. They employed a multi-message design including narratives about prisoners, elderly people, and immigrants. Their study explored the roles of involvement[6], empathy and compassion in achieving these outcomes. The authors discussed two ways through which the narrative influenced behavioural intentions. First, in an affective path, the narrative stimulated feelings of compassion for on-screen characters, which led to empathic attitudes toward the overall group. This had a positive relation to behavioural intentions. In a second, cognitive path, the narrative format stimulated more story involvement, which directly led to higher behavioural intentions. In the end, those behavioural intentions were also put into action in the form of a direct influence on information seeking behaviour. This study is one of the few to include an actual behavioural action measure, allowing participants to engage in voluntary information seeking about advocacy groups who support the stigmatized groups included in the study. Overall, the key takeaway message from Oliver et

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[6] Importantly, Oliver et al. (2012)'s study approaches involvement as one factor of transportation, with story-impact being another. The factor of involvement was measured with items "pertaining to being mentally involved in the story, to being distracted while reading (reverse coded), and to having one's mind wander while reading (reverse coded)" (p.210).

al. (2012) seems to be the importance of stimulating both cognitive reflections and affective compassionate experiences in search of destigmatizing outcomes. While this study focussed on news stories and not narrative entertainment texts, the narrative manipulation of this news story seems comparable to human-interest as it has been used in entertainment television as well, making it applicable to the work presented in this dissertation. As described by Oliver et al. (2012, p. 209) "in the narrative versions, the […] issue was illustrated using a specific person and his or her experiences to frame the information." More on how this fits with the case study used in this dissertation can be found in the methodological framework (chapter four) and the study in chapter six.

Igartua and Frutos (2017) compared two narratives about immigrants: one that showed empathy towards immigrants' struggles and a condemnation of racism, compared against a narrative including positive intergroup contact. Two findings are particularly relevant to this dissertation: Overall, it was found that the condemnation narrative led to a more positive attitude toward migration. This is interesting, considering how the mediated intergroup contact hypothesis stresses the importance of showing positive interactions when looking to stimulate intergroup contact, and that this condition was not as effective in stimulating these positive attitudes. Additionally, the study also showed that people in the condemnation condition experienced higher identification with immigrants, but only when they already scored low to moderate on the modern racism scale, which shows the importance of individual differences in responding to E-E narratives. One important note to make about this study, is that the positive intergroup contact narrative was referred to as a comedy film, while the condemnation narrative was considered a drama. The positive intergroup contact narrative led to significantly higher levels of enjoyment, which in turn also influenced identification with the main characters. The study did not include a counterarguing or trivialization measure, which may have explained why the positive, comedic intergroup contact narrative

managed to stimulate fewer positive attitudes compared to its dramatic counterpart.

More recently, Moyer-Gusé et al. (2019) found that people who watched a successful intergroup interaction became less prejudiced and more willing to engage in future intergroup contact with Muslims. The study identified two ways in which mediated intergroup contact can facilitate future intergroup contact. First, identification with an on-screen in-group character who participates in successful intergroup contact was associated with a greater sense of self-efficacy about one's own future intergroup interactions. This in turn reduced anxiety about future interactions, was related to lower prejudice, and higher willingness to engage in future intergroup contact. Lack of self-efficacy has been considered a form of resistance in the EORM (Moyer-Gusé, 2008), to be overcome by showing characters highly similar to the audience that engage in the desired behaviour, functioning as a model as discussed in SCT. While this study confirms that theory, Bond (2020) was unable to reproduce this outcome in a longitudinal design, showing that more work is needed regarding parasocial relationships with ingroup characters who engage in intergroup contact as a driver for prejudice reduction. Second, liking the on-screen outgroup character lowered prejudice and willingness to engage in future intergroup contact both directly and mediated through a feeling of guilt regarding prejudice and discrimination. This is interesting, because these feelings of guilt could understandably also cause reactance responses, which did not happen here. Looking back to our discussion regarding eudaimonic experiences to overcome reactance, it would make sense that these experiences of guilt coincide with experiences of mixed affect, including a sense of connection and self-transcendence, causing a prosocial rather than reactive processing of collective guilt.

Over the past year, Dale and Moyer-Gusé (2021) published a study which suggested that inclusion of interdependence (i.e., teamwork and working together to a common goal) in a televised narrative may be uniquely suitable to stimulate feelings of self-efficacy regarding future intergroup contact, by lowering intergroup anxiety. That lower sense of

anxiety stimulated increased inclusion of the outgroup, more positive attitudes, and a greater willingness for future intergroup contact. Showing how people of in- and outgroups work together, could be an additional path into stimulating future intergroup contact.

Overall, a significant amount of evidence shows that mediated intergroup contact can contribute to destigmatizing outcomes, especially when the entertainment-education narrative includes successful on-screen intergroup relations as well. This study shows that entertainment media can function both as a way to model intergroup contact, and that intergroup contact itself can occur through a mediated contact, showing the two ways in which entertainment media can contribute to overcoming stigmatization for outgroups.

5   Conclusion

Most of the studies that applied the EORM have focussed on overcoming resistance to persuasion to stimulate attitudes and behaviours regarding health issues. While this is of course a valuable and important avenue for research, there seems to be less research about the way that entertainment-education can overcome resistance to persuasion to engage in intergroup contact, as such contributing to destigmatizing outcomes. Additionally, entertainment-education research has, for now, not taken into account how the hedonic and eudaimonic experiences framework can help formalize the ways in which entertainment can overcome resistance to persuasion. These are two gaps the current dissertation aims to address. It is my purpose to continue building and extending the work done in the E-ELM and EORM and expand that vision with the work done by Oliver and colleagues regarding entertainment experiences.

Overall, the way in which entertainment experiences, especially eudaimonic gratifications, have been discussed, builds its own argument for inclusion in prosocial entertainment-education research: they are characterized by meaningful cognitive thought and mixed affect responses which stimulate continued reflection, connection with on-screen characters and beyond, a sense of human connection and they

have been linked to prosocial intentions and destigmatizing outcomes, often in response to stories about human challenges. Regarding hedonic experiences, we have already briefly touched upon the way that comedy has been studied to overcome resistance in the form of counterarguing, but also runs into the challenge of trivialization. As mentioned by El-Khoury (2020), entertainment-education research seldom focusses on the use of comedy therein. This dissertation wants to change that, which is why I will discuss the role of comedy in entertainment experiences and entertainment-education in the third and last chapter of this theoretical framework.

3

COMEDY

Up to this point, this framework has focussed on entertainment as a response to media consumption. I explained how content can stimulate not only hedonic enjoyment, but also eudaimonic appreciation, and how those experiences differ based on the type and intensity of affective and cognitive experiences, and a sense of "meaningfulness" being related to eudaimonic experiences of entertainment. This was followed by a discussion of entertainment-education and its application through the narrative persuasion framework, detailing how narratives that entertain can help overcome barriers to persuasion. This chapter will follow the order of the previous chapters, and address what position comedy can take within those processes.

To begin, as a genre or text that can stimulate entertaining experiences, comedy has most often been related to hedonic experiences. This relies on experiences as well as its theoretical foundation, which will be covered in the first section of this chapter. Next, in the research on entertainment-education and narrative persuasion, humorous approaches are praised for their potential to provide new perspectives, and studied for their role in overcoming resistance, which I will address in section two. Subsequently, based on the research of humour's functions in interpersonal relationships, I will discuss the way we hypothesized that comedy may also play a role in mediated intergroup contact in the third section. Finally, I will address the functions of humour and comedy for minorities and stigmatized groups themselves and combine this with a brief discussion regarding representation issues throughout media texts in Flanders.

1   Experiences of humour and comedy

As discussed above, it is clear where the research interest in eudaimonic entertainment experiences for social good has come from. Due to their combination of affect, thought, meaningfulness and even the built-in experience of connecting with others beyond the self, eudaimonic experiences can appear to be a prosocial experience in and of itself. However, in the discussion regarding the socially beneficial outcomes of entertainment experiences, hedonic experiences and their orthogonal

relationship with eudaimonic experiences have moved to the background. Considering the popularity and mass-appeal of comedic and light-hearted television, and the centrality of enjoyment as an entertainment experience, it is of key importance to address this research matter. Before I delve deeper into entertainment experiences of comedy and humour, I would like to address the three classical humour theories: relief theories, superiority theories and incongruity-resolution theories. The question appears to be where humour comes from, and what makes something funny. The work done to answer this question also offers some foundational underpinnings to understand entertainment experiences thereof.

1.1 Humour theories

First, **relief theory** states that the setup of comedy creates arousal, and the punchline creates relief from arousal or tension (Berlyne, 1972). The sweet spot of humour, according to this theory, lies somewhere in the middle. Jokes that create either too little or too much arousal are considered less amusing. Additionally, jokes that are too easy or too difficult to understand are also not enjoyed as much as "moderately challenging jokes" (Goldstein, 2021). This point of view considers joking about taboo topics a mechanism to release tension by expressing "repressed" thoughts (Freud, 1960) or simply to be playful (Freud, 1928) without accountability (Wolfenstein, 1954). Van der Wal (2020) links relief theory to irreverent humour, humour which lacks respect for authority or norms.

Second, **superiority theory** considers aggression as the fundamental part of humour, and is therefore also known as the disparagement or hostility theory. It assumes that humour is always targeted toward another, with malicious intent. Enjoyment comes from a sense of superiority over that other, and victimization (Zillmann, 1983 as referenced in Martin et al., 2003) in the form of ridicule. Whether or not comedy is enjoyed then depends on the amount of dislike/disposition toward that other (Zillmann, 2000). This explanation has long been discounted as lacking complexity (Carroll, 2014) and does not seem

applicable to more positive types of comedy. Van der Wal (2020) links superiority theory to aggressive, slapstick and self-defeating humour, all elements of comedy that seem to be more in line with maladaptive (negative or hostile, see further) comedy styles (Martin et al., 2003).

Finally, **incongruity theory** approaches humour on the level of the text and structure, and the processes they stimulate to lead to enjoyment (McGhee and Pistolesi, 1979 as explained in Van der Wal, 2020). Whereas relief and superiority theory focussed on attitudes, beliefs, and presuppositions (Goldstein, 2021), incongruity theory focusses on the audience as they process a violation of their expectations. According to Suls (1972), humour is a problem-solving process, where the audience is exposed to a setup (which can be visual or narrative) and applies a schema upon which they base a conception of an expected outcome, an expected next phrase or event. Then, they receive the punchline. If this punchline diverges from their expectation they see the incongruity between their expectation and the reality, which results in surprise. The audience then applies a different schema that can be used to explain the connection between the setup and the punchline. If they can find this schema and understand the "trick" that has been played, enjoyment follows (Martin & Ford, 2018). Overall, humour is a product of the unexpected result and surprise. According to Van der Wal (2020), types of humour related to this theory are parody, wordplay, "pure" incongruity, and absurdity. These types of humour seem to be more in line with more innocent, adaptive styles of comedy (Martin et al., 2003).

Similar to other researchers (Martin, 2018; Van der Wal, 2020) I will not be focussing on one of these theories, but trust that each theory offers value to understanding how humour is processed and creates pleasure and enjoyment. Throughout this research, we will often discuss the difference between positive and negative styles of humour. More about how this line was drawn be found in the theoretical framework of our last study (see chapter nine).

1.2   Hedonic and other entertainment experiences of comedy

Hedonic entertainment experiences during media consumption or the so-called enjoyment of media texts, are characterized by fun, relaxation, diversion, and positive affective experiences. They are linked to fast, intuitive processing of the content (Hofer & Rieger, 2019). Looking back at the first chapter, it is important to remember that hedonic experiences were distinguished from suspenseful or eudaimonic experiences due to their positive affective component, and lack of cognitive reflection or mixed valence. This link also flows understandably out of the definitions of humour. Goldstein (2021) defines humour as "a stimulus, usually text and/or speech, that is intended to elicit amusement or mirth, the pleasurable sensation elicited by comedy, and most often expressed as laughter or smiling" (p. 439). On the level of emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses, Goldstein (2021) mentions amusement, perceived funniness, and laughter/smiling. This definition, following the media psychology tradition, is made up of elements that signify responses and experiences rather than content. Theories of how comedy stimulates such mirth have been discussed above.

The enjoyment of comedy has also been studied for its personal and interpersonal benefits. On a personal level, research has found that adaptive styles of humour have been associated with greater self-esteem, and more positive judgements of self-competency (Martin et al., 2003). O'Connell (1960) defines adaptive forms of humour as the counterpart of hostile humour, and equates it to harmless or even nonsense humour. In this dissertation, adaptive styles of humour are understood as types of humour that lack negativity, hostility, or the intent to hurt or ridicule. These types of humour have been to be able to help people to reduce their stress-levels (Martin et al., 2003; Martin, 2007) and is a fairly easily accessible coping mechanism (Strick et al., 2009; Strick, 2021). In a study conducted during the first lockdown of the COVID-19 pandemic, we found that hedonic motivations to select entertainment content were related to the use of comedy as a coping strategy (De Ridder, Daneels et al., 2021). As such, at least one element of the link between comedy and hedonic experiences seems to be anchored in

positive experiences of comedy, and their contribution to the search for hedonic well-being.

There are two related issues regarding experiences of comedy that I would like to add at this time. First, the enjoyment of comedy is dependent on a positive affective entertainment experience. When comedic content stimulates only thoughtful reflection without positive affect, it may have been processed, and therefore "experienced", but not hedonically enjoyed. This is what differentiates enjoyment from simply "watching" or "consuming" comedy texts, the experience of positive affect during consumption. While this positive affective experience is a prerequisite to discuss a hedonic entertainment experiences of comedy, and the most natural connection, I do believe that comedy is not limited to hedonic experiences alone.

This brings us to the second issue: the question of whether comedic content can also lead to eudaimonic experiences. More on this is included in the discussions of the fourth study, which can be found as chapter eight in this dissertation. First, circling back to the insight that the concepts of hedonic and eudaimonic experiences actually come from the framework of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, these conceptions of comedic media texts as a coping strategy and well-being enhancer again make sense. If comedy in media texts has similar benefits to using humour in "real life", entertainment experiences of such entertainment content can contribute to hedonic well-being. Second, watching comedy can cause shared laughter, which has been shown to contribute to a sense of connection and belonging (see below). By categorizing these responses as gratifications with an outward component and human connection, it becomes clear that these are in line with a sense of eudaimonic well-being. Third, the fact that comedy experiences can also have a cognitive component (Nabi et al., 2007) has also been picked up by the studies of comedy and politics in satiric news or talk shows (Kim & Vishak, 2008; Roth et al., 2014). For example, Roth et al. (2014) found that viewers of political talk shows who describe eudaimonic entertainment experiences, feel more informed by them, while this is not the case for those only reporting hedonic experiences. I

already discussed how comedy is processed through cognitive schemata (Martin & Ford, 2018), and will continue below to discuss studies which have shown that comedy can stimulate audiences to pay more attention or reflect on the topics in the narrative or media text. By taking this into account, it becomes evident that comedy is not limited to positive affective experiences alone, but may also appeal to other cognitive gratifications (Young, 2013).

In conclusion, comedic texts appeal to a hedonic experience on a superficial level, but can also offer eudaimonic experiences when a deeper, more complex form of processing occurs. This is not necessarily the case, and not all comedy has to offer these experiences to be considered valuable. Comedic entertainment and hedonic enjoyment thereof can stand on its own and have value in its contribution to hedonic experiences and well-being. Additionally, added value comes from the fact that it can also appeal to eudaimonic experiences, which opens the door to another view of comedy as a tool for social change.

2 Comedy's persuasive potential

In this section, I will discuss the relevance of comedy as a topic of research in the context of entertainment media's destigmatizing outcomes, and why this is the focus of this dissertation. Comedy and humour have a long tradition of being researched for education purposes (Goldstein, 2021). Studies in the field of education and learning praise positive styles of humour for their potential to increase abstract understanding and reduce tension, creating a beneficial learning environment (Wanzer & Frymier, 1999). Still, no conclusive evidence has been found regarding how humour can contribute to knowledge acquisition or retaining factual information or objective knowledge, neither in the classroom (Wanzer, Frymier & Irwin, 2010) nor in mediated environments (Kim & Vishak, 2008). Results are also mixed regarding comedy's influence on attitudes (Smedema et al., 2012; Nabi et al., 2007) and behaviours (Schneider et al., 2016; Zhao, 2018). Despite these shortcomings, research interest in comedy as a route to influence audiences remains (Borum-Chattoo, 2018).

It is therefore not surprising that researchers on entertainment-education also considered what humour can contribute to its educational objectives. However, most studies that consider the role of comedy in entertainment-education focus on health education (Weber et al., 2006; Skalski et al., 2009; Moyer-Gusé, Mahood & Brookes, 2011; Collins et al., 2003). Some of those studies showed promising results: Moyer-Gusé et al. (2018) performed a study about vaccination reluctance, and Weber et al. (2006) studied the influence of humour on willingness to become an organ donor. We will draw from these studies when discussing the way that comedy can help overcome resistance to persuasion. This dissertation considers humour as a vehicle for social change (Borum-Chattoo, 2018), exploring the potential of comedy to provide information and push boundaries, introducing innovative ideas and perspectives (McGuigan, 2005; Klein, 2013) on the topic of prosocial outcomes. This includes a research interest in the way comedy can be used by and for marginalized groups to shine a light on experiences and issues that may otherwise go unnoticed. Borum-Chattoo (2018) summarized the potential of comedy to motivate people to participate in social change in five areas: by attracting attention and continued recollection; through persuasion; by facilitating access to more complex social issues; by dissolving social barriers; and amplification of the ideas by encouraging the sharing of the content and ideas. Research showed that humour was effective in attracting more attention and increasing interest in subjects (Nabi et al., 2007; Weinberger & Gulas, 1992) in a more diverse and larger audience (Malmberg & Awad, 2019), compared to more serious (media) texts. In some cases, it even stimulated more positive attitudes toward stigmatized groups (Smedema et al., 2012). Additionally, Nabi et al. (2007) found evidence for a sleeper-effect: their results showed that a humorous message coming from a credible source stimulated the most recall about the nature of the message and attitude change, one week after exposure. Interestingly, this result was not found immediately after exposure, meaning it increased over the course of the week.

The main focus of our discussion will be on the potential to be persuasive, facilitate access and dissolve social barriers. Aside from

those forms of facilitation on the audience's end, comedy can also be used as a tool for empowerment by marginalized groups themselves, which I will discuss in section 3.4, further in this chapter. From here on, the current section will first address what elements of humour determine its persuasive potential. Next, I will outline how humour and comedy help overcome resistance to persuasion, following the order of the discussion in the previous chapter. At the end of this section, I pay attention to the specific potential of comedy hybrids with other genres, the importance of which will become more clear in our discussion of the case study in the methodological framework in chapter four.

2.1   When *does* comedy persuade?

In 2018, Walter and colleagues performed a meta-analysis of research that considered the influence of comedy on persuasion, in the field of education, health and marketing. It is important to note that these studies were not limited to the field of media or even entertainment studies. However, I would like to briefly address three factors that Walter et al. (2018) discussed and will be taken into account throughout this dissertation: humour style, humour intensity and humour relatedness (is the comedy about the topic in the message).

First, their study showed that parody has a positive influence on persuasion, while the influence of satire and irony are not yet clear. It seems that ambiguous **styles of comedy** are difficult due to their openness to interpretation. Satire is one of the most prevalent forms of comedy regarding social issues, and over the past decade has become a staple of television fare, often presented as a hybrid of news and entertaining media texts, especially pertaining to its potential influence on awareness, knowledge, and attitudes about political and social issues. This topic is certainly worth further exploration, but is outside the scope of the current dissertation, which focusses on other types of comedy and humour.

Second, Walter et al. (2018) discussed the **intensity** of the included comedy. Their study showed that average levels of comedy are the most persuasive. While low intensity comedy may fail to lower

apprehension about the persuasive nature, too intense comedy may take over processing capacity and as such impede the persuasive quality of the text. As an alternative explanation, I suggest that more "intense" comedy may lead to higher levels of trivialization. Comedic texts which include a rapid-fire round of jokes or make a person laugh intensely can understandably forgo any persuasive intentions, causing audience members to simply "miss" any messages that may have been included.

Third, not all humour seems to work similarly as part of a media text or persuasive narrative. As Walter et al. (2018) discussed, the more **"on-topic"** the comedy is, the more it will resonate with the main message, and the more likely persuasion is to occur. The study pointed out an interaction with individual issue involvement, as follows: Both individuals who are less involved with the topic and those who are highly involved will be more persuaded by a message containing on-topic comedy. However, highly involved individuals are far less persuaded by messages containing off-topic comedy, an effect that was less pronounced in low-involvement individuals. In other words, whether a message benefits from using either on- or off-topic comedy depends on the amount of involvement the targeted audience already has with the topic. These findings interestingly parallel the work by Hoeken and Fikkers (2014), who contributed evidence that narratives were more persuasive when they were more relevant to participants, which I would argue could translate into higher involvement with the topic. Their study also found support for a model by Fisch (2000), who stated that argumentative content in the narrative should be made explicit to be persuasive, which potentially could be done through on-topic comedy. Overall, it appears that finding the right type, intensity, and topic for comedy, and adjusting these elements to the desired audience, will be crucial when considering how to integrate comedy in a persuasive message.

2.2 Comedy overcoming resistance to persuasion

I addressed several ways in which entertaining narratives can help overcome resistance to persuasion in the previous chapter. This section will focus on the position that comedy can take in this process. As such, we answer a call for more research regarding the underlying processes through which comedy overcomes resistance to persuasion (Borum-Chattoo, 2018; El-Khoury, 2020). In this overview, I will focus on the initial stages of message processing, rather than ultimate attitudinal or behavioural outcomes. Specifically, I will be discussing how comedy can overcome selective exposure, reactance, counterarguing and trivialization, which are all types of resistance that have to be overcome before influence on attitudes or behaviours can take place.

2.2.1 Comedy and selective exposure

In the EORM, Moyer-Gusé (2008) explained how selective avoidance can be overcome by introducing persuasive storylines into narratives that are enjoyed, and through the lens of characters with whom the reluctant viewer can identify. As such, the person who is difficult to reach would be attracted even before the persuasive nature becomes apparent. I suggest that the combination of offering hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences would attract a wider audience, due to its potential to offer gratifications for several motivations.

As I will discuss in the section below, humour in interpersonal communication is known for its potential to connect people and stimulate and strengthen relationships. Taking into account the parasocial contact hypothesis (see before; Schiappa et al., 2006), I argue that this also translates into a mediated environment. As we have already extensively discussed, comedy will stimulate enjoyment, and is therefore a widely popular and attractive genre. While a full exploration of the genre concept would take us too far, it is good to consider the genre schema that a person brings into their viewing experiences. In the case of comedy, persuasion and thought are not expected, which means that comedy can sidestep selective avoidance that other informational content may run

into. Once willing exposure is achieved, comedy can then continue to reduce other barriers to persuasion, such as reactance.

2.2.2 Comedy and reactance

Even in studies where humorous stimuli did not result in the desired persuasive outcomes, the inclusion of humour still managed to reduce reactance responses (El-Khoury, 2020; Moyer-Gusé et al., 2018). As discussed in the previous section, reactance occurs when audience members feel manipulated into being persuaded, which may cause so-called boomerang effects or "doubling down" into the discouraged beliefs and behaviour. According to the EORM (Moyer-Gusé, 2008), reactance can be avoided or reduced through the use of narrative structures, parasocial interactions and source liking. Our framework suggests that combining enjoyment and appreciation will limit the "manipulated" feeling that classic persuasion may encounter. This chapter already includes a discussion regarding the role of comedy in stimulating enjoyment, so we will not be discussing this experience in this section again. A study in the field of health communication showed that the relation between a humorous (print) message and lowered reactance was mediated through increased positive emotions (Skalski et al., 2009), for which enjoyment of entertainment is known. Research suggested that humour reduces defensive processing and the risk of the boomerang effects, even in a group resistant to the message being communicated (Moyer-Gusé et al., 2018). However, it has also been found that combining humorous content with a public service announcement (PSA) led to more reactance, and subsequential undesired outcomes (Moyer-Gusé, Tchernev & Walther-Martin, 2019) when initial participant attitudes were counter to the desired outcome attitudes before exposure. The authors of this study discussed that the inclusion of the PSA made the persuasive intent salient in such a manner that it reminded the audience of their original position on the issue, causing this so-called boomerang effect. A salient sense of being persuaded into something that goes against one's initial attitudes, led to increased reactance, even when humour was included. It appears that

finding the right balance between information and entertaining is crucial when creating the right context for the reception of comedy.

Another route to lowering reactance may be discussed in previous research (outside of entertainment or media studies) that showed that using humour stimulates increased source liking (Weinberger & Gulas, 1992), a finding that is clearly supported by studies of humour in interpersonal communication (see below) and can be considered a precursor to parasocial interaction. El-Khoury (2020) found evidence that parasocial interactions can form while watching a humorous fiction television programme, even with multiple characters simultaneously. Other studies showed that a humorous message was more persuasive when it came from a comedian, while serious messages were more persuasive when attributed to someone who was not a comedian (Nabi et al., 2007). In the case of liking comedians, enjoyment of comedy and finding the content funny play a key role in source liking (Ellithorpe et al., 2014; Nabi et al., 2007), which is important to take into account when choosing a host or spokesperson, and writing comedy for them in a format with persuasive potential. Another hurdle closely related to reactance, is resistance in the form of counterarguing, which I will address next.

2.2.3 Comedy, counterarguing and trivialization

As discussed, comedy and enjoyment thereof have been studied specifically to explore the way they can limit counterarguing. Studies have shown that including comedic elements in a media text can reduce counterarguing responses (Nabi et al., 2007; Moyer-Gusé, Mahood & Brookes, 2011; El-Khoury, 2020), which the EORM (Moyer-Gusé, 2008) attributed to their positive effect on source liking and processing depth. However, while comedy may be praised for its potential to limit counterarguing, it can also lead audience members to trivialize or discount the topics that are being discussed (Moyer-Gusé, Mahood & Brookes, 2011; Nabi et al., 2007; Young, 2008; Zillmann & Bryant, 1985). Due to the humorous nature of the text, the audience members perceive it as "not serious" and do not pay attention to the topic at hand. They

discount the entire message, including its serious content. While this is not an issue when the joke material is about less serious fare, problems occur when the narrative or content aimed to spread a valuable message. In their study on the perceived severity of unintended pregnancies Moyer-Gusé et al. (2011) showed that on-topic comedy led to less counterarguing, but more trivialization compared to off-topic comedy. In other words, aside from the fact that the way in which comedy leads to counterarguing and/or trivialization may depend on issue involvement (Futerfas & Nan, 2017; Walter et al., 2018), it may also depend on whether or not the comedy is related to the rest of the storyline and intended outcomes. Current research evidence suggests that more on-topic comedy may be beneficial to potential persuasive outcomes overall (Walter et al., 2018), but also risks higher trivialization (Moyer-Gusé et al., 2011).

A suggested solution has been to "restore" the gravity (Nabi et al., 2007) surrounding the topic by creating the right context (Campo et al., 2013) or by concluding comedic texts with a message re-establishing serious intent (Nabi et al., 2007). Such context should shine a light on the severity or sensitive details surrounding the topics that are being addressed. This would be especially beneficial in entertainment-education narratives, which often include health topics or the challenges facing prejudiced minorities. Throughout the studies presented in this dissertation, I suggest that entertainment narratives that combine comedy with appeals to eudaimonic experiences benefit from hybridity in both content (comedy and more serious or emotional elements) and context (enjoyment and appreciation), which will result in limiting both counterarguing and trivialization. I will argue that complimenting hedonic experiences of comedy with more thought-provoking and moving eudaimonic experiences can be exactly the context that comedy requires to work its magic as an attention-grabbing, mood-lifting, new-perspective machine, without foregoing the necessity to remind the audience of the severity of the topics addressed.

2.3   Comedy hybrids and entertainment

We are not the first to consider how a hybrid of comedy and another type of content can stimulate both enjoyment and appreciation experiences together, and even not the first to argue that combining comedy with another genre can help overcome trivialization responses. While *Taboe* is unique in its combination of comedy and human-interest, the idea of comedy to address difficult topics in media through light-hearted conversation of course is not. One specific example from the UK, *The Last Leg* is a late night talk show with sketch comedy elements, hosted by "four guys with three legs", referring to the fact that two of the three hosts are physically disabled. The programme has received public praise for its potential to open conversations in a light-hearted manner, similar to *Taboe* in Belgium.

> "Those conversations hadn't been had on TV before," says Brooker. "We'd discuss the etiquette of handshakes or hard-hitting stuff […]. Me and Adam compared prosthetics as if we were discussing cars. I'd never joked about my disability like that before. It's been like nine years of therapy. It's made me much more comfortable with myself. I just wish The Last Leg had been around when I was a kid. I never saw people like me on TV, let alone talking so honestly." (Hogan, 2021)

Malmberg and Awad (2019) provided a production and textual analysis of a Finnish radio talk show praised for its humorous tone interspaced with social commentary and serious talk about (among other) migration and ethnicity issues. Other examples (Borum-Chattoo & Feldman, 2017; Feldman & Borum-Chattoo, 2018) focussed on outcomes, and studied how comedy fared in combination with serious informational genres of media content. In their 2017 study, Borum-Chattoo and Feldman found that a hybrid of stand-up comedy and documentary outperformed its serious counterpart in stimulating awareness, knowledge, and behavioural intention. Overall, despite the

inclusion of comedy, the topic was not trivialized, or at least not enough to offset persuasive effects. In that study, the authors drew attention to an understudied mediator in narrative persuasion, which they called **perceived entertainment value**.

In a follow-up study, Feldman and Borum-Chattoo (2018) reconsidered this perceived entertainment value and found evidence that it was an important mediator in the influence of hybrid comedy on attitude change. Unique to this study was that entertainment value was measured through a set of "items intended to assess a unified concept of entertainment value that includes elements of enjoyment and appreciation" (Feldman & Chattoo, 2018, p. 12), although unfortunately, methodological challenges made it impossible for the study to correctly discuss hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences separately. Because this study is one of the few to compare comedy and another genre and takes into account entertainment value and resistance in the form of trivialization, I will discuss it more extensively.

The study compared four stimuli: a satirical news segment, a classic news segment, a combination in the order of news followed by comedy, and the reverse combination of comedy followed by news. The results showed that people in the satire and combination conditions cared more about the Syrian refugee crisis, compared to those who only watched the traditional news segment. All four conditions stimulated more positive attitudes toward the refugee crisis, but the three comedy conditions showed significantly larger effects, and those effects persisted over two weeks. What the study was unable to determine, was a synergetic effect of combining comedy with news, as the effects of the hybrids were not significantly larger.

In comparing the four conditions, it became clear that comedy and the combination in order news-comedy led to higher perceived entertainment value, but more trivialization and lower perceived argument quality than their news-only/comedy-news counterparts. Considering the suggestions made by Nabi et al. (2007) and Campo et al. (2013), it is possible that the order of news-comedy or comedy-news may have made a difference: ending on news rather than comedy might

have provided the required context to avoid trivialization. Sadly, it also cancelled out perceived entertainment value, which is not surprising for a classic news segment. This brings us to question what would happen if this context was created through another type of content, that also provides entertainment experiences. This is one of the questions that will be addressed in this dissertation.

For their mediation analysis, the authors focussed on comparing the comedy-only segment with the news-only segment. This analysis showed that comedy had a direct effect of increasing trivialization and lowering argument quality, which could be detrimental to its persuasive effects. However, comedy also stimulated higher perceived entertainment value which, against expectations, did not increase trivialization but rather reduced it. Additionally, it is interesting that this study showed a positive effect of entertainment value on attitudes, but no results were found regarding trivialization's negative effect on attitudes.

Notably, the hybrid genre studied in this research was a political satire news show. As a genre, these television programmes are structurally closer to classic news broadcasts than to narrative entertaining content. The authors also argue that satire already blends entertainment and information, which may explain why the perceived entertainment value thereof could contribute to persuasive outcomes by lowering trivialization. Ultimately, the study was unable to determine which types of entertainment experiences their participants were having. Based on a previous study of eudaimonic experiences while watching political talk shows (Roth et al., 2014), it is possible that these participants were having thoughtful and reflective eudaimonic experiences, which would possibly bypass trivialization. Satire is known for its mixed effect on persuasive outcomes, as discussed by Walter et al. (2018). This begs caution but argues for further research studying other types of comedy and other hybrid genres, with a clearer view on distinguishing the effect of hedonic and eudaimonic elements in entertainment value, or as we refer to them, entertainment experiences.

3   Comedy facilitates mediated intergroup contact

This dissertation reports research on combined hedonic and eudaimonic experiences of hybrid comedy and human-interest, and how those can help improve intergroup relations, mostly by stimulating prosocial attitudes and intergroup contact willingness. The previous chapter addressed the importance of intergroup contact, and how mediated intergroup contact can contribute to increased perceptions of self-efficacy for future contact with stigmatized groups. In this chapter, I already discussed how comedy can lower resistance to persuasion by crossing several hurdles that persuasive entertaining content may face, but also that it is very difficult to directly link comedic fare to attitudinal or behavioural outcomes. The latter issue underscores the importance of combining comedy with other genres that are better suited to influence attitudes, when in search of destigmatizing outcomes. That being said, there is one benefit to comedy which we have not addressed sufficiently, being its potential to improve intergroup relationships.

This section provides an overview of humours' position in stimulating intergroup relations, drawing on research from interpersonal communication, the parasocial contact hypothesis and mediated intergroup contact. As Borum-Chattoo (2018, p. 16) stated: "Comedy can influence individuals' real-world perspectives about unfamiliar people and often divisive social issues or cultural norms by allowing them into personal worlds in non-threatening ways." Humour is known for its potential in strengthening interpersonal relationships (Martin, 2007; Bormann, 1982; Fraley & Aron, 2004), a quality that has been shown to translate to mediated interactions, facilitating the construction of parasocial relationships, even with multiple characters simultaneously (El-Khoury, 2020). As a personality trait, a sense of humour has been related to trust, empathic concern, attractiveness, and likeability (Fraley & Aron, 2004). Additionally, a shared sense of humour can encourage future interactions and can facilitate contact and collaboration (Curry & Dunbar, 2013). Laughing together is also more common in already established friendships (Curry & Dunbar, 2013). Overall, combining these insights about sharing humour and laughter with understanding of

mediated intergroup contact and parasocial relationships, leads to the idea that sharing laughter with an on-screen character could potentially improve the parasocial relationship. Taking into account the importance of mechanisms such as parasocial interaction and identification in potential persuasive outcomes, this could be an additional argument for the inclusion of humour in narratives with destigmatizing potential.

Of course, not all forms of humour will be suitable to achieve such outcomes. As we have discussed above, certain types of humour are more or less persuasive. Similarly, not all types of humour are as adequate and appropriate to the goal of connecting people. Adaptive types of humour (self-enhancing and affiliative humour) put people at ease, while maladaptive styles (aggression and self-defeating humour) are more negative (Martin et al., 2003), and therefore less suitable to stimulate parasocial contact for the purpose of destigmatizing outcomes. Additionally, on the topic of minorities, maladaptive humour is not as appreciated or enjoyed as its positive counterpart, as developed below. Meyer (2000) also discussed his classification of humour as a way to either unite or divide groups of people, but points out that these functions are often dual or paradoxical. More on this can be found in the fifth chapter of this dissertation, but in short, the identification and clarification functions of humour can help speakers to make themselves more relatable, to relieve tension, or to indicate what socially desirable behaviour is, all through creating mutual enjoyment.

Based on the parasocial contact hypothesis (Schiappa et al.,2005; 2006) it is known that exposure to narratives that include positive and even funny on-screen characters representing stigmatized or minority groups can reduce prejudice to that group as a whole (Batson & Ahmad, 2009), even in those who barely interact with those groups in their daily lives. Based on these studies, we know that mediated interactions with stigmatized groups can lower prejudice, including when these narratives are humorous in nature. Borum-Chattoo (2018) stated that these entertainment texts find their value in normalizing the unfamiliar, bringing the story into the lives of those who may otherwise not come into contact with these groups. The risk of classic storytelling about minorities would

be to stimulate feelings of pity rather than positive connections (Bartsch et al., 2018; Smedema et al., 2012), something which may be overcome through either comedy (Borum-Chattoo et al., 2018) or mixed affective experiences (Bartsch et al., 2018), but with a clear positive element to its story, nonetheless.

4 Media and comedy for outgroups and minorities

Throughout this theoretical framework, we discussed what "comedy can do for destigmatization", focussed on the side of the audience: either by discussing selection motivations, experiences, or outcomes. The way that minority groups themselves interact with media texts and comedy about or by them is a perspective that is underrepresented in the empirical work of this dissertation (more on this can be read in the discussion, in chapter ten). This was a well-considered decision, as the goal of this dissertation is to contribute to the understanding of the role that media play in encouraging destigmatizing outcomes in a non-minority audience. I believe the responsibility to change perspectives and facilitate interactions lies with that majority audience and with creators of these programmes.

Earlier in this chapter, I discussed how Walter et al. (2018)'s meta-analysis of humour and persuasion shows how responses to comedy are context-related. This makes sense, considering the fact that comedy and humour are cultural products. Graefer and Das (2017) discuss how approval and enjoyment of comedy about personal and sensitive topics are tied to Bourdieu's (2010) concept of cultural capital and the power of those with higher cultural capital to decide what is in "good taste". This means that one's appreciation of certain types of humour about certain topics is related to sociocultural backgrounds and education (Graefer & Das, 2017), and that those who enjoy privilege in those areas have often determined the boundaries, even (and maybe specifically) if the comedy in case was aimed directionally away from them, targeting outgroups who do not enjoy such privileged status. Overall, studies in European contexts have found that educational and social background determines more about what styles of comedy a person will enjoy than their

nationality will (Claessens & Dhoest, 2010; Kuipers, 2002; Graefer & Das, 2017). Enjoying the same style of comedy also functions as a connector, with people setting boundaries of what humour style they enjoy, and seemingly more importantly in this regard, do not enjoy. When asked what they would think of a friend enjoying comedy that they find "in bad taste", the reflex is to evaluate one's perspective of that person, rather than their negative evaluation of the joke (Graefer & Das, 2017). This indicates how closely tied comedy and enjoyment thereof can be to our personal identities and social relations (Friedman & Kuipers, 2013). Aside from this connection to identity and socio-cultural background, evaluations of comedy can also be influenced by evolutions in our normative perceptions around the topics. Kuipers (2006), for example, mentions how humour targeting ethnic minorities in both the USA and the Netherlands is discouraged overall, but that whether jokes are considered innocent or racist is never set in stone, but shifts over time. These negotiations follow discussions and conversations in society, and are portrayed in television comedy, contributing to that conversation once again. The boundaries of comedy are drawn and redrawn, not only over time, but also depending on circumstances, target audience, setting, purpose, and many other contextual elements. For now, I would like to make note of the fact that the studies in this dissertation include samples that overrepresent highly educated persons, which is often been brought in relation to more cultural capital privilege. A reflection on how this steers interpretation of the research findings is included in the final conclusion of this dissertation.

This section approaches this issue of representation with a focus on the Flemish television and media market. I will discuss the representative potential of entertaining narratives, but also the risk of falling into "positive stereotypes" and typical frames used in such representations. I will connect this with **humour regimes,** the unwritten rules of who is allowed to laugh at what (Kuipers, 2006). Next, I will focus on stand-up comedy in Flanders, and how it differs from the Anglo-Saxon tradition of the comedian as a voice for social change, a research topic that is especially relevant to the ninth chapter in this dissertation

but will echo throughout. I will discuss comedy as a tool for empowerment, and the justifiable apprehensions about ingroup members engaging in outgroup comedy.

4.1 Minority representation in Flanders

Studies regarding the representation of minorities on Flemish television have been conducted with a focus on queer and LGBTQ+ representations (Vanlee, Dhaenens & Van Bauwel, 2018), cultural and ethnic diversity (Panis, Paulussen & Dhoest, 2019; Jacobs, 2017), disability (Vertoont, 2019) and poverty (Dhoest et al., 2021; Panis, Dhoest & Paulussen, 2019). These studies understandably focus on one minority group, a choice essential to discussing their representation in depth. Such studies are important, as television programmes provide audiences with images under the pretence of a natural and neutral narrative, inviting them to adopt these perspectives (Fiske, 1986). Aside from issues of underrepresentation (Gerbner & Gross, 1976), minority representation often lacks quality and diversity by relying on stereotypical and negative portrayals. While the foundational aspects of television' importance in representation issues were formulated several decades ago, their insights remain relevant to the current research. Vertoont (2019) refers to Ellis (2016) in stating that true equal on-screen representation of disabled persons lies in the possibility for them to be represented and seen in any and all possible roles and identities on popular television. Following that notion, I propose that comedy as a representation tool encapsulates more diverse entry points to discuss minority issues, compared to more serious genres. In their study on the representation of poverty, Panis, Dhoest and Paulussen (2019) highlighted the problem of having external experts or celebrities discuss the topic and turning the conversation into one "about" the minority, rather than "with" them. While Vertoont (2019) mentioned that people with disabilities are included mostly as expert spokespersons in non-fiction in news and human-interest television, she also discussed how these people are selected entirely because of their disability (Vertoont, 2019), but lack a more complex view on their identities. This issue is reflected in Panis, Dhoest et al.'s (2019)

discussion on the representation of poverty: individual testimonies often lack a structural perspective on the issues.

In 2019, Panis, Paulussen and Dhoest conducted a study on the representation of ethnocultural minorities in VRT's programming. According to this study, the PSM institution makes efforts to improve its on- and off-screen diversity, but still faces difficulties regarding homogeneous representation that bypasses intragroup differences, offers voices to people with a migration background as expert spokespersons for their ethnocultural group, but pays little attention to intersectionality, and portrays minorities from a dominant group perspective. That being said, while VRT's diversity and representation policies can easily be found in publicly available documents due to its nature as a public institution, their commercial counterparts are less transparent and less researched. In their chapter on the representation of poverty, Dhoest, te Walvaart and Panis (2021) included a selection of factual entertainment[7] programmes that show people in poverty. Five of the seven analysed programmes were broadcast on PSM channels, whereas only two were broadcast on smaller commercial channels. The programmes of the commercial channels did prioritize entertaining elements above reflections on social vs. individual responsibility structures[8], but also managed to avoid sensational or exploitative approaches to representing poverty. The authors discuss how this may be the result of following the example of the strong public broadcaster VRT. As such, the PSM institution makes use of its position as a market amplifier and apparently sets the tone for conversations about minorities, beyond their own channels or programmes.

The full scope of representation practices and experiences thereof in the Flemish media market is difficult to discuss. This dissertation also focusses on a television programme broadcast by VRT's primary

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[7] The authors refer to factual programmes that "add entertainment elements, that is televisual techniques making factual programming palatable to a broader audience" (Dhoest et al. p.169).
[8] For more on how responsibility perspectives on poverty are translated on television in Flanders, see Dhoest et al. (2021) and Panis et al. (2019).

television channel, but encourages future researchers to look beyond this PSM focus.

4.2 Humour regimes and offensiveness

Throughout this dissertation, I will often refer to the concept of humour regimes and summarize it as "the unwritten rules of who is allowed to laugh at what". However, the concept of humour regimes is more complicated than this one phrase could capture. As Kuipers (2006; 2011) discussed, humour regimes are culturally specific discursive regimes that draw social boundaries, and therefore also encapsulate a notion of power. Humour regimes give people a framework within which to understand comedic texts and jokes, knowing that a distinct set of rules apply regarding responses and understandings of comedic messages compared to serious talk (Kuipers, 2011). In sociological research of humour, this fits within frame theories' understanding of jokes as a "break from everyday life" (Mulder & Nijholt, 2002). Altogether, such humorous frames provide a chance for to break certain normative rules about topics, perspectives, and taboos. However, this does not make any and every topic or style "fair game". As Kuipers (2011) states, humour regimes also include restrictions, marking which topics are advisable to joke and not to joke about, and who should be able to "take the joke". Under the guise of entertainment value ("can't we make a joke?") or freedom of speech, minorities and marginalized groups are pressured to accept being targeted, even if public discourse states that "kicking down" is not the accepted form of joking (Howells, 2006; Bucaria & Barra, 2016). Lion and Dhaenens (2021) link this to the idea of offence and suggest that humour scholars should take into account not only the politics of representation (i.e., the use of stereotypes in discussing minorities), but also the politics of offence, i.e., when, why, and how audiences take offence to comedy. Their research shows that minority groups can negotiate comedy about themselves within socially constructed notions of offensiveness, evaluating their personal feelings and beliefs within those humour regimes, against their desire for belonging and acceptance. As a discursive practice, Nicolaï and

Maeseele (2021) suggest that comedy performances can interrogate existing power relations, being performed from the sidelines of the norm, while discussing and poking fun at what happens in the centre (Kuipers, 2011). Humour can "(re)frame, (re)define, and (re)present issues in a wide range of ways. In terms of interaction, humour can highlight positions between actors, ideas, or perspectives" (Nicolaï & Maeseele, 2021, p. 5). It is worth noting that most of the research addressed in this section adopts a Western-centric perspective, but seems to be echoed in current research by those interested in integrating the voices of ethnic minorities in European cultural spaces as well. This idea of negotiating existing norms regarding taboo topics becomes especially relevant when we consider it through the perspective of public service media institutions and their approaches to diversity and universality. In their discussion of the Finnish radio talk show *Ali Ja Husu* (*Ali and Husu*), Malmberg and Awad (2019) stressed how the programme's humorous tone allowed the radio hosts to diverge from more serious portrayals on immigration and cultural diversity. According to the authors, this radio talk show broadcast by Finnish public media institution Yle, "used humour to engage relatively large and diverse audiences in discussions meant to humanize immigrants and challenge social prejudices, while minimizing right-wing criticism and unintended readings" (p. 2). Introducing new perspectives on existing ideas can help to challenge norms regarding marginalized communities, who often face prejudice both in their real life and in mediated interactions. This is an important assignment that PSM institutions can contribute to and which creates public value. Alternatively, using comedy to address such issues can also be seen as a form of genre diversity, an issue that challenges the notion of what PSM can and should produce and broadcast, as was discussed in the introduction of this dissertation. This topic is further developed in the theoretical framework of chapter five.

4.3   Minority stand-up comedy and a Flemish context

The last empirical study in this dissertation (chapter nine) considers the way that an audience requires approval to enjoy comedy about

minorities, and that this approval should come from the minority themselves. Additionally, it takes into account humour types, considering that adaptive styles of comedy are more accepted when discussing difficult topics. In this section, I want to address a certain forcefield I believe was insufficiently addressed throughout that paper, but is important to interpret the work presented in this entire dissertation, namely the approach of engaging in comedy about minorities for the purpose of destigmatizing outcomes.

By "stepping up to the mic" minority members have purposefully drawn attention to their lack of voice in previously exclusionary spaces, both on- and off-screen. Minority comedy and minority stand-up comedy are tools that marginalized communities use as a form of empowerment (Dahl, 2021; Lee, 2005; Porter, 2005; Wells, 2005). Stand-up comedy's discursive power for minorities has been studied in the context of religious minorities (Michael, 2013), immigrants (Dahl, 2021), people of colour (Scarpetta & Spagnolli, 2009), disabled persons (Lockyer, 2015), queer people (Gilbert, 2016; Jenzen, 2020), and women (Waisanen, 2011; Votruba, 2018), to name a few. While British and American stand-up comedy sprung from marginalized communities claiming time and space by using subversive comedy with a connection to counterculture and political movements, this was not the case for stand-up comedy's evolution in Europe (Dahl, 2021). Similar to the Scandinavian context described by Dahl, stand-up comedy came to Flanders relatively late, and drew inspiration from Dutch "cabaretiers" rather than the Anglo-Saxon traditions. Even then, it would take several years for stand-up comedy to gain popularity, more in line with the style of the American and British stand-ups, but not originating from a minority perspective at all. In a news article overviewing the Flemish stand-up comedy landscape, Decroubele (2018) names and discusses the plethora of comedians that the 2018 cultural season had to offer. Without making any reflection on the subject, the journalist included no less then 55 comedians, of which three have an ethnically diverse background and one is a woman. While recently, more women, queer persons and people of colour have managed to find their way to the stand-up scene, this

2018 overview provides a clear picture to what the stand-up comedy landscape in Flanders has been like, and that it did not come up from a position of marginalized communities. This culturally specific context of stand-up comedy will become more relevant as we discuss the professional pragmatics of television production. All of this pertains to the choice of Philippe Geubels as the host of *Taboe*, rather than creating the same programme with minority comedians, as further discussed in the methodological chapter of this dissertation.
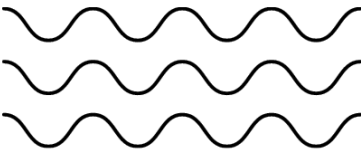
5   Conclusion

Research has considered both the attention-grabbing and persuasive potential of including comedy in media texts, including narratives and entertainment. Based on three overarching theories of humour and studies on its reception, I was able to conclude that humour can be a valuable inroute to draw attention to issues pertaining to minorities and to stimulate intergroup contact willingness. Based on the current research regarding minority representation and stand-up comedy in Flanders, caution seems necessary: operating within humour regimes, production logics and representational power, the act of creating comedy about minorities should not be underestimated in its difficulty, nor its potential in creating qualitative representations. But as a wise man once said: with great power comes great responsibility.

Aside from issues of representation, this chapter also discussed the way in which hybrid genres that combine comedy with other styles of entertaining television programmes can contribute to prosocially persuasive outcomes by lowering both counterarguing and trivialization. By combining the hedonic enjoyment of comedy with the eudaimonic experiences of other entertainment content, a context may be created that not only minimizes trivialization, but can also offer some background and clarification regarding the risks discussed in the paragraph above.

This dissertation aims to disentangle how these mechanisms work together or against each other, with what potential outcomes and underlying processes, from production to reception.

4

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK AND SCOPE OF THE DISSERTATION

Overview Figure 2 *Dissertation framework*

	Before text	**During text**		**After text**
Level of production	Production and PSM culture	Stimulate conversation and interaction with text		
	Motivation or intention			
Level of the text	Genre conventions	Host	Human-interest	
		Comedian	Comedy	
			Comedy type	
Level of the individual	Motivation for selection or gratification sought	Selective exposure	Eudaimonic entertainment experiences	Social sharing activities	Changed attitudes
	Genre schemata		Hedonic entertainment experiences	Counterarguing and trivialization	Self-efficacy
			Source liking		Willingness to engage in future intergroup contact
			Parasocial relationships		
Level of society					Destigmatization

This dissertation reports research that combines insights from different fields and perspectives of communication and media studies. While this has often challenged me both within the research and during communication and publication processes, I still believe this approach to be the most valuable route to answering our research questions. The purpose of the work presented in this dissertation is to study the processes that determine the potential prosocial outcomes of television

programmes that combine comedy with human-interest (or as we call it, humour interest) about minorities. The processes we focussed on were entertainment experiences' position in overcoming resistance to persuasion, but the research also positions those experiences in the wider context of a television programme by considering one case study from production to reception. In this chapter I will begin with a discussion of the value of focussing on a specific case study, followed by an outline of the research questions I aimed to answer with this dissertation. After that, this chapter will include a synopsis of the connection between the methodological framework, the theoretical framework, and the research questions.

1   Case study

One of the challenges facing entertainment research today is the need to move beyond the dominant westernized perspective and acknowledge that entertainment texts are cultural products (Vorderer et al., 2021). This implies the awareness that entertaining media texts are created in specific contexts, and that their forms and receptions vary around the world. After all, while the research presented in this dissertation is also conducted in a Eurocentric western perspective, it offers a very close look into one specific cultural context, being that of Flanders, a small television market with a strong public service media institution and commercial counterparts. It is important to study this specific Flemish context for two reasons: first, entertainment media texts, just like comedy and humour, are culturally specific, and should not be studied outside of that context (Douglas as discussed in Mintz, 1985). More about the context of stand-up comedy in Flanders is included in chapter three, while more about the context of stand-up comedy on Flemish television is included here. This section also discusses how Philippe Geubels is tied to the rise of popularity and mass mediatisation of Flemish stand-up comedy. The work presented in this dissertation combines an in-depth qualitative analysis of the reception and interaction with a television programme with quantitative and experimental testing of those insights. In doing so, we not only contribute to the field by

looking at a unique case study and offering insights regarding the potential of entertainment-education and hybrid genres, but also by considering the applicability of current models and theories of media psychology in one specific cultural context. Additionally, case studies of Flemish PSM have been discussed earlier as being valuable beyond the case study itself. As Donders and Van den Bulck (2019) discuss, the challenges faced by VRT are not unique to the Flemish media market alone. Several other PSM institutions have faced the difficulties of legitimizing their choices for entertaining content as a part of public value creation, and the work presented in this dissertation can offer more insight regarding the opportunities and challenges that such an approach may face.

1.1 The value of a case study

Scholars entering the arena of media research face several choices when designing their studies. First, a choice has to be made regarding methods. While it has become widely accepted in audience reception studies to use a multi-method framework to study phenomena (Schrøder, 2018), the same cannot be said for effect studies, where a quantitative focus is almost religiously followed (Vorderer et al., 2021). Second, reception studies in the past has chosen between a focus on the text and extrapolating how an audience would receive and decode the content, or a focus on the actual audience's reception itself. When choosing to focus on the audience itself, a third choice follows, about the moment in which the study takes place. It is possible to study audience reception in the actual moment of reception, for example through thought-listening exercises or physiological measures, but it can also be studied later, usually in the form of interviews or focus groups, where participants reflect on their meaning-making processes and the context within which those took place (Heiselberg, 2018).

Fourth, when choosing to take into account the context in which audience experiences and reception takes place, an explosion of available digital communication tools has introduced researchers to a whole new array of ways to share and express experiences of "classic"

medium consumptions (Vorderer et al., 2021; Jensen, 2018). In an effort to combine several of these options, this dissertation conducted a case study. In the overview figure (see figure 2) that is included throughout this dissertation, these options are positioned as before, during or after the text, and on the level of production, the text, the audience, and society. By using these visuals as a guide, it is possible to determine not only which elements of the theoretical framework are addressed in each study, but also to understand on which level the study is focussed, and at what moment. For example, study one includes a production and content analysis, and spans its research focus across the moments before, during and after production and broadcast. Later, study four is interested in audience experiences, but focusses only on the level of the actual audience.

The use of a case study gave us the opportunity for an in-depth exploration of one phenomenon by taking into account multiple forms of evidence (Yin, 2018). Case studies are considered a tool to reach a thick description, are not limited to exploratory research (Yin, 2018), and in media studies become especially suitable when looking to study policy and production issues (Vanhaeght & Donders, 2015). In essence, the purpose of a case study is to research decisions that were made, the reasons behind them (why), their implementation (how) and the results of those decisions (Schramm, 1971). This dissertation covers all of these elements, with a focus on using the "why" and "how" to interpret and better understand the results of those decisions.

Case studies are not a choice of method, but a choice of research design (Bryman, 2008). As an empirical tool, case studies look at a contemporary phenomenon, in-depth, within the real-world context. What differentiates case studies from other research designs, is that the research is interested in the actual case in and of itself (Bryman, 2008), rather than as a simple illustration. Unique to this approach is that it allows researchers to consider that context and phenomena are not always clearly separable (Yin, 2018). Academics often relate only qualitative methods to case study research (Yazan, 2015), thereby limiting potential triangulation beyond qualitative insights alone.

Nevertheless, case studies can triangulate evidence sources and methods, which can include quantitative data (Bryman, 2008). While the use of case studies does come with its own challenges of generalizability and validity, the solutions offered to these challenges also answer some of the concerns regarding choices made in media studies in general.

A common concern regarding this dissertation, and case studies in general, is related to the **generalizability** of the results. Case studies do not strive to be generalizable to a population or universe, rather they search to generalize theories, also known as analytical generalization (Yin, 2018). This concept refers to "the extraction of a more abstract level of ideas from a set of case study findings – ideas that nevertheless can pertain to newer situations other than the case(s) in the original case study" (Yin, 2013, p. 325). Analytical generalization may also benefit from linking findings back to research literature, or by replicating findings in other case studies. Rather than discuss generalizability, other authors refer to this concept as "transferability" (Schoch, 2020), resulting in knowledge and insights that can be applied to other cases and situations. That is exactly what this dissertation hopes to achieve by discussing the processes and outcomes of one successful case, testing these findings, and formulating advice for future endeavours with similar ambitions.

To strengthen the **validity** of our results, this dissertation includes two types of triangulation, method triangulation and theory/perspective triangulation (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2013). As already discussed in the discussion of generalizability, case studies can benefit from replicating their results in different case studies. I opted not to conduct multiple case studies but focussed on corroborating findings through method triangulation. The use of mixed methods has been discussed as a way to increase confidence in results by combining qualitative and quantitative methods (Yin, 2013) and could encourage "independence from subjective author assessments" (Vorderer et al., 2021, p. 17). In mixed method design, Bryman (2008) refers to method triangulation as a way to increase confidence in findings of a study by crosschecking those results with the results of a different study using a method associated

with another type of research strategy. Regarding the potential outcomes of *Taboe*, we engaged in method triangulation by conducting in-depth interviews and analysis of tweets, followed by experimental testing of the findings from those studies. Theory triangulation (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2013) is usually discussed as a way to increase the reliability of qualitative research methods (Yazan, 2015), but can offer researchers a guide to look beyond their case study as well. As suggested by Bennett (1997) "restricting oneself to a single theory can constrain one's thinking and preclude full comprehension of the phenomenon" (p. 97). When studying a topic that is covered by many research fields and theoretical models (as entertainment, comedy and television all are), it is more desirable to strive for a complementary expansion of views on the research topic, rather than having the theories compete for attention and thereby limiting understanding of complex realities (Bennett, 1997). As evidenced by the theoretical chapters, and the section on scope and methods in the second half of this chapter, this dissertation follows this logic by applying multiple perspectives to the research problem.

Looking back to the introductory paragraph of this section, we can argue that the use of a specific case study solves several of the challenges that media, television, and entertainment studies face. First, the choice of method is resolved through method triangulation and experimental testing of the results, with the initial qualitative studies providing context to the effect studies in the second half of this dissertation. Next, by triangulating both theory and method, we will take into account the level of the text, the context of production (before and during text) and reception (after text), and study the audience's meaning-making processes both in the actual moment of reception (during text in the visual framework) and post-exposure (after text), allowing us to consider both classic and new digital approaches to entertainment experiences, and research thereof.

1.2 Taboe

While we introduce our case study in several of the individual papers included in this dissertation, I often struggled with capturing its richness

under the constraints of a journal word limit. More about the content of the programme can be found in chapter five, as part of the methodology of the first study, including the topics covered by the show and timings of broadcast. *Taboe* is a television programme that was broadcast by the Flemish public service media institution VRT between January and March of 2018. It was the first television programme that Philippe Geubels hosted after his new deal with VRT. The programme was introduced to the audience with the tagline "laughing at things you should not be laughing at." Before the initial broadcast, it was met with a certain level of (understandable) doubt and apprehension (Van Tendeloo, 2018), but it was quickly praised for its novel approach to televising minority stories (de Leur, 2018). It was produced by Panenka (the production company) and developed by Geubels along with Bart Cannaerts (another Flemish comedian) and Tom Baetens (who was interviewed for the first study in this dissertation). Philippe Geubels, one of the most popular comedians in Flanders, Belgium, has clearly broken his mould as a stand-up comedian alone. He is known as a celebrity, who hosts television shows, can interview, and is not afraid to show a vulnerable side (de Leur, 2018). Interestingly, Geubels has been criticized for making rude or stereotypical jokes (de Leur, 2017), but has mentioned himself that he always attempts to avoid being hurtful when joking (Coenegracht, 2018).

As mentioned, *Taboe* combined comedy with human-interest. First, it is important to note that the comedy of *Taboe* was stand-up comedy, a unique form of comedy that is not readily comparable to any other broadcast comedy. As we discussed in the previous chapter, types and styles of comedy and humour can play a role in reception and experiences thereof. Not all types of humour are as suited to all topics and it is important for programme makers and comedians to take into account the context surrounding both production and reception. Which styles of comedy were used in *Taboe*, and what influence those choices had on the final content and resulting experiences, is discussed in chapter five of this dissertation. Furthermore, it is of interest to note that the Flemish audience is well acquainted to seeing stand-up comedy on television. As stated in our discussion in chapter three, stand-up comedy

gained popularity in Flanders over the last two decades, but was certainly present before that. Between the success the Dutch cabaretiers enjoyed in Flanders, the broadcast of 'conferenciers' bringing their yearly comedic overview of the news, the popularity of cult-figure Urbanus and sketch-comedy shows on commercial broadcaster VTM, several types of comedy found their way to the small screen, including many distinctive styles, from musical comedy to stand-up comedy and comedic panel shows. In 1998, magazine Humo set up the first edition of its Comedy Cup, which would become the starting point for several well-known comedians in Flanders. In 2005, Canvas (the second channel of public service media broadcaster VRT) first broadcast stand-up comedy show Comedy Casino. From personal experience, the recordings of these shows were fairly simple: audience members bought tickets for an evening of stand-up comedy by several (national and international) performers, and the entire evening was filmed. Later, several sets were edited together into episodes, giving the audience at home the same comedy club vibe. In 2007, the team behind Comedy Casino set up the Comedy Casino Cup, a broadcast stand-up comedy competition that was inspired by the success of formats such as Pop Idol or The X-Factor. The television programme not only broadcast new stand-up comedian's sets but linked these aspiring comedians to more experienced stand-ups and documented their journey throughout challenges and performances. As such, the idea of the stand-up comedian as a celebrity with personality beyond their stand-up persona grew in popularity. Philippe Geubels became the runner up of the competition, and has barely left the Flemish television screen since. Known as "the relatable comic with the monotone voice", most of his stand-up discussed having a regular job in a supermarket, or his marriage. Flanders' most popular comedian built his audience on being relatable. This overview illustrates how far back the Flemish audience's parasocial relationship with Philippe Geubels goes, and how Flanders' mediatized stand-up comedy and his career are unequivocally tied to each other.

One crucial element that broadcast stand-up comedy brings with it, results from the way it is filmed in a theatre in front of a live audience.

This audience can then be seen and heard by the television viewer at home. The interaction between the comedian and his live audience becomes part of the viewing experience at home, part of the way that viewers negotiate their reception of the text in context. Thereby, the live audience, present at the recording, becomes "the arbiter of funny" (Brodie, 2014, p. 163). Seeing and hearing their recorded enjoyment can indicate a level of taste in that audience, and that this performance caters to their positive experience. This role will become important in our discussion of the fifth and final study (chapter nine) in this dissertation. Moreover, filming and broadcasting stand-up comedy (when not for a "special"[9]) most likely results in a routine becoming segmented, which is usually considered a downside to experiences, interrupting a narrative build-up or flow of the performance. In the case *Taboe*, the programme used this segmentation to its advantage, as we will discuss in the first study during a content analysis that discusses the interaction of comedy and human-interest more in depth[10]. That being said, the stand-up comedy of *Taboe* was always written to be included in this television programme, so it is likely that this was taken into account when breaking up the set.

Another element in *Taboe* are several candid-camera scenes where participants prank regular people on the street. Jokes were made by using their status as minorities and known prejudices as the butt of the joke. We opted not to include a focus on these scenes, as the research showed that these scenes were often forgotten by the audience members. Due to this lack of interest, we also did not include these elements as part of our further research, which focusses on audience experiences. These scenes are also no longer part of the second season of *Taboe* (R. Vermeulen, personal communication, November 9, 2021), potentially due to the lack of response these elements received.

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[9] A comedy special is a recorded performance by a stand-up comedian that is usually between one and two hours long, filmed in front of an audience. It is a performance of a set written for the purpose of touring or for that specific recording, filmed with the purpose of broadcasting to a wider audience.
[10] For an overview of studies on recording and broadcasts of stand-up comedy (with a strong USA centric focus), see Brodie's (2014) book "A vulgar art: a new approach to stand-up comedy".

Complementing its stand-up comedy, *Taboe* also included human-interest stories based on interviews with the participants of the episode, conducted by Philippe Geubels. Each episode included four to five people who belong to a certain stigmatized group and invited them to share their stories and discuss their perceptions of comedy about their situation or experience. For more about the limited research existing on human-interest outside of news coverage, see study two in chapter six. In *Taboe*, the human-interest sections were directed by Kat Steppe, a female director known for her own style and voice, who was praised in the press for her approach (de Leur, 2018; Van Rompaey, 2018). During our interviews with production stakeholders, many stressed the importance of Steppe's role in the eventual effect of *Taboe*. According to them, Geubels was a great interviewer, but Steppe created the space for participants to share their stories in a safe environment.

While we studied *Taboe* as an entertainment-education programme in this dissertation, it is important to note that all production stakeholders clearly steered away from the notion that this programme was made with any intent but "to be good/qualitative television." According to the makers, good television will often be about real stories and sharing perspectives still unknown (Vanlee, 2019). This hesitancy and rejection toward being labelled as entertainment-education is in line with the concerns of other production executives in other countries, as described in chapter two. Within our discussion of entertainment-education, *Taboe* is more in line with the contemporary conceptualization. The programme was not created with a specific, measurable, or strategized goal. That being said, while the inception of *Taboe* may not have started from a strategized desired outcome, every programme broadcast on PSM channels is evaluated against the background of public value creation. Over the years, VRT has continued to praise *Taboe* for its contribution to public merit in several and diverse ways. More on this can be found in our discussion of the production analysis in chapter five.

In the Summer of 2021, VRT announced that the second season of *Taboe* would be broadcast in the fall season that same year. In

September, I attended a stand-up comedy recording which would be integrated in the second season. This evening was a general dress rehearsal, meaning that the attending crowd was not selected due to its connection to one of the themes. People in attendance were a mixture of invitees and general audience members who bought tickets. Based on this short experience, it appears that the second of *Taboe* will not be deviating from its successful format. Topics and groups included in the second season of *Taboe* are people on the autism spectrum, senior citizens, people who suffer(ed) from addiction, gender diversity, people who "look different", (feminist) women, and people who wanted children but were unable to have them. More on this second season and why it is not a part of this dissertation work, is discussed in the last section of this methodological chapter.

1.2.1 Taboos, stigma and stigmatized groups

Throughout this dissertation, I addressed the importance of representation of minority groups but mostly focused on the potential of entertaining content and the outcomes of one's experiences in response. Our case study *Taboe*'s tagline ("laughing at things you should not be laughing at") reflects that the groups of participants for each episode have *something* about them that makes them interesting for television, but also that it is something outside of the "regular", something that makes them "not suitable to be laughed at". These are labelled as taboos, starting from the title of the programme. From that insight follows the question of what a taboo is, and how it relates to the stigmatized groups as we discussed them in previous chapters.

In their discussion of the taboo and stigma surrounding the subject of death and grief, sociologists Chapple et al. (2015) discuss how people use the concept of 'taboo' interchangeably with both 'forbidden' and 'stigma'. The case study used in this dissertation chose its title in a comparable way: topics that feel forbidden to be laughed at. More on how audience members experience that feeling can be found in chapter four and five. According to Stevens (2016, p. 4), stigma can be "defined as an attribute that is 'deeply discrediting' (Goffman, 1963, p. 3) and

devalued (Crocker et al., 1998), which causes the stigmatized person to be seen as tainted or discounted when the attribute is contrary to the social norm (Stafford & Scott, 1986)." While stigma can be considered a mark, the process behind it is socio-cultural in nature and labels people of certain (often marginalized) groups as abnormal (Subu, 2015). This process of devaluation is based first in the differences that people see between themselves and their norms, and other individuals or groups, and second in the connection that is made between one attribute of a person and a related stereotype (Goffman, 1963). Crucial to stigma are those stereotypes, which cover (over)simplified differences, resulting in a perspective that lacks nuance. This process of stigmatization is discussed more in depth by Link and Phelan (2001); but overall consists of four components: (1) distinguishing and labelling differences, (2) associating those differences with negative attributes, (3) separating between the in- and outgroups ("us" from "them") and (4) status loss and discrimination. Together, they make up a concept that encompasses processes of stereotyping, labelling, separation, status loss and discrimination faced by stigmatized groups. Similar to Stevens (2016), when this dissertation includes the concept of "stigma" or "stigmatization", I am referring to the catch-all term that includes all these parts, including negative stereotyping, discrimination and status loss and the resulting gap between in- and outgroup members.

If the process of stigmatization is the process that encompasses all these components, *de*stigmatization is then the reversal thereof. In this dissertation, I understood it as the process of bridging those gaps, based in the reduction of prejudice, breaking down stereotypes and re-evaluating perceptions. Based on the 'distance' included in the definition of stigma, destigmatization could in part be achieved by stimulating closer relations through a sense of similarity, often based in a more complex understanding of the "other" and re-introducing nuance.

Every episode of *Taboe* introduced the audience to four or five representatives of the weekly topic, being stigmatized (minority) groups. This means that the first season covers eight groups, as will the second season. By studying the entire first season in our first study (chapter five)

and three of the eight in our fourth study (chapter eight), it is crucial to consider that we did not provide ample nuance to each of the topics that are covered in *Taboe*. Each of the presented groups and participants have their own unique stories and perspectives. Relevant to the research presented here, each of these topics also come with their own specific potential prejudices and resulting processes of stigmatization. When interpreting the findings of the dissertation, it can help to keep in mind that our results are generalized across different minority groups and topics. While these choices were well considered at the time, and offer the benefit of transferability (see above), they also hinder more complex and nuanced understanding of the mechanisms of discrimination that are tied to each individual minority group. The discrimination faced by people with mental vulnerabilities (episode six), obesity (episode eight) or people of colour (episode three) is fuelled by different power structures, social norms (such as perceptions of guilt), and levels of legal protection. To address all of these for all eight topics covered by the first season of *Taboe,* would be outside the scope of this dissertation, but we recognize that future research may benefit from a more focussed perspective on issues of media representation and diversity.

2   Scope, research questions and methods of the dissertation

As has been described in the first theoretical chapter of this dissertation, the field of entertainment studies has undergone several transformations over the past decades. We have mostly discussed the work done in the field of media psychology, but also addressed that researchers from media psychology have been calling for an ecological perspective (Vorderer & Hartmann, 2009). This perspective considers the individual's position in the real and mediated environment during their media consumption, to study how these interact with each other. Even more recently, Vorderer et al. (2021) highlighted the need for connecting the psychological and critical perspective on entertainment theory. He refers to this oversight as one of the major challenges in the field today. We hope to contribute to this research challenge by applying multiple perspectives and adopting a mixed-method approach to our research,

covering a case study from inception to reception and reflection. This dissertation includes five studies that complement each other methodologically in the way that has been discussed by studies on PSM performance (Dhoest, 2012), case study experts (Yin, 2013; 2018; Stake, 1995) and by media psychologists (Vorderer, Klimmt & Bryant, 2021). I will now discuss where each of these studies fit in the frameworks that underlie each of them, the methodologies that accompany those frameworks, and how together they offer a more complete understanding of a viewing experience and its outcomes. Each of these studies will be discussed as follows: I first introduce the underlying framework, then the research question, and then discuss which methods were used to find an answer to that question.

Just like the overall communication discipline (Vorderer et al., 2021) and the entertainment research field (Gray, 2008), television studies as a field lacks a unified approach (Zaborowski & Dhaenens, 2016). This has often resulted in an overt focus on the audience, which is valuable, but misses several other elements that are crucial to understanding viewing experiences. In an effort to offer a more complete look at our research problem, we began by looking at the process of creation and production, and the resulting text. Studying how production decisions are translated into the text can increase understanding of audience interactions with the text. Additionally, we reflect on the institutional underpinnings and the role they play in developing television within the context of balancing public value creation, viewer ratings and "quality" television. This brings the dissertation in the field of production studies on a micro and macro level, taking in account both the daily decisions that go into making a television programme (Havens & Lotz, 2017) as the realities of regulations, policy, and industries (te Walvaart, 2020) behind the companies that create, the institutions that broadcast, and the governments and people who finance. This brings us to our first and second research question:

RQ1. How do production stakeholders consider the public value and potential impact of *Taboe*? (study one)

RQ2. What is the role of humour in diverse representation of minorities and their challenges, and how does it contribute to conversation beyond the programme? (study one)

The goal of the **first study** (Chapter five) was to answer these research questions, by exploring the policy and production decisions that underlie *Taboe*'s creation and formed its hybrid genre format. This study takes into account the realities of television production in a public service media environment, and how normative values are put into practice by producers and creators today. It discusses how humour can be used to include qualitative representations of minorities and how this serves public value. The chapter includes the results of six in-depth interviews with production stakeholders (including two participants of *Taboe*) and combines them with findings from an in-depth content analysis of the programme. By combining analysis of content and production practices, the study allows itself dialogue between the creation process and the resulting media text. As discussed by Malmberg and Awad (2019), interviews with creators "offer important insights into the makers' backgrounds and intentions in producing the show and in involving humor. […] intentions […] are relevant to understand humor's potential as a strategic device" (p. 7), especially when studying a phenomenon through the lens of a case study.

In their overview of television studies, Zaborowski and Dhaenens (2016) discuss how the field positioned itself between the textual deterministic approach of film studies, and the effect paradigm of mass communication research. Its focus on audiences has been embedded in the paradigm since its inception. That media reception and experiences while watching cannot be discussed through study of the text alone, is evident to television studies (Zaborowski & Dhaenens, 2016). Television studies prioritizes the audience and aims to understand their viewing practices and meaning-making processes. This view is not limited to television studies alone but is echoed by entertainment-education researchers. Green (2021) argues that we must take into account conditions and context when attempting to understand when and why

certain media messages are successful at persuading, and others are not. Vorderer et al. (2021) state that critical approaches to entertainment media can help media psychologists by offering "precise observations on contents and forms of messages and rich accounts of symbol systems and contexts of relevance to (audience) interpretations of entertainment" (p. 16). The authors state that these insights can empower psychological approaches to entertainment theory, precisely because they can discover and discuss specific experiential effects of message exposure, specifically because they study one specific, prominent example of media entertainment in depth. On the other hand, by embracing psychological entertainment theory, critical approaches may benefit from the systematic and empiric approach that leads to stronger generalizability and independence from subjectivity. This brings us to our third research question, which is at the heart of this dissertation, and therefore is answered across three different studies:

> RQ3. How do audience members experience the combination of comedy and human-interest in *Taboe*? (study two, three and four)

The **second study** (Chapter six) consists of qualitative in-depth interviews with people (N=21) who watched *Taboe*. These interviews were conducted one year after the initial broadcast and are therefore a unique example of the classic retrospective method of studying the discursive process of meaning-making through talk (Schrøder et al., 2003). Aside from this choice being steered by pragmatic decisions and research realities, it is valuable to consider the element of time as a natural part of the way that audience members interact with television. We consider the way that audiences negotiate the text as part of their entertainment experiences, but also within the reality of television viewing practices, such as tuning in based on television schedules, and their motivations for doing so. We also asked audiences to share their thoughts and continued reflections after watching the programme, and to consider how their viewing experiences changed their perspectives on the represented groups.

Like television studies, audience research encompasses a wide variety of research methods, ranging from the quantitative perspective of classic social sciences research to the qualitative in-depth interviews of ethnographic approaches, and the textual analysis of the humanities (Jensen, 2018; Livingstone, 1998). In a reflection on their work, Jensen (2018) states that recent evolutions from mass communication to networked media environments introduced, yet again, new audience practices that should not be overlooked. Additionally, researchers have discussed the retrospective methods used in television studies as problematic and overshadowing interest in the actual moment of reception (Heiselberg, 2018). These new digital media forms not only are communication behaviours and forms of interaction with television that are worth researching, they can also be used as tools in overcoming the challenge of studying people either in lab or after the fact. Unkel and Kümpel (2020) suggest that the study of conversations on social media through the lens of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences can aid researchers by looking beyond retrospective self-reports. Our fourth research question tackles this evolution through the lens of social television practices.

> RQ4. How do people use live tweeting as a practice to share hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences while watching *Taboe*? (study three)

In a **third study** (chapter seven) presented in this dissertation, we conducted an analysis of tweets (N=1643) sent by audience members watching *Taboe* as it was being broadcast and immediately after the broadcast. The study again considers viewing experiences of *Taboe*, thereby complementing the results of the second study, but also goes beyond that initial research interest. In its exploration of what people share online while watching *Taboe*, the study considers live-tweeting as a social sharing behaviour, where audience members express and process affective and cognitive experiences through this type of metacommunication about the programme. This study is also unique in

the way that it focusses on spontaneously shared audience experiences in the moment of reception itself, a time of study that is often overlooked by researchers preoccupied with discursive meaning-making practices (Zaborowski & Dhaenens, 2016). The purpose of this study was to increase our understanding of reactions to the programme specifically, and entertainment experiences overall, through the lens of what they choose to share online. By understanding more about the way that these experiences are shared, we hoped to increase our insight in the results further studies provided.

These previous studies took a case studies approach to researching the how, why and outcomes of a specific phenomenon. By triangulating the methods, we were able to discuss how its hybrid format contributed to its ability to create public value and distinguish processes to explain why and how *Taboe* impacted its viewers. Bolls (2020 – lecture) considers immersion to be the first step to successful experiments: getting acquainted with the bigger picture is crucial to understanding the many complexities of the research topic. This can then be followed by the "systematic and empirical pattern discovery" (Vorderer et al., 2021, p. 16) at the core of psychological entertainment theory. Following theories of entertainment-education, narrative persuasion and the EORM (see chapter two), we continued our research by taking a new perspective into account, that of entertainment experiences' role in persuasion. From that came the following research questions:

RQ5. Does watching the combination of comedy and human-interest in *Taboe* lead to increased prosocial outcomes compared to separate comedy or human-interest? (study four)

RQ6. What is the role of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences in lowering resistance to persuasion, and how does this influence prosocial outcomes related to entertainment-education consumption? (study four)

The **fourth study** (Chapter eight) delves deeper into the results of study two and three. Whereas study two and three discussed entertainment experiences based on in-depth interviews and spontaneous expressions, this study examined the role of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences in overcoming resistance to persuasion. In order to test the effects of entertainment experiences on the hypothesized outcomes, an experimental design was set up. This method allowed us to draw causal conclusions (Martin, 2008). Due to COVID-19 restrictions, we opted to conduct this study as an online experiment in a Qualtrics survey. While there are disadvantages to online studies (i.e. a lack of control regarding the social and physical circumstances during the procedure), there are also clear advantages of accessibility and reach. We conducted an experiment (N=418) in which participants were exposed to comedy, human-interest or a combination of both. Based on this experiment, we discuss how counterarguing and trivialization are influenced by comedy, and the role that comedy and positivity play in achieving destigmatizing outcomes.

This study could have been the natural stopping point to this dissertation. However, throughout our research one finding appeared time and again: the role of the comedian and the type of jokes. Repeatedly, audience members praised *Taboe*'s comedy style, discussed their level of sympathy and admiration for Geubels, and so on. After it turned out we would not be able to conduct our planned fifth study (see Covid-19 reflection in chapter ten), I opted to take a deeper look at this phenomenon. In line with the research on narrative persuasion, audience members had clearly linked source liking to increased acceptance and enjoyment. In line with humour theory, they also praised *Taboe* for its positive, non-hostile style of comedy, indicated by the fact that the participants of *Taboe* clearly enjoyed the comedy. However, literature research showed that most studies considering the influence of comedy about minorities aggregated comedy source and comedy type, rather than looking at their separate effects, and did not take into account the idea of "approval from the target" as a factor in comedy enjoyment. Most studies considered the difference between

self-directed and other-directed humour to be parallel to the type of humour, respectively as non-hostile or hostile. Stepping away a bit from *Taboe*, but still testing findings based on our case study, brings us to our final research question:

> RQ7. What is the role of comedy type and in-group approval in stimulating hedonic enjoyment and resulting prosocial outcomes? (study five)

The **fifth study** (Chapter nine) answered this final research question by conducting another online experiment (N = 408). Participants were exposed to a fictional comedian's promotional flyer, including several jokes. The premise of the study was that people would enjoy comedy about a minority group more if they thought that (1) the targeted group enjoyed and approved of the comedy, and (2) the jokes were less hostile (adaptive) in nature. Most importantly, this study reflects on the responsibility of comedians to consider directionality and style of their comedy, but also on facilitating spaces and access for minority voices in comedic spaces.

In the empirical section of this dissertation, each chapter will begin with a visual overview of the theoretical framework and will highlight which part of is covered by the presented study. In the final discussion of the dissertation, **chapter ten**, all of the findings will be linked back together, including a reflection on the limitations and future research options.

5 ✕✕✕✕✕

HUMOUR AS AN INROAD TO QUALITATIVE MINORITY REPRESENTATION: THE CASE OF TABOE, A HUMOROUS HUMAN-INTEREST-PROGRAMME

Chapter five: Humour as an inroad to qualitative minority representation: The case of *Taboe*, a humorous human-interest-programme

Healing the world with comedy
The indescribable power of your comedy
The world needs direction
From a white guy like me?
Bingo
Who is healing the world with comedy?
That's it!
\- Comedy, Bo Burnham (2021)

Abstract: One of the challenges Public Service Media institutions face today is how to translate normative values such as universality and diversity into measurable and tangible content in an attempt to realize their "public value". This contribution shows how the communicative functions of humor can help create public value by introducing audiences to minorities. As a case in point, we analysed Taboe, a humorous human-interest program about minorities including, amongst others, the visually impaired and the obese, broadcast by Flemish public broadcaster VRT in 2018. Based on in-depth interviews with program makers and participants and a qualitative content analysis of the program, the study found that humor provided the program with a positive, funny yet emotional tone of voice that attracted and kept the audience's attention. By giving various minorities an active voice, Taboe introduced mainstream audiences to their perspective, encouraging increased knowledge and understanding and, in turn, tolerance of, and acceptance towards, the minority groups represented.

Overview Figure 3 *Position of the first study in the overall dissertation*

	Before text		**During text**		**After text**
Level of production	Production and PSM culture		Stimulate conversation and interaction with text		
	Motivation or intention				
Level of the text	Genre conventions	Host	Human-interest		
		Comedian	Comedy		
			Comedy type		
Level of the individual	Motivation for selection or gratification sought	Selective exposure	Eudaimonic entertainment experiences	Social sharing activities	Changed attitudes
	Genre schemata		Hedonic entertainment experiences	Counterarguing and trivialization	Self-efficacy
			Source liking		Willingness to engage in future intergroup contact
			Parasocial relationships		
Level of society					Destigmatization

1

Study one

Public Service Media (hereafter: PSM) institutions differ from their commercial counterparts on the basis of a number of qualities that originate from normative values such as universality and diversity and which are translated into government contracts or mission statements. A main challenge for PSM in today's scattered media market is to simultaneously manage quantitative targets, mainly with regards to audience reach, while providing public value, for instance, by including and addressing minorities in their content. This contribution aims to show the relevance of humorous programming in addressing those challenges. From a market failure perspective, some argue that (humorous) entertainment content no longer is a relevant part of PSM goals.

However, we maintain that this remains a key area where PSM can create public value.

This contribution centres on understanding the potential of creating public value by combining humour with human-interest. To this end, a theoretical framework is developed that explores PSM's public value remit and how it relates to presenting minorities on-screen while reaching wide and diverse audiences. This will allow us to understand the potential of humour in this context. Next, we discuss the case of *Taboe*, a humorous human-interest program about minorities that was broadcast on één, the general-interest television channel of Flemish PSM institution VRT in 2018. Based on a content analysis and in-depth interviews with program makers and participants, we analyse the specific ways in which *Taboe* combined humour and human-interest to get its complicated message across. This leads to a broader discussion of the role that humour can play in promoting knowledge and understanding towards minorities.

1 Literature review

1.1 Normative PSM concepts and public value

Since its inception, both the normative idea and the reality of PSM have been organized around a number of key principles, including universality and diversity (Donders & Van den Bulck, 2016; Garnham, 1990; Jakubowicz, 2003; Scannell & Cardiff, 1991; Van den Bulck & Moe, 2017). Aside from the technology-oriented definition regarding availability, the concept of universality has a social dimension that refers to PSM having a diverse reach, that is, it should reach an audience that is both wide and varied across ethnic backgrounds, sexes, age differences, levels of education, amongst others, including minority groups (Garnham, 1990; Scannell & Cardiff, 1991; Van den Bulck & Moe, 2017). With regards to programming, universality means providing content that shows the diversity of cultural and ethnic groups in society (Donders & Van den Bulck, 2016).

While universality and diversity have been PSM goals since the beginning, their abstractness makes it difficult to translate into specific

programming. Furthermore, following shifts towards a more competitive media landscape, PSM's growing need to legitimize its position has pushed them to translate normative concepts such as "providing a service" and "public value" into measurable performance indicators but has found them struggling to do so.

In its simplest form, public value means that what adds value to the public. In PSM practice, it lets us consider value creation beyond economic value and include social, cultural, and political value (Benington & Moore, 2010). Social and cultural value refers to what adds to social capital, cohesion, social relationships, meaning and cultural identity, and both individual and communal wellbeing (Benington & Moore, 2010). This way, the concept of public value helps PSM institutions to operationalize normative, long-lasting values such as universality in ways that the public can appreciate and governments can evaluate (Lowe & Martin, 2014). This paper focuses on one of these: expanding knowledge and understanding of minorities with which audience members may not come into contact in their everyday lives. This principle of "dispersed disconfirmation", bringing individuals into contact with minority groups, can help change attitudes towards, and ideas about, these groups, encourage acceptance, increase tolerance and discourage stereotypical thinking (Johnston & Hewstone, 1992). However, several authors point to a severe lack of representation of minorities, also in PSM content (Klein & Shiffman, 2009), which Gerbner calls "symbolic annihilation" (Gerbner & Gross, 1976). To counter this, PSM should aim for a well-rounded and complete representation of minority groups.

1.2   PSM programming: Generalist and special interest

To fulfil their remit, PSM are expected to provide programming that meets two main aims. On the one hand, public broadcasters should offer generalist content aimed at a wide audience. This type of programming should reflect a broad audience's interests and the common culture shared among citizens (Born & Prosser, 2001; Donders & Van den Bulck, 2016; Jakubowicz, 2003). On the other hand, their schedule should

include content that goes beyond the mainstream, including less accessible and more complex topics such as issues dealing with various minority groups. Traditionally, these topics tend to be situated in more "difficult" program genres such as hard news and current affairs. We argue that public value is also created by bringing these topics into the mainstream and deliver it to wider audiences.

Considering popular content with a mass appeal as an appropriate vehicle for the representation of minorities has relevance both from a market failure perspective – PSM offering content that is not popular/mainstream enough for commercial broadcasters – and from a cultural-educational logic: PSM providing a large audience with alternative perspectives to help them gain a more diverse understanding of society. From this perspective, popular programs have been and remain an important part of PSM institutions' generalist programming schedules. This leads us to our first and second research question:

How does *Taboe* provide a diverse representation of minorities and the issues they are confronted with?

What is the perceived public value of *Taboe* and its potential impact?

1.3   Humour: Types and functions

We combine two perspectives to take a closer look at humour's possibilities to create public value. First, we look at humour within interpersonal communication, where research has shown the benefits of humour in psychological wellbeing. While our research focusses on the use of humour in television programs, this psychological framework offers valuable insights concerning the motivations for using humour and responses to those uses. We discuss two typologies, one based on the types of humour, the other based on the functions that humour can fulfil. In the next section, we discuss how audiences respond to humour in entertainment with prosocial potential.

The use of humour in social interaction has been studied quite extensively for its benefits (Martin & Lefcourt, 1983). Humour can help to deal with stress (Martin & Lefcourt, 1983), can reduce tension (Lynch, 2002), and can stimulate closeness among people experiencing humour together (Fraley and Aron, 2004). Research distinguishes four humour styles, two adaptive and two mal-adaptive (Martin et al., 2003), comparable to the divide between positive and negative humour. Adaptive humour styles are affiliative and self-enhancing humour, both of which help to regulate tension, stress, and make people feel more comfortable. These styles of humour use funny things and tell jokes (Kuipers & McHale, 2009). Just like positive humour, the jokes are good-natured, integrating, and non-hostile (Samson & Gross, 2012). Alternately, mal-adaptive humour styles are aggressive and self-defeating, including sarcasm, ridicule, and teasing at the expense of others or oneself (Kuipers & McHale, 2009). Similarly, negative humour is more mean-spirited or disparaging (Samson & Gross, 2012). While this typology already refers to the outcomes of humorous communication, it still remains close to the actual content of the jokes or message.

Meyer (2000) offers another classification, based on the functions and goals behind humorous communication. He steps away from interpersonal communication and looks at the way public speakers and leaders use humour to unite and divide among their audiences. In the identification function, for example, the sender attempts to put himself on the same level as the audience, trying to relieve tension. The clarification function uses anecdotes and memorable phrases to teach socially expected behaviours but only addresses mild violations of norms and seeks to unify the audience in mutual enjoyment. Enforcement – a dividing function – singles out behaviours that do not fit expected social patterns and ridicules them. The caused laughter directed at the transgressor is meant to change his future behaviour in a more socially accepted manner. Finally, the function of differentiation is used to divide between groups, social views, opinions, and people. It uses violence and aggressions towards an out-group, whose beliefs and convictions are

held up to be ridiculed. As such, it is meant to establish a line between the in-group and the others (Meyer, 2000).

Meyer (2000) recognizes that these functions are often dual and even paradoxical. While negative, dividing humour points out and emphasizes gaps between in- and outgroups by punishing undesirable social behaviour, it simultaneously promotes in-group cohesion. Sharing jokes can lead to feelings of in-groupness, belonging together, and closeness (Bormann, 1982; Fraley & Aron, 2004). According to Meyer (2000), which function a message actually fulfils depends on the rhetorical goal by which intent the message was created. This brings us to the third research question:

Which types and functions of humour are used in *Taboe*?

1.4 Humour and its audience

Existing literature (Bartsch & Oliver, 2011; Bucaria & Barra, 2016; Chattoo & Feldman, 2017; Corner, et al., 2013; Graefer & Das, 2017; Kuipers, 2011; Nabi et al., 2007) has discussed the processing of entertaining content and, more specifically, humour, and has found insights that help explain its prosocial potential. These insights concern both the characteristics of humour itself and its potential for PSM in reaching wide audiences with diverse content.

Comparable to the concept of "dispersed disconfirmation", Gray (2008, p. 54) discusses how entertainment programming can help viewers gain insight in unfamiliar cultures by watching and interacting with television as a form of "play". Audiences rehearse for interactions they would not be confronted with in their everyday lives, for instance, coming into contact with minorities. McGuigan (2005) and Klein (2013) specifically point to humorous programs as a way to provide viewers with alternative representations of social issues and to highlight perspectives that may have been neglected by news or current-affair programs. Another way humour can contribute to PSM objectives is by aiding the creation of a common culture, by affirming and re-examining shared

cultural beliefs (Douglas as cited in Mintz, 1985). In their opinion, humour can disrupt existing patterns of perception but also create a celebration of agreement due to shared laughter.

The use of humour does, however, require consideration. Buijzen and Valkenburgh (2004) indicate that certain types of humour work for certain types of audiences or messages. Several factors determine what topics one can joke about, and context is the most important. This refers to all participants – the sender, the audience – and the setting. For one, there are individual preferences of what someone does or does not like, or simply what mood they are in. Bucaria and Barra (2016) emphasize the relativity of what is considered appropriate and mention that the directionality of humour is a key factor to determine what is acceptable humorous behaviour. Similarly, Kuipers' (2011) talks about "humour regimes", the unwritten rules of who can joke about what topics. In a study by Graefer and Das (2017), involving dark humour, participants stress the importance of who the sender and recipients of humour are. When a member of a majority group addresses the minority, humour is considered offensive. A member of the minority group itself, joking about the topic at hand, however, is less problematic. Especially when it comes to humour about difficult situations, joke appreciation depends on who is the target (Sultanoff, 1995). Overall, self-deprecating humour and humour directed at the situation are more appreciated than humour targeted towards a specific group or a person. Additionally, humour about crisis situations requires a certain distance, either in time, emotion, or proximity, to be considered helpful rather than hurtful (Sultanoff, 1995).

Aside from the type of humour and directionality, the context within which humour is created is key to avoid message discounting (Nabi et al., 2007) or trivialization of serious topics (Moyer-Gusé, Chung, and Jain, 2011). To increase message acceptance, Campo et al. (2013) state that humour on sensitive topics requires attention to sensitive details, and placing humour within the context of the overall message is key. Nabi et al. (2007) call this the "restoration of gravity", meant to remind viewers of the realness and seriousness of the topic at hand. One approach to reduce message discounting is to introduce a likable and

credible source, such as a familiar and trusted celebrity (Nabi et al., 2007) whose real-life identity is known to the audience (Graefer and Das, 2017, p. 5).

As we can imagine, reality is often more complex, which we believe to be demonstrated by our chosen case study, *Taboe*. This raises our fourth research question:

In what ways did the including of humour in a human-interest program influence the potential to discuss minorities?

2   Methodology

2.1   VRT and Taboe

To better understand how the prosocial potential of humour can be translated to the television screen, this paper conducts a case study of *Taboe*, a human-interest and comedy program broadcast on VRT's general interest and primary TV channel *één* between January 21st and March 18th, 2018. Each episode discussed a particular topic considered "taboo" and introduced with the tagline "This is something people should not be laughing at, but we are going to do it anyway". Each episode started by introducing the audience to four or five members of the general public, functioning as representatives of a taboo-topic.

Table 1 *Overview of all episodes of Taboe*

First broadcast date	Topic of the episode
Episode 1: 21/01/2018	Physical disabilities
Episode 2: 28/01/2018	Incurable disease
Episode 3: 04/02/2018	Different skin colours
Episode 4: 11/02/2018	Visually impaired
Episode 5: 18/02/2018	Poverty
Episode 6: 25/02/2018	Mental vulnerabilities
Episode 7: 04/03/2018	Sexual orientation
Episode 8: 11/03/2018	Obesity
Episode 9: 18/03/2018	Compilation episode

The host was Flemish Philippe Geubels, who has a successful career as stand-up comedian and panel member in humorous TV shows. Geubels and the participants spent one week in a shared house near the Belgian coast, a setting familiar to most Flemish citizens. Each episode alternated human-interest with fragments from a stand-up comedy performance on the taboo subject, performed in front of the week's participants and a wider audience, including but not limited to, others who identify with the taboo topic. We selected the program for our case study due to its prime-time spot in the schedule, high viewing ratings, its critical and public acclaim, well-known host, and combination of sensitive topics and humour. At the time of writing, the format had been purchased by nine countries (Zaman, 2018).

The research was conducted with a mixed-methods design applied to the case study of *Taboe*, combining interviews and content analysis of the program. The aim is to form a thick description with insights into policy and production issues regarding *Taboe* (Vanhaeght and Donders, 2015, p. 140) and its representation and discussion of minorities with humour.

2.2 Interviews

We conducted expert interviews with two groups of respondents: (1) those involved in the production and broadcasting of *Taboe*, and (2) participants of the program. Ethical clearance was obtained from University of Antwerp's Ethics Committee for the Social Sciences and Humanities. Participants were selected via a convenience sample. Producer René, who was our first contact in Panenka (the production company that created *Taboe*), introduced us to key stakeholders in the production process and participants. We contacted those most relevant to our research. All the contacted parties accepted our invitation except for one, who worked as an editor and helped in selecting and interviewing the candidates. Since we were able to conduct an interview with her supervisor, we decided not to replace this respondent. This resulted in a small interview sample, based on the size of the crew itself, and the

consideration that we were not aiming for a representative sample of participants or producers. We acknowledge that this led to certain limitations when drawing conclusions beyond individual experiences.

Table 2 *Overview of interviewees*

Respondent	Role	Interview date	Interview location
Steve	Channel manager één for VRT, responsible for purchasing of *taboe*	24/07/2018	VRT offices
Tom	(co-)creator and comedy writer	06/08/2018	Panenka offices
Thibaut	Participant episode 01	21/08/2018	Home Thibaut
René	Producer	28/08/2018	Panenka offices
Tineke	Editor, selecting candidates	03/09/2018	Panenka offices
Mireille	Participant episode 02	05/09/2018	Home Mireille

In our research, an expert is considered someone selected due to recognition of their knowledge otherwise not accessible to researchers (Littig, 2009). The two types of expert interviews each required their own approach. First, we interviewed those involved in production and broadcasting of the program. We noted the risk of gathering rehearsed responses, formed through media training. We anticipated this by also "studying down" (Mayer, 2008), interviewing those involved in the day-to-day production of *Taboe*, who may be less prone to rehearsed responses. Due to the exploratory nature of our research, we conducted open-ended interviews (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002). This offered respondents a framework to organize their responses, while also inviting them to freely express their views. We believed this would maximize

respondents' input. The interviews were analysed to gain insight in the production process of *Taboe*, the selection of topics and candidates, and their opinions about the use of humour, their understanding of its potential, and how they considered this during production.

Secondly, we interviewed participants who are experts in their own right. Considering this is exploratory research, we did not seek full representation of all participants of the program. These respondents are experts from experience as part of a minority group. We practiced caution regarding the sensitive and personal matters by offering additional time and consideration during both planning and conducting the interview where needed (Ritchie,et al., 2003), without foregoing the purpose.

The interview guide first addressed factual information, moved to experiences during the production/airing period and ended with opinions on the use of humour in communication about sensitive topics. Interviews were transcribed and coded using NVivo software. This led to an extensive list of descriptive codes that we later fit into a thematic framework based on explored literature (Ritchie et al., 2003, p. 300). This framework was made in both excel and x-mind, a free mind-mapping software. This resulted in the code book that formed the basis for our analysis.

2.3   Content analysis

A small-scale content analysis was done for each episode (except for the compilation episode). The objective of the content analysis was to better understand how certain production decisions were translated to the screen. An analytical tool was developed based on the literature study.

The tool consisted of four parts. The first section registered general information per episode, as a way to identify episodes for potential future research. Second, we discussed the actors, meaning every participant in the program. We looked at their background, other forms of diversity, and whether the episodes addressed stereotypes. We considered "holistic representation", that is, whether their personality was shown in a well-rounded way that went beyond being part of a

minority group. Third, we examined the content of the episode. We explored whether the audience was provided with information about the minority and how this was approached, that is, individual experiences, the use of emotions, and by indicating explicit mentions of society's responses and (lack of) tolerance. Finally, the tool explored the use of humour in the program. We examined the topics, tone, styles, and source of humour throughout human-interest and stand-up comedy scenes and studied how they related to each other. We paid attention to elements addressed in literature, such as humour regimes, functions, and potential "restorations to gravity".

3   Results and discussion

3.1   Diversity and representation of minority groups

We discussed above how PSM provide a service to their audience by offering insights on topics they may not come into contact with in their daily lives, and how this can be linked to the concepts of "symbolic annihilation" and "dispersed disconfirmation" or "play". To indicate if and how *Taboe* helped diverse on-screen representation of minorities, we address representation both in quantitative and qualitative terms. The first considers simple on-screen visibility of minority groups, the latter looks for non-stereotypical portrayals as a counterbalance to more cliché representations.

The *Taboe* format takes minority groups as starting point, ensuring visibility for the "group of the week". Interviews with production stakeholders revealed they understood the need for diversity within participants' demographics, for example, by balancing age and gender of participants. Special attention was given to within-topic diversity, for instance, in episode 2, which included participants born blind and those who became visually impaired through injury or illness. Other factors affecting selection included willingness to share personal stories, be vulnerable on camera, fit with the group per episode, having a sense of humour, and the capacity to put comedy in perspective. The production team stressed that participant selection in television is about gut feeling, also when it came to *Taboe*, and about finding participants that stimulate

the audience to relate on a personal level. They explained how they believe that including emotional background stories can encourage the audience to connect and build a "para-social" relation with participants. They especially stressed the potential of moments when the program emphasized similarities between minority and majority groups rather than differences. Such a connection is fundamental in decreasing feelings of prejudice towards minorities (Schiappa et al., 2005).

In our content analyses, we explored quantitatively and qualitatively how production considerations were translated on-screen. In episode 3 (different skin colours), all participants identified as male. When we addressed this during interviews, the team mentioned they considered adding female participants but believed this would have changed the tone of the conversation in the episode. While we could not determine whether this would have been the case, it was interesting to examine, considering the tone of voice of the program. The production team prioritized the positivity in the program. In that way, *Taboe* differentiated itself from more traditional, sober human-interest programs, even before adding stand-up comedy. This choice to approach minorities with a more positive and lighter tone of voice was appreciated by both participants and the person responsible for purchasing the program at VRT.

Television programs often struggle to give each participant sufficient airtime. Content analysis indicated each episode was on average 55 minutes to one hour long, which was split between humour and human-interest and about four to five emotional stories. So, while the program attempted to show its participants as well-rounded people, there was not always enough time to portray each participant as "more" than their minority group. Instead, our content analysis showed that participants of *Taboe* addressed the importance of on-screen representation, mostly during episode 3 (skin color) and 7 (sexual orientation). They recalled a lack of positive role models in the media and feeling like "outsiders" or "not normal". They also addressed stereotypical representation and how they linked it to negative, disrespectful treatment by the general public. This indicates attention to

the importance of well-rounded representation, even if realization was sometimes limited by the format. Geubels also addressed how society and media tend to reduce people to their minority group. These stereotypes were used in the stand-up comedy routine. The clichés were used as a starting point, but the comedy built beyond them, even going as far as to ridicule those who frame people only within their stereotypes (see below).

3.2 Public value and impact

> "It is everything the public broadcaster is, which is, offering people insights, more understanding, connecting people, surprising them." – Steve, Channel manager één

The above-quoted view of the channel manager regarding how *Taboe* fits the PSM profile was confirmed by members of Panenka, emphasizing the "natural" fit of the program with the values of PSM. We will now discuss this match, focusing on the value added by combining humour and human-interest. The key factors which our research identified were the program's wide reach, the service provided by exploring alternative perspectives, including information, and stimulating debate.

    Taboe profited from favourable scheduling (prime time, Sunday evening on VRT's primary channel), and interviews revealed a wide reach across age groups. The channel manager discussed how PSM channels often struggle to attract an audience that is not initially interested in a topic, even when socially relevant. He believes entertainment can function as a catalyst, because more people are willing to give it a chance. In our interviews, one participant compared the program to a teacher who makes jokes and manages to keep students' attention.

    While it could be considered successful enough for a program to reach a wide audience, PSM additionally strive to provide a service of value to that audience. The first way *Taboe* offered the audience an alternative perspective from the views expressed in other programs is by approaching minorities in a positive, humorous manner. Our content analysis indicated a need to consistently restore the program to a

positive tone of voice. This was created by comments or jokes from Geubels or participants and by editing, following up emotional moments with lighter scenes or comedy. Our interviews with participants pointed out that their topics can be a heavy load to carry, but that is exactly why they feel humour has value, breaking this negativity. A second alternative perspective we found is that the program let the minority group join in the laughter, including them in the process of creating the comedy rather than to treat them as an outsider. Because of this inclusion, the program was allowed to laugh at a minority, thus going against the existing humour regimes. This makes sense within Bucaria and Barra's (2016) discussion of the appropriateness of jokes. Because Geubels is considered "part of the group", the directionality changes. Even though his status as a member of the majority has not changed, in this context he is accepted as an ally of the minority, and now gets to target jokes inward and make fun of the situation. This resulted from conversations and attention to sensitivities created in the human-interest scenes of the program and, subsequently, was used in the more humorous scenes. We will address this combination in the following section.

Additionally, *Taboe* provided a service to its audience by informing them on topics outside of their everyday lives. Our content analysis indicated several instances where participants in the program mention they have grown to accept their own reality, but their greatest discomfort comes from how society treats their minority group. They discuss topics such as social exclusion, bullying and its emotional consequences, or how lack of acceptance has affected their ability to openly discuss their situations. Interviews with participants of the program indicate that they appreciate the program's insights and especially the casual tone it applies, lowering the threshold to understanding. Our content analysis identified reoccurring entry points for information in the program. First by the selection of b-roll[11]; for instance, during episode 2 (visual impairment), Geubels led participants to their rooms, explained the set-

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[11] "B-roll can be any visual material that 'shows' something related to the topic of the program you are constructing. It is often used by the editor of the video to 'cut away' from the main interviews [...]" (Bowen and Thompson, 2013, p. 240).

up of the building, and the b-roll showed how participants made their way through the house. Second, information came in the form of personal stories which participants shared with Geubels in their private interviews. These provided a more emotional insight for the audience, when participants explain how they dealt, and came to terms, with their issue. Aside from personal perspectives, certain topics are also explained in a technical, factual way. One participant discussed the course of treatment the cancer required, and another used suicide ratings to support his call for better mental healthcare in Belgium. Finally, Geubels became an audience surrogate by asking the participants questions that the general audience may have but are too sensitive to ask in "real life" situations. He often pointed out his own lack of knowledge or stated he was prejudiced before hearing the participants' stories. It is possible that this reassured the audience regarding their own lack of knowledge, as long as they are willing to increase their understanding, following Geubels' example. We consider him to be the type of likable and respected source, discussed by Nabi et al. (2007), as a tool to increase message acceptance. One important note is that it is likely that the participants and the audience knew who Geubels was before they met him. This could be intimidating, since Geubels has been known for his more hostile style of comedy in the past. We find in our content analysis that Geubels uses self-defeating humour and, in some episodes, the participants target him with jokes of their own. Even though self-defeating humour typically gets labelled as a mal-adaptive style of humour, we believe that its function here is to let the participants identify with Geubels and make him more approachable.

3.3 Mixing the types and functions of humour

We found different applications of the styles and functions of humour discussed in our literature review throughout *Taboe*. As mentioned, *Taboe* is a mix of human-interest and humour. We will discuss this combination in the next section, but it is crucial to understand that this merging occurred throughout the entire program. Rather than alternating each other, both can be found all over. An emotional scene can end with

a joke, and a funny scene can include moments of poignancy. In this context, a mix of humour styles and functions emerges.

Our content analysis showed that *Taboe* combines negative and positive humour styles but uses the paradoxical function discussed by Meyer (2000) to maintain a positive message. Which humour style is used seems to be determined by who is targeted by the joke. When addressing the minority itself or the general audience, for example, by pointing out common misunderstandings, the program usually makes lighter jokes and recovers to the normal situation quickly, avoiding harm, as pointed out in Meyer's (2000) clarification function. For example, in episode 1, Geubels makes Manon, a young girl struggling with an injury that paralyzed her left arm, drop a ball during a game. While they share the silly joke, Geubels picks up the ball and hands it back. This type of slapstick type joke could be hurtful, considering it highlights her disability. However, because of the quick restoration and shared laughter, it does not resonate as a negative form of humour. Rather than creating a divide between Geubels and Manon, it is a bonding moment.

Alternatively, the program uses humour that is usually categorized as negative or mal-adaptive when targeting people who are unwilling to accept the minority or display other forms of anti-social behaviour. The program points out this anti-social behaviour and wants it to be ridiculed. These harsher jokes can be seen as an enforcement of acceptable social behaviour, that is, tolerance towards minorities. This way, a dividing function occurs between those who are accepting of minorities and those who are not. However, if we consider the context of PSM, it becomes clear that the actual function is more determined by the prosocial stance than the used humour-style, confirming what Meyer (2000) pointed out regarding the rhetorical goals and functions of humour in communication. This makes us conclude that *Taboe* uses a combination of adaptive and mal-adaptive humour styles to fulfil a positive communicative function by being crude only to those displaying undesirable social behaviour and by uniting the audience with the represented minority group. According to Meyer's (2000) insights

regarding these functions, it could be that this communication leads viewers to feel discouraged to continue displaying anti-social behaviour.

3.4 Merging humour and human-interest

In this section we will discuss how the program used context to adjust humour regimes in a positive manner and how this had a synergistic effect on the public value of the program.

In several instances, *Taboe* showed understanding of the existing humour regimes (Kuipers, 2011), understanding that members of majority audiences do not easily get permission to laugh at minority groups and have to be aware of the sensitivities surrounding these topics. For example, one of the tricks used to bypass these humour regimes was to create a fictitious character that fits the taboo topic or by joking about the whole minority group rather than singling out one person, targeting comedy into the "vacuum of the collective". This corroborates Sultanoff's (1995) idea that distance may be crucial in humour about troublesome situations. These collective or fictitious targets often underwent more negative, mal-adaptive forms of humour.

The program's most substantial consideration of sensitivities is embodied in its format: merging the emotion and fact of human-interest with comedy. The combination of music, tone of voice, and room for emotional conversation is an example of how humour on sensitive topics can be placed within a context to avoid trivialization or message discounting. The human-interest scenes in *Taboe* were shot in director Kat Steppe's respectful and patient style. Geubels, known as comedian, surprised the audience by showing a soft-spoken version of himself. We link this to Campo's consideration of sensitivities (Campo et al., 2013), because the program remains aware of the difficulty of the topics it is handling. Our content analysis showed that some candidates discussed what they thought of as humorous and what not. If and when they identified certain issues as off-limits, this was considered during the stand-up comedy routine. Different from basic comedy, the audience was shown the routine's actual ending. Geubels thanked his audience and often jokingly apologized or stated how nervous he had been before.

We mark this as a recognition of the atypical situation where a majority member jokes about a minority. Stripping the comedy of that background could render it offensive. Not including comedy would reduce *Taboe* to a classic human-interest program. The choice to edit human-interest and stand-up comedy interlaced with each other provides air to human-interest and a gravity to comedy.

Our interviews with the production team showed a good understanding of humour's dual function (Meyer, 2000). The program made use of this potential in a couple of ways. One comedy writer pointed out the concept of a "common enemy" as a target for jokes. We will explore this specific application in more detail because it bridges the paradox of unifying the audience with the minority, while simultaneously excluding the unaccepting members. This target is a person or group that is universally disliked by majority and minority groups, which creates what Mintz (1985) called "shared laughter". This points the audience towards underlying commonalities between them and the minority group, rather than differences. Our content analysis identified three variations where humour addressed a shared target. The first instance was when Geubels became the target of the jokes made by both himself and participants. We would not label him as an "enemy", considering the lack of aversion towards him, but he is well-known by diverse audiences and formed a common target for shared laughter nonetheless. The second variation was the creation of a new outgroup, where a sort of "unknowing outsider" became the target. This fits better with the idea of a "common enemy" because we identified these personas in the hidden camera scenes, where participants "trick" regular people into misunderstandings, creating a sense of discomfort by employing majority groups' lack of understanding as a source of comedy. The audience, who gets to watch these interactions from the comfort of their living room, now gets to look in on these awkward interactions with a sense of privilege, caused by their newly gained understanding of the minority groups and their issues. The third and final variation was created during Geubels' stand-up comedy, joking about people who were ill-

informed, who have mistreated or ridiculed the minority group or were in any way related to creating the taboo surrounding their topic.

The combination of context, a shared target for jokes and the shared laughter it creates lead to the feeling that a new ingroup was created. This new ingroup overlaps the minority group and the audience at home, and the new outgroup are those unknowing and unwilling to understand. The outgroup becomes the butt of the joke. By pointing out which behaviour the minority group finds hurtful or uncomfortable, the program identifies what behaviour is considered antisocial by the newly created ingroup, as such encouraging the prosocial alternative. This would confirm that Meyer's (2000) idea regarding the paradoxical function of humour in communication, to promote in-group cohesion while simultaneously increasing distance from the out-group, can also be applied in mass media communications such as the consumption of television programs. However, whether this actually occurred can only be confirmed by follow-up audience research.

4   Discussion and conclusion

Following previous studies, this paper demonstrated the potential of humour in addressing minorities. We considered this potential within PSM's need to operationalize normative values such as universality and diversity in programs. Our research focused on a case study of *Taboe*, a program whose format combined humour with human-interest. This provided a unique perspective for both the program and the study alike. We explored the combination of these two styles and looked at the public value *Taboe* created. To do so, we explored the representation of diversity in the program, the combination of humour styles and human-interest, and the public value of the program for PSM institution VRT.

Our case study reached four conclusions. First, we addressed the importance of a production team that is aware of the need for on-screen diverse representation and indicated that other considerations in selecting candidates and storylines are sometimes prioritized. These choices were made to uphold an overall positive perspective in the program, an interesting choice when dealing with these topics. Second,

the study addressed the public value of the program for its public service media institution VRT and considered how this fits into the normative values and assignments of PSM institutions. Here we identified *Taboe*'s special capability to attract and keep attention, which is essential in addressing the universality principle (Scannell & Cardiff, 1991). The program did this while providing new insights and perspectives outside of the audience's everyday lives, showing the diversity of groups in society (Donders & Van den Bulck, 2016). Due to the information provided in the program and its wide popularity, we can hypothesize that the conversation outside of the program, both online and in person, carried on after broadcast. Third, we found that *Taboe* combined adaptive and mal-adaptive humour styles (Meyer, 2000) but with a clear positive communicative function (Samson & Gross, 2012), namely to point out socially undesirable behaviour (Meyer, 2000). Finally, we found that human-interest can create context for humour used in the program, while humour removes some of the seriousness, potentially increasing a willingness to watch. Moving forward, we would call this combination "humour interest", and particularly stress its potential to create ingroups that overlap minority and majority groups.

We acknowledge the limitations of this study, most notably due to the choice of a specific case study. All results in this study can only be accepted regarding *Taboe* and its specific point in time and within the Flanders' television market. Additionally, this study did not include any audience research, and therefore can only hypothesize regarding the formation of new ingroups or audience discussions and their afterthoughts.

Maybe the most important conclusion from this study should be considered within the larger discussion of what content PSM should provide. As mentioned, VRT's current management contract pays little attention to entertainment programs, only clearing the path for entertainment when public value is created. *Taboe* appears to be an example of how public broadcasters and their production companies can move beyond a classic idea of "either-or" and use hybrid formats with

meaningful content, considering the public value that was created by this program and its unique approach.

Due to international interest for the format, it could be possible to repeat this analysis in other countries, considering their specific regional and cultural differences and sensitivities. Furthermore, follow-up audience research will be conducted by the research team in 2019, one year after the first broadcast of the program. Additionally, a second season of the Flemish version of *Taboe* has been announced, addressing a new range of topics worth exploring.

6 ✕✕✕✕✕

HUMOUR AND HUMAN-INTEREST: COMBINING HEDONIC AND EUDAIMONIC EXPERIENCES FOR A MORE POSITIVE REPRESENTATION OF STIGMATIZED GROUPS

Chapter six: Humour and human-interest: combining hedonic and eudaimonic experiences for a more positive representation of stigmatized groups

Are you feeling nervous? Are you having fun?
It's almost over, it's just begun
Don't overthink this, look in my eye
Don't be scared, don't be shy
Come on in, the water's fine
-    All Eyes on Me, Bo Burnham (2021)
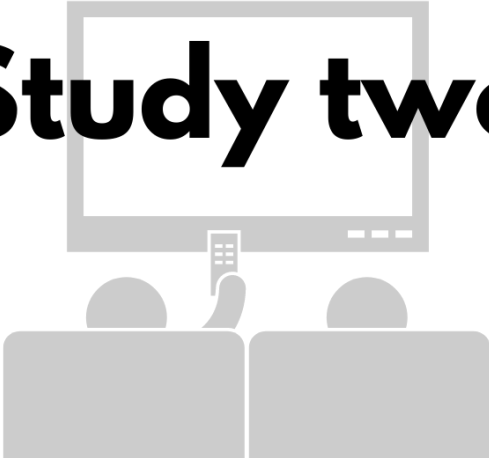
Abstract: This paper explores audience responses to the combination of comedy and human-interest television, which can lead to the simultaneous experience of hedonic enjoyment and eudaimonic appreciation. This qualitative audience study consists of 21 interviews with members of the public, reflecting on their viewing experiences of Taboe, a Flemish television programme that combines humour and human-interest about stigmatized groups. This research finds that combining hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences could be key in advancing the way in which television programmes talk about stigmatized groups, leading them to a more inclusive, accessible and overall positive narrative.

Overview Figure 4 *Position of the second study in the overall dissertation*
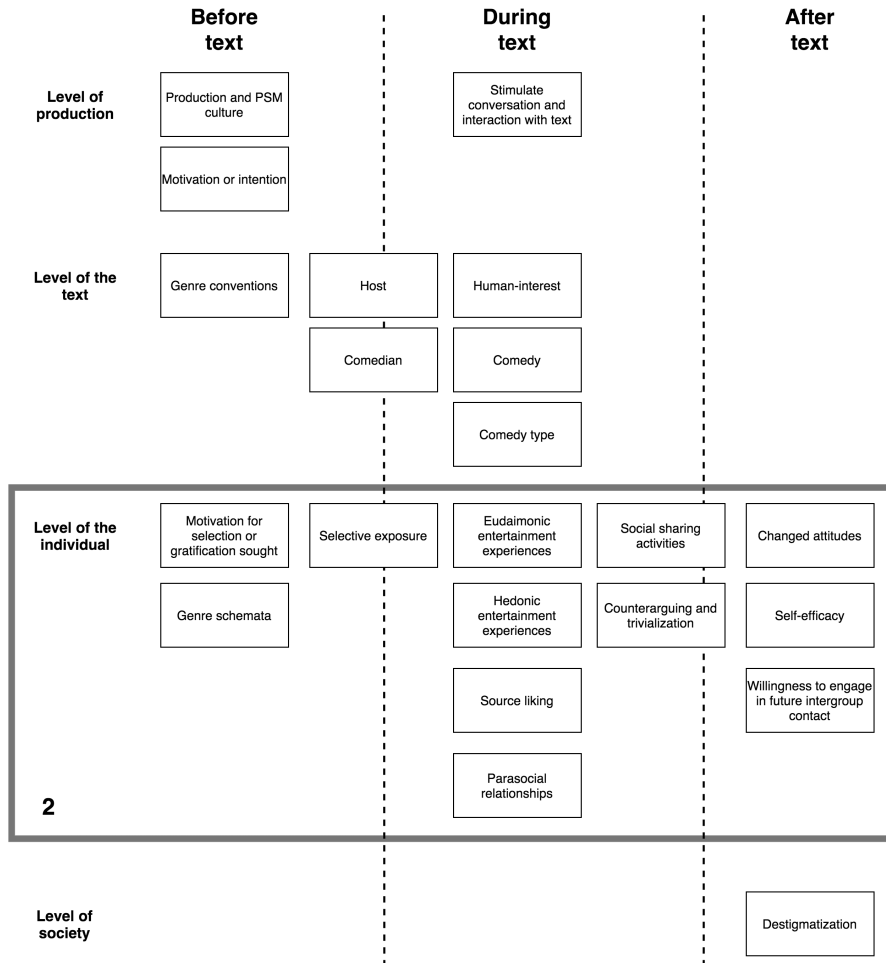
	Before text		**During text**		**After text**
Level of production	Production and PSM culture		Stimulate conversation and interaction with text		
	Motivation or intention				
Level of the text	Genre conventions	Host	Human-interest		
		Comedian	Comedy		
			Comedy type		
Level of the individual	Motivation for selection or gratification sought	Selective exposure	Eudaimonic entertainment experiences	Social sharing activities	Changed attitudes
	Genre schemata		Hedonic entertainment experiences	Counterarguing and trivialization	Self-efficacy
			Source liking		Willingness to engage in future intergroup contact
2			Parasocial relationships		
Level of society					Destigmatization

Study two

The idea of using an entertaining format to educate or inform is not new. From the ancient Greek fables meant to illustrate correct morals to the spreading of news by song in Old Regime France (Darnton, 2000), entertainment has always been a means to the end of shaping attitudes in society. Recent scholarship has discussed how audiences consume entertainment for more than purely fun, pleasurable reasons, also known as hedonic enjoyment. We now understand that entertainment experiences are more complex, and that entertainment stimulates the audience in both affective and cognitive manners. The appreciation of entertainment media including poignant and moving elements, often leading the audience to reflect on the human condition and increasing

feelings of empathy, is referred to as the eudaimonic appreciation of entertainment.

This paper aims to contribute to the existing research on hedonic enjoyment and eudaimonic appreciation by studying audience experiences of a television programme that combines humour with human-interest. On the one hand, humour has a specific communicative potential to address certain topics in a light-hearted manner, but also certain rules to follow when using it as a communicative tool. Due to its fit with positive affective moods, including humour in entertainment makes it suitable for evoking hedonic enjoyment of a text. But aside from political talk shows, humour in non-fiction television programmes has rarely been researched in the context of media experiences. On the other hand, human-interest as a communication style approaches topics from a personalized, often more emotional point of view, which led us to think about human-interest as an enticer of eudaimonic appreciation of entertainment. But outside of news media, human-interest is under-researched, and certainly in combination with another genre such as humour. Therefore, this paper will explore what the added value of combining humour with human-interest is, from the perspective of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences. The analysis of interviews with individuals who reflect upon their viewing experiences of one television programme that combined humour and human-interest, will provide us with insights of how these two entertainment experiences interact. In this way, we aim to contribute to a better understanding of the power of humour and human-interest in creating combined hedonic and eudaimonic experiences, which in turn could be beneficial in creating a sense of understanding of and empathy with social issues.

1   Literature Review

1.1   Entertainment Experiences

Over the past 30 years, researchers' understanding of how people are entertained by the media they select, and why they select those media, has evolved (Oliver & Hartmann, 2010; Vorderer & Reinecke, 2015). Entertainment as a concept can be approached from the production

perspective or the perspective of the audience. From the production perspective, some media texts are made with the explicit intention to entertain the audience. These "entertainment texts" created by producers span across many different media and their genres. It is a plethora of television programmes, books, games, movies etc., catering to different audiences. The audience perspective considers "entertainment" as an immersive and personal experience (Vorderer & Reinecke, 2015). Not all individuals are entertained by the same media, and their experiences differ based on their personalities, media preferences and attitudes.

For a long time in audience research, entertainment experiences were understood in purely hedonic terms (Zillmann & Bryant, 1985). It was thought that people selected what to watch or read in order to maintain or stimulate positive emotions, such as pleasure or enjoyment (Oliver & Hartmann, 2010; Oliver & Raney, 2011). However, this *hedonic enjoyment* failed to explain why people would be drawn to sad and tragic films (Oliver & Hartmann, 2010). Some media texts make people think of a deeper meaning and elicit a poignant feeling, moving them, sometimes even to tears (Vorderer & Reinecke, 2015; de Leeuw & Buijzen, 2016). Those media experiences are not considered negative per se, because they often include simultaneous feelings of sadness and joy. This has been called the *eudaimonic appreciation* of entertainment media (Oliver & Raney, 2011), which can be elicited by diverse narratives, for example when people share personal experiences in a human-interest segment. Eudaimonic experiences are not limited to entertainment or narrative media. For example, Hall (2015) found that spectators of a basketball game perceived it as meaningful and moving, feeling a connection to the team and its players.

While both of these entertainment experiences have been researched separately, not much research has been done on how they interact. This paper discusses how a television programme that combines humour with human-interest about sensitive topics was received by individual audience members. The research focusses on how the combination of two styles of television can lead people to have

hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences simultaneously. We will start by discussing humorous television and human-interest television separately. Then, we will identify which shared and compatible qualities lead us to consider the potential of their combination, before moving on to the methodology and results of our research.

1.2 Humorous Television

We will begin our discussion of humour by identifying what makes humour and hedonic enjoyment a natural fit. For this we will use characteristics from humour in interpersonal communication and mass communication alike.

One of the most important theories using hedonic enjoyment as an explanation for viewers' entertainment experiences, is Zillmann's (2000) mood management theory. Building on the Uses & Gratifications theory, which assumes people select media in light of the gratifications they seek to fulfil (Katz, Blumler & Gurevich, 1974), mood management theory states that individuals' media selection is a tool to maintain positive or diminish negative moods. If we follow this theory and consider humour's natural relation to laughter, joy and pleasure, it is a logical deduction that humour plays a role in stimulating this type of enjoyment. Humour and humorous television have many attributes that make it a perfect tool to stimulate joy. The enjoyment of positive humour has also been linked to help people regulate their emotions for the better (Samson & Gross, 2012) such as reducing stress (Martin & Lefcourt, 1983). Enjoying humour together can help people to form connections with each other (Bormann, 1982; Fraley & Aron, 2004). Because of this, it is possible that audience members feel connected to a television persona, considering that they may respond to characters in a television programme in a similar manner as they would to a real-life person (Schiappa, Gregg & Hewes, 2006), when they see a humorous character, or share laughter with them. After all, studies have found that as a personality trait, being humorous has positive correlations with trust, empathic concern, attractiveness and likeability (Fraley & Aron, 2004) and other positive attributes.

From a production perspective, research has shown that humour has several characteristics that make it an effective communication tool. It has been proven to draw the attention of a more diverse and larger audience due to its entertaining nature (Malmberg & Awad, 2019). When it comes to communicating about social topics on television, the use of humour is decidedly nothing new. As Chattoo (2018) discusses, humour has been often used and researched as a tool for social change. She specifically makes note of humour's potential as a positive agent of change by offering social criticism in a way that is accessible to many (Quirk, 2015 as cited in Chattoo, 2018). It has also been explored as a suitable way to present the audience with alternative perspectives on issues (Feldman, Leiserowitz & Maibach, 2011; McGuigan, 2005), aside from the prevailing views in mainstream news and information programmes. This potential of humour as an agent of change may come from the fact that part of the cognitive processing of the text goes towards understanding the humour, leading to less counterarguing against the contents of the message (Moyer-Gusé, Mahood & Brookes, 2011).

However, the use of humour in communicating about difficult topics in a humorous fashion has its risks. For one, humorous content is often taken less seriously. Young (2008) suggests that the reason people argue less with funny content is simply that they consider it as a form of discourse that is not meant to be taken seriously. This risk of trivialization or "message discounting" (Moyer-Gusé et al., 2011; Nabi, Moyer-Gusé & Byrne, 2007; Young, 2008) means that talking about social topics with humour, when aiming to increase knowledge or understanding, may be a waste of time, if people trivialize the serious aspects of the communication. Additionally, not all types of humour are suitable for all topics or all types of audiences (Buijzen & Valkenburgh, 2004). Kuipers (2011) calls these unwritten rules on who can make fun of which topics "humour regimes". These regimes declare certain topics off-limits and assign rights to make jokes to some groups more than others. Additionally, they restrict groups from speaking up about what makes them uncomfortable, by stating "one should be able to take a joke."

When these rules do get broken, the audience of the joke no longer experiences joy, but will consider the humour unacceptable. Overall, joke appreciation depends on the directionality (Bucaria & Barra, 2016) and who is the target (Sultanoff, 1995). For example, self-deprecating humour or humour directed at a situation will be more appreciated than jokes targeting a specific group or person, especially minority groups.

1.3   Human-interest Television

Human-interest focusses on an individual as an example of an event or topic, and uses this individual to tell the story in a personalized and dramatized way (Steimel, 2010), by accentuating the affective dimensions of the story (Luther & Zhou, 2005). Research on human-interest is spread thin, and the majority is focussed on its application in news programmes. Human-interest news stories are often referred to as "soft news" or "the story behind the story" (Xu, 2014), and in the past they have been linked to concepts such as "tabloidization" or "infotainment", terms used to describe news providers' inclination to add entertainment in an effort to attract audiences. It has also been found that news stories containing human-interest narratives produced more compassion and favourable, empathic attitudes towards stigmatized groups (Oliver, Dillard, Bae & Tamul, 2012).

Comparable to human-interest news segments, meaningful entertainment that features sad stories, drama and human connections are known to cause feelings of warmth, sympathy and understanding (Oliver, 2008). Human-interest programmes include storytelling elements similar to those in meaningful entertainment, for example private life stories that lead viewers to self-reflect. Audiences appreciate seeing how the plot develops and how these tragedies are dealt with by the on-screen characters (Oliver & Hartmann, 2010). These mixed-affect responses are crucial to the concept of eudaimonic appreciation (Klimmt, 2011). By combining the depiction of struggles and challenges with uplifting moments of human endeavour and strength, audience members may not only experience both negative and positive affective responses, but they may also gain cognitive awareness and understanding about the

human condition (Oliver & Hartmann, 2010). Because of this unique blend of mixed-affect responses and cognitive potential, Oliver et al. (2012) found that people who experience meaningful affect while watching entertainment films, also showed motivational outcomes of desire to be more moral and lead a more meaningful life. As Vorderer (2001) suggested, being confronted with these human challenges can be a form of "play", or "rehearsal" for how audience members would respond to similar situations in "real life" (Sharf & Freimuth, 1996).

1.4   Combining Hedonic and Eudaimonic Experiences

After exploring humorous and human-interest television separately, we now address how combining these styles may be key to overcoming their limitations.

While the hedonic enjoyment and eudaimonic appreciation of media texts have been researched separately, most of this research has focused on fictional media texts, nor has much research been done on how these experiences may co-occur or interact. In their paper validating the measurement of entertainment experiences, Roth, Weinmann, Schneider, Hopp and Vorderer (2014) did research on the viewing motivations and hedonic and eudaimonic experiences in viewers of political talk shows. It is one of the few researches that takes into account the potential of non-fiction television as a stimulus for eudaimonic entertainment. Unfortunately, the study did not go into how the hedonic and eudaimonic experiences seem to interact, nor was it able to address how mixed affect responses and hedonic enjoyment interact, due to the nature of the selected programmes ("serious" political talk shows). On the combination of pleasurable and meaningful television, Tsay-Vogel and Krakowiak (2016) found that reality TV, in this case game-shows and lifestyle transformation or makeover shows, have the potential to lead to feelings of elevation and altruism. The researchers link this to television's potential to offer both pleasure and meaning to its audience. They also encourage future researchers to explore how audiences respond to different subgenres. This existing gap in research on humour and human-interest is worth addressing because programmes evoking both

experiences may overcome the limitations of each separate style, which may be particularly beneficial to programmes aiming to address sensitive or difficult topics.

As we discussed before, humorous communication runs the risk of trivializing serious topics and is dependent on "humour regimes". Both these problems can be tackled by creating the right context for jokes. Nabi et al. (2007) call this the "restoration of gravity", which means that jokes on difficult topics are more accepted when they are delivered in a context that pays attention to sensitive details (Campo et al., 2013), meant to remind the audience of the realness and seriousness of the topic at hand. This context can be created in multiple ways, for example when the source of the joke is considered trusted and credible, or by combining the humour with topical stories. Because meaningful entertainment contains poignant and sad moments and elicits mixed-affect responses, we think that human-interest can be a tool to reground comedy into reality, and as such to bypass certain humour regimes and avoid trivializing important topics. Simultaneously, humour can also be an effective way to counterbalance the heavy-handedness of the topics addressed (Xu, 2014), and lift the spirits of those watching sad or tragic stories.

2 Methodology

To further discuss how hedonic enjoyment and eudaimonic appreciation of media texts may interact in the viewing of programmes combining humour and human-interest, we conducted a qualitative reception analysis of *Taboe* (2018). This is a human-interest and comedy programme broadcast by VRT, the Public Service Media institution in Flanders (the Northern, Dutch language region of Belgium). Each episode of *Taboe* discussed a new topic that is considered "taboo", with the tagline "this is something people should not be laughing at, but we're going to do it anyway." Every episode introduced four or five participants, members of the general public, as representatives of the taboo topic. The topics discussed ranged widely, including physical disabilities, poverty and mental vulnerabilities. The programme's host was Philippe Geubels,

a successful stand-up comedian and Flemish celebrity. Geubels and the participants spent one week together in a house, where they lived together and Geubels conducted interviews. Each episode compiled human-interest segments with fragments from a stand-up comedy performance on the taboo subject, filmed in front of the participants and a wider audience, including other members of the represented group and other stakeholders such as family, friends and caretakers.

We conducted 21 interviews with members of the general audience, one year after the original broadcast of the programme. A convenience sample of participants was selected using snowball sampling. All interviewees saw at least six of the eight episodes, during the broadcast in the spring of 2018. Interviews were conducted in the spring of 2019. The sample is varied, consisting of eight men and thirteen women. They cover a wide age range, between 19 and 79 years. However, most of them (18) are highly educated.

Interviewing one year after the broadcast has the benefit of letting audiences reflect on their feelings and reception of it, rather than discussing immediate responses. The downside is that their recall of the programme may not have been very good, or that memories were altered by conversation in the press or among peers. However, this can be considered as a natural part of how audiences interact with television programmes. We also found it interesting to note how much the audience actually recalled, one year later. Recall was stimulated in a second stage of the interview, rather than at the beginning. In the last 15 minutes of the interview, the respondents were shown an international promotional trailer that showed them all the topics and some of the participants again, as a refresher. After this, certain questions about retention and viewing experiences were revisited. This decision was made to ensure spontaneous recall and not to steer or influence participants at the beginning of the interview.

A team of interviewers conducted interviews, under the supervision of the main researchers. Interviewer effects were minimized by conducting all interviews with the same semi-structured questionnaire. Additionally, the quality and comparability of the

interviews were assured by interview training, clear briefings before and during data collection, and a debriefing after. We chose this approach to ensure consistency throughout the collected information. Because we are conducting research that discusses an individual entertainment experience, our questionnaire followed stages in which experiences occur: their motivation to start and keep watching the programme, their experience while watching and their reflection on the programme afterwards. Our questions also focussed on humour, human-interest and on the combination of both, in an effort to map how these relate to their potentially hedonic and eudaimonic experiences.

The interviews were transcribed and analysed by the first author of this paper. Analysis of the 21 interviews was conducted in NVivo 12, resulting in a codebook that formed the basis for our analysis. This analysis focussed on the audience members' affective and cognitive experiences while watching *Taboe.* We started by making an extensive open codebook of the transcribed interviews. During this process, general trends in the responses were noted in a system of memos. After all interviews were coded, we moved on to axial coding, combining and connecting existing codes into an organized codebook in order to better understand the data. Based on those structured data and the drafted memo's, an overview of the results and first draft of the discussion were written.

3   Results and Discussion

3.1   Humour: Avoid Offence, Keep it Fun

Before the broadcast, audience members felt motivated to watch *Taboe* due to several promotional and communication efforts made by PSM institution VRT and production company Panenka. The promise of combining humour with sensitive topics drew their attention. We found that the strongest motivator to watch the programme was a feeling of curiosity, stimulated by these promotional efforts. That curiosity directed itself to multiple facets of the programme: Some liked humorous television and thought this would be an interesting and risky angle to comedy, others were curious and even concerned about the role of the

host. Philippe Geubels has been known for his use of risky and sometimes offensive comedy styles in the past, and audience members wondered how he would handle jokes about stigmatized groups. Mostly, the audience was curious about the programme's combination of humour and human-interest about sensitive topics.

> I did not know what to expect because Philippe Geubels usually makes fun of everything and I couldn't predict up front how he would handle such delicate situations. So, I was actually quite curious. (Charlotte, 23)

Including humour attracted people to watch the programme, and increased attention to the programme overall. Considering this in the perspective of Uses & Gratifications research (Katz, Blumler & Gurevich, 1974), for these audience members watching *Taboe* would mostly gratify their need to find out whether the humour in the programme would "work", fulfilling their curiosity.

Contrary to their apprehensive attitudes before the broadcast, the programme was hedonically enjoyed by all our interviewees. Audience members expressed joy, said they found the humour in the programme funny and that they felt good after watching *Taboe*. Some said that the humour of the programme was key in their viewing experience, and that they would not have continued to watch without humour. One person even mentioned that they sometimes found themselves waiting for the stand-up comedy parts.

> … When they start telling their stories, it hits you. And then you're actually waiting for the moment that Philippe Geubels will start talking, so you can relax and laugh it off for a bit. (Deborah, 50)

It is interesting to note that some audience members said they would not have enjoyed another, ruder style of comedy in this programme. Comparable to the curiosity and apprehension felt before broadcast, their evaluation while watching *Taboe* still took into account certain

humour regimes (Kuipers, 2011) and the sensitivities that come with them. We found that it was important for the interviewees that the participants of the programme were not hurt by the humour, as such allowing the audience at home to also laugh at jokes they would otherwise have been uncomfortable with.

> It definitely did not ridicule people. That was very important to me, because if that were the case, I wouldn't have watched it after the first episode. (Deborah, 50)

> Those people are already suffering so much, but it's good a television show like this gets made. As long as they're not making fun of them, there's a difference. (Maria, 60)

We will continue our discussion of these regimes in the section on combining hedonic enjoyment and eudaimonic appreciation, and identify the ways in which human-interest helped the audience negotiate the existing humour regime they experienced.

Finally, humour also played a role in audience experience after watching the programme. Not only was humour an inroad to discuss the programme with other audience members, but we noticed a good understanding of how humour can function as a lubricant to difficult conversations.

> Because actually humour is a coping strategy to handle something, isn't it? If you're having these very heavy-handed conversations without humour, I think it's more difficult to deal with it sometimes, but then if you add some humour I think you can achieve more in those conversations. Just taking a breather and then, go back to the serious things. (Charlotte, 23)

We also noticed that interviewees addressed how it can be therapeutic to laugh at challenging situations as a way to release tension. We can even consider this release of tension within the perspective of

"suspense", where audience members have to wait in order to find out what is going to happen (Tan & Diteweg, 1996). Our interviewees who express feelings of unease regarding their interactions with people in stigmatized situations, may experience a sense of relief when this suspense is resolved, by seeing how the minority group participates in the jokes and laughter.

> Sometimes I thought, isn't this crossing the line? But then I saw the response of the audience [of the stand-up comedy] and thought, no, because those are the people who are dealing with the problems and apparently, they are okay with it. (Sandra, 50)

Taboe not only taught people about the topics at hand, but it also showed the audience ways to approach unfamiliar situations in which they may not have felt comfortable before, living vicariously through the programme. The programme thus functions as a rehearsal for real life (Sharf et al., 1996), or a form of "play" (Vorderer, 2001), offering a chance to rehearse the diversity in outcomes their behaviour may produce.

> *Taboe* was helpful to normalize your behaviour towards people who are different, in any shape or form. (Eric, 67)

Taboe gives special attention to how stigmatized groups prefer to be treated, and this is taken to heart by the interviewed audience members, because the programme tackles this topic in a funny way. The interviewees appreciated this, because this active, positive voice for stigmatized groups is something they are not used to seeing all that often.

> If you would say it very seriously, it would land much more harshly. Also for the people [participants], and confronting. But now it's a softer way to show or talk about their deficiencies. I think. (Linda, 51)

3.2 Human-interest: Courage and Beauty

Similar to how certain audience members wanted to watch *Taboe* because they like comedy, others like watching human-interest programmes, because they want to learn about new topics. Some preferred topics they know little about, others actually prefer learning about topics they already have a personal connection with.

> It is a slice of life. Like poverty and incurable illnesses, you don't get confronted with them on a daily basis. And then you would like to know how they feel in society and how they deal with it and such. (Lucy, 33)

Taboe had episodes on issues such as physical disability, visual impairment, sexual orientation, mental vulnerabilities or incurable (often terminal) illnesses. While the human-interest segments did include emotional moments, the audience members we interviewed rarely indicated feeling sad after watching *Taboe*. Some used those moments to compare their own luck or prosperity. Most discussed their feelings of sadness while adding how they appreciated that the programme had a positive tone of voice, and they were never sad for long.

> When you hear some of their stories, so much worse than you have it. And then you think about that and of course you get emotional for a bit. But then on the other hand, I also felt joy because you know they don't wallow (Julia, 22)

Audience members felt respect and admiration for the participants of the programme. They praised them for having the courage to talk about these personal and sensitive stories on television.

> I thought it was great that they were willing to share that on television. […] any programme where people talk about … - I mean, it takes guts. Like, talking about your sexual preference or that you have financial trouble. (Richard, 51)

The aspect they seemed to appreciate most, was the participants' ability to keep a positive perspective on life, even when faced with hardship and life's challenges. We found that this positivity was one of the strongest contributing factors to how well-liked *Taboe* was by the audience. By letting the participants share their own stories and reflect upon them with such positivity, the audience sensed that the participants felt good about themselves. This encouraged the audience to respond with feelings of sympathy.

> Our society has so many prerequisites to live a qualitative life. […] many of them can't be met by these people, and still you see that these people built a happy life for themselves. (Monique, 60)

This admiration resulted from the stories that the participants of *Taboe* shared, which often elicited affective responses in the audience. Audience members said they felt torn between tears and smiling, because of the way these stories were told and how the participants were able to stay strong while telling their stories. These mixed affect responses, that clearly intertwine sad and positive emotions regarding stories about human strength and reflections on struggles, seem to match with what Oliver and Raney (2011) referred to as the eudaimonic appreciation of a media text. While sadness does occur, the participants' reflection on life and displays of courage led viewers to move beyond simply feeling sad, to experiences of beauty or being moved.

> It was beautifully translated on screen as well. For example, the blind man running on the beach… You can feel his sense of freedom… And then you feel… I think that is so beautiful, all those emotions and how it was visualized. (Freya, 22)

Next to these affective responses, we also found indications of the cognitive responses that have been linked to eudaimonic viewing experiences in the past. The stories that participants shared made them

gain insights into situations they are not familiar with in their real lives. It stimulated them to reflect on their own situations, as we discussed above for the responses to humour. We noticed that the "play" (Vorderer, 2001) caused by humour was more about how they would interact with people facing those challenges, while their "rehearsal for real life" (Sharf et al., 1996) is more targeted towards how they think they would respond to facing similar life-changing challenges.

> After the programme, in bed you start thinking about some topics, how would I handle such a situation, if I was the victim of racism or became terminally ill. And then you start thinking, how would I respond. (Wim, 23)

Taboe led viewers to reflect upon their own attitudes towards minorities. Some interviewees felt confirmed in their opinions and behaviour, stating they have always been tolerant, also before the programme.

> I mostly felt confirmation, I mean, I always try do that – to not judge people. And to think of the person behind the label. (Freya, 22)

The positivity in the stories the participants of *Taboe* shared, also seemed to stimulate viewers to reflect upon their own attitudes towards their daily struggles. On multiple occasions, they wished to be more positive themselves, and put things into perspective, complain less and generally have a more positive attitude.

> I think I am someone who thinks a lot, very often negative thoughts. And because of [*Taboe*] you think 'there are worse things.' (Richard, 51)

3.3   Hedonic and Eudaimonic Experiences: Selection to Action

As we have demonstrated above, audience members appreciate both humour and human-interest about difficult topics, depending on the way these are portrayed in the television programme. For humour, the audience takes into account existing humour regimes, saying they like the humour because it was not hurtful for the group it targeted. In their evaluation of the human-interest segments, the viewers emphasized that they appreciate the positivity in the way the participants tell their stories. Not only do they appreciate those styles separately, our research found that the interviewees specifically praised the programme for making the combination.

> In this case [combining humour and human-interest] was appropriate, and it was new and it spoke to people. I think you can reach a very wide audience, much more than if you didn't combine them. (Jules, 52)

We have mentioned before that combining humour and human-interest may help overcome the limitations that occur when these styles are used separately. We will now discuss each of these limitations separately. First, we will discuss how human-interest could leave people in a negative affect mood. Second, how including humour could lead audiences to trivialize serious topics, and third, we will discuss how *Taboe* handled humour regimes about stigmatized groups. For each of these, we will discuss how this limitation was overcome by combining the programme styles.

To begin, human-interest segments can sometimes be very emotional or heavy, and make people feel sad. Although we know by now that not all motivation to watch television is only hedonically driven, what audiences select to watch remains an individual selection depending on attitudes, preferences, and moods. Some viewers said they liked *Taboe* because it did not leave them sad. As we discussed above, even though they sometimes felt sad while listening to the

participants' especially difficult or poignant stories, they said the humour in the programme always put them in a good mood again.

> When they were sharing their own experiences, that was sometimes serious, but it was always followed by stand-up comedy and that was funny. I liked that – that it wasn't always "jokes jokes jokes", but that it was alternately stand-up comedy and laughing, then interviews, switching gear, and then back to stand-up. – Bert, 22

We also discussed that including humour in a conversation or media text about sensitive topics may lead an audience to trivialize the topic, think it is less serious because it is approached in a humorous fashion. However, our research did not show any indication of this. Due to the reflection and thought, conversations about the topics, even intentions to change behaviours that the interviewees discussed, we would say that trivialization was avoided by *Taboe*. Based on our research and Nabi et al. (2007) thoughts on "restoring the gravity" of the topic, we believe that the human-interest scenes created the right context for the audience. These heartfelt stories and personal experiences reminded the audience members of how real and difficult these situations are for the participants. This was also shown by how aware the audience was of existing humour regimes, saying they would only appreciate certain types of humour, but e.g. not offensive or hurtful jokes.

> That was *Taboe*'s strength. If you have one without the other, it's not the same impactful programme. If you're only laughing at it, it wouldn't be as respectful. (Charlotte, 23)

> [humour on sensitive topics] should be allowed, but with respect. Which was definitely the case here. (Freya, 22)

Finally, something we have already touched upon before are the existing humour regimes, which in this case are the rules of who is allowed to

laugh at who and at what. Generally speaking, a member of the majority group is not allowed to make fun of the minority. However, this is exactly what occurs in *Taboe*: Philippe Geubels, a male, white, celebrity comedian made jokes about stigmatized or minority groups. And, as we have also mentioned above, some interviewees were curious about how Geubels would handle humour regarding such sensitive topics. Others said it made them feel uncomfortable, an indication of the humour regime at work. We found that audience members identified three contextualizing factors that adjusted the humour regime and allowed them to laugh at the jokes. We already discussed above how seeing the participants laugh at jokes at their own expense, made the viewers at home more comfortable in joining in on the laughter.

> I thought it was important that the people laughed at it themselves. And then I think it's funny. Because I sympathize with the people there, and if they think it is funny and laugh, so do I. I feel like it grants me permission to laugh at the jokes. (Deborah, 50)

Additionally, the other two contextualizing factors were only possible because of the combination. *Taboe* not only talked about stigmatized groups, it also let them talk. It offered participants the chance to discuss how they feel about making jokes about their situation. They also get to draw lines, of what they found acceptable to joke about and what not, or how they handle jokes in their daily lives.

> I think Philippe [Geubels, the host] always asked everyone how far he was allowed to go with his comedy. And I thought those responses were very interesting when they drew a line. (Charlotte, 23)

And finally, the personal and positive stories that these participants shared, stimulated the viewers to consider them as well-rounded people, not only a victim of circumstance, or someone to be pitied. All of this led the interviewed audience to consider the participants as equals,

belonging to the same group as them. As such, the humour regime about majority members laughing at a minority, gets broken. There are no longer two groups, where one mocks the other, but rather one group, bantering internally.

> Those situations are dire, being disabled, terminally ill or facing racism, those things are never fun for anyone, but you never pitied them. You considered them as equals, not victims. That was impressive. (Wim, 23)

4   Conclusion

This paper addressed the combination of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences by looking into audience responses to *Taboe,* a Flemish television programme that combined humour and human-interest styles. Our research showed that combining humour with human-interest has the capacity to make an audience experience both hedonic enjoyment and eudaimonic appreciation by watching a single television programme. To our knowledge, this paper is one of the first exploring the combination of these entertainment experiences.

While both humour and human-interest have their separate potential to discuss sensitive topics, they also each have their downsides: humour has the risk of not being taken seriously, or of being hurtful. Human-interest can sometimes be too heavy-handed, and turn people off the topic due to being too emotional. By combining these two styles, *Taboe* stimulated audience members to watch a programme about stigmatized groups, and to reflect upon their own attitudes. The humour of the programme often formed a needed break, providing air for the personal stories. Alternatively, these personal stories in the human-interest segments were needed for the audience to accept the humour in the programme. This was indicated by their expressions of curiosity and even unease regarding humour on stigmatized groups, a clear indication of "humour regimes" (Kuipers, 2011) at work. The human-interest style also bypassed the risk of trivializing certain topics by addressing them in a humorous way, because we found no indication of

the audience not taking the topics seriously. This "restoration of gravity" (Nabi et al., 2007) by combining humour with human-interest could be the key to a widely accessible but respected communication on stigmatized topics.

While their hedonic enjoyment of the programme encouraged them to keep watching, the eudaimonic appreciation stimulated mixed affect responses. Humour, hedonically enjoyed, introduced the topics in a favorable manner. The risky jokes stimulated the audience to think about how they interact with a stigmatized group, as a form of "play" (Vorderer, 2001). Similarly, human-interest's talk of life altering challenges led the audience to affective and cognitive perspective taking, a form of "rehearsal for real life" (Sharf et al., 1996), where viewers placed themselves in the position of the represented minority. This eudaimonic appreciation and its signature mixed affect responses, led audience members to feel empathy towards the participants, rather than pity, something they themselves addressed as a negative emotion. In the end, most of the interviewed individuals said they enjoyed watching *Taboe* because it was funny, and appreciated how it made them feel and think about minorities because of the positive approach to otherwise heavy-handed topics.

Our final conclusion would be to consider our research within the broader perspective of media representation studies and the need to talk about difficult topics in a more light-hearted, accessible and sincere manner, by providing an active voice to the stigmatized group. A seat at the table for these groups could be the key factor in creating these types of programmes. We make this reflection based on the audience's appreciation of laughing together with the represented groups, rather than "at" them, and their own discussions of what they learned from seeing the participants as well-rounded and complex individuals. By talking to the public, this research hopes to be an indication of the success these programmes can have with a wide audience, and a clear indication of the potential that combining humour and human-interest has in this regard. As our research shows, the perceived risks can be

bypassed, and even harnessed as a strength for learning about issues that may otherwise be avoided.

We acknowledge the limitations of our research, most importantly the fact that interviews were conducted one year after the initial broadcast of the programme. While this provided an opportunity for the audience to reflect upon their experiences, it is also possible that their personal experiences have been altered by interacting with the press or their peers. We also note that our interview sample consisted mostly of highly educated participants. Past research has suggested that a relation between one's level of education and capacity for perspective taking and cognitive empathy exists (Schieman & Van Gundy, 2000; Dewaele & Wei, 2012). Therefor it could be interesting to see how these results may differ in a different socio-economic sample. Additionally, the results are only applicable to this specific case study in Flanders. We would like to encourage other researchers to conduct similar research regarding the interaction of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences, and more specifically on the combination of humour and human-interest. In an effort to assess the generalizability of these findings, we would encourage experimental research on the influence of humorous messages on attitudes and beliefs about these topics. Additionally, we would encourage this research in attitudes in an audience with no prior exposure to the programme. Another approach to understanding the mechanisms at play during these entertainment experiences can be found in the distancing-embracing model of enjoyment (Menninghaus, Wagner, Hanich, Wassiliwizky, Jacobsen & Koelsh, 2017). It is possible the audience used their hedonic experience as a way to first guarantee distance from too heavy-handed, negative emotions, ensuring their enjoyment of the programme. Following the distancing-embracing model, this would also set the stage for later appreciation of the emotional content, embracing the profound and the meaningful.

Alternatively, this research could be recreated in other countries, where *Taboe* will soon be produced and broadcast as well.

7 ✕✕✕✕✕

LIVE TWEETING AS A SOCIAL SHARING PRACTICE OF HEDONIC AND EUDAIMONIC ENTERTAINMENT EXPERIENCES
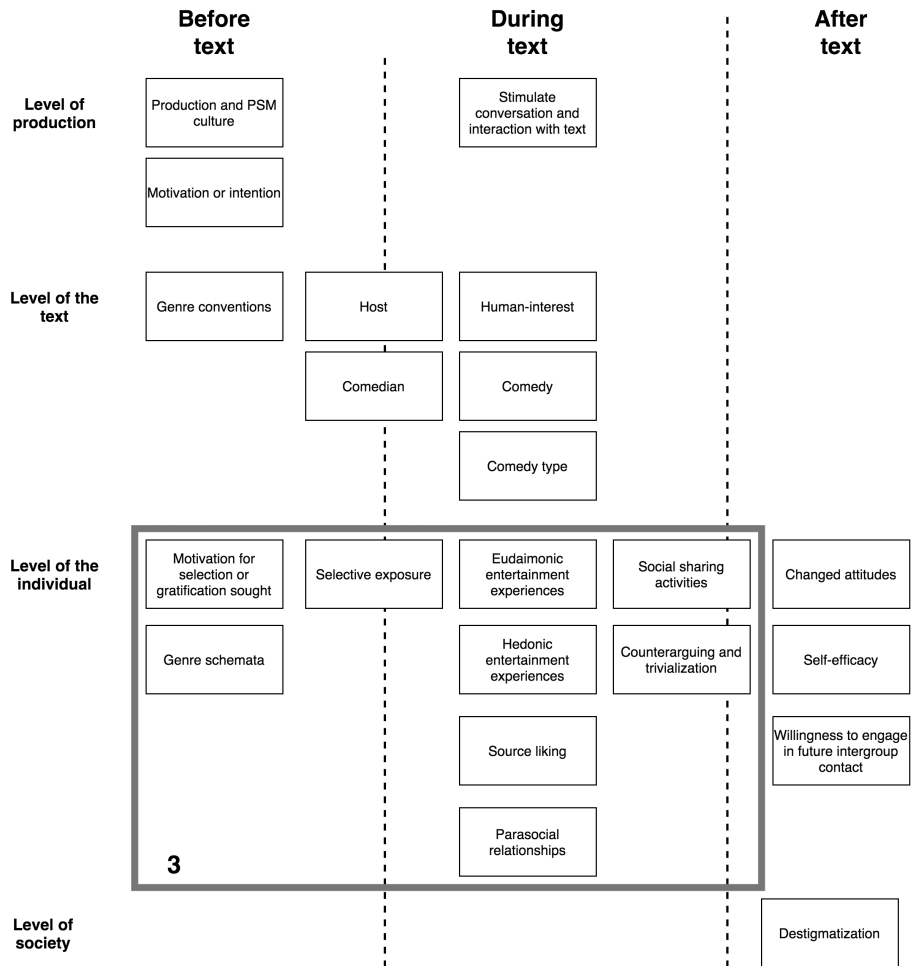
Chapter seven: Live tweeting as a social sharing practice of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences

Welcome to the internet
What would you prefer:
Would you like to fight for civil rights?
Or tweet a racial slur?
Be happy?
Be horny?
Be bursting with rage?
We got a million different ways to engage
- Welcome to the internet, Bo Burnham (2021)

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Abstract: This research explores how audience members use live tweeting to share their entertainment experiences of a non-fiction, hybrid-format television program. We conducted quantitative and qualitative analyses of audience responses sent via Twitter to a television programme that combines humour and human interest. We propose that audience members live tweet as a way to extend their experiences of hedonic enjoyment and eudaimonic appreciation, and as a tool to share the vicariously experienced emotions while watching, to express and process complex emotions related to eudaimonic entertainment experiences. We analyzed the expressed entertainment experiences in 1648 tweets. We found that people share both hedonic and eudaimonic experiences by live tweeting, and identified expressions of psychological gratifications such as mastery experiences and personal growth. We encourage future studies on the social and psychological need gratifications related to live tweeting as a way of sharing vicarious emotional experiences while consuming entertainment.

Overview Figure 5 *Position of the third study in the overall dissertation*

	Before text	**During text**			**After text**
Level of production	Production and PSM culture	Stimulate conversation and interaction with text			
	Motivation or intention				
Level of the text	Genre conventions	Host	Human-interest		
		Comedian	Comedy		
			Comedy type		
Level of the individual	Motivation for selection or gratification sought	Selective exposure	Eudaimonic entertainment experiences	Social sharing activities	Changed attitudes
	Genre schemata		Hedonic entertainment experiences	Counterarguing and trivialization	Self-efficacy
			Source liking		Willingness to engage in future intergroup contact
	3		Parasocial relationships		
Level of society					Destigmatization

Study three

Live tweeting television, the practice of sharing thoughts and opinions about "live" television events, has been the topic of studies since the start of Twitter in 2008. Live tweeting is done in response to both serious and entertainment programming. In social science research, television viewing has always been considered a social activity (Ji, 2019), engaging viewers not only with the content, but also with each other. Social TV is a dual concept that refers to both all the technology that can be put to use to facilitate co-viewing across barriers of time and space, and also to the active media behaviour itself (Harboe et al., 2008). With the use of social media now being commonplace, it makes sense that this social practice would continue on these platforms. In 2015, a mere seven years

after the launch of Twitter, 1.3 million people turned to Twitter to share their experience of the season premiere of AMC's The Walking Dead (Ji, 2019). The research on live tweeting has considered news, sports, and political events, but entertainment television has also been a growing topic of interest. However, one angle that seems to have been overlooked, is the integration of insights regarding hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences and their related psychological need gratifications. Hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences are concepts derived from philosophy and the study of wellbeing, referring respectively to pure enjoyment of entertainment and more complex, mixed-affect and reflective experiences (Wirth et al., 2012).

This study will demonstrate how people turn to live tweeting to extend their entertainment experiences. We will draw from (1) research on the emotional gratifications of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences (Oliver & Raney, 2011; Oliver et al., 2018; Bartsch, 2012) and (2) studies on social sharing via interpersonal media (Choi & Toma, 2014), and (3) studies on live tweeting as an active media behaviour and extended experience of television viewing (Wohn & Na, 2011; Ji & Raney, 2015; Ji, 2019). This research will provide, to our current knowledge, the first exploration of the position that live tweeting can take in sharing entertainment experiences for social and psychological need gratification. To address this research objective, we will conduct a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of tweets sent in response to a popular, non-fiction television programme that has been shown to lead to both hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences.

1   Theoretical framework

For a long time, entertainment research interpreted the consumption of entertainment media as striving for pure hedonic enjoyment (Zillmann & Bryant, 1985). However, this hedonic perspective failed to explain why audiences are also drawn to sad or tragic films (Oliver & Hartman, 2010). More recent research has developed a two-factor model that includes the concept of "eudaimonic appreciation", as a way to explain the appeal of these "other" experiences (Oliver & Hartmann, 2010; Oliver & Raney,

2011; Vorderer & Reinecke, 2015). Where one-factor approaches limit the understanding of the use of entertainment to striving towards an optimized mood, these two-factor models link entertainment experiences to more complex human experiences and gratifications, such as self-determination, personal growth and experiencing "meaningfulness" (Vorderer & Reinecke, 2015: 449). Oliver et al. (2018) delineate three major components in the scholarship on eudaimonic entertainment experiences. These are, first, mixed affect responses such as poignancy and being moved; second, a fulfilment of intrinsic needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness (which are eudaimonic types of psychological well-being); and third, a cognitive component by being provoked to think about the content (Oliver et al., 2018).

In another two-level approach to entertainment experiences, Bartsch (2012) discusses what emotional gratifications people may derive from entertainment experiences. She notices that theories on the affective gratification of entertainment experiences include two kinds of factors: the first are gratifying in their own right, while the other factors stimulate social or cognitive processes. On the one hand, experiences such as fun, thrill and empathic sadness are gratifying per se. Fun and thrill can be linked to one-factor models and understood as the hedonic enjoyment of entertainment. On the other hand, she identifies experiences that are gratifying because they stimulate a social or cognitive process, and links these to the concept of eudaimonic wellbeing. These processes can provide audience members a way to fulfil certain psychological needs: for example, the vicarious release of emotions can satisfy autonomy needs, contemplative emotional experiences can lead to personal growth, and social sharing of emotions can be linked to relatedness needs (Bartsch, 2012).

When it comes to understanding experiences of entertainment, recent calls have been made to consider the social and mediated environment wherein audience members are exposed to content (Vorderer et al., 2021), including their more immediate access to media for interpersonal communication. Additionally, the rise in the use of social media beckons researchers to consider these forms of interaction with

entertainment content not only as an extension to classic entertainment experiences, but as an activity that offers entertainment experiences in their own right (Raney & Ji, 2017). As argued by Jensen (2018), recent evolutions in mass communication led to new audience practices that must be taken into account. Unkel and Kümpel (2020) add that the study of online conversations can offer a new lens through which to study hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences, to help research look beyond retrospective self-reports. Research has already found that reading comments about a television show can influence one's enjoyment thereof (Winter et al., 2018). Interestingly, Winter et al. (2018) found no influence of reading comments on eudaimonic appreciation. This study will consider audience responses on Twitter as a form of social sharing of their entertainment experiences, by considering responses to a television programme that has been found to lead to both hedonic and eudaimonic experiences (De Ridder, Van den Bulck & Vandebosch, 2021).

Social sharing is the practice of discussing significant emotional events with others. It helps to fulfil important psychological needs, such as expressing emotions and connectedness, by amplifying the experience (Rimé, 2007). Choi and Toma (2014) found indications that these affordances are not limited to face-to-face interaction, but also occur when social sharing is practiced through interpersonal media, such as texting, phone calls, Facebook, or Twitter. Sharing both negative and positive experiences aggrandizes the emotional tone of the triggering events, meaning that individuals experience respectively increased positive and negative affects after sharing. In relation to Twitter, the study found that mostly high intensity positive events are shared. Alternatively, Vermeulen et al. (2018) found that adolescents did use Twitter to share negative emotions as well, but often choose to do so in a vague way: they tweet about events causing negative emotions, or vent those negative emotions, but not both. This was done with their imagined audience (those who they imagine will read their tweets) in mind: it could be a way of reaching out, opening conversation for future face-to-face interactions. While it may be the case that social sharing on Twitter is

often limited to high intensity positive events, or to partial sharing of negative affective experiences, we wonder how this will ensue when people share entertainment experiences, rather than personal experiences, which has been the focus of research up to now. Afterall, we propose that live tweeting can be used to share entertainment experiences, but live tweeting is also a way of sharing opinions, thoughts and, maybe even judgements about the program.

Twitter has been dubbed the "virtual watercooler", an online gathering space to discuss the content of television programmes, making the active audience paradigm visible (Bernabo, 2019). By embracing the activity of "live tweeting", audience members use Twitter to share their experiences while watching the programme (Schirra et al., 2014). Live tweeting while watching television is an active, inclusive media behaviour (Ji, 2019) where people share "time-sensitive, rapidly unfolding, impromptu" thoughts, opinions, or reactions about what happens in a live television show (Ji & Raney, 2015: 225), right before, during and immediately after the programme. Research has looked at the content of social television live posts (Wohn & Na, 2011), the circumstances in which people turn to social TV (Auverset & Billings, 2016) and people's motivations for participating in this active media behaviour (Guo & Chan-Olmsted, 2015). In their recent study, Ji (2019) identified four motivations for such social TV practices: first, a need for social connection with other viewers, to feel as if they were watching together. Second, a content-based catharsis was the strongest predictor for live tweeting specifically, with respondents indicating that they tweet to verbalize what they feel while watching, sharing their emotional experiences as it were. Third, people expressed a search for content-based engagement, continuing interaction with the content of the television programme, elaborating on what they saw, discovered, or learned. Fourth and finally, the study identified the extending enjoyment as the strongest overall predictor for social television use, confirming previous studies. This indicates that individuals use live tweeting to extend the hedonic entertainment experience. However, looking at the first three motivations, the need for social connection, catharsis, and

continued engagement seem to strongly relate to our previous discussion of emotional gratifications derived from entertainment experiences: relatedness needs, personal growth and autonomy needs.

As Auverset and Billings (2016) mention, analysing the role of live posting in the consumption and enjoyment of a television programme can increase understanding of viewer's entertainment experiences. However, none of these studies regarding live posting or tweeting as a social TV practice have considered these sharing practices within the framework of a two-factor model of entertainment experiences. Taking into account our discussion of eudaimonic entertainment experiences and emotional gratifications one can derive from such experiences, and what we know about gratifications sought in live tweeting, and the practice of social sharing emotionally triggering events on Twitter and how this could relate to sharing vicarious emotional experiences, brings us to our current research question. While it has been found that people extend upon their enjoyment of television programmes by live tweeting about them, it does not address the relation of its other motivations to eudaimonic experiences. In what way do people use live tweeting as a social sharing practice of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences? As a secondary research goal, we will also consider the possible gratifications one may derive from participating in such active media behaviour.

2　Methodology

2.1　Research topic: Case study Taboe

This paper analyses live tweets sent while watching *Taboe*, a television programme broadcast on Flemish[12] public service media VRT's general interest and primary TV channel "één" in 2018. The programme was about topics considered "taboo" introduced with the tagline "Laughing at what we should not be laughing at". *Taboe* was nominated for an Ensor[13] for best documentary, and an international Emmy Award for non-

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[12] Flanders is the Dutch-language region of Belgium.
[13] Awards given to Flemish Local audiovisual projects (VZW Les films du bord de mer, n.d.).

scripted entertainment (Panenka, 2019). The format has been sold to 19 countries (VRT, 2019) and has been produced and broadcast in Australia, Canada, and Switzerland (Panenka, 2019). Each episode introduced the audience four or five individuals, functioning as representatives of a weekly topic. Host Philippe Geubels, a successful Flemish stand-up comedian and celebrity, spent one week with the participants. Each episode alternated human-interest with scenes from a stand-up comedy performance about the taboo topic, performed for the week's participants and a wider audience, including but not limited to others who identify with the topic. Previous qualitative audience studies (De Ridder, Van den Bosch & Dhoest, 2021) indicated that people had both hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences while watching *Taboe*, making it a suitable case study for our research objective.

2.2   Data collection: Twitter

The aim of this research is to investigate the use of live tweeting as a social sharing practice of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences. We conducted a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of tweets sent during the broadcast of the programme. Previous research has shown the appropriateness of Twitter as a tool for observing users' opinions, interactions and reported behaviours (Deller, 2011; Schirra et al., 2014). The public nature of the data ensured access (i.e. by tracking the hashtag #*Taboe*) and allowed us to look into audience members' unprompted responses to a television programme. This provided a rich source of information that is usually inaccessible to social sciences research, namely a spontaneous response sent in a natural viewing environment.

Certain cautions are required when using Twitter as a source of data collection. Twitter users are not representative for the general public (Beckers & Harder, 2018), especially when not weighed for demographics. Because Twitter users tend to be younger (Malik et al., 2015), higher educated and more liberal in their worldviews, the results gathered from these types of studies cannot be generalised to the broader population (Mellon & Prosser, 2017). Finally, we take into

account that social media users employ Twitter for online impression management (Hall et al., 2014), curating their self-presentation by managing the content they post and choose to share. Alternatively, Beckers and Harder (2018) propose that reactions sent on twitter may sometimes be impulsive and emotional, thus very spontaneous.

We sampled Twitter data using TwiNL, a search tool that provided access to Dutch language tweet id's for education and research purposes (Tjong King Sang & Van den Bosch, 2013). We mined Twitter for the use of the hashtag (#) *Taboe* from January 21st (first episode broadcast) until March 19th 2018 (the day after airing the last episode). TwiNL only accessed tweets sent from public accounts, and no demographic data were included to maximise pseudonymisation. According to the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR[14]) Article 4 (5) pseudonymisation refers to the processing of data in such a manner that additional information is required to attribute personal data to the subject. This information is stored separately from the data used in the analysis. This allowed us to process the data without links to an identified or identifiable person, while remaining able to later identify individuals to request their approval for publication. Ethical clearance was obtained from University of Antwerp's Ethics Committee for the Social Sciences and Humanities.

The additional data fields for the tweets were accessed through the official Twitter API. Besides the text in the tweets, we collected timestamps, usernames, and the frequencies of favourites (comparable to likes) and retweets. Usernames were excluded from the data file used for coding. In a last step, to ensure data privacy and in line with Twitter API, a final automated check was done to ensure only tweets still publicly available online were included. We excluded retweets and advertising to avoid saturation of the sample (Chew & Eysenbach, 2010). After data cleaning this resulted in 1643 original tweets sent on the evenings of the broadcasts. Because this research focusses on responses audience

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[14] "As of May 2018, with the entry into application of the General Data Protection Regulation, there is one set of data protection rules for all companies operating in the EU, wherever they are based." (https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/law-topic/data-protection/eu-data-protection-rules_en)

members have while watching, the data were coded as sent either during the time of the original broadcast (20u30-21u35, 1048 tweets) or in the hours after the broadcast (21u36-01u00, 595 tweets). The latter allowed us to also consider responses to the complete episode.

2.3   Research method: quantitative and qualitative content analysis

Most research on entertainment experiences has used experiments to offer a stimulus and subsequently measure outcomes. We build on this work by using a novel approach that relies on entertainment experiences in a more natural setting, the at-home viewing context. To analyse the ways in which audience members use Twitter to share their entertainment experiences, we use a mixed-method design that combines quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The purpose of this design was to first use quantitative analyses to systematically and objectively identify trends in this large set of data, categorising the tweets using a codebook based on existing research (Bryman, 2016). Second, we used qualitative content analysis to conduct a more in-depth analysis of the types of responses, taking into account the complexity of audience responses in a more holistic way (Wester et al., 2006). This allowed us to both provide a comprehensive overview of the types of sharing in response to the programme, and insight into the discourses and arguments developed within those responses.

For the quantitative content analysis, we used a codebook and descriptive statistics in SPSS Statistics 24 to identify relevant trends in the data. Two precautions were taken regarding the reliability of the coding. First, we based our coding scheme on previous survey and experimental research on entertainment experiences. The coding scheme was developed by reinterpreting measurement scales as variables for coding. For example, when looking at the hedonic and eudaimonic experiences expressed in tweets, our coding schedule was based on the validated OB scale of hedonic (enjoyment) and eudaimonic (appreciation) responses to entertainment media (Weinmann et al., 2016). To illustrate: the appreciation sub-scale of the OB scale includes the item "I found this talk show/movie to be very meaningful". This translated to

a variable "meaningfulness". If a tweet contained an expression of finding the programme meaningful, this was coded 1=meaningful. Due to the more straightforward nature of hedonic enjoyment, all items (fun, entertaining, pleasure) were combined in one variable "hedonic enjoyment". Finally, we coded each tweet based on its programme evaluation: positive, negative, neutral, or mixed. Each tweet was coded on all of the included variables, meaning that a tweet could be coded as hedonic enjoyment, meaningfulness, moving etc., simultaneously, if necessary.

As a second precaution, a second researcher with experience in research on the topic of eudaimonic appreciation coded a sample of 164 tweets (10% of N=1643). Intercoder reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa (k). Coding, intercoder reliability tests and descriptive statistics of these data were analysed using SPSS Statistics 24. All included variables had a minimum Cohen's Kappa (k) score of .499. Considering the interpretive nature of these variables and the fact that the quantitative analysis will be elaborated and interpreted with an accompanying qualitative study, we follow Banerjee et al. (1999) and consider that this agreement is beyond chance and thus acceptable for these data.

Additionally, we conducted a qualitative analysis to increase our understanding of social sharing in the practice of live tweeting. While the quantitative analysis focussed on "what" experiences the audience shared, categorising their responses in predetermined categories, the qualitative analysis provided a richer and more interpretive account of their shared experiences. The quotes in this paper were translated from Dutch to English by the author, for both research and pseudonymisation purposes. Following the ethical framework suggested by Williams et al. (2017) we used the tweet ID's to contact the original senders of the tweets, requesting consent to include the translated quote in our research.

3   Results

First, we offer an overview of the overall response. Second, we look at tweets containing expressions of hedonic enjoyment, and third, eudaimonic appreciation in the form of being moved, meaningfulness and being thought-provoked. For each section, we begin with the results of the quantitative analysis, followed by a discussion of the qualitative analyses of the content of the tweets.

3.1   Overall response

The Flemish population at the time of writing was 6.58 million citizens, which means that most episodes reached over 27% of the Flemish population. VRT's main channel "één" is the leader in Flanders' television market, enjoying an overall market share of 33,8% at the time of the broadcast of *Taboe*.

Overall, 62% of all tweets expressed a positive evaluation of the programme, compared to only 2,45% tweets expressing negative opinions. This high number of favourable tweets is interpreted as an indicator of the positive reception. No significant difference was found in the type of evaluations based on the moment the tweets were sent, during or after the episode (X^2 (3, N = 1643) = 3.134, p = .371). The responses included praise for the makers, the host and the participants, about both the comedy and human-interest scenes.

> #*Taboe* continues to amaze. Humour on a Sunday evening, with a hard look at reality. Bring on the television awards! All credit to @philippegeubels and team! (ep 5: poverty)

Nearly one third of all tweets expressing positive opinions tagged or mentioned Geubels by name. This makes sense, as he is the only visible member of the production team. Tagging creators of the programme can be a way to attract attention and increase a two-way flow of communication (Auverset & Billings, 2016). Such behaviour likely indicates a desire to continue a sense of connection, beyond classic one-way viewing. It is also important to take into account the local context.

Flanders is a small television market and community. Geubels, while being a popular comedian, remains accessible: it is not unlikely that audience members have seen Geubels perform live, or experience a sense of familiarity, considering how often they "meet" him onscreen. It is possible that this parasocial connection, combined with emotional experiences while watching, led people to express appreciation in a more personal manner, or fulfilling a need to exteriorize the relationship, making it less parasocial.

3.2 Hedonic enjoyment

We began our exploration of entertainment experiences expressed in the tweets by looking at the expressions of hedonic enjoyment. Our quantitative analysis showed that nearly 20% of all tweets contained some expression of having fun, enjoying the programme or laughing at the humour (320). A chi-square test showed that there was a significant difference between the number of tweets expressing hedonic enjoyment during (229) and after (90) the programme, $X^2(1, N = 1643) = 11.257$, $p < .001$. A Cramér's V of .083 indicates a moderate to weak association. Because this entertainment experience is more related to emotions that are gratifying in their own right, it could be the case that people are able to express their enjoyment in a more immediate fashion, requiring less processing or reflection.

Qualitative analysis indicated that most of the tweets expressing hedonic enjoyment, did so by sharing expressions of laughter and liking the jokes, for example by quoting or making a joke themselves. While these types of tweets may appear rude or hurtful, it is important to keep in mind that *Taboe* framed jokes about minority groups in such a manner that showed outspoken approval coming from the minority themselves, negotiating the temporary humour regimes – the unwritten rules of who is allowed to laugh at what (Kuipers, 2011):

'I was hoping for a blind date' Sacha kicking things off 😄*#Taboe* (ep 4: visual impairment)

We're not bothered at all that this episode is about obesity. We have a wide-screen TV anyway. #*Taboe* (ep 8: obesity)

A first way of understanding these tweets is as an expression of appreciation for what the programme is doing, building on the concept and format of *Taboe.* A second option comes from tweets that seem to literally embody Mood Management Theory, sharing how watching the programme resulted in a lift in their moods:

This episode of #*Taboe* by @philippegeubels is doing such wonders for my mood, I get to take 50mg of Sertraline less tomorrow 😌👍 (ep 6: mental vulnerability)

These insights confirm the findings of Auverset and Billings (2016) regarding the use of live posting as a way to extend hedonic entertainment experiences of enjoyment, and the understandings offered by Choi and Thoma (2014) regarding the use of Twitter to share positive emotional experiences.

3.3 Eudaimonic appreciation

This section is divided in three parts, reflecting three components which are seen as indicators of eudaimonic appreciation for entertainment content: being moved; finding the content meaningful; and being provoked to think about the content of the programme.

3.3.1 Being moved

A little under 15% of all tweets contained some expression of being moved by the programme. Each episode evoked on average 26 or 14,2% tweets containing an expression of being moved. There was no significant difference (X^2 (1, N=1643) =.391, p =.532) in expressions of being moved between the moment the tweets were sent (during: 145 or 13,8% of tweets; after: 89 or 15% of tweets).

Previous research of *Taboe* (De Ridder, Van den Bulck & Vandebosch, 2021) showed that episode 2 included emotional

conversations about difficult but universal topics such as illness, death and saying goodbye. In the current research, we identify that similar conversations are found online, with viewers tweeting complex emotional experiences while watching. It is interesting to note that these tweets include references to certain affordances that the social sharing of emotions can bring individuals: we see clear expressions of emotional responses, but also catharsis. While they include negative affective responses such as sadness or tears, most immediately put those sad emotions in perspective:

> The left part of my body is laughing, while the right is shedding a tear. *#Taboe*

> With a recovering eye, sunglasses and misguided self-pity started watching *#Taboe* for the first time. Have rarely veered so between crying and then, all of a sudden, like a small blanket, a laugh. How sweetness narrowly wins from bitterness. Beautiful.

This could be an indication of the notion that Twitter is less suitable for sharing negative emotional experiences (Choi & Toma, 2014), leading people to quickly restore their negative moods, at least at face value. On the other hand, these mixed affect responses are not negative in nature, so restoration may not even be required. Audiences eudaimonically appreciate content that addresses human existence (Oliver & Hartmann, 2010). However difficult, these experiences of content involving somber aspects of humanity are still considered positive or uplifting. Possibly, these tweets indicate the release of vicariously experienced complex emotions, where audience members allow themselves to experience emotions they would usually avoid (Bartsch, 2012).

3.3.2 Meaningful experiences

Our quantitative analysis showed that 36.5% of all tweets, or 600 exactly, indicated having a meaningful experience while watching *Taboe*. A chi-square test found a significant difference between the number of tweets sent during (334 or 31.9%) the programme and those sent after (266 or 44.7%), and whether they contained an expression of meaningfulness, (X^2 (1, N=1643) = 36.972, p < .000). Cramér's V (.128) confirmed that this association was moderate to strong. Proportionally, significantly more tweets containing an expression of meaningfulness were sent after than during the broadcast. This follows the logic presented in our discussion of hedonic experiences: whereas those require less contemplation and are therefore more immediately ready to share, sharing more complex affective responses may require more reflection, and thus, more time. It is also possible that these experiences require more time to process, the desire to share gradually developing. As pointed out by Seibt et al. (2017), viewers often discuss feeling both sadness and happiness after watching a television programme, even though those emotional responses probably occurred sequentially rather than simultaneously.

Most tweets expressing meaningful experiences were sent in response to episode 1 (physical disabilities), both in absolute numbers (162) and in in relation to the total tweets in response to the episode (56,3%). 95 of those tweets were sent during the broadcast. This leaves us to wonder why so many audience members would already express meaningfulness with the first episode of the programme still going on. We believe this can be explained by the nature of live tweeting and the context in which *Taboe* was promoted and first viewed. Twitter is a real-time platform, allowing audience members to respond in the moment. Research has indicated that people use Twitter to have a sense of belonging to a wider phenomenon that goes beyond their immediate circle. These expressions of meaningful experiences could have been given in response to specific moments or quotes in the programme that the audience found meaningful enough to respond in real time, so-called "have-to-tweet" moments (Schirra et al., 2014). We also consider the novelty of the format. In the time between the promotion and broadcast

of the first episode, *Taboe* was already a "hot topic". Previous audience research has shown that curiosity was one of the main motivations for watching the programme (De Ridder, Vandebosch & Dhoest, 2021). Combined, the anticipation and desire to be part of a communal experience could have driven viewers to tweet in real time. Participating in this conversation could be a way to establishing connection and belonging to the viewing community and the phenomenon, fulfilling relatedness and connection needs.

> Wow, #*Taboe*, I have no words for this. Or yes, actually just one. Wonderful!

> The programme of the year is known already. So impressed. #*Taboe*

Audience members talked about *Taboe* finding the right balance, and being beautiful, discrete, disarming, encouraging, and for some recognizable. They encouraged others to watch as well, reaching out and continuing the conversation online. It is interesting to note how much these short tweets manage to contain: objectivized opinions, sharing complex affective entertainment experiences, an encouragement for others to watch, gratitude, and continued online conversation.

> #*Taboe* delivered, four people who serve as an example for, in my opinion, over half a million people in our country. #Bad #Poverty (ep 5: poverty)

3.3.3 The experience of being thought-provoked

The last indicator of eudaimonic appreciation were expressions of being provoked to think about the content of the programme. Over one third (36,2%, 595) of all tweets we analysed contained some indication of being provoked to think. 36% of tweets sent during episodes contained an expression of being thought-provoked, which is not significantly

different from the 36,6% after, as confirmed by the chi-square test, $(X^2 (1, N = 1643) = .047, p < .787)$.

> Wow this programme makes me think about how good I have it…
> #*Taboe* (ep 2: incurable disease)

Qualitative analysis showed that most shared thoughtful reflections about the content of the programme, through the lens of their own (lack of) experiences. Eudaimonic entertainment experiences can be linked to reflections about our sense of humanity and morality, which can offer a step to fulfilling autonomy needs and personal growth. We take note of the difference between twitter users reflecting the unknown stories of participants on themselves, as a type of "play", and those who are reminded of actual past experiences. These latter tweets were noticeably more present in response to episode 7 (Sexual orientation). People who self-identified as part of the LGBTQ+ community, shared their own stories. Some expressed gratitude regarding their own coming out experiences, when compared to the difficult stories shared in *Taboe*. Others talked about the changing society, or shared their experiences of discrimination. It is important to note that while these tweets referred to difficult moments in the lives of the audience member, they reflected on those moments in a more positive light, which could indicate a sense of mastery over their past experiences.

> Now that I've seen #*Taboe* on homosexuality I realize how lucky I was with my surroundings. Only love and a silly joke here and there. Thank you.

> Very harsh episode today. So many flashbacks to before and how I hope that all those people who hurt me in middle and high school, were watching as well! But secretly proud of myself and where I am now. 😌🖤 #*Taboe*

The other type of thought-provoked tweet expressed more surprise and learning. After being confronted with a reality that audience members were unaware still exists in Flanders, some tweets called for the community and leaders to improve their treatment of minorities. These expressions fit the idea that eudaimonic experiences have an outward component that allows viewers to transcend their own experiences and feel more connected to others. It is possible that these responses are a manifestation of feelings of "collective guilt", considering how these audience members reflect on their past attitudes towards the minority (Moyer-Gusé et al., 2019).

> Strong episode of #*Taboe* about poverty. What I remember most is that real poverty is social poverty. And not the financial one. The impact of being ruled out and excluded is huge. We don't take enough pause to think about this when we ignore people facing poverty on a daily basis. This should not be allowed. (ep 5: poverty)

These insights confirm that part of the audience is open to views presented in entertainment programming. This willingness is crucial when we consider older views on entertainment media as exclusively pleasurable, or limiting serious topics to news and information television.

4   Discussion and conclusion

This research explored how audience members use live tweeting as a social sharing practice of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences, and the possible gratifications derived from such sharing behaviour. We found evidence that audience members not only turn to Twitter to share purely positive, hedonic experiences of enjoyment, but use Twitter as a sharing platform for other, more complex, eudaimonic entertainment experiences as well.

Based on our analysis of 1648 tweets, we can confirm what has previously been suggested by Ji (2019): in our case study as well, audience members turn to Twitter to extend their enjoyment of the

television program. They extend the experience into the online conversation, for example by sharing or creating jokes. Sharing these positive experiences can be a way to aggrandize emotions and preserve the lift in moods beyond the viewing entertainment experience, by participating in live-tweeting as its own entertaining experience. We noticed that when negative affective experiences are shared, a restoration to positive moods is nearly always included in the same tweet. This is in line with the idea that Twitter is mostly used to share positive affective experiences, or more vague expressions of negative emotions. We suggest alternatively that people use social sharing by live tweeting as a way to process the complex emotions that come with eudaimonic experiences while watching.

As shown in several studies on social sharing, expressing and sharing negative affective states can be a way to aggrandize and process such emotions. Regarding the situational difference between sharing personal stories and their emotional experiences, or those experienced vicariously, we suggest that people turn to live tweeting and an online viewing community (brought together with the use of a hashtag) rather than reaching out to friends or family. This could be out of fear for being discounted, considering the emotions one is working through are the result of entertainment experiences, rather than real-life events. By live tweeting, they may be searching for other viewers who went through similar experiences at that exact moment, to process these complex emotions together. Additionally, our results show how audience members reflect the content back upon themselves, working through emotions and thoughts, as a type of "rehearsal for real life". This vicarious release of emotions can contribute to personal growth and mastery experiences, while remaining in the "safe space" of entertainment experiences, both in the context of television and in live tweeting. For those who were reminded about actual experiences from their personal past, it seems live tweeting was a way to share personal growth, which may contribute to their overall sense of accomplishment and wellbeing by fulfilling mastery needs.

This study contributes to the research field with two overall conclusions: first, individuals use live tweeting not only to extend their hedonic entertainment experience of enjoyment, but other entertainment experiences as well. They do this by sharing what affective emotional experiences they had while watching, often complex in nature. We identified shared experiences of being moved, finding the content meaningful and being provoked to think, concluding that audience members do turn to twitter to share eudaimonic entertainment experiences. Such sharing behaviour is known to aggrandize affective experiences and help people process them, making it an interesting research route to explore in function of processing of vicariously lived experiences and emotions. Second, we propose that live tweeting is not just a way to extend the entertainment experiences of watching, but an active media behaviour that comes with its own entertainment experiences, and there from derived gratifications, as well. In line with the psychological gratifications discussed by Bartsch (2012), and studies on social sharing on social media (Choi & Toma, 2014), we identified affordances from live tweeting that are similar to those of entertainment experiences while watching content, but would be less attainable without such online active behaviour. Looking for connection and an online community that originates from a viewing experiences can help fulfil social connectedness needs. Continuing (online) conversation about the information learned from the programme can contribute to learning and perspective taking, autonomy and personal development. Similarly, the sharing of complex emotional experiences can lead to experiences of catharsis, mastery over complex emotions and personal growth. Overall, we conclude that the practice of social sharing entertainment experiences by live tweeting can extend the experiences, and expand the consequent psychological gratifications derived.

Our study contributes to the research field of media psychology by looking at hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences in two different, but compatible contexts. First, insofar as we know, we are the first study to look at eudaimonic entertainment experiences as they are shared in live tweeting. Second, again, insofar as we are aware, we are

one of the first studies dedicated to exploring the idea of social sharing entertainment experiences in an online environment. We would encourage future researchers to address these matters, especially focusing on different types of sharing behaviours and motivations. These results can contribute to our understanding of the function of entertainment in managing moods and emotions, and how social sharing of those experiences functions in improving one's overall psychological wellbeing. Additionally, these insights can be of importance to the field of entertainment-education, which is dedicated to the strategic use of entertainment media to change and manage attitudes and behaviours, aiming at health and prosocial outcomes, among others. When we consider the role that Slater and Rouner (2002) ascribe to discussion in the Likelihood Elaboration Model, such continued interaction can be seen as an enforcement opportunity that contributes to lasting attitude and behaviour change. It could therefore be beneficial for those working on entertainment-education campaigns, to consider if and how encouraging live tweeting behaviour could contribute to the objectives of their interventions.

We recognize the limitations of our research. First, we only studied live tweeting. It is logical that live-posting and fan practices on other social media platforms will yield both similar and different findings, due to their unique contexts and ways of content creation. Each platform and their users have unique contexts, behaviours and interactions which can lead to other patterns of sharing and other affordances as a result. We would urge further (comparative) research to address this question. Second, due to the method of data collection, we were able to discuss a large and diverse number of shared experiences, but we also had to cede any insight into the demographic background of this audience. Third, we focused on a single television programme. Future research should explore how different genres and ways of storytelling may lead to differences in the experiences shared and expressions of gratifications. These and other questions open the door for future research efforts in the fields of eudaimonic entertainment, mood management theory and social media studies alike.
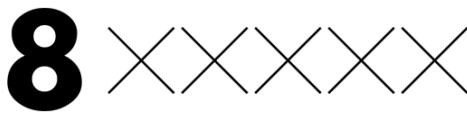
8 ✕✕✕✕✕

ACHIEVING DESTIGMATIZING OUTCOMES BY OVERCOMING RESISTANCE TO PERSUASION THROUGH COMBINED ENTERTAINMENT EXPERIENCES

Chapter eight: Achieving destigmatizing outcomes by overcoming resistance to persuasion through combined entertainment experiences
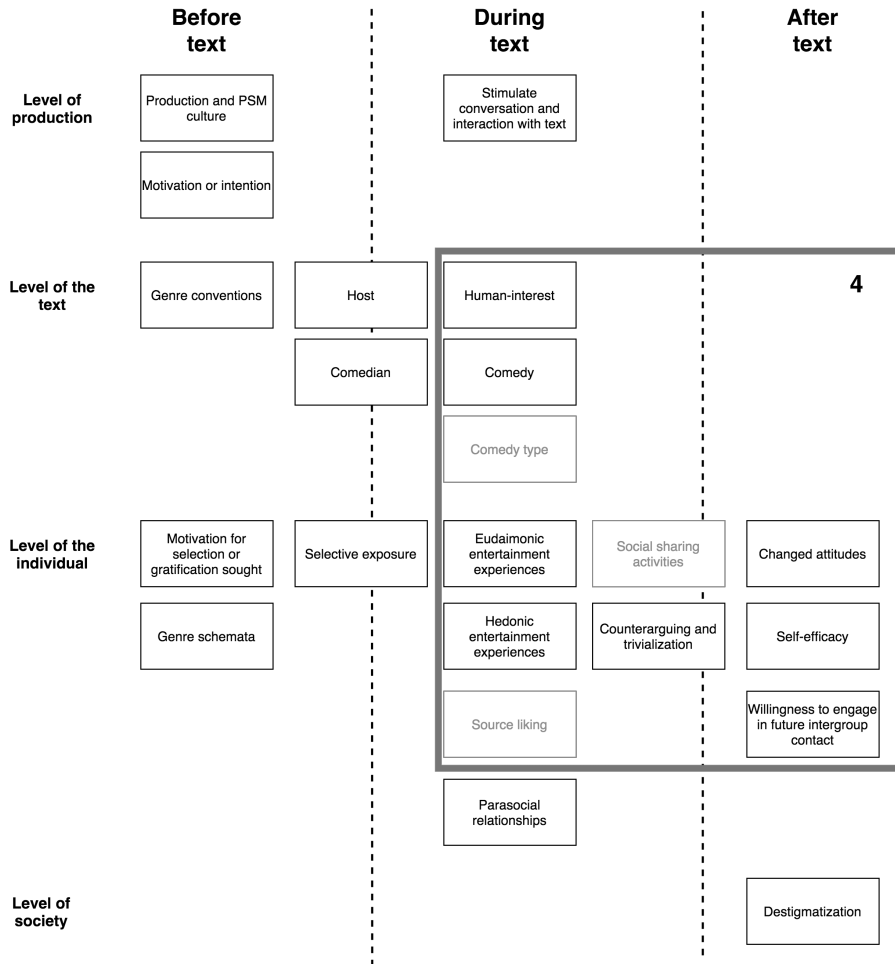
The more I look, the more I see nothing to joke about
Is comedy over?
Should I leave you alone?
'Cause, really, who's gonna go for joking at a time like this?
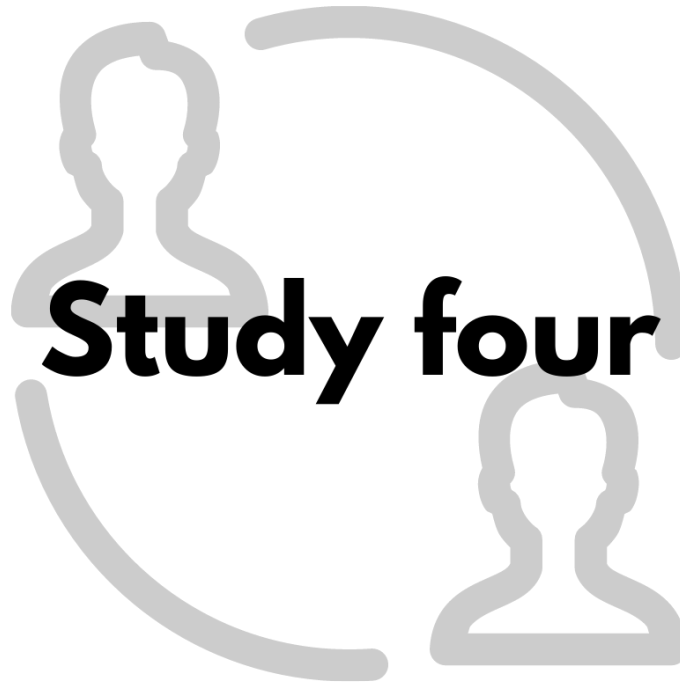*Should I be joking at a time like this?*

I wanna help to leave this world better than I found it
And I fear that comedy won't help, and the fear is not unfounded
- Comedy, Bo Burnham (2021)

The manuscript of this article was submitted for publication with *Media Psychology* on 6th August 2021. My co-authors on this article are Sara Pabian, Alexander Dhoest, and Heidi Vandebosch. It is currently under review.

Abstract: Drawing on theory from entertainment experiences and narrative persuasion research, this study investigates destigmatizing responses to a genre-hybrid (human-interest and stand-up comedy) non-fiction television program about minority groups. Using an online between-subjects experiment with 417 participants, we found that the combination of human-interest and stand-up comedy can simultaneously stimulate hedonic and eudaimonic experiences, and that this combination reduces trivialization, but not counterarguing responses compared to its separate genre components. Results also show that combining stand-up comedy with human-interest led to higher perceptions of self-efficacy regarding future intergroup contact with minorities, and that this relation was mediated via elevation and counterarguing. This study is the first to show the potential of genre-hybrid entertainment-education to reduce resistance in relation to entertainment experiences and their destigmatizing outcomes.

Overview Figure 6 *Position of the fourth study in the overall dissertation*

	Before text		**During text**		**After text**
Level of production	Production and PSM culture		Stimulate conversation and interaction with text		
	Motivation or intention				
Level of the text	Genre conventions	Host	Human-interest		**4**
		Comedian	Comedy		
			Comedy type		
Level of the individual	Motivation for selection or gratification sought	Selective exposure	Eudaimonic entertainment experiences	Social sharing activities	Changed attitudes
	Genre schemata		Hedonic entertainment experiences	Counterarguing and trivialization	Self-efficacy
			Source liking		Willingness to engage in future intergroup contact
			Parasocial relationships		
Level of society					Destigmatization

Study four

Scholars have considered the way television entertainment can play a role in reducing prejudice towards minorities both on- and off-screen (Schiappa et al., 2006; Oliver, Dillard et al., 2012; Hoffner & Cohen, 2012; Stevens, 2016; Moyer-Gusé, Dale & Ortiz, 2019). One of the ways researchers have approached this is by looking at this process through the lens of Entertainment-Education (hereafter: E-E). E-E is the practice of integrating health, educational, prosocial, and destigmatizing messages in entertainment media with the intent to influence awareness, knowledge, attitudes, and even behaviour, all while increasing the potential reach of such messages (Brown & Singhal, 1999). More recently, scholars aligned the definition of E-E with the reality of the

practice, by including entertainment media that were not intentionally designed to persuade but have similar potential (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010).

Just like the potential of E-E is not bound to its intentional strategic purpose, it is also not limited to dramatic television serials or soap operas, the genres that were mostly equated to E-E in the "early years" (Singhal & Brown, 1996). Bouman (2002) outlined genres of television varying in degrees of informing and entertaining purposes. She identified three genres as most suitable for Entertainment-Education purposes, namely talk-shows, drama and games, while also noting the (at the time) upcoming trend of genre hybridity. To the contrary, the author explicitly stated that comedy, due to its reliance on stereotypes, is less suitable for E-E purposes. More recent work in the field of narrative persuasion goes against this notion, even emphasizing comedy's potential to contribute to E-E (Borum-Chattoo & Feldman, 2017), which we will discuss further below. In this paper, we consider comedy to be a first suitable genre for E-E television programs.

In 2018, Flanders' public service media institution VRT broadcast *Taboe*, a hybrid format television program that combined interviews with minorities (one group per episode) with stand-up comedy performed by comedian and local celebrity Philippe Geubels (VRT, n.d.). The interviews in *Taboe* were labelled as the television genre of "human-interest". Human-interest focusses on an individual as an example of an event or topic and uses this individual to tell the story in a personalized and dramatized way, while accentuating the affective dimensions of the story (Luther & Zhou, 2005; Steimel, 2010; Xu, 2014). The combination of entertaining elements and information, alongside its potential to stimulate audience understanding, brings us to consider human-interest as a second highly suitable genre for E-E television programs.

To better understand E-E outcomes and audience experiences of such programs, we will use a theoretical framework that combines insights from narrative persuasion (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010; Slater & Rouner, 2002) and entertainment experiences (Bartsch, 2012; Clayton et al., 2019; Vorderer & Reinecke, 2015;). The purpose of our study is to

examine entertainment experiences and resistance to narrative persuasion in response to a hybrid genre (human-interest and stand-up comedy) television program about minority groups.

1 Theoretical framework

1.1 Entertainment overcoming resistance to persuasion

We first propose that combining comedy with human-interest will reduce resistance to persuasion. In the entertainment overcoming resistance model (EORM), Moyer-Gusé (2008) looks at the underlying processes that allow E-E to overcome resistance. This framework integrates several established theories that have been applied in E-E, such as the Extended Elaboration Likelihood Model (E-ELM, Slater & Rouner, 2002) and Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1985). By exploring different processes that help overcome resistance, this framework offers "a comprehensive examination of how E-E may affect attitudes and behaviors'" (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010, p.29). When confronted with a message, individuals may have thoughts that are inconsistent with, or actively dispute against persuasive content. This is a type of resistance referred to as counterarguing (Slater & Rouner, 2002). Previous research found that counterarguing has a mediating role in achieving story-consistent persuasive outcomes (Ma, 2020), more counterarguing having a negative impact on persuasion. And while comedy has the potential to reduce counterarguing (Nabi et al., 2007; Moyer-Gusé et al., 2011; Young, 2008;), research also indicates that addressing issues with comedy can lead viewers to discount the message altogether, thinking it must not be meant to be taken seriously, due to its humorous tone (Nabi et al., 2007). This is referred to as the "trivialization" of the message. Because the audience discounts the message, the envisioned persuasive influences are less effective than they could be. To minimize trivialization, Nabi et al. (2007) suggest that humorous content could benefit from the right context, also referred to as "the restoration of gravity", a way to re-establish serious intent. Referring to our discussion regarding human-interest, we argue that genre hybridity could offer exactly such a solution, by minimizing both counterarguing and trivialization. Whereas comedy

could lower counterarguing, but lead to trivialization, human-interest could offer balance, and re-establish serious intent without foregoing entertainment which is, after all, an essential element to *entertainment*-education. This brings us to the following research hypotheses:

> H1: Participants who watch a comedy program (H1a), and participants who watch a program combining comedy and human-interest (H1b) will score lower on counterarguing then those who watch a human-interest program.

> H2: Participants who watch a human-interest program (H2a), and participants who watch a program combining comedy and human-interest (H2b) will score lower on trivialization then those who watch a comedy program.

1.2 Combining hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences

Second, next to the potential of grounding comedy in reality by combining it with human-interest, more can be understood about the underlying processes of entertainment-education by looking at the audience's actual entertainment experiences. In a study comparing traditional documentary to hybrid stand-up comedy/documentary on their potential to stimulate indicators of social change, Borum-Chattoo and Feldman (2017) show that the hybrid documentary outperforms its serious counterpart when it comes to stimulating awareness, knowledge and intended action. The authors highlight the potential of an understudied mediator in narrative persuasion: the perceived entertainment value. This opens an interesting avenue for follow-up research, especially considering the growing amount of research on hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences and their potential for (social) wellbeing and prosocial outcomes (Bartsch et al., 2014; Das et al., 2017; Oliver et al., 2018).

When it comes to selecting entertainment, audience members have preferences for types of experiences. These preferences are flexible, and depend on personal attributes, attitudes, moods and even one's mood regulation preferences. This means that not all audience members will always be "in the mood" to watch any television program. Here again, genre hybridity could offer a solution, by offering diverse experiences in one program. When it comes to the potential of E-E to change attitudes and even behaviors, research has focused on overcoming resistance, but it often glossed over the potential role of entertainment experiences within that process. However, when we look at the two-factor models of entertainment reception that include hedonic and eudaimonic experiences (Bartsch, 2012; Clayton et al., 2019; Vorderer & Reinecke, 2015), it becomes clear that the gratifications a person can derive from consuming entertainment media have a strong outward focused component (Oliver et al., 2018), especially those related to eudaimonic or self-transcendent experiences. While hedonic experiences are understood as enjoyment, fun and positive affective experiences (Hofer & Rieger, 2019), eudaimonic entertainment experiences are defined by higher-order gratifications such as feeling elevated, moved and thought-provoked (Oliver & Raney, 2011). Studies have looked specifically at the potential of being moved to stimulate thought and reflection (Bartsch et al., 2014), and how this can be a key factor in the persuasive potential of entertainment to stimulate changes in attitudes and behavior (Das et al., 2017). Self-transcendent experiences center around that particular outward focused component of eudaimonic experiences, and include emotions such as elevation, awe, gratitude, and hope. Based on psychological research that connects self-transcendence with outcomes of perspective taking, altruism, connection and helping behavior, Oliver et al. (2018) modelled how inspirational media and self-transcendent experiences can lead to prosocial outcomes.

As far as we are aware, no studies have considered entertainment experiences of hybrid genres that seem to appeal to both sides of the two-factor model. This brings us to the following research hypotheses:

H3: Participants who watch a program combining comedy and human-interest will have (a) higher scores on hedonic experiences than those who watch only human-interest, but (b) no significant difference in hedonic experiences from those who watch comedy.

H4: Participants who watch a program combining comedy and human-interest will have (a) higher scores on eudaimonic experiences than those who watch only comedy, and (b) no significant difference in eudaimonic experiences from those who watch human-interest.

Due to the combined potential of comedy to stimulate positive affective hedonic experiences, human-interest's seemingly clear path to eudaimonic experiences, and previous studies showing their contribution to destigmatizing outcomes, we hypothesize that combining these genres will lead to stronger destigmatizing outcomes, creating a synergetic effect.

H5: Participants who watch a program combining comedy and human-interest will have higher destigmatizing outcomes when compared to those who watch either comedy or human-interest.

1.3   The mediating role of entertainment experiences

But what role exactly do those entertainment experiences play in achieving destigmatizing outcomes? And how can they play a role in reducing persuasion? Tsay-Vogel and Krakowiak (2016) found that eudaimonic experiences, in the form of elevation as well as moving and thought-provoking experiences, function as positive mediators of the path between reality TV and altruistic motivations. Comparable results were found in Schnall et al. 's (2010) study concerning the influence of witnessing altruistic behaviour's on willingness to help, again mediated by one's sense of elevation. From the work done on the E-ELM and

EORM, we take that engagement and enjoyment play a key role in stimulating message consistent outcomes. While Moyer-Gusé (2008) links enjoyment mostly to reducing selective avoidance, Murphy et al. (2011) also found that positive emotional experiences stimulate participant's willingness to engage in conversation about the presented topic, and that these experiences mediate the influence of engagement on the willingness to engage in conversation about their presented topics. Several studies have linked engagement with hedonic experiences (Igartua, 2010; Moyer-Gusé et al., 2011), and in turn with reducing resistance, but the mediating role of both eudaimonic and hedonic entertainment experiences between entertainment-education content and reducing resistance, seems to have been overlooked. This brings us to the following hypotheses:

> H6: The effect of the manipulation on resistance (counterarguing and trivialization) will be mediated by (hedonic and eudaimonic) entertainment experiences.

> H7: The effect of the manipulation on destigmatizing outcomes will be mediated by entertainment experiences and resistance to persuasion.

2   Methodology

To test these hypotheses, this study used a three (genre: stand-up comedy/human-interest/combination of stand-up comedy + human-interest) by three (topic: obesity, people of color, visual impairment) between-subjects quasi-experimental design with an online survey using Qualtrics online software. Participants were exposed to clips selected from a television program that combined comedy and human-interest, manipulated to fit the conditions.

2.1   Participants

For this study to have 95% power to detect an effect of .25 with a .05 significance level, 400 participants had to be recruited. The sample

included 417 Dutch-speaking persons between 18 and 35 years old. Our participants were predominantly female (71%), young (77% under 30, M = 25.02 years, SD = 4.59 years) and highly educated (78.4% with at least a three-year college degree).

The study was advertised through social media posts, among students, and by contacting (young adult) organisations who were invited to voluntarily share the study with their members. Participants were self-selected, but the personal network of the researchers was excluded. The incentive to participate was a raffle to win a gift certificate. Participants were informed that the study would be about "emotional and cognitive experiences while watching entertainment media". A debriefing with the real purpose of the study was included after completing the online survey.

2.2 Procedure

All participants were randomly assigned to one of nine conditions. Three stand-up comedy and three human-interest clips were selected from three episodes of *Taboe*, spanning different topics to ensure results were not limited to only one specific taboo topic or stigmatized group. The comedy and human-interest clips were edited together to create clips for the combination condition. We proceeded to conduct our analysis after aggregating responses across the three topics, resulting in three genre conditions, as this was the focus of the current research. A Chi-square and one-way MANOVA (p > .05) were done to compare genre conditions for the following variables: age, gender, education, professional situation, trait empathy and previous intergroup contact with the groups presented in the clips. No significant differences were found.

2.3   Open science practices

Approval was obtained from the University of Antwerp's Ethics Committee for the Social Sciences and Humanities [Dossier number: SHW_20_81], before participant recruitment began. Stimulus materials, data sets and more detailed results will be available on an Open Science Framework project page. (https://osf.io/4gdpy/?view_only=323633dbb90b40159e42618417d644a9)

2.4   Measures

Previous exposure was measured with two items: "Have you ever seen *Taboe* before?" and more specifically, "Have you seen episode x of *Taboe* before?" This was summarized in a dummy variable, indicating whether a participant had seen the relevant episode for their condition (0 = no, 1 = yes).

Empathy as a personality trait (α= .76) was measured using Empathic Concern and Perspective Taking subscales of the Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983). This scale consists of 14 items measured on a 5-point Likert format. It included items such as "I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective."

Previous intergroup contact was assessed using four items based on Schiappa, Greg and Hewes (2006). The scale includes items such as "I have more than three close friends or co-workers who are people of color". Wording was adjusted to the minorities represented in our study.

2.4.1   Entertainment experiences

Hedonic experiences were measured using a combination of the hedonic enjoyment subscale (α= .93) (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010) and two items (funny and humorous) measuring humorous evaluation (α= .97) (Nabi et al., 2007).

Eudaimonic experiences were measured combining scales that measure thought and reflection, and elevation, on a 7-point Likert scale. For thought and reflection (α=.85), we included four items regarding

retrospective reflection (Hamby et al., 2017). From Bartsch et al. (2012) we took four items measuring contemplative experiences. Following Thomson and Siegel (2013) we combined the 15 items of the Aquino et al. (2011) elevation scale (α= .92) with five items measuring physiological responses, all scored on a 7-point Likert format.

2.4.2 Resistance to persuasion

Counterarguing (α= .82) was measured using four items in a 7-point Likert format (Nabi et al., 2007), i.e. "I sometimes felt I wanted to "argue back" to what was going on onscreen".

Trivialization (α= .72) was measured by using four items on a 7-point Likert format (Nabi et al., 2007), i.e. "The program was just joking."

2.4.3 Destigmatizing outcomes

Attitudes towards minority groups (α= .81) were measured by using adaptations of seven items on a 7-point Likert scale used by Batson et al. (1997), based on McConahay's Modern Racism Scale (1986). For example: "For most obese people/people of color/visually impaired people, it is their own fault that they have problems."

Prosocial behavioural intent (α= .90) was measured in two parts on a 7-point Likert format: first, items that questioned willingness to engage in conversation (Moyer-Gusé et al., 2011) and second, items that assessed helping behaviour from Fitzgerald et al. (2019).

Intergroup contact – perception of self-efficacy (α= .90) was measured with four items (Moyer-Gusé, Dale & Ortiz, 2019) regarding confidence in future successful intergroup contact, i.e., their ability to socialize with members of the out-group.

Intergroup contact willingness (α= .86) was measured using Esses and Dovidio's Willingness to Engage scale (2002). This scale includes twelve 7-point Likert items, e.g., willingness to "confide in" an out-group member.

2.5   Data analysis

To test the hypotheses, Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) with a bootstrapping procedure and mediation analysis using Hayes' Process Macro (model 4 and 6) with bootstrapping were performed in SPSS 27. Preliminary analyses indicated that the multivariate normality assumption was violated, as determined via the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk statistic. However, MANCOVA and regression analyses are known to be fairly robust to violations of normality assumptions (Atiqullah, 1964; Tabachnick & Fidel, 1996) and bootstrapping is an approach that takes normality violation into account by repeatedly selecting data points for the existing sample. Mean scores (as reported in Table 1) on evaluation of humour, enjoyment, thought, elevation, counterarguing, trivialization, attitude, prosocial behaviour, self-efficacy regarding future intergroup contact, and willingness to engage in future intergroup contact were compared for those exposed to comedy, human-interest and a combination of comedy and human-interest. Empathy, previous intergroup contact with minority represented in the clip, previous exposure to the clip and gender were added as control variables. In a next step, four mediation analyses were conducted to test the mediating role of entertainment experiences and resistance to persuasion. The results of the MANCOVA analyses were used to select the exact dependent variables and covariates that would be included in the mediation analyses. In all analyses, 0.05 was used as significance level, and partial eta squared as effect size indicator. The later was interpreted as 0.01 (small), 0.09 (medium), and 0.25 (large) (Cohen, Miles, & Shevlin, 2001). All the hypotheses and research questions were specified before the data were collected.

Table 1 *Descriptive statistics of all dependent variables, by condition*

Dependent Variable	Condition	Mean	SE	95% CI	
				LL	UL
Humorous	Comedy	5.770	.100	5.574	5.966
evaluation	Human-interest	2.168	.103	1.966	2.370
	Combination	5.444	.110	5.227	5.661
Enjoyment	Comedy	5.700	.092	5.519	5.881
	Human-interest	4.049	.095	3.862	4.235
	Combination	5.450	.102	5.250	5.651
Thought and	Comedy	3.261	.087	3.090	3.432
reflection	Human-interest	4.270	.089	4.094	4.446
	Combination	3.917	.096	3.729	4.106
Elevation	Comedy	3.454	.067	3.322	3.587
	Human-interest	4.080	.069	3.944	4.217
	Combination	3.944	.075	3.797	4.091
Counterarguing	Comedy	3.120	.075	2.972	3.267
	Human-interest	2.514	.077	2.362	2.665
	Combination	2.536	.083	2.373	2.698
Trivialization	Comedy	4.637	.077	4.485	4.789
	Human-interest	2.497	.080	2.341	2.654
	Combination	3.338	.086	3.169	3.506
Attitude	Comedy	5.406	.073	5.262	5.550
	Human-interest	5.142	.075	4.994	5.290
	Combination	5.282	.081	5.122	5.441
Prosocial	Comedy	3.392	.092	3.212	3.573
behavioural intent	Human-interest	3.493	.095	3.307	3.679
	Combination	3.587	.102	3.387	3.786
Self-efficacy IGC	Comedy	6.194	.063	6.069	6.319
	Human-interest	5.908	.065	5.780	6.036
	Combination	6.169	.070	6.032	6.307
Willingness IGC	Comedy	6.356	.048	6.262	6.450
	Human-interest	6.201	.049	6.104	6.298
	Combination	6.358	.053	6.254	6.463

3 Results

MANCOVA analysis was performed to test hypotheses 1-5. The multivariate result was significant for condition, *Pillai's Trace* = .943, *F(20, 802)* = 35.754, *p* < .001, partial η^2 = .471. The between-subjects tests showed there was a significant difference between those exposed to comedy, human-interest and a combination of comedy and human-interest for evaluation of humour (*F(2)* = 373.022, *p* < .001, partial η^2 = .646), enjoyment (*F(2)* = 87.929, *p* < .001, partial η^2 = .301), thought (*F(2)* = 33.452, *p* < .001, partial η^2 = .141), elevation (*F(2)* = 22.784, *p* < .001, partial η^2 = .100), counterarguing (*F(2)* = 19.947, *p* < .001, partial η^2 = .089), trivialization (*F(2)* = 186.858, *p* < .001, partial η^2 = .477), attitude (*F(2)* = 3.132, *p* < .05, partial η^2 = .015), self-efficacy regarding future intergroup contact (*F(2)* = 5.849, *p* < .01, partial η^2 = .028), and willingness to engage in future intergroup contact (*F(2)* = 3.265, *p* < .05, partial η^2 = .016), but not for prosocial behaviour (*F(2)* = 1.002, *p* = .368, partial η^2 = .005). Bonferroni corrected pairwise comparisons indicated which types of content differed significantly from each other for the dependent variables.

3.1 Resistance to persuasion

The MANCOVA was employed to examine how the conditions differed on resistance to persuasion. The analysis showed significant differences in counterarguing between comedy and human-interest, and significant differences in trivialization between comedy and human-interest, and comedy and the combination. H1 predicted that participants who watched comedy or the combination, would score lower on counterarguing, when compared to those who watched only human-interest. Comedy provoked more counterarguing than human-interest ($M_{difference}$ =.606, SE=.108, 95% CI [.346, .866], *p* < .001), in stark contradiction to H1a. No significant differences in counterarguing were found between the combination and human-interest ($M_{difference}$ =.022, SE=.113, 95% CI [-.249, .294], *p* = 1.00), meaning we did not find any evidence for H1b. No support was found for our first hypothesis, going against earlier findings in other studies.

H2 then predicted that participants who watched human-interest or the combination would experience less trivialization than those who watched only comedy. Comedy provoked more trivialization than human-interest ($M_{\text{difference}}$ =2.140, SE=.112, 95% CI [1.872, 2.408], p < .001), supporting H2a, while the combination provoked less trivialization than comedy alone ($M_{\text{difference}}$ =-1.300, SE=.116, 95% CI [-1.578, -1.021], p < .001), in favor of hypothesis H2b. Together, we can confirm our second hypothesis.

3.2 Entertainment experiences

The third hypothesis predicted that the combined condition would stimulate more hedonic experiences than the human-interest condition, and the same level of hedonic experiences as the comedy condition. For hedonic experiences, the combination was found more humoristic ($M_{\text{difference}}$ =3.276, SE=.151, 95% CI [2.914, 3.638], p < .001) and more enjoyable ($M_{\text{difference}}$ =1.402, SE=.139, 95% CI [1.067, 1.736], p < .001.) than human-interest, providing evidence for H3a. No significant differences were found in humorous evaluation ($M_{\text{difference}}$ =.326, SE=.149, 95% CI [-.033, .686], p = .089) and enjoyment ($M_{\text{difference}}$ =.249, SE=.138, 95% CI [-.082, .581], p = .214) between the combination and comedy conditions, giving support to H3b.

Similarly, the fourth hypothesis predicted that the combined condition would lead to stronger eudaimonic experiences than the comedy condition, and the same level of eudaimonic experiences as the human-interest condition. For eudaimonic experiences, the combination was found to be more thought-provoking ($M_{\text{difference}}$ =.656, SE=.130, 95% CI [.344, .969], p < .001) and lead to more elevation ($M_{\text{difference}}$ =.490, SE=.101, 95% CI [.247, .733], p < .001) than comedy, providing evidence for H4a. However, the combination provoked less thought ($M_{\text{difference}}$ =-.353, SE=.131, 95% CI [-.668, -.038], p < .05) than human-interest, but no significant difference was found between the combination and human-interest regarding elevation ($M_{\text{difference}}$ =-.136, SE=.102, 95% CI [-.318, .109], p = .545), providing partial evidence for H4b.

3.3 Destigmatizing outcomes

Our fifth hypothesis predicted that people who watched the combination condition would score higher on destigmatizing outcomes when compared to those who only watched comedy or human-interest. For self-efficacy, the combination provoked more self-efficacy than human-interest ($M_{difference}$ =.262, SE=.096, 95% CI [.031, .492], $p < .05$), but not comedy ($M_{difference}$ =-.024, SE=.095, 95% CI [-.253, .204], $p = 1.00$). For attitude, no significant differences were found between the combination and comedy ($M_{difference}$ =-.125, SE=.110, 95% CI [-.389, .139], $p =.766$) or human-interest ($M_{difference}$ =.139, SE=.111, 95% CI [-.126, .405], $p =.624$), but we did find a significant difference between comedy and human-interest ($M_{difference}$ =.264, SE=.106, 95% CI .010, .518], $p < .05$).

   Although the between-subjects test showed a significant difference between the genre conditions for willingness to engage in future intergroup contact, the Bonferroni corrected pairwise comparison did not indicate any significant differences between the types. Overall, we found partial evidence for H5 insofar that the combination leads to a significantly higher perception of self-efficacy for future intergroup contact than the separate clips.

3.4 Covariates

Assessing covariates' simple main effects on the dependent variables, for the covariate empathy the results revealed a positive association with thought ($F(1) = 10.610$, $p < .01$, partial η2 = .025), elevation ($F(1) = 30.069$, $p < .001$, partial η2 = .068), attitude ($F(1) = 36.109$, $p < .001$, partial η2 = .081), prosocial behaviour ($F(1) = 45.070$, $p < .001$, partial η2 = .099), self-efficacy regarding future intergroup contact ($F(1) = 12.620$, $p < .001$, partial η2 = .030), and willingness to engage in future intergroup contact ($F(1) = 27.098$, $p < .001$, partial η2 = .062). For the covariate previous intergroup contact with the minority represented in the clip, a positive association was found with thought ($F(1) = 26.708$, $p < .001$, partial η2 = .06), trivialization ($F(1) = 5.743$, $p < .05$, partial η2 = .014), self-efficacy regarding future intergroup contact ($F(1) = 46.266$, $p < .001$, partial η2 = .102), and willingness to engage in future intergroup contact ($F(1) =

9.477, *p* < .01, partial η2 = .023). Previous intergroup contact with the minority represented in the clip had a negative association with elevation (*F*(1) = 10.375, *p* < .01, partial η2 = .025), and attitude (*F*(1) = 9.519, *p* < .01, partial η2 = .023). For the covariate previous exposure to clip, a positive association was found with evaluation of humour (*F*(1) = 7.237, *p* < .01, partial η2 = .017), enjoyment (*F*(1) = 18.762, *p* < .001), partial η2 = .044), and elevation (*F*(1) = 6.352, *p* < .05, partial η2 = .015). Previous exposure to clip had a negative association with counterarguing (*F*(1) = 5.226, *p* < .05, partial η2 = .013). Finally, for the covariate gender, females scored higher on thought (*F*(1) = 8.113, *p* < .01, partial η2 = .019), elevation (*F*(1) = 4.208, *p* < .05, partial η2 = .010), attitude (*F*(1) = 8.523, *p* < .01, partial η2 = .020), and prosocial behaviour (*F*(1) = 5.169, *p* < .05, partial η2 = .012).

3.5   Test for indirect relations

The mediation analyses provide additional insight in the experiences underlying the outcomes of the conditions on these destigmatizing outcomes. To test hypotheses 6 and 7, we conducted mediation analyses with bootstrapping using Hayes (2017) PROCESS macro for SPSS. All reported models were estimated using bootstrapping procedures employing 5000 bootstrapped samples. Due to the multi-level categorical predictor in this study (comedy, human-interest, combination), dummy coding was used to represent the groups. This means that these results are to be interpreted in relation to the reference category, in this case, comedy.

To test the mediating role of entertainment experiences (evaluation of humour, enjoyment, thought and elevation) in the effect of the stimulus on resistance (counterarguing and trivialization) (H6), two mediation analyses with a multicategorical independent variable (representing the condition) were conducted, one with counterarguing as dependent variable (DV) and one with trivialization as DV (Hayes & Preacher, 2014). Covariates were included in the mediation analyses, based on the results of the aforementioned MANCOVA. For counterarguing, previous exposure to the clip was included as a

covariate. For trivialization, previous intergroup contact with the minority was included as covariate.

**Figure 1** *Mediated influence of the conditions on counterarguing via enjoyment and elevation*
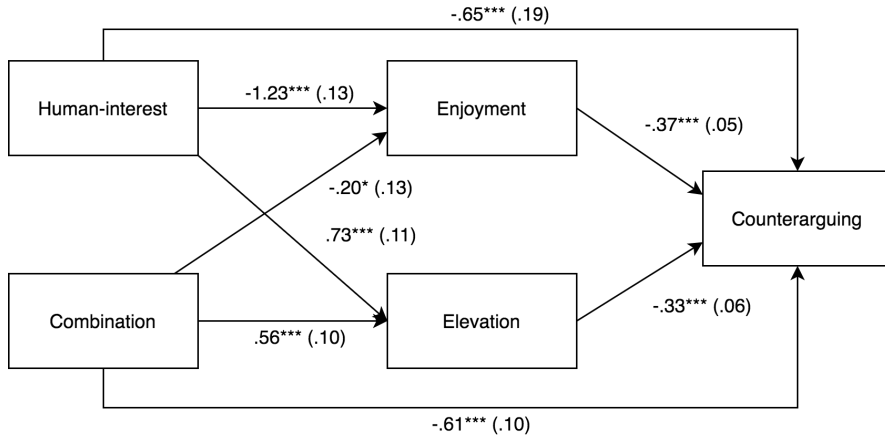
Note. Standardized coefficients reported. *p >.05. **p> .01. ***p> .001. Standard Error in parentheses.

The mediation analysis with counterarguing as dependent variable indicated that the model explained 35.10% of the variance of counterarguing (R^2 = .3510). All significant paths included in the model are presented in Figure 1. Considering that the results included standardized coefficients > 1, we calculated the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values and Tolerance. As a rule of thumb, a VIF value should be below the threshold of 10, and Tolerance should be over 0.1. This indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern (Treatment X1 (human-interest): Tolerance = .265, VIF = 3.78; Evaluation of humour: Tolerance = .201, VIF = 4.98; Enjoyment: Tolerance = .368, VIF = 2.71). The indirect pathway of condition on counterarguing via enjoyment was significant and positive for the human-interest condition ($B_{bootstrap}$ = .44, BSE = .09, BCI 95% [.28; .62]) and the combination condition ($B_{bootstrap}$ = .07, BSE = .04, BCI 95% [.01; .15]). The indirect pathway of condition on

counterarguing via elevation was significant and negative for the human-interest condition ($B_{bootstrap}$ = -.23, BSE = .05, BCI 95% [-.33; -.14]) and the combination condition ($B_{bootstrap}$ = -.18, BSE = .05, BCI 95% [-.28; -.10]). Both enjoyment and elevation partially mediated the relationship between condition and counterarguing, as the direct relations between condition and counterarguing were also significant.

Figure 2 *Mediated influence of the conditions on trivialization via thought*
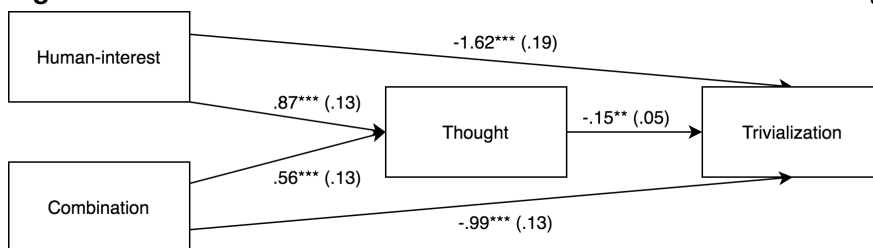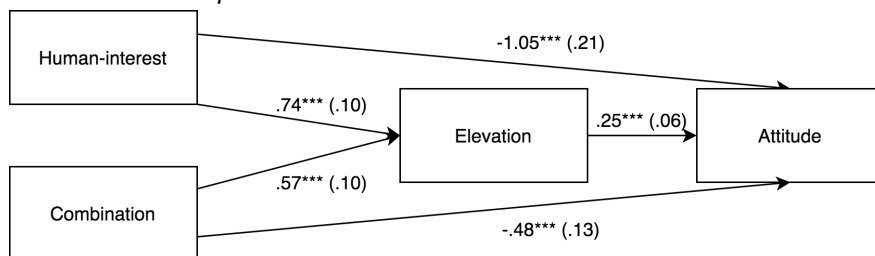

Note. Standardized coefficients reported. *p >.05. **p> .01. ***p> .001. Standard Error in parentheses.

The mediation analysis with trivialization as dependent variable indicated that the model explained 52.88% of the variance in trivialization (R^2 = .5288). All significant paths included in the model are presented in Figure 2. Considering that the results included standardized coefficients > 1, we calculated the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values and Tolerance. This indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern (Treatment X1 (human-interest): Tolerance = .265, VIF = 3.77; Evaluation of humour: Tolerance = .201, VIF = 4.98; Enjoyment: Tolerance = .376, VIF = 2.66). The indirect pathway of condition on trivialization via thought was significant and negative for the human-interest condition ($B_{bootstrap}$ = -.17, BSE = .06, BCI 95% [-.29; -.07]) and the combination condition ($B_{bootstrap}$ = -.11, BSE = .04, BCI 95% [-.19; -.04]). Thought partially mediated the relationship between condition and trivialization, as the direct relation between condition and trivialization was also significant.

In order to test the mediating role of entertainment experiences (evaluation of humour, enjoyment, thought and elevation) and resistance to persuasion (counterarguing and trivialization) in the effect of the

stimulus on destigmatizing outcomes (H7), three mediation analyses with a multicategorical independent variable (representing the condition) were conducted, one with attitude as dependent variable (DV) and two serial mediation (model 6) with self-efficacy for future intergroup contact as DV (Hayes, & Preacher, 2014). Attitude and self-efficacy were selected, as the MANCOVA analyses showed that the conditions do not differ for prosocial behaviour and willingness to engage in future intergroup contact. Covariates were included in the mediation analyses, based on the results of the aforementioned MANCOVA. For attitude as DV, empathy and gender were included as covariates. For self-efficacy for future intergroup contact as DV, empathy and previous intergroup contact with the minority represented in the clip were included as covariates.

Figure 3 *Mediated influence of the conditions on attitude via the entertainment experience of elevation*

Note. Standardized coefficients reported. *p >.05. **p> .01. ***p> .001. Standard Error in parentheses.

The mediation analysis with attitude as DV indicated that the model explained 21.61% of the variance in attitude (R^2 = .2161). All significant paths included in the model are presented in Figure 3. Considering that the results included standardized coefficients > 1, we calculated the VIF values and Tolerance. This indicated that multicollinearity was not a concern (Treatment X1 (human-interest): Tolerance = .212, VIF = 4.73; Evaluation of humour: Tolerance = .198, VIF = 5.05; Enjoyment: Tolerance = .343, VIF = 2.92; Trivialization:

Tolerance = .456, VIF = 2.20). The mediation analysis showed only one significant indirect relation, namely between the conditions and attitude via elevation. The indirect pathway of condition on self-efficacy via elevation was significant and positive for condition human-interest ($B_{bootstrap}$ = .18, BSE = .05, BCI 95% [.08; .29]) and condition combination ($B_{bootstrap}$ = .14, BSE = .04, BCI 95% [.06; .23]). Elevation partially mediated the relationship between condition and attitude, as the direct relation between condition and attitude was also significant.

To test hypothesis 7, a Hayes process model 4 mediation analysis was run with perception of self-efficacy for future intergroup contact (hereafter: self-efficacy) as DV. The model included the following variables: Condition as IV, evaluation of comedy, enjoyment, thought, elevation, counterarguing and trivialization as mediators, and covariates empathy and previous intergroup contact. This model indicated four significant indirect pathways, namely through elevation and counterarguing, as can be seen in table 2.

Table 2 *Significant indirect pathways in Mediation model: Mediating role of entertainment experiences in the effect of condition on perception of self-efficacy regarding future intergroup contact (SE_IGC)*

Path	B	SE	95% C.I.	β
X1 to SE_IGC via elevation	-.11	.04	-.19, -.04	-.13
X2 to SE_IGC via elevation	-.08	.03	-.16, -.03	-.10
X1 to SE_IGC via counterarguing	.10	.04	.03, .19	.12
X2 to SE_IGC via counterarguing	.10	.04	.03, .18	.12

Note. This table demonstrates the significant paths in the first model with self-efficacy as the DV. No other variables of entertainment experiences or resistance to persuasion were significant mediators in this model.

Considering that the results of the mediation analysis with DV counterarguing showed that the effect of the condition on counterarguing was mediated by elevation and enjoyment, Hayes process macro model 6 was used. Only variables that had a significant direct or indirect effect in the two previous mediation models (being the model with counterarguing as DV and the above discussed model with self-efficacy as DV) were included: condition as IV, elevation as M1, counterarguing as M2, self-efficacy as DV and empathy and previous intergroup contact as covariates.

Figure 4 *Serial mediation of the influence of the conditions on perceptions of self-efficacy regarding future intergroup contact, via elevation and counterarguing.*
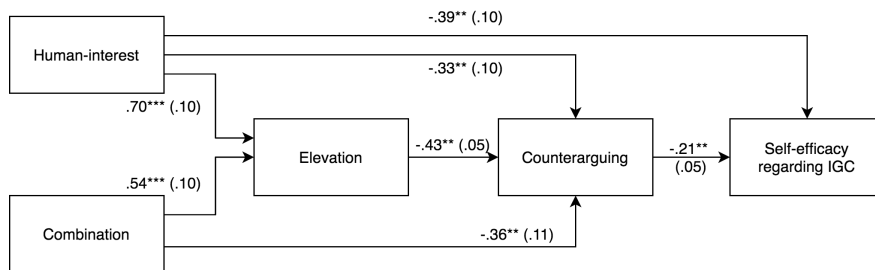
Note. Standardized coefficients reported. *p >.05. **p> .01. ***p> .001. Standard Error in parentheses.

The sequential mediation analysis indicated that the model explained 19.48% of the variance in self-efficacy (R2 = .1948). The indirect pathway of condition on self-efficacy via elevation and counterarguing was significant for the human-interest condition ($B_{bootstrap}$ = .05, BSE = .02, BCI 95% [.02; .09]) and the combination condition ($B_{bootstrap}$ = .04, SEB = .01, BCI 95% [.02; .07]). All significant paths included in the model are presented in Figure 4. In the case of the human-interest condition, elevation and counterarguing partially mediated the relation between condition and self-efficacy. There is a direct negative relation between the human-interest condition and self-efficacy when compared to comedy, while the mediated relation via elevation and

counterarguing seems to counterbalance this negative relation. In the case of the combination condition, the relation from the condition to self-efficacy was completely mediated by elevation and counterarguing. The relation from elevation to self-efficacy was fully mediated by counterarguing, elevation reducing counterarguing, which in turn negatively influences self-efficacy.

4   Discussion

The initial objectives of the study were, first to identify the differences in entertainment experiences, resistance to persuasion and destigmatizing in response to comedy, human-interest and a hybrid genre of comedy and human-interest. Second, we looked at the underlying mechanics of achieving destigmatizing outcomes in response to the combination of comedy and human-interest.

We first hypothesized that comedy would stimulate less counterarguing, but more trivialization than human-interest. Surprisingly, compared to earlier findings (Nabi et al., 2007; Young, 2008; Moyer-Gusé et al., 2011), no evidence was detected that comedy leads to less counterarguing, it even stimulated more counterarguing than its alternatives. One possible explanation may be the nature of the comedy stimulus: we used clips of pure stand-up comedy, which tends to be rather confrontational in comparison to the narrative comedy included in previous studies. Another aspect was the way that counterarguing was measured, which could have led to a discrepancy in what the items intended to measure, and participant's interpretation. For example, after watching stand-up comedy about people of colour, it is possible that participants interpreted items like "I sometimes found myself thinking of ways I disagreed with the clip" as a way of disapproving of comedy about this topic, rather than going against the prosocial message behind *Taboe*, as this message is not as clearly articulated when comedy is taken out of context. We encourage future studies to evaluate existing counterarguing measures in relation to stand-up comedy. We also found that the negative relation between the conditions and counterarguing was mediated by experiences of enjoyment and elevation. Both

entertainment experiences had a negative effect on counterarguing, as such reducing the resistance a person experiences in response to the media content. Again, it is interesting to consider this through the lens of our results regarding comedy and counterarguing: enjoyment is experienced most in response to comedy, and enjoyment then lowers counterarguing. This means that other factors must play a role in comedy's relation to counterarguing in this study. In earlier research by Nabi et al. (2007), perceived humour was associated with counterarguing through trivialization, source liking and processing depth. Of those three, source liking and processing depth minimized counterarguing. Our research did not include such measures, but future research may consider exploring the role of source liking in counterarguing responses to stand-up comedy materials.

We also suggest that comedy only lowers counterarguing insofar as it is enjoyed, but actually leads to increased counterarguing when it is not enjoyed. Previous research (Nabi et al., 2007) has shown the relation between perceived humour and reduced counterarguing, but for now, no studies have explored counterarguing responses in comedy which is not enjoyed. Considering Nabi et al.'s (2007) results, it is reasonable to consider that those who do not enjoy comedy regarding minorities, would find themselves arguing against the entire notion that this type of comedy should even be performed or exist. Future research is warranted.

We next hypothesized that the combination would bring the "best of both worlds" by reducing both counterarguing (driven by comedy), and trivialization (the added value of human-interest). While we found no evidence that the combination led to lower counterarguing when compared to human-interest, this could again be related to our previous discussion regarding counterarguing and stand-up comedy. However, the combination did lead to less trivialization than comedy. This finding extends former research in a meaningful way, by demonstrating that the entertaining format of human-interest can provide counterbalance to comedy, by minimizing trivialization. As has been argued by Moyer-Gusé et al. (2011) trivialization is a risk one takes when using humour to discuss

serious (i.e., health or social) topics, and this study provides first evidence that human-interest can be a valuable way to counteract such reactance. Additionally, the results indicate that the experience of being provoked to think about the content partially mediates the negative effect of these conditions on trivialization. This of course seems only natural: if trivialization is the absence of reflection, the presence of thought should in fact result in lower trivialization scores.

We hypothesized that entertainment experiences would play a key role in stimulating prosocial outcomes, as eudaimonic experiences have been linked to perspective taking, altruism, connection and helping behaviour. We proposed that not only eudaimonic experiences, but also the combination of hedonic and eudaimonic experiences, would drive such outcomes in response to a hybrid genre. We first explored whether these entertainment experiences can in fact work alongside each other. Our study largely confirmed our hypotheses: the combination was found to be similarly funny and enjoyable as comedy, and as thought-, reflection- and elevation provoking as human-interest. This has implications for future designs of E-E television programs, and for the research regarding entertainment experiences. We offer evidence that both entertainment experiences can simultaneously occur, and therefore open the door to combining both beneficial outcomes. However, no significant outcomes were found regarding differences in attitudes between the combination and comedy or human-interest. Surprisingly, and while not hypothesized, results show that comedy actually produced more favourable attitudes than human-interest. Our later mediation analysis indicated a significant negative direct relation from the conditions of human-interest and combination to attitudes, but also a significant positive indirect relation from those conditions to attitudes, via elevation. One possible explanation could be that the driver for positive attitudes towards the outgroup is to be found in positive affective experiences, aside from minimizing trivialization or counterarguing, or the genre. In combination with the knowledge that the combination's negative direct impact on attitude was notably smaller than the influence

of human-interest alone, we propose this as an argument in favor of genre hybridity's positive influence on destigmatizing outcomes.

Additionally, the combination led to a significantly higher perception of self-efficacy to engage in future intergroup contact, when compared to the outcomes of comedy or human-interest. We conducted a serial mediation analysis and found that elevation and counterarguing sequentially mediated the relation between the conditions and self-efficacy. In the case of human-interest, we found both direct and indirect effects, but in the case of the combination, the full impact of the condition on the dependent variable of self-efficacy was mediated by elevation and its resulting lowering of counterarguing. Again, while human-interest itself had a negative impact on self-efficacy, its positive impact on elevation and its negative impact on counterarguing help keep the negative effects on self-efficacy at bay.

If we compare all of this to the combination condition, we find that when comedy is introduced, the direct negative impact disappears, and only the beneficial associations remain, leading to higher levels of elevation, lower levels of counterarguing, and resulting in a stronger perception of one's ability to engage in future intergroup contact. No significant association between the combination and enjoyment was found, meaning that the combination also manages to stimulate as much enjoyment as the comedy condition.

Most likely, the forming of a parasocial relation (Schiappa et al., 2006) plays a role in this outcome, and it is interesting to consider how elevation and other positive affective experiences may play a role in achieving such outcomes. One's perception of self-efficacy can help to reduce prejudice regarding intergroup conversations and contact, encouraging viewers to engage in exactly such behaviour in the future. We would argue that it is exactly the combination of comedy's positive affective experiences and the background provided by human-interest, that brings about this potentially promising outcome. This has been argued before by Fitzgerald et al. (2019), who found that positive emotions can drive willingness to engage in helping behaviour. A future

study with a focus on the role of positive emotions, self-efficacy and achieving such willingness outcomes is warranted.

5   Conclusion

The main goal of this study was to determine differences in audience responses to a hybrid entertainment-education format that combined stand-up comedy with human-interest. The study contributes to the growing body of research that looks into the underlying mechanisms of entertainment-education, and entertainment experiences of different genres. Insofar as we know, this study is the first to focus on a hybrid genre of non-fiction entertainment.

The study showed that this hybrid genre managed to minimize trivialization of comedy, stimulated as much hedonic experiences and elevation, and led to higher perceptions of self-efficacy, when compared to its separate counterparts. We also found additional evidence for the role that elevation plays in achieving destigmatizing and prosocial outcomes in response to entertainment(-education). Our research enhances our understanding of combined entertainment experiences and their implications for destigmatizing outcomes and links these insights to the literature on narrative persuasion. By doing so, we were able to find evidence for suggestions made earlier by Nabi et al. (2007) regarding the "restoration of gravity" as a way to counteract trivialization outcomes in response to E-E comedy. We want to merge these two insights: offering context and background to minority groups' stories does not require dry, stuffy information. These insights are also not limited to strategic entertainment-education purposes, considering the materials used in this study were not part of an entertainment-education campaign. Rather, thinking about eudaimonic experiences and sincerity, can offer a framework for producers to reflect on the way we bring the stories of minorities into the audience's living rooms in prime time, without foregoing either entertainment or educational purposes, also through non-fiction genres. Restoring gravity does not mean sacrificing entertainment or positivity, and the experience of elevation holds promise in achieving this difficult balance.

The generalizability of these results is subject to certain limitations. For instance, our clips came from only one television program, namely *Taboe*. The data were gathered from a young, Flemish, highly educated and mostly female sample. A natural progression of this work is to study the mediating roles of entertainment experiences and resistance to persuasion between the conditions and their prosocial outcomes. More information regarding their positions in stimulating these outcomes, can contribute not only to the research on entertainment-education, but could formulate even more concrete guidelines for creators and producers who want to explore hybrid genres and incorporate social and educative stories in their television programs.

9 ╳╳╳╳╳

KICKING UPSIDE DOWN: THE ROLE OF COMEDY TYPE AND IN-GROUP APPROVAL IN ENJOYMENT AND ACCEPTANCE OF DISABILITY COMEDY BY NON-DISABLED COMEDIANS
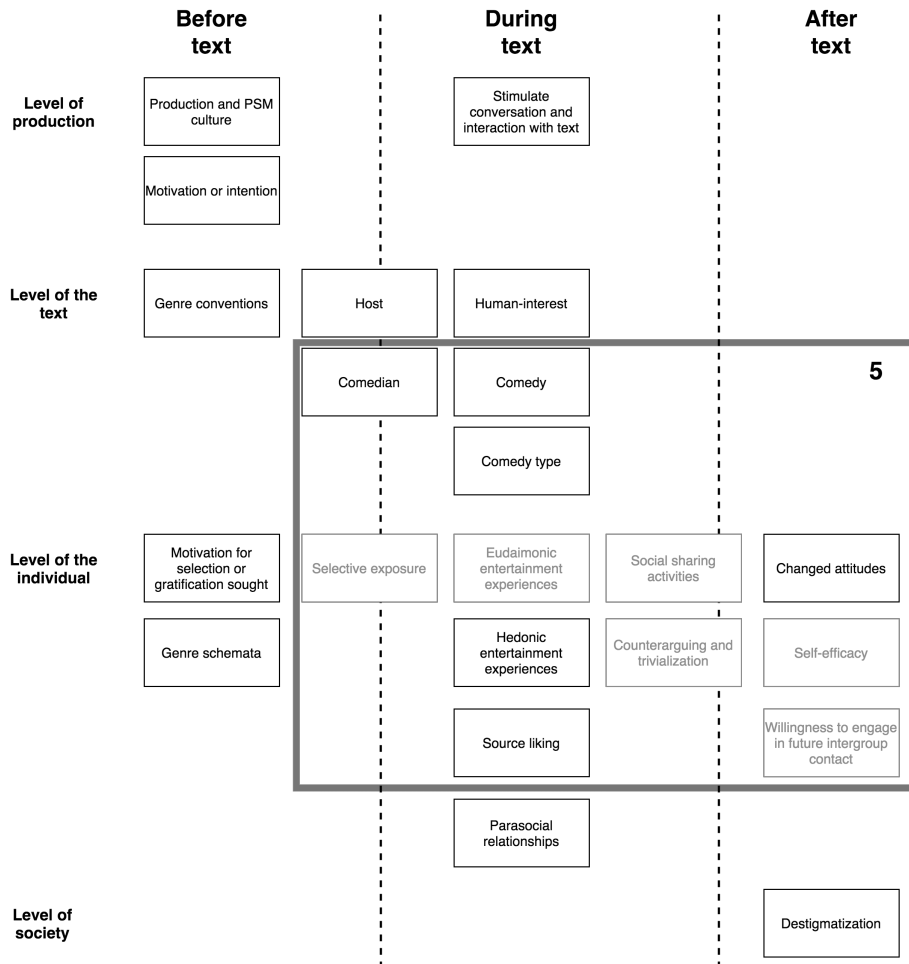
Chapter nine: Kicking upside down: the role of comedy type and in-group approval in enjoyment and acceptance of disability comedy by non-disabled comedians

I'm a special kind of white guy
I self-reflected, and I want to be an agent of change
So I am gonna use my privilege for the good (Very cool, way to go!)
American white guys
We've had the floor for at least 400 years
So maybe I should just shut the fuck up...
- Comedy, Bo Burnham (2021)

The manuscript of this article was submitted for publication in *Humor: the international Journal of Humor Research* on 5th October 2021. I was the sole author on this manuscript. It is currently under review.

Abstract: Social norms state that comedy about disabled persons will be more accepted and enjoyed when it is either self-directed or "kicks up", created by disabled comedians and targeting those with more social power. Up to now, the allowance to engage in the creation of disability comedy has mostly been studied in relation to one's own status of having a disability. However, there seems to be lack of research which separates the style of comedy from the source. This manuscript includes the results of an online experiment that tested the influence of comedy type and group approval on enjoyment and evaluations of the non-disabled comedian. Results show that comedy in an adaptive style is more enjoyed, and that enjoyment leads to more positive evaluations of the comedian. Additionally, disability comedy is enjoyed more when the audience is aware that the targeted group approves of the comedy, which also leads to more positive evaluations of the comedian. The study contributes to the research on disability comedy by distinguishing the influences of comedy type and approval by the targeted group. Additionally, findings can help future comedy creators to consider how they address disability, but also to include disabled persons in their creation process.

Overview Figure 7 *Position of the fifth study in the overall dissertation*

	Before text	**During text**		**After text**
Level of production	Production and PSM culture	Stimulate conversation and interaction with text		
	Motivation or intention			
Level of the text	Genre conventions	Host	Human-interest	
		Comedian	Comedy	5
			Comedy type	
Level of the individual	Motivation for selection or gratification sought	Selective exposure	Eudaimonic entertainment experiences	Social sharing activities	Changed attitudes
	Genre schemata		Hedonic entertainment experiences	Counterarguing and trivialization	Self-efficacy
			Source liking		Willingness to engage in future intergroup contact
			Parasocial relationships		
Level of society					Destigmatization

Study five

Comedy and entertainment have been reliable, accessible ways to introduce audiences to topics they are unaware of or not knowledgeable about, including the representation of minority groups. In a unique example, Flemish public broadcaster VRT introduced its audience to *Taboe* (2018), a television program with the tagline "laughing at things we should not be laughing at". Each episode of *Taboe* discussed a new topic that is considered "taboo" to joke about, including physical disability, mental illness, blindness and visual impairment, people of color and others. Every episode introduced four or five non-celebrity participants as representatives. The program's host was Philippe Geubels, a successful stand-up comedian and Flemish celebrity. The

host and participants spent one week together in a house, where they lived together and Geubels conducted interviews. Each episode compiled human-interest segments with fragments from a stand-up comedy performance on the taboo subject, filmed in front of the participants and a wider audience, including other members of the represented group and other stakeholders such as family, friends, and caretakers. The television program became one of the most successful television shows of the past years. At the time of writing, the program was nominated for an international Emmy Award for Non scripted Entertainment and international versions have been made in Switzerland, Canada, and Australia (Panenka, 2021). It was not only well-received by members of the general public (De Ridder, Vandebosch et al., 2021), but by members of the represented stigmatized groups as well (Van den Abbeel, 2018; Van Tendeloo, 2018). At its peak, over one quarter of the Flemish population watched *Taboe*. The program also managed to stimulate conversation and impact, with 22% of an audience panel indicating that the program actively taught them something (Weckx, 2018).

Overall, comedy about minorities and disabled persons will be more accepted and enjoyed when it "kicks up", meaning that it comes from the minority and targets majority group members or persons with more social power. However, this successful format that managed to have a positive, lasting impact on almost one quarter of its audience, and gathered positive responses from several stigmatized groups, did the exact opposite. Based on previous research and other comedy examples, I hypothesized that its success depended on the type of comedy and explicit approval by the participants. While *Taboe* did not limit its topics to disability alone, this study focusses on disability comedy (Reid et al., 2006), as previous research has found that Flanders lacks in genre-diverse representation of persons with disabilities (Vertoont, 2019). *Taboe* seems to form one recent exception to this rule and inspired the current study due to its novel approach. This manuscript includes the results of an online experiment that tested the influence of comedy type and group approval on enjoyment and evaluations of the

comedian. Additionally, I am interested in seeing how type, approval and individual experiences influence the potential of disability comedy to result in positive attitude change.

1 Literature review

1.1 Disability humour: type and source status

It is well documented that the context and processes of joke telling are at least as important as the content of the joke (Douglas, as discussed in Mintz, 1985) when it comes to understanding the meaning of jokes. And while not all types of humour are suitable to all situations or audiences (Buijzen & Valkenburgh, 2004), it has been established that an audience's appreciation of jokes depends on directionality (Bucaria & Barra, 2016; Graefer & Das, 2017; Littlewood & Pickering, 1998) and their target (Sultanoff, 1995). Kuipers (2011) refers to these rules as the so-called "humour regime", a discursive regime within which comedy and jokes are understood and which sets rules for who is allowed to laugh at what, such as what types of comedy or topics are off-limits. When it comes to comedy about sensitive topics, adaptive styles of comedy (Martin et al., 2003) tend to be more appreciated, due to their more positive, good-natured and non-hostile functions (Samson & Gross, 2012). Martin et al. (2003) highlight how comedy is conceptualized through a lens combining function, form, and style. In their categorization of adaptive comedy, type elements include benign and benevolent jokes, and sets itself apart from maladaptive types of comedy, which include denigration, excessive teasing, and ridicule (Zillmann, 1983 in Martin et al., 2003). This paper will follow this distinction when discussing adaptive versus maladaptive comedy types. In what follows, I will discuss how disability comedy has been defined through the lens of comedy type and comedy source.

Disabled people have been a target of jokes historically, even when social norms and the rules of laughter forbade it (Lockyer, 2015). Haller and Ralph (2003) introduce the idea that disability comedy has worked itself through several stages throughout the 20th century and up to a 21st century, integrated approach. Whereas phase one consisted of freak shows and a representation of disabled persons as "fools", phase

two marked itself with "sick" comedy, emphasizing the limitations experienced by the disabled persons rather than upholding a societal perspective on disability. In the third stage, disabled people step center stage and take up the comedic mic. Their focus is often not aimed at disability itself, but at society's limits in how it handles disability and issues of access, or (dis)comfort around disability. The phase is characterized by its potential to introduce non-disabled audiences to a new perspective on disability and their treatment of disabled persons. Haller and Ralph (2003) offer that a fourth stage of disability humour had sprung into existence by casting off the disability-focused approach to introduce an integrated approach. The disabled person is one of many sources of comedy, rather than the target of mockery. There is no specific focus: it is comedy, and sometimes disability is just one more funny thing, as many human features and experiences can be. In that way, comedy contributes to normalizing disability by using its potential to share new perspectives on sensitive subjects (Graefer & Das, 2017). In their study on the difference between other-directed and self-directed humour about a blind political candidate (senator David Paterson), Becker and Haller (2014) found that people exposed to other-directed humour scored marginally lower on attitudes toward blindness when compared to those in a self-directed, control or even neutral condition. They suggest that it may have been Paterson's presence in the clip, and willing contribution to the comedy therein, which led the participants to evaluate the candidate more favourably, along with more favourable attitudes toward blindness in general.

Reid et al. (2006) differentiate between "disabling humour" and "disability humour". Disabling humour is denigrating humour as categorized in phase one and two, created by non-disabled persons, whereas disability humour is comedy created by persons with disabilities, using their own experiences as the source and inspiration. Also, in other studies (Ellithorpe et al., 2014; Becker & Haller, 2014), comedy about disability is labelled as either self-directed positive humour, or other-directed hostile humour. Up to now, the allowance to engage in the creation of disability comedy has mostly been studied in

relation to one's own status of having a disability. However, there seems to be lack of research which separates the style of comedy from the source, being the comedian. As shown in research regarding disability comedy, people evaluate a comedian more positively once they are made aware of their status as being disabled (Ellithorpe et al., 2014). By manipulating the awareness of the comedian's status, the comedy style also changes from other-deprecating to self-deprecating. Ellithorpe et al. (2014) discuss how this change is crucial for people's enjoyment of comedy (in their case, cartoons) and evaluations of the comedian himself. However, no matter how logical and inseparable the connection between the source of the comedy and the type, it clouds the potential to identify the separate influences on humour appreciation, comedian evaluation and possible attitude outcomes toward the addressed minority.

It becomes clear that previous studies have focussed on either self-directed disability humour, created by a disabled comedian who offers a peak behind the curtain and takes back control, or on its disparaging counterpart: the comedians who mock and ridicule by using other-directed hostile humour and as such, maintain and contribute to dangerous and stigmatizing perspectives on disability (Kuipers, 2011). In the case of *Taboe*, the included comedy seems to fall somewhere between phase two, three, and four as discussed by Haller and Ralph (2003), with the exception that all of this comedy was not delivered by a member of the disabled community, but rather by a non-disabled comedian. Based on the aforementioned humour regimes surrounding disability comedy, this alone should have resulted in disapproval from a wider audience, due to its breaking the rules regarding kicking up and down.

However, an in-depth content analysis of the stand-up comedy style in *Taboe* (De Ridder, Van den Bulck & Vandebosch, 2021) categorized its style as a positive mix of self- and other-directed humour, referred to as adaptive comedy (Martin et al., 2003). First, by taking the perspective of the privileged, non-disabled, white, male celebrity comedian to mock his own and society's lack of success in

understanding minority groups and discomfort surrounding disabilities. But secondly, also by using experiences shared by disabled participants of the program as a starting point for less hostile types of humour, without targeting or mocking the disabled person directly. I suggest this positive, non-hostile style contributed to the successful impact of the television program, and its popularity with the wide audience. This brings us to the following hypothesis:

> H1: Participants who are exposed to a more inclusive, adaptive type of comedy will (a) experience more enjoyment, (b) evaluate the comedian more positively, and (c) score higher on positive attitudes, when compared to participants in the control or "maladaptive humour" conditions.

1.2 Implied approval by proximity

A second gap in research becomes apparent when looking at comedians who engage in disability comedy without being disabled themselves, but rather from a position of proximity to disability. Guttiérez et al. (2018) found that group approval has an overall positive effect on how funny people find comedy about their own in-group. Their study shows that students find disparaging humour about student life funnier if they believe other students favour the included humour. It also shows that disparaging humour has negative potential: it can influence an in-group to accept negative characteristics about oneself more easily. However, while students may sometimes be portrayed in a negative light, their experiences cannot be compared with those of people with disability. Additional studies are necessary. Our research will consider the influence of group approval on enjoyment in an out-group sample and introduce the idea of a liked and approved-of comedy source, namely the comedian.

An audience's response to comedy depends on cultural and social norms, which is exactly what comedy plays around with: by creating incongruity or surprise, comedy comes into existence (Meyer, 2000). However, as discussed above, all comedy is created within a humour regime, which puts up certain rules of who is allowed to laugh at what.

Anderson (2019) illustrates how comedian Daniel Sloss' Edinburgh Fringe performance (2015) and later Netflix special "Dark" (2019) includes stories about Sloss' sister Josie, who had cerebral palsy. Sloss plays with his audience by breaking norms, addressing their discomfort, and next reassuring the audience that he is allowing them to enjoy the jokes. As such, Sloss created a "safe space in which to engage with this discomfort" (Anderson, 2019, p. 23). While Daniel Sloss has no experience of what it is like to be disabled himself, he has real-life experience with life that includes disability and how ableism influences everyday life (Lane, 2019). He also stresses that humour and disability can go together, because "disability can be hysterical" (Sloss, 2015). Looking back at the audience's appreciation of comedy about disability, the norm would state the audience should and would not allow a non-disabled comedian to engage in such style of comedy. However, due to his confrontation of the norm and his first-hand experience, the audience allows Sloss to make these jokes, and feels comfortable to engage in laughter.

Taboe created a similar system by performing its stand-up comedy in front of an audience made up entirely of people who have experience with the topic of the week and shows them enjoying – and therefore: implied approving of – the comedy that is being brought by this comedian who lacks first-hand experience. This led audience members at home to evaluate the comedian and his comedy in a positive way (De Ridder, Vandebosch & Dhoest, 2021). Thus, rather than relying on the status of the comedian as an in-group member (Reid et al., 2006, Graefer & Das, 2017), these viewers seem to rely on approval given by these in-group members. This brings us to our second research hypothesis:

> H2: Participants who are aware that the targeted group explicitly approves of the comedy, will (a) experience more enjoyment, (b) evaluate the comedian more positively, and (c) score higher on positive attitudes, when compared to participants in the control or "disapproval" conditions.

1.3 The mediating role of enjoyment

Finally, this study aims to explore the position of comedy enjoyment in this process. When it comes to stimulating awareness, knowledge and intended action, Borum-Chattoo and Feldman (2017) show that a hybrid documentary/comedy outperforms its serious counterpart. The authors highlight the potential of an understudied mediator in narrative persuasion: the perceived entertainment value. As evidenced by both Nabi et al. (2007) and Ellithorpe et al. (2014), evaluations of the comedy, specifically how funny one finds the comedy or how much it is enjoyed, also play a key role in evaluations of the comedian. While the role of comedy in stimulating social change and prosocial outcomes has been discussed, no direct effect of comedy on attitude change has been found (Nabi et al., 2007). However, little research has been done regarding the mediating role of comedy enjoyment in the effect of comedy or even entertainment exposure on prosocial attitudes. Schneider et al. (2016) found that enjoyment was positively related to one's perception of having learned something, which was associated with behavioural intentions. However, Zhao (2018) found no evidence for a mediating role of enjoyment in stimulating prosocial outcomes. This brings us to our final research question:

> RQ1: How does enjoyment of the comedy mediate the relations between group approval and humour type (IVs), and the evaluation of the comedian and positive attitudes towards the in-group (DVs)?

2 Methodology

To test these hypotheses and answer this research question, the study relied on a two (comedy style: adaptive/maladaptive) by three (group approval: control/disapproval/approval) between-subjects quasi-experimental design with an online survey using Qualtrics software. Participants were exposed to descriptions of a fictional comedian and three jokes, manipulated to fit the conditions.

2.1 Participants

For this study to have 95% power to detect an effect of .25 with a .05 significance level, a minimum of 324 participants had to be recruited. Participants were recruited with the help of a professional recruitment agency to reach demographically diverse samples in Flanders, Belgium. I recruited Dutch speaking respondents in Flanders, as the survey and materials were in Dutch. Considering the cultural aspect to understanding comedy (Mintz, 1985), it was important to recruit only persons from Flanders, leading us to exclude Dutch-speaking participants who indicated living in other countries than Belgium. 10 participants indicated being blind or visually impaired themselves. Because this study focusses on out-group individuals' experiences of disability comedy, these participants were excluded from our dataset. The final sample of participants (N=408) were 50 years old on average (M = 50.05, SD = 16.55), 50.7% male and 52.9% enjoyed higher education (three years Bachelors' degree or higher). 64.9% of the participants indicated being averagely to highly interested in stand-up comedy (M=4.68, SD = 1.49).

Participants were informed that the study would be about comedy and entertainment, would take 15 minutes and that they would be exposed to some comedy fragments during the course of the study. The recruitment agency incentivized participants by rewarding them with credits for completing a survey. These credits could later be used to purchase a range of items in the platform's online store. Our participants were rewarded 110 points, which translates into a monetary value of around €1, depending on what products participants purchase.

2.2 Procedure and stimulus materials

All participants were randomly assigned to one of six conditions. All participants were exposed to a description of a fictional comedian and three jokes. The description of the comedian was written in the style of a promotional flyer for a live stand-up comedy show, introducing the comedian. This introduction mentioned past success by the comedian, and that the target in their new show would be the blind and visually

impaired community. The text was manipulated to include either explicit approval or disapproval by blind persons. In the control condition, no mention of approval or disapproval was included. Jokes were taken from *Taboe*, season 1 episode 2, which centered blind and visually impaired persons. Because the style of stand-up comedy used in *Taboe* was very adaptive, three jokes were manipulated to be more maladaptive in style.

After this, the participants continued the questionnaire with measures of their enjoyment of the comedy, their evaluations of the comedian and their attitude towards blind and visually impaired persons, and blindness in general.

2.3 Open science practices

Approval was obtained from the University of Antwerp's Ethics Committee (Dossier number: SHW_21_68), before participant recruitment began. Stimulus materials, data sets and more detailed results will be available on an Open Science Framework project page: https://osf.io/g46zt/?view_only=78ce48185908419485a49e45bfbbd07f

2.4 Measures

2.4.1 Independent variables

Sociodemographic background: gender (male/female/other/rather not say), age, level of education and professional occupation.

Belonging to ingroup and intergroup contact: An adjusted version of items used by Schiappa, Greg and Hewes (2006) were included, which consists of questions meant to categorize the level of intergroup social contact. This includes statements such as "I don't know any people who belong to group x" or "I have more than 3 friends or close contacts who belong to group x". Based on the study by Ellithorpe et al. (2014), the questionnaire included an item that gages whether someone is blind or visually impaired themselves.

Liking of stand-up comedy: one item was included to gage one's appreciation or dislike of stand-up comedy. Participants were asked to rate on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 7 (very much) how interested they are in stand-up comedy as a form of entertainment.

Humour type: Every person has a preference for a certain type of humour style. This measure was included because it could explain why a participant enjoys certain jokes more or less. The Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ, Martin et al. 2003) consists of 32-items that measures four styles of humour: two adaptive (non-hostile, benevolent) and two maladaptive (hostile, ridiculing). Higher scores indicate that the person uses a certain style more. This scale includes items such as "I laugh and joke a lot with my friends" (affiliative, $\alpha = .837$), "If I am feeling depressed, I can usually cheer myself up with humour." (self-enhancing, $\alpha = .804$), "If someone makes a mistake, I will often tease them about it." (aggressive, $\alpha = .674$) and "I let people laugh at me or make fun of me at my expense more than I should." (self-defeating, $\alpha = .808$) (7-point Likert-type scale, 1 'totally disagree' to 7 'totally agree').

2.4.2 Manipulation check

To ensure participants correctly interpreted the materials, three manipulation check items were included.

Adaptive or maladaptive: This item accounted for the intended comedy type. Participants rated the jokes on a 7-point Likert-type scale for the following items: 'positive', 'negative', 'kind' or 'rude/mean'.

Group approval: This item was included to confirm whether it was clear for the participants whether blind and visually impaired people as a group approved or disapproved of the comedian making jokes at their expense, or whether no mention was made (being the control condition) (7-point Likert-type scale, 1 'not at all' to 7 'very much').

2.4.3 Mediating and dependent variables

Entertainment experience of enjoyment ($\alpha = .979$) was assessed by combining two measures that have been proven suitable for measuring experiences of comedic content in previous research. The first being the remaining item from the perceived humour measure from Nabi et al. (2007), being 'amusing', 'funny', and 'humorous'. The second came from Oliver and Bartsch's (2010) OB scale, of which I only used the three enjoyment items. This includes items such as "It was fun for me to watch

this movie". Items were adjusted to fit the manipulation, i.e. "It was fun for me to read these jokes." (7-point Likert-type scale, 1 'not at all' to 7 'very much')

Evaluation of the comedian ($\alpha = .940$): I based our measure on Nabi et al. (2007), who used three 7-point semantic differentials to evaluate liking the comedian: '1 unfriendly/7 friendly', 'unlikeable/likeable' and 'unpleasant/pleasant'. I separated these differentials into six items and added four: 'congenial', 'tormentor', 'good company' and 'bully'.

Attitude toward blind and visually impaired persons ($\alpha = .745$): To assess attitudes toward blind and visually impaired persons, I used the Social Responsibility about Blindness Scale (SRBS, Bell & Silverman, 2011). The use of this scale was authorized by the original authors. The scale has been found suitable to measure both blind and non-blind persons' attitude toward blindness and visual impairment (Rowland & Bell, 2012). This psychometrically validated scale consists of 20 items, such as for example "It is irresponsible of blind people to have children" and "Blindness is just a normal characteristic like being tall or short." (7-point Likert-type scale, 1 'not at all' to 7 'very much').

2.5 Data analysis

To test the hypotheses, Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA) with a bootstrapping procedure and mediation analysis using Hayes' Process Macro (model 4) with bootstrapping were performed in SPSS 27. Preliminary analyses indicated that the multivariate normality assumption was violated for the variables of enjoyment and comedian evaluation, as determined via the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk statistic. However, MANCOVA and regression analyses are known to be fairly robust to violations of normality assumptions (Atiqullah, 1964; Tabachnick & Fidel, 1996) and bootstrapping is an approach that takes normality violation into account by repeatedly selecting data points for the existing sample. Mean scores (as reported in Table 1) on enjoyment, evaluation of the comedian and attitude toward blindness were compared. Age, liking of stand-up comedy, gender, a dummy for use of adaptive comedy style and a dummy for use of maladaptive comedy

style were added as control variables. In a next step, four mediation analyses were conducted to test the mediating role of enjoyment. The results of the MANCOVA analyses were used to select the covariates that would be included in the mediation analyses. In all analyses, 0.05 was used as significance level, and partial eta squared as effect size indicator. The latter was interpreted as 0.01 (small), 0.09 (medium), and 0.25 (large) (Cohen, Miles, & Shevlin, 2001). All the hypotheses and research questions were specified before the data were collected.

3   Results

3.1   Manipulation checks

A manipulation check showed that the jokes in the adaptive condition were understood as significantly more positive ($M_{difference}$ = .61, $F(1,406)$= 17.25, p <.000) and well-meant ($M_{difference}$= .56, $F(1,406)$=13.732, p <.000) than those in the maladaptive condition.

A second manipulation check showed that jokes in the approval condition scored significantly higher on items asking whether the participants thought that blind and visually impaired persons would appreciate ($F(2,405)$= 5.30, p < .01) and enjoy ($F(2,405)$=8.25, p <.000) the comedy, and scored significantly lower on an item measuring whether participants thought the group would disapprove of it ($F(2,405)$=6.31, p <.01). See Table 1 for an overview of the mean scores on this manipulation check. Due to a failed manipulation on the level of the disapproval condition, I aggregated the data from the disapproval and control group. No significant differences were found between the control and disapproval condition for any of the manipulation checks, as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 *Bonferroni Post Hoc multiple comparisons*

		Appreciate	Enjoy	Disapprove
Control condition	Disapproval condition	.10	-.01	-.04
	Approval condition	-.42*	-.61*	.49*
Approval condition	Disapproval condition	.52*	.59*	-.53*

Note. Mean differences reported. * = significant difference on the p < .05 level. Items: "please indicate below how much you think blind and visually impaired persons would appreciate/enjoy/disapprove of these jokes"

3.2   Multivariate results and covariates

MANCOVA analysis with 1000 bootstrap samples was performed to test hypotheses 1 and 2. Because I wanted to take into account a potential interaction effect, a MANCOVA with both conditions and an interaction term was conducted. The conditions are comedy type (Adaptive/maladaptive) and ingroup approval (Control/approval). Age, gender, education, comedy liking, and two dummy variables indicating preferred comedy style were added as covariates. Aggregating the control and disapproval manipulations into one control condition resulted in unequal sample sizes ($N_{control}$ =270, $N_{approval}$ =138). However, Box's test of equality of covariance matrices was not significant (M=25.24, *p* = .129), showing that the equal variances assumption was not violated.

The multivariate result was significant for condition comedy type (*Pillai's Trace* = .054, *F(3,396)* = 7.522, *p* < .000) and the condition group approval (*Pillai's Trace* = .04, *F(3,396)* = 5.182, *p* < .01), but not the interaction of both conditions (*Pillai's Trace* = .006, *F(3,396)* = .756, *p* = .520). Since no interaction effect was found, only the univariate results will be reported below.

Assessing the covariates' simple main effects on the dependent variables, the results revealed that the covariate age had an association with enjoyment (*F(1)* = 18.249, *p* < .000, partial η^2 = .044) and attitudes

($F(1)$ = 9.151, p < .01, partial η^2 = .022), but not evaluations of the comedian ($F(1)$ = 2.371, p = .124, partial η^2 = .006). The covariate liking of stand-up comedy had an association with enjoyment ($F(1)$ = 18.954, p < .000, partial η^2 = .045), evaluation of the comedian ($F(1)$ = 30.59, p < .000, partial η^2 = .071), but not with attitudes ($F(1)$ = 3.685, p = .056, partial η^2 = .009).

The other covariates (gender, dummy adaptive comedy style, dummy maladaptive comedy style) were not significant predictors for any of the outcome variables.

Table 2 *Mean scores per condition*

		Enjoyment	Comedian evaluation	Attitudes blind and visually impairedness
Adaptive	Control (N = 66)	4.10 (1.61)	4.41 (1.25)	53.21 (7.69)
	Disapproval (N = 72)	4.27 (1.47)	4.39 (1.28)	54.62 (7.35)
	Approval (N = 70)	4.79 (1.38)	4.99 (1.01)	55.62 (8.71)
	Total	4.39 (1.51)	4.60 (1.21)	54.51 (7.96)
Maladaptive	Control (N=64)	3.49 (1.61)	4.08 (1.30)	55.42 (8.82)
	Disapproval (N=68)	3.55 (1.70)	4.05 (1.04)	55.65 (8.43)
	Approval (N=68)	3.99 (1.57)	4.54 (1.22)	55.40 (9.37)
	Total	3.68 (1.63)	4.23 (1.20)	55.49 (8.84)
Control		3.80 (1.63)	4.25 (1.28)	54.30 (8.31)
Disapproval		3.92 (1.62)	4.22 (1.18)	55.13 (7.88)
Approval		4.40 (1.52)	4.77 (1.14)	55.51 (9.01)
Total (N=408)		4.04 (1.61)	4.42 (1.22)	54.99 (8.41)

Note. Mean (standard deviation from the mean)

3.2.1 Condition comedy type

Next, the between-subject tests showed there was a significant difference between those exposed to the adaptive and maladaptive condition for enjoyment ($F(1)$ = 22.467, p < .000, partial η^2 = .053) and comedian evaluation ($F(1)$ = 10.484, p < .01, partial η^2 = .026), but not for attitudes towards blindness ($F(1)$ = .469, p = .494, partial η^2 = .001). Bonferroni corrected pairwise comparisons indicated which types of content differed significantly from each other for the dependent variables.

H1 predicted that participants who were exposed to the condition with adaptive comedy would evaluate the comedian more positively, and would score higher on positive attitudes toward blindness, when compared to those who were exposed to maladaptive comedy. Participants in the adaptive condition enjoyed the jokes more ($M_{difference}$ =.752, SE=.159, 95% CI [.440, 1.063], p < .000) and evaluated the comedian more positively ($M_{difference}$ =.394, SE=.122, 95% CI [.155, .633], p < .01) than those in the maladaptive condition, providing evidence to only the first part of hypothesis 1. As discussed above, no significant differences in attitudes toward blindness were found as a result of the condition.

3.2.2 Condition approval

The between-subject tests showed there was significant difference between those who saw the manipulation where the blind and visually impaired community approves and the control condition for enjoyment ($F(1)$ = 9.857, p < .01, partial η^2 = .024) and comedian evaluation ($F(1)$ = 14.414, p < .000, partial η^2 = .035), but not for attitudes towards blindness ($F(1)$ = 1.065, p = .303, partial η^2 = .003). Bonferroni corrected pairwise comparisons indicated the direction in which the types of content differed significantly from each other for the dependent variables.

H2 predicted that participants who were exposed to the approval condition would experience more enjoyment, evaluate the comedian more positively, and would score higher on positive attitudes towards blindness, when compared to participants in the disapproval or control

condition. I can not report results regarding the disapproval conditions based on the current study and will limit our discussion to the approval and control condition. Participants in the approval condition experienced more enjoyment than those in the control condition ($M_{difference}$ =.495, SE=.158, 95% CI [.185, .805], $p < .01$), providing evidence to the first part of hypothesis 2. Participants in the approval condition also evaluated the comedian more positively when compared to those in the aggregated control condition ($M_{difference}$ =.459, SE=.121, 95% CI [.221, .697], $p < .000$). This confirms the second part of hypothesis 2. As explained above, no evidence was found regarding the influence of the approval condition on attitudes towards blindness.

3.3　Mediation analysis

In order to test the mediating role of enjoyment in the effect of comedy type and group approval on the evaluation of the comedian and attitudes toward blindness and visual impairment (RQ1), four mediation analyses with 5000 bootstrap samples were conducted using Hayes PROCESS in SPSS (Hayes & Preacher, 2014). The first two had evaluation of the comedian as the dependent variable (DV), the next two had attitude as DV. Covariates age and liking of stand-up comedy were included in all four mediation analyses, based on the results of the aforementioned MANCOVA and their association with enjoyment.

　　　The first mediation analysis with comedy type as the independent variable and evaluation of the comedian as DV indicated that the model explained 57.69 % of the variance in evaluations of the comedian (R^2 = .5769, p <.000). The paths included in the model are presented in Table 3. The mediation analysis shows that there is a significant indirect relation between the maladaptive comedy condition and evaluation of the comedian, via enjoyment (β = -.32, 95% BCI = [-.56, -.22]), as can be seen in figure 1. The direct relation between comedy type and comedian evaluations was not significant.

Table 3 *Mediating role of enjoyment in the effect of comedy type and in-group approval on comedian evaluation*

Path	B	SE	95% C.I.	p	β
Mediation model 1: Mediating role of enjoyment of comedy in the effect of comedy type on comedian evaluation					
Comedy type to enjoyment	-.70	.15	-1.00, -.41	.000	-.44
Age$_{(c)}$ to enjoyment	-.02	.01	-.03, -.01	.000	-.18
Liking comedy$_{(c)}$ to enjoyment	.25	.05	.15, .34	.000	.23
Enjoyment to evaluation comedian	.56	.03	.51, .61	.000	.74
Age$_{(c)}$ to evaluation comedian	.01	.00	.00, .01	.006	.09
Liking comedy$_{(c)}$ to evaluation comedian	.09	.03	.03, .14	.002	.10
Comedy type to evaluation comedian (direct relation)	.04	.08	-.12, .20	.599	.04
Comedy type on evaluation comedian via enjoyment	-.40	.09	-.56, -.22		-.32

Cont. Table 3

Path	B	SE	95% C.I.	p	β
Mediation model 2: Mediating role of enjoyment of comedy in the effect of group approval on comedian evaluation					
Approval to enjoyment	.50	.16	.18, .81	.002	.31
Age(c) to enjoyment	-.02	.01	-.03, -.01	.000	-.19
Liking comedy(c) to enjoyment	.24	.05	.14, .34	.000	.22
Enjoyment to comedian evaluation	.55	.03	.50, .60	.000	.73
Age(c) to evaluation comedian	.01	.00	.00, .01	.012	.08
Liking comedy(c) to evaluation comedian	.08	.03	.03, .14	.003	.10
Approval to evaluation comedian (direct relation)	.20	.09	.04, .37	.017	.17
Approval to evaluation comedian via enjoyment	.27	.09	.10, .45		.23

Note. Report the bootstrap results for B, SE and 95% CI. p-values are not calculated in process Hayes for the indirect effects. (c) refers to covariates. In the mediation with comedy type as IV, comedy type was coded as 0 = adaptive, 1 = maladaptive. In the mediation analysis with group approval as IV, approval was coded as 0 = control, 1 = approval.

Figure 1 *The indirect effect of maladaptive comedy on evaluations of the comedian via enjoyment*
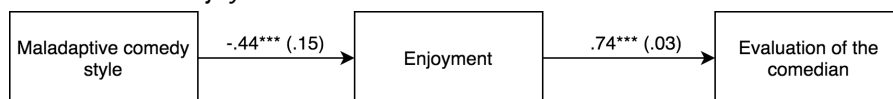
Note. Standardized coefficients reported. *p >.05. **p> .01. ***p> .001. Standard Error in parentheses.

The second mediation analysis with group approval as the IV and evaluation of the comedian as DV, indicated that the model explained 58.25% of the variance in the evaluations of the comedian (R^2 = .5825, p <.000). The paths included in the model are presented in Table 3. The mediation analysis shows that there is a significant direct relation from the explicit approval condition to evaluation of the comedian (β = .17, 95% BCI = .04, .36]). There is also a significant indirect relation between the explicit approval condition and the evaluation of the comedian via enjoyment (β = .23, 95% BCI = .08, .36]), as can be seen in Figure 2.

Figure 2 *The direct and indirect effect of group approval on evaluations of the comedian via enjoyment*

Note. Standardized coefficients reported. *p >.05. **p> .01. ***p> .001. Standard Error in parentheses.

For both models with evaluation of the comedian as the DV, the included covariates age and liking comedy were significant, predictors of how the comedian would be evaluated.

As discussed in the section above, the MANCOVA analyses indicated there would be no significant effects found of the conditions on attitudes toward blind and visually impaired persons and blindness. Mediation analyses confirmed these findings, results of which can be found in the appendix on the OSF-page linked to this article.

4   Discussion

In 2018, Flemish television program *Taboe* became a rating hit and had a positive impact on nearly one in four audience members, all by having a celebrity comedian perform stand-up comedy that deliberately broke the social norm regarding disability humour. This study analyses the

influence of comedy type and group approval on enjoyment, evaluations of the comedian and attitudes toward the represented group, in this case people who are blind or visually impaired.

A first key result is that participants evaluate the comedian more favourably when exposed to adaptive comedy compared to maladaptive comedy (H1). However, a mediation analyses later showed that this relation was entirely mediated by the amount of enjoyment experienced (RQ1). This indicates that rather than the style of comedy inherently influencing evaluations of the comedian, it is more dependent on how much people enjoy the comedy attributed to the source. This confirms earlier research regarding comedy about sensitive topics: more positive, adaptive styles of humour are enjoyed more (Sultanoff, 1995). The included covariate regarding which comedy style participants use in their daily lives (adaptive vs. maladaptive) did not indicate any relation with enjoyment or evaluations of the comedian, an interesting result. One would expect that a persons' own comedy style preference would translate into enjoyment of similar styles of stand-up comedy. It may be possible that the humour regime within which a person evaluates comedy plays a role here: a person may appreciate a ruder style of comedy in general, but not when it addresses disability. Future research should dive deeper into differentiating between funniness and comedy style or look closer at the demographics that play a role in those evaluations.

Secondly, as far as I am aware, at the time of writing, this study is the first to consider the separate influence of approval by the targeted group on out-group members' enjoyment and evaluations of the comedian. Our findings show that approval from the targeted group leads to more enjoyment and more positive evaluations of the comedian, compared to the control condition (H2). Once again, a mediation analysis showed that the relation between approval and evaluations was mediated by enjoyment (RQ2), but only partially. Group approval also has a direct effect on evaluations of the comedian, even when enjoyment as a mediator is taken into account. When I consider this in the light of earlier findings regarding the difference of enjoyment between self- and

other-directed humour, this provides new insight: maybe it is not (only) the style of comedy, but (also) its inherent approval that creates a safe space to engage with disability comedy. While several studies found that audiences enjoy self-directed and self-disparaging humour more, it may be that these results can also linked to the inherent approval these styles include, rather than the content of the comedy. The findings of this study can help to differentiate between the separate roles approval and comedy style play in audience experiences of such comedy. Considering the importance of what Haller and Ralph (2003) call the fourth phase of disability comedy, where disability is simply one of many sources of humour, this will become more important to create a safe and collaborative environment for both disabled and non-disabled comedy creators alike. I consider it beneficial that people prefer explicit or implicit approval from the targeted group to enjoy comedy more and approve of the source behind them. It shows that humour regimes and social norms regarding minorities function in their favour, rather than against them.

The lack of significant results regarding the influence of comedy type and approval on attitude toward blindness and visual impairment may be explained. Previous research has linked a sense of humour to prosocial tendencies (Curry & Dunbar, 2013), especially appreciation for more positive humour styles (Neuendorf et al., 2014). Our study showed that general liking of stand-up comedy was related to higher attitude outcomes, and our complete sample scored high on comedy liking overall. Our results confirm what has been found before by Nabi et al. (2007), that comedy does not lead to direct additional beneficial attitude change compared to other persuasive messages. However, in their study, Nabi et al. (2007) did find evidence for a sleeper effect, meaning participants may have been stimulated to later recount and remember jokes they were exposed to, as such contributing to destigmatization in a more constructive, but slower and less immediately measurable way. This, of course, is grounds for future research.

A first limitation of this study is that it was conducted in a specific cultural context, including only participants from Flanders. While it is difficult for studies on comedy to take into account the cultural

differences and compare them, it would be worthwhile for future research to recreate these results in other cultural settings. Another option would be to test our findings in regard to other stigmatized groups who may be the target of comedy, but may be denied (both physical and structural) access to comedic spaces (Lockyer, 2015), such as people with a physical disability other than blindness, or people of colour. Also worth exploring may be the inclusion of a neutral comedy style that lands somewhere between adaptive and maladaptive, which audience members evaluate as neither positive nor negative toward the targeted group. The current research suggests that adaptive comedy would lead to more enjoyment and more positive evaluations of a comedian, but no conclusions can be drawn regarding the effect of adding adaptive elements compared to a "neutral" comedy option – if such comedy can even exist. Future research is warranted.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that our intended disapproval manipulation did not result in a significant manipulation check. This condition included a phrase stating that not everyone would be a fan of the comedian's work targeting blind and visually impaired persons. In hindsight, the wording of this manipulation may have been too open-ended, and I would encourage future studies to be more explicit when manipulating disapproval of the targeted group. The fact that this study did not manage to manipulate a sense of disapproval, can also be a sign that one subjugating notion surrounding disabilities may be well in place: the assumption that minority groups should be able to "take a joke" (Kuipers, 2011). One avenue for future studies could be to explore what exactly it requires for an audience to understand and accept disapproval, and how this influences people's enjoyment and evaluations of the comedian.

5   Conclusion

This study found evidence that two underlying factors influence the amount of enjoyment one can derive from disability comedy, and how they influence evaluations of the comedian. Elaborating on past research, this study distinguished between the type of comedy and approval provided by the targeted group. Overall, I found that our Flemish sample most appreciates adaptive comedy and comedy approved of by the targeted community, showing that humour regimes regarding the boundaries of the targeted group follow existing social norms. How a comedian is evaluated is always mediated by how much his material is enjoyed, but also influenced by the idea that the target of the joke can approve of and enjoy the material as well.

The question is whether it is ever possible for a non-disabled person to engage in positive disability comedy, and even more importantly, whether it is even desirable to do so. As comedian Liam O'Carroll describes in Lockyer's (2015) work on live performances of comedy by disabled comedians and their experiences in the stand-up comedy scene, seeing their disability used by other non-disabled comedians as setups for jokes about them, can take away "control of how my blindness was made funny. I wanted to have a say in that." (O'Carroll in Lockyer 2015) This begs the question regarding approval from the disabled community itself, and answers seem to lie in active participation and accepting boundaries to ensure empowerment. As discussed by De Ridder, Van den Bulck et al. (2021), while *Taboe* may have been promoted as program that would "make fun of minorities", the program-makers intention seemed to lean more to answering that question: where and how should a line be drawn? By including the targeted group, the intention was to create a safe comedic space for all parties involved. Based on words of praise coming from participants (De Ridder, Vandebosch et al., 2021) and in-group members watching from home (Van den Abbeel, 2018; Van Tendeloo, 2018; Panis et al., 2019), it appears this goal was achieved.

These insights can help future comedy creators to consider not only the way they address minority and disabled groups, but also how to

include them in the creation process. Most importantly, these findings are far from a "free pass" for non-disabled or privileged comedians to engage in what Reid et al. (2006) refer to as "disabled comedy". Our study not only shows that participants enjoy comedy more when it is positive and approved of by the targeted group, it may also be considered a call for qualitative inclusion of disabled persons in the creation of comedy, and for comedians to lend their platforms to those who may not have the same facilitated access as them.

10
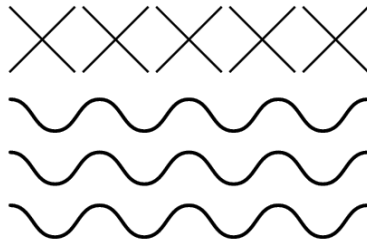
DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, FUTURE
RESEARCH, AND REFLECTION

The purpose of this dissertation was to combine and integrate multiple perspectives on the mechanics that make that a hybrid television programme can contribute to destigmatizing outcomes. By integrating the research of entertainment experiences with the framework of entertainment-education and narrative persuasion, we were able to identify several ways in which combining comedy with human-interest can help overcome several forms of resistance to persuasion. Additionally, the ecological perspective of our research shows the value of approaching a phenomenon from inception to reception. We did this by triangulating our methods and theoretical frameworks, taking into account not only experiences and outcomes of the text, but also the institutional and production decisions that shaped it. Because the focus of this dissertation is on discussing the combination of humour and human-interest, we want to bring attention to the concept as we dubbed it in the fifth chapter: Humour interest. In the following discussion, rather than referring to "the combination" or *Taboe* specifically, I will be referring to this hybrid television concept as such.

In this final chapter, I will first discuss the key findings that overarch the five studies included in this dissertation. The next section addresses the limitations of the research, and makes suggestions for future researchers to build upon our work. After that, I will formulate recommendations for future programme makers, comedians, and broadcasters by translating our findings to guidelines that can be useful when creating humour interest television with destigmatizing potential. Finally, I included a section that reflects on my own position as a researcher of this case study, and the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on this research.

1 Key findings

This dissertation contributes insights to several research fields, including television studies and research on public service media, media psychology, entertainment-education and comedy research. This discussion of our results will follow the order of the studies as presented in this dissertation. I will begin with broader insights that came from our

production and content analysis, and that first arose from our qualitative audience studies. In the third section, I will integrate those findings with the results from the final two studies, where these results were tested in a quantitative manner. This order will result in a discussion of our findings across three larger themes: to begin we will look back to where the introduction of this dissertation began, by addressing the public value of entertainment and comedy for public service media. This is followed by a discussion of the value of humour interest in general. The third section addresses the role of entertainment experiences in overcoming resistance to persuasion and entertainment-education. While this research also has valuable contributions to add regarding production practices, I opted to include those findings in the form of recommendations and guidelines for future programme and content creators, which can be found near the end of this chapter.

1.1   Public value of entertainment and comedy

In the introduction of this dissertation, I argued that motivations to steer PSM institutions away from creating entertaining content fail to fully understand the complex ways in which individuals enjoy and appreciate entertainment content. Throughout this dissertation, an image arose of entertainment experiences as enjoyable, but also as moving, emotional and thought-provoking, with potential for personal and social gratifications. Overall, based on the research presented in chapter five and six, we found that entertainment content can add value by being **universally appealing**, addressing a wider audience, including those who may be difficult to reach with more classically informative or more serious content.

On top of that, offering combined entertainment experiences in one format can strengthen that effect: by creating a programme that appeals to both hedonic and eudaimonic viewing motivations, the audience does not need to be divided into segments. Rather, it creates the potential for a television programme to increase **connection** among its viewers, both with the presented outgroup members on-screen, as well as with fellow ingroup audience members. As evidenced in chapter seven,

entertainment experiences are shared in an online context. As such, entertainment content creates value for individual viewers by offering an inroad to connect with a community beyond their immediate environment. From an entertainment-education perspective, online sharing can contribute to the potential prosocial benefits by continuing the discussion (Slater & Rouner, 2002). This could have the added benefit of reaching persons who (at first) were not exposed to the programme, but may notice it a week later, or by means of postponed viewing. We found indications of viewers using the programme as an example, urging for more attention to the addressed issues, even going so far as to address policy makers and set up grassroots initiatives to support people in need (nkdr, 2018). These conversations were often the result of so-called "have to tweets" moments, and therefore rely on the inclusion of surprising or suspenseful moments in the programme. By constructing the format around the challenging concept of humour interest, programme makers can facilitate these conversations even before the first broadcast has taken place.

1.2   The value of humour interest

Throughout our research, we identified several ways in which humour interest can be a unique concept to create television programmes about minorities and diversity. While I will discuss the ways in which humour interest can overcome resistance to persuasion in the following section, here I will discuss four additional attributes that we have found evidence for in the studies presented in the fifth, sixth and seventh chapter.

First, this comedic perspective can increase **selective exposure** to this type of content. Not only did the levity of jokes create a pleasant experience that stimulated audience members to continue to expose themselves to stories about and by outgroup members, but it was also the concept of humour interest that attracted attention even before the first episode was broadcast. Audience members were motivated to watch the programme by their curiosity (chapter six), but also an apparent need to be part of the phenomenon (chapter seven). Humour interest was also praised as a safe space for catharsis: experiencing

mixed affect responses rather than negative emotions alone, resulted in repeated exposure to the programme. According to audience members, the release of tension they experienced as a result of alternating human-interest with comedy was crucial to their overall positive viewing experience.

Second, humour interest offers a **different perspective** on the outgroup minority compared to classic documentary or human-interest approaches on Flemish television. Considering that truly diverse, qualitative representations of minorities remain a challenge for Flemish broadcasters (Vanlee, 2019; Panis et al., 2019; Vertoont et al., 2021), concerns exist not only about the quantitative, but also qualitative representation of minorities on television. As evidenced by Dhoest et al. (2021) it can be difficult for factual entertainment to find the right balance between entertaining and informing. However, the research presented in this dissertation shows that information and background can be provided without foregoing entertaining experiences. The research presented in chapter six and seven shows that audience members appreciate a positive and new perspective on diversity. Crucially, the audience expressed that they "felt" that the participants of *Taboe* also embraced this perspective. Based on our conversations with participants (chapter five) and testimonies of other participants (Delissen & Delva, 2019; De Milde, 2018; Van Tendeloo, 2018), it became clear that this comfort was not only fabricated for the purpose of reassuring the viewer, but actually a well-determined production practice. Based on these insights, I understand that the production team paid considerable attention to creating a space with its own humour regime during filming. However, this approach also has to be translated into the actual text that reaches the audience at home.

This brings us to a third contribution to the research, which is about the risks that come with the use of comedy to discuss minority issues. Next to curiosity, the announcement of the humour interest concept as a way to address minority topics also came with a darker form of curiosity, namely a sense of apprehension. Our research shows that humour interest can be a way to **negotiate existing humour**

regimes (Kuipers, 2006; 2011), if the right choices are made regarding the type, topic, directionality and context of comedy. By adjusting comedy type to the target of the jokes, a combination of adaptive and maladaptive comedy can be used to redraw boundaries between groups, and to establish new socially desirable behaviour. Our textual analysis indicated that humour interest can alternate between comedy styles to achieve a positive communication function, using adaptive humour to connect, and maladaptive humour to identify social and norm transgressions. Additionally, choosing the right comedy type resulted in a sense of shared laughter, which was increased by the production decision to visually and audibly include the audience of the comedy performance. Based on the work presented in chapter six, we know that audience members understood this as a form of "approval from the targeted group", which chapter nine explains as a crucially important factor for the enjoyment of comedy about minorities. We extend on the existing research that links comedy enjoyment and source liking (Nabi et al., 2007; Ellithorpe et al., 2014) by taking into account the influence of comedy type and approval separately, which provides additional insight into the way that comedy regimes are negotiated on the production and audience side of the programme.

Of course, not only the comedic side of humour interest adds value to its concept. A fourth characteristic is that by countering humour with participants' human-interest stories, humour interest manages to provide the **required context**. We already addressed that the comedy itself can include context (by showcasing a system of approval through including laughter and enjoyment of the outgroup), but equally important are the information and emotional stories provided by the outgroup members themselves, in a non-sensationalized environment. These human-interest elements can lead audience members to eudaimonic experiences in the form of elevation, thought and reflection on the self and their surroundings.

1.3 Overcoming resistance to persuasion with entertainment experiences

At the heart of this dissertation is the question of how humour interest can successfully create comedy about minorities, what production decisions need to be made, and how these decisions impact the audiences' experience and potential prosocial outcomes. After considering the level of production and the elements that made up *Taboe* as a humour interest concept, the dissertation moved its focus to audience experiences of the concept. The sixth and seventh chapter of this dissertation illustrate how audience members have and share hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences. We found that humour interest is considered a **safe space**, allowing viewers to avoid negative affective experiences while still engaging in rehearsal for real life, practicing how to handle similar situations. Alternatively, viewing experiences were used as a rehearsal for future intergroup contact, reflecting on what their affective and cognitive experiences were while watching *Taboe*. This even went so far as to leave audience members stimulated to share emotional and vulnerable reflections, sometimes including calls for change. Throughout the research, I later opted to combine these insights in *Taboe*'s destigmatizing potential with knowledge from existing research. For example, media studies on reducing prejudice (Murrar & Bauer, 2017; Moyer-Gusé, Dale & Ortiz, 2019) and on entertainment experiences' role within destigmatizing outcomes (Oliver et al., 2018). Other related studies found mixed results (Dale et al., 2020), beckoning further research. At that point, the dissertation work shifted its approach to media psychology and its accompanying quantitative methods.

To understand more about the way that humour interest can stimulate prosocial outcomes, we conducted two experiments. These studies were based on (1) studies from entertainment experiences in media psychology indicating the prosocial potential through experiences of elevation and thought (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Oliver, Dillard et al., 2012; Oliver, Hartman & Woolley, 2012), and (2) research from the entertainment-education field, which showed the potential of

entertaining content to overcome resistance to persuasion (El-Khoury, 2020; Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010; Slater & Rouner, 2002) and to stimulate changes in beliefs, attitudes and sometimes even behaviour (Banerjee & Greene, 2012; Collins et al., 2004; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010; Moyer-Gusé, Dale & Ortiz, 2019; Murphy et al., 2011; Oliver, Hartmann & Woolley, 2012; Oliver, Dillard et al., 2012; Schiappa et al., 2006; Wilkin et al., 2007).

Following the order of the discussion in chapter three, I will discuss the contributions of our research on humour interest in overcoming resistance to persuasion in the same order. We have already discussed above how humour interest can stimulate selective exposure by using comedy to reach more universal audiences, including those that would otherwise avoid more serious content. From our audience research, we hypothesized that humour interest would encounter less resistance to persuasion than its separate components, and that this would be driven by the combined entertainment experiences of the content. We considered that this would be the key to stimulating positive attitudes toward the included outgroups and would lead to increased perceptions of self-efficacy and willingness to engage in future intergroup contact, which is crucial to reducing prejudice and intergroup relationships (Ortiz & Harwood, 2007; Moyer-Gusé, Dale & Ortiz, 2019). Most crucially, the results discussed in chapter eight show that taking into account entertainment experiences increases our understanding of how entertainment content helps to **overcome resistance to persuasion**. The research showed that watching humour interest about minorities can lead to higher levels of confidence to engage in future intergroup contact. However, we also found that comedy by itself leads to more counterarguing than human-interest, and that comedy has a stronger positive effect on attitudes than humour interest. The explanation for these unexpected patterns can be found in the role of entertainment experiences. Next, I will discuss the role of humour interest in overcoming counterarguing, trivialization and reactance, linking each of these to its contribution to the potential outcomes.

First, we were able to confirm evidence that **trivialization** is minimized when humour is combined with human-interest, and that this relation is partially driven by human-interests' ability to stimulate thoughtful reflection, a eudaimonic entertainment experience. As such, this dissertation provides evidence to the claim that persuasive comedy requires context (Nabi et al., 2007; Campo et al., 2013), but adds that this restoration of gravity can also be achieved with other entertainment experiences, rather than relying on news or dry factual background.

Second, our results regarding **counterarguing** were surprising. We found that comedy leads to more counterarguing than human-interest or humour interest. This is curious: based on previous research (El-Khoury, 2020; Moyer-Gusé, Mahood & Brookes, 2011; Nabi et al., 2007), it was expected that humour would reduce counterarguing responses. Our research showed that both enjoyment and elevation play a crucial rule in the influence of humour interest on counterarguing, by turning the negative direct influence of the content into a positive mediated relation. Because counterarguing has a detrimental effect on self-efficacy, it is crucial for entertainment-education to keep these responses at bay. Another explanation may be found in the context of exposure: not only were the stand-up comedy clips separated from its human-interest restoration, viewing experiences in an online study are very different from those watching television in their natural setting. This could explain why we found no indications of counterarguing in our interviews with audience members or on Twitter, but did register counterarguing in this experimental setting. Another explanation could be that this response was made salient after exposure to the question, but was simply not considered during regular viewing experiences. We encourage further research into counterarguing responses and stand-up comedy about minorities in particular. Additionally, compared to comedy alone, humour interest has a negative direct influence on attitudes. When the mediator of elevation was introduced in the model, a positive counteracting relation appeared: it seems that human-interest can have a positive influence on attitudes, as long as it manages to stimulate elevation.

Similar patterns emerged: a negative direct influence of the content on the prosocial outcome, being counteracted by a positive one through entertainment experiences. Combined, these insights show the importance of taking into account both hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences when considering the persuasive potential of entertainment content.

Third, we found evidence that humour interest can be a great tool to reduce **reactance** responses. Based on the discussion in chapter two and three, we know that reactance can be reduced through positive affective experiences such as enjoyment and via source liking. Regarding positivity, the results discussed in chapter six show how audience members attribute their willingness to watch and to engage in reflection to the positive experiences that humour interest offers. According to them, this focus led them to positive types of empathy, rather than feelings of pity, which, according to the research conducted by Bartsch et al. (2018) is crucial to stimulating positive attitudes. We also found that humour interest can stimulate the same level of enjoyment as comedy does by itself, in the case of our study. In the end, this shows that creating context by introducing elements that appeal to eudaimonic experiences does not counteract hedonic experiences, nor vice versa.

A final way in which humour-interest can help overcome reactance, is by increasing source liking. Building on previous evidence for the role that enjoyment of comedy plays in **source liking** (Ellithorpe et al., 2014; Nabi et al., 2007), we wanted to take into account the sensitivities that humour interest may come into contact with. From our audience research, we noticed several discussions regarding the style and type of comedy. For example, several people stated they would not have continued watching the programme if the applied comedy style was rude or hurtful. This was evaluated based on the type and directionality, but also by taking into account that the participants seemed to approve of the jokes, and even sometimes made their own jokes.

Based on those findings, we formulated hypotheses that were tested in the study presented as chapter nine of this dissertation. First, we were able to show that the Flemish audience prefers adaptive comedy over

maladaptive comedy types, and that this leads to more enjoyment of the comedy, which results in more positive evaluations of the comedian. This confirms what our interview panel suggested in chapter six: not all comedy about minorities is equally enjoyable. A second finding we wanted to test was the role of approval from the outgroup itself, and once again we found confirmation of our previous suggestions: comedy that has been explicitly approved of by the outgroup, is more enjoyed. We also found that approved comedy has a direct positive relation with more positive evaluations of the comedian, combined with an indirect positive relation, mediated through enjoyment. As such, we were able to confirm that enjoyment of comedy plays a crucial role in source liking. Reflecting on this result with earlier findings of qualitative audience studies in mind, it bears consideration that this may point to a circular relationship: while our experiment showed that enjoyment positively influenced source liking, certain interviewees shared that they enjoyed watching *Taboe* because Philippe Geubels was a part of the programme, leading them to enjoy it more than if the host would have been another celebrity or spokesperson. Future research regarding this circular relationship and the role of celebrity status in such enjoyment and source liking may be warranted. Additionally, we contributed that in the case of comedy about minorities specifically, enjoyment is dependent on the type of comedy and approval by the targeted group, and must be taken into account when considering comedy as a tool to reduce reactance in search of positive attitudes.

By studying these experiences both qualitatively and quantitatively, this dissertation provides additional evidence to the work done by several authors in the field of media psychology (Oliver et al., 2018; Raney et al., 2019). Additionally, the results presented in chapter eight contribute convincing evidence to the orthogonal conceptualization of hedonic and eudaimonic experiences (Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Oliver & Raney, 2011; Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017; Vittersø & Søholt, 2011), showing that humour interest can be equally hedonically stimulating as comedy alone, and equally eudaimonically appreciated as human-interest alone. Furthermore, our research contributes to the field by

applying these concepts outside of the predominantly USA-centric focus at its foundation. Due to our decision to approach one case study with different theoretical perspectives and triangulation of methods, we are able to provide these findings with confidence. Additionally, this allowed us to provide context and background to our results and interpret them within the Flemish television context, and specifically television from public service media institution VRT. However, this multimethod framework results in some decisions with their own limitations.

2   Limitations and future research

Entertainment experiences are a **field in motion**. Upon entering the field of entertainment research, several decisions have to be made: Does the research problem require a focus on production, creation, or texts of entertainment media content? Or a focus on reception? In which area are the studies best located: audience reception studies, media psychology, one specific medium or multiple media? Even after making such decisions, the work does not end. Nor does it appear that it will end soon. In the past year, Peter Vorderer, one of the researchers at the foundation of the dual-process perspective on entertainment experiences as it is included in this dissertation, presented the idea that the word "entertainment" requires a narrower definition, and suggested that eudaimonic experiences would be closer in line with the concept of "resonance" (Vorderer, 2021). Others have linked the self-transcendent qualities of eudaimonic entertainment experiences to spirituality and even religious experiences (Janicke & Ramasubramanian, 2017). Alternatively, in her study on "the bright and dark side of eudaimonic emotions", Hellen Landman (2021) interestingly considered how positive eudaimonic affects may be prosocially stimulating, but can also be employed for darker purposes, such as manipulation and propaganda. These are just some of the many recent works that have broadened our perspective on entertainment experiences and the way that they influence and resonate with people. I encourage future researchers to take them into account as they reflect on the work presented in this

dissertation and apply them to their own studies of entertainment experiences of humour interest.

In reflecting on the limitations of the presented work, I began by rereading the discussions of limitations of the individual chapters of this dissertation. Repeatedly, these discussions begin by addressing the **specific case study** used to study the phenomenon of humour interest. Within case studies research, *Taboe* could be considered an exceptional case of human-interest, or minority representation, or comedic television. Taking human-interest television about minorities as the population within which we selected our case study, it could be beneficial to study entertainment experiences overcoming resistance to persuasion in response to more representative cases as well (Yin, 2009). By comparing case studies from human-interest and humour interest, understanding about their unique possibilities and characteristics will grow. This will allow future researchers and producers to determine which elements were unique to humour interest, or even *Taboe*, and which practices and results can be replicated beyond the case or the format.

The case study approach of the dissertation also includes a specific **cultural context** wherein the research is conducted. Even though I included short discussions regarding the need to introduce elements of critical and cultural studies in media psychology, and even though this dissertation already made efforts to include multiple theoretical perspectives to one phenomenon, I think the cultural context of the reception of humour interest requires more research. Based on the research presented in chapter six and seven, I am aware that considerations of attitudes toward celebrities and their social engagement (Panis & Van den Bulck, 2012), personal politics and ideologies, and previous experiences with outgroups will most likely play a role entertainment experiences of humour interest about minorities. Socio-cultural background shapes how entertainment experiences are processed, as has been evidenced in the work by Claessens and Dhoest (2010), Graefer and Das (2017) and Kim et al. (2014). Researchers have called for the reintegration of the cultural in media psychology (Odağ &

Hanke, 2018) and media effects research (Ramasubramanian & Banjo, 2020). Additionally, there is the question of shared cultural appeal (Odağ & Hanke, 2018), which becomes especially relevant in the study of comedy and humour regimes, but was outside the scope of our dissertation. In the research that I conducted for chapter seven of this dissertation, I often found expressions of surprise shared on Twitter. Exclamations such as "does this still happen in Belgium/Flanders?!" were not unusual in discussions of political and social aspects in the treatment of outgroups. By moving from the specific case study to more general insights regarding the humour interest phenomenon, this layer of insight fell outside the scope of the dissertation.

From a research design perspective, I want to address the approach of this dissertation regarding outgroups and minorities. Because I wanted to include a more complete understanding of the concept of humour interest, and *Taboe* specifically, I decided not to select one episode of the programme, but rather the full first season as our case study. Looking back, I see the value of the alternative approach. Choosing one topic covered by *Taboe* could have given me the opportunity to enter into conversation with the people represented, and step past the **monolithic perspective on minorities** that is sometimes present in this work. Considering the need for both television and academic work to diversify perspectives and voices, I hope the work presented in this dissertation inspires future researchers to do exactly that. It is very well possible that humour interest is desirable for the groups presented in the first season of *Taboe*, but not in the second, or that certain groups can even benefit more from this approach. Studying the unique situations of each minority and outgroup as well as including their voices in the research will be key to a successful follow-up to this work.

While this dissertation already moves beyond most audience and entertainment experiences research by also including a production and content analysis of the case study, we cannot make claims regarding the actual creation or production processes. By choosing in-depth interviews over ethnographic observation as our chosen method for the

production analysis, we were only able to collect **insights retrospectively**, and must acknowledge that these production stakeholders may be monitoring what and how they share about their experiences during production. While we did take this into account by including those involved in the day-to-day production of *Taboe*, and by triangulating their answers with the experiences of participants, all interviews explore an event through a meaning-making process relying on reflection. Future researchers are encouraged to consider the work presented in this dissertation as guide to start ethnographic studies of production processes of humour interest.

Next, a word is required on the **samples** that were included in this dissertation. First, our interview sample in the study presented in chapter six consisted of 21 members of the general public, which were mostly female and mostly higher educated. The research presented in chapter eight follows the same pattern, with a higher educated, young and female sample. As we mentioned in our discussion of comedy, their level of education may influence the way people respond to comedy so that their privileged background influences their evaluation of comedy targeting outgroup members. Findings from interviews with audience members showed that humour was evaluated against their own understandings of norms surrounding the topics at hand. This also means that not all topics were treated the same, of course. As we discussed above, several elements play a role in appreciating humour about stigmatized groups and topics, mostly related to how complex one's own understanding of the topic is. It is possible that this highly educated sample already interpreted *Taboe* within a more nuanced understanding of the addressed taboos, but this would be ground for further research.

As far as differences in sex are relevant to entertainment experiences, eudaimonic experiences are usually more prevalent in female participants. However, no different patterns of experiences were noticeable in the male audience members who were interviewed for the qualitative audience research, and several of the tweets we included as examples in the seventh chapter were sent by men. This gives us some indication of the generalizability of these results, but caution is still

warranted. Future research should search to corroborate or counteract the findings presented in this dissertation. That being said, the value of the presented work does not depend on external validity, as the success of *Taboe* was evidenced before this dissertation focused its research work thereupon (Weckx, 2018). Additionally, the experiment in chapter eight took gender, age, and level of education into account, and found no correlation between gender or level of education with the dependent variables. Age was added as a covariate to the multivariate and model tests.

One of the aims of this dissertation was to study how entertainment experiences can be an alternative route to studying how entertainment content can overcome resistance to persuasion. We found that including entertainment experiences in the study of the influence of entertainment media content on prosocial outcomes can help explain how entertainment overcomes resistance to persuasion. However, we did not include other, **classic approaches to narrative persuasion** in our study. I would recommend future researchers to test how these entertainment experiences position themselves in regard to absorption and identification as well, as such offering a more complete understanding to how entertainment narratives contribute to persuasion.

Another interesting route for future research could come from re-evaluating what it means for entertainment-education to include storytelling about outgroups, with impact on ingroups' perceptions of them. We can wonder which elements should be included in order to achieve persuasive outcomes. Our research clearly found evidence for the concept of the "restoration of gravity" and showed that there are different routes to creating this, including other types of entertainment experiences. Based on the studies by Hoeken and Fikkers (2014) and Igartua and Vega Casanova (2016), one would assume that **successful impact** relies on the potential of the narrative to present clear arguments that the viewer can consider. This would include elements of information and background, stimulating a cognitive process. However, Moyer-Gusé, Tchernev and Walther-Martin (2019) found that the inclusion of a Public Service Announcement (PSA) alongside comedic elements

undermined the subtility of the narrative approach, negatively impacting its potential outcomes. Alternatively, researchers have always suggested that inclusion of positive ingroup interactions in entertainment content would result in encouraging viewers to engage in future intergroup contact (Schiappa, Greg & Hewes, 2016; Moyer-Gusé, Dale & Ortiz, 2019), while Igartua and Frutos (2017) found the opposite: a dramatic narrative that included a condemnation of racism led to a more positive attitude toward migration, than a narrative of positive intergroup interactions.

But how should one decide which approach to use when stimulating positive attitudes? The answer appears to be that it depends. If both hedonic enjoyment and eudaimonic appreciation can contribute to overcoming resistance and stimulating prosocial outcomes, and information can be a way to increase thoughtful reflection, does this mean one has to do it all? How does one design a balanced, careful, and thoughtful entertainment programme about minorities, sidestepping all the risks? I will not flatter myself into thinking this dissertation can answer such a complicated question, but in the following section, I will present what our research contributes to the decisions that programme makers and broadcasters may face when tackling humour interest.

3   Recommendations and guidelines

As Jensen (2018) highlights, since the inception of the field "communication research has been called upon not only to interpret different media and communicative practices, but also to imagine – reinterpret – what media and communication *could* be" (p. 151, italics in original). The research presented in this dissertation bridged the production, text, and audience perspective with one case study. In this chapter, I have discussed how our findings can be understood across different disciplines, while also keeping in mind the limitations that come with certain research design and methodological considerations.

One goal that developed while working on this dissertation was to contribute knowledge and understanding to the ways that marginalized groups can be an active part of entertaining content about them, without

falling into the classic traps of sensationalizing or talking "about" but not "with" them. Future content and programme creators, producers and production stakeholders who are looking to create content that involves minority outgroups and stigmatized topics, may find value in the following recommendations. These subsections will refer to findings and their respective studies in this dissertation (and sometimes beyond) but will also include broader interpretations of the results and knowledge gained throughout the research. These recommendations address the potential of balancing entertainment experiences, the importance of the broadcasting and production team, the inclusion of minority spokespersons behind the scenes, and the assessment of positivity and authenticity in representation on television.

3.1   Balancing entertainment

The findings presented in chapter five, six and eight of this dissertation contributed evidence to the claim that the **restoration of gravity** can be created by countering hedonic enjoyment with eudaimonic appreciation of entertaining content. The results of chapter eight also found that this restoration is required: comedy alone leads to trivialization of the topic addressed, which is not surprising. What we add here is that this restoration does not require a deadly serious or informative approach. Rather, using other narrative forms of entertainment that contain stories of the targeted group can be entertaining and thought-provoking at the same time. By tapping into the outward oriented, self-transcending qualities of eudaimonic experiences, humour interest is an approach that is entertaining in more ways than one, appealing to an even wider audience while also minimizing the risk of trivialization.

Additionally, it can help producers to consider the position that each component of humour interest takes in their narrative, and **what each element contributes**. Overall, our qualitative audience studies showed that humour attracts attention, and can lead to hedonic enjoyment when the right combination of style and approval is included (more on that below). However, when it comes to actually influencing behavioural change, attitudes and beliefs… those outcomes seem more

dependent on entertaining content that leads to eudaimonic experiences such as thought and elevation. While enjoyment lowers reactance, making the audience more open to the message, the restoration elements are still required to change perspectives and stimulate thoughtful reflection.

That being said, I would like to balance this notion with some words of wisdom that I received during the first week of my dissertation work. During one of our first meetings, Prof. Van den Bulck urged me to be careful with bold claims of how public broadcasting media should be influencing people. The point of these recommendations is not to help producers create television programmes that directly persuade or convince the audience to adopt their perspective. It is to aid reflection on production practices, to widen our perspective on what television entertainment can be, and how to approach difficult topics in an entertainment framework **without** leading to **sensationalized** or trivialized responses.

This also beckons the question of what **"successful" impact** looks like. In this dissertation, we operate from a PSM perspective: public value as created under the guise of universality, diversity and even stimulating connections. Reflections, positive empathic feelings, a moment of wonder about what was learned about the unknown – for VRT, these outcomes are desirable, but often difficult to translate to outcome measures. However, when designing entertainment-education interventions, expected outcomes become more specific, and maybe even more pressing. When communicating about the importance of, for instance, vaccines or cancer screenings, a solemn moment of reflection may not be enough, and the actual step up to persuading a person into attitudinal or behavioural change is understandably more pressing and desirable.

3.2 Awareness and willingness of the production and broadcasting team

In the conversations conducted for our first study, but also in continued interaction with the people of Panenka and VRT, an awareness always seemed present. While creating content that involves minorities by itself may appear to deserve a pat on the back, valuable approaches will not satisfy themselves with merely quantitative inclusion, counting the number of 'minority representations' included. Our first study's conversations with participants, content analysis and others' testimonies (De Milde, 2018; Van Tendeloo, 2018; Delissen & Delva, 2019) include several examples of considerations and practices that facilitate access, for example by including caretakers during production, attention to sensitivities, or even breaking format by conducting interviews at home rather than on-location, in the case of a person who deals with social anxiety (episode 6, mental vulnerabilities).

The production team behind *Taboe* seemed very aware of the humour regimes within which they were creating content. Not only were they aware of them, their willingness to interact with and to question them was the foundation for the format. *Taboe* began from a willingness to adjust the operational humour regime where necessary, based on the active input of the participants of the programme. Their approach did not come from a defensive, protective attitude ("this is my show, let me tell your story"), but rather one of openness and curiosity: how should we be making this television programme? What are we missing? What jokes are funny, which jokes have you heard too often, which are just mean rather than funny? Refusing to enter a conversation about what *is* possible, leaves opportunities for shared laughter unused. Humour interest should not attempt to dictate a humour regime to stigmatized persons, or the at-home audience, but rather open conversations about possibilities and boundaries, and take those boundaries as a challenge and invitation for co-creation and participation. All of this perfectly follows the remit of public service media institutions, and again highlights why and how comedy can be a valuable tool in its public value creation-toolbelt.

3.3 Active voice to outgroup members and consultation

First, by discussing their approach to the topics with other stakeholders and foundations who are more intimately familiar with the topic, production teams can tackle their own biases and widen their own perspectives. While not all television about minorities has to be created with its persuasive potential front and center (based on the EORM (Moyer-Gusé, 2008) and recent work by Moyer-Gusé, Tchernev and Walther-Martin (2019), we would even suggest you better refrain from such practices), approaching such topics does come with responsibility. This is especially true in the case of television programmes that will be broadcast on public service media channels, but should not be limited to public broadcasting alone. The entire team, from creation to purchase to broadcast, has to be willing to take up this responsibility, as their commitment to valuable and qualitative approaches is not only to the outgroups they are including in the production, but also to the audience at home. The viewer at home places a certain level of trust in their content: trust to be entertained, to be correctly informed, to not be manipulated, and so on. It can be especially valuable for programme makers to reflect on what a member of the addressed minority would think while watching their content. If they watch the programme, based on their understanding of the world, not yours: can you share it proudly, or do you hope they will not watch it? This simple question can help production members when creating content about minorities.

Secondly, the research presented in chapter nine shows that humour styles and outgroup approval play a vital role in the way that audience members evaluate comedy about difficult topics. In short, adaptive and approved comedy are more enjoyed. Therefore, it will be crucial for future content creators to take these elements into account, and not just "slap some comedy" on human-interest in hopes of attracting a wider audience. While comedy style can be addressed during the writing process, approval is a more complex, but maybe even more important production factor. The research in chapter six, seven and nine also identified approval as a crucial component to the enjoyment of the audience, which leads to shared laughter and improved intergroup

relationships. In the case of *Taboe*, performing stand-up comedy in front of an outgroup audience during the recording creates a sense of approval. By doing so, the mode of comedy is specifically changed: comedy is decisively inclusionary, rather than exclusionary, used for a positive communicative function. This research identified the visual and auditory inclusion of the minority audience as one characteristic that signalled inclusion, but just as important is the actual active voice that participants have in creating content. It will be up to production companies and broadcasters alike to create inclusive and diverse spaces not only on-screen, but maybe even more importantly, behind the scenes. More diverse crews can facilitate more inclusive and more grounded representations of diversity and minorities. Similar findings are presented by Panis et al. (2019), whose work on super-diversity[15] was applied by VRT as a foundation to create a series of workshops focused on "sensitivity for super-diversity among its employees and within its programmes, which may encourage them to engage more in "listening across difference" and to question the professional pragmatics that shape their practices and strategies towards diversity management" (p. 20). While our production study found that the creators and producers of *Taboe* complemented their own perspective with that of interest groups and participants, it could be valuable to consider a bold production practice where no content is made about a group, without including that group in every step of the production process. Being well-aware of the influence such practices have on the production process, it is clear that the actual answer lies in more diverse hiring practices of the Flemish production companies all round, which will only increase the (already high) quality standard of Flemish television.

3.4 A positive perspective can still be authentic

Throughout this dissertation, I often referred to the need to approach difficult and sensitive topics with positivity, supported by the audience

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[15] For more on the concept of super-diversity, its application to PSM production practices in Flanders, and how this differs from the multiculturalism approach that prioritizes "collective identities", I refer to Panis, Paulussen and Dhoest (2019)

research and beneficial prosocial outcomes related to enjoyment and elevation. Producers may find themselves pondering the story they are looking to share: a positive one, or a realistic one? When these perspectives seem to contradict each other, the positive perspective can appear to sacrifice authenticity, thereby opening itself up to criticism that such a perspective is "one-sided" or even "leftist". However, as Vertoont (2019) argued, television does not require an authenticity-license. Borrowing her example, we follow the perspective that showing the reality of often unemployed disabled persons may rather normalize than criticize these realities. By showing unique perspectives or alternate options to existing prejudices in society, television entertainment content can highlight diversity within an outgroup, and include intergroup connections. Television creators have often emphasized that they want to use their texts as a way to share interesting stories from the community with a wider audience in search of "good television" (Vanlee, 2019). I would argue that diverse, positive perspectives can contribute to that endeavour, and to the prosocial potential they embody.

4 Position of the researcher and Covid-19 reflections

> *If you'd have told me a year ago*
> *That I'd be locked inside of my home (Ah, ah, ah)*
> *I would have told you, a year ago:*
> *"Interesting; now leave me alone"*
> - Bo Burnham (2021)

As a closing section to this work, I would like to shortly discuss my own experience in writing this dissertation. I interspaced this dissertation with fragments from Bo Burnham's *Inside*, a Netflix special that was released 30th May 2021. At that time, I was translating the data analysis of our fourth study into a research paper, while setting up the fifth and final study of this dissertation on, among other things, comedy. Burnham's *Inside* has been praised by critics and public alike (Rotten tomatoes, 2021). Film critic Witney Seibold (2021, podcast) described it as "[Inside] encapsulat[ing] the claustrophobia of the pandemic, while also

unleashing the raw, frustrated poetry of an entire generation". Burnham has suffered from depression and anxiety, the latter of which is intimately familiar to me before and during (and let us be honest, probably after) this writing process. At the time of the release of Burnham's Inside, I was struggling with the concept of writing a PhD that could potentially be used to argue in favour of *all* comedy about minorities, by radical free speech-advocates who "consider nothing off-limits" and proudly state that "comedy should attack everyone". In his work, Burnham struggles with comparable questions regarding his own position as a privileged stand-up comedian, in a time where he believes space should be made for future generations of more diverse voices and comedians. That is why his words mark the beginning of each empirical chapter. Trust me when I tell you that I realize how ironic it is to address issues of diversity with words of a white male comedian. Alternatively, it makes sense that this person would be best suited at voicing the doubts that I myself also had during this time. Written by anxiety-plagued privileged people reflecting on their position regarding the (lack of) power (relations) in comedy, overcast by COVID-19 lockdowns, I flatter myself at the thought that my dissertation and *Inside* have some things in common.

If so desired, this dissertation could be a study of white, cisgender men creating comedy about minority groups. You would not be mistaken to consider it exactly that. However, if I would be allowed to, I would kindly suggest differently: this dissertation can be a word of caution, including examples of the difficulties and understandable concerns that come with creating comedy about such topics. It discusses the balance that has to be maintained to minimize risks of delivering unfortunate messages and to stimulate audiences to engage with content on the terms of those who need to have their own voice be heard. It discusses a new perspective on entertainment media texts and allows for an emotional space for comedy and its many genre hybrids. I consider this contribution to be valuable especially because it focusses on the most undesirable form of power imbalance in comedy. By studying a specific example, interesting insights arose.

I have little claim to a voice in discussions about minorities or stigmatized groups. Alternatively, I am not a television producer, nor public broadcaster employee or government representative at the public broadcaster. Just like comedy, academic research is a privileged space that still lacks diversity, both in work and in the voices we share and amplify. Whereas this dissertation has only two participants share their experiences of being part of *Taboe*, I found incredible value in the work of Anke Lion who is currently working on her PhD at Ghent University, and involves ethnic minority youth in creative processes where they use humour to address issues of discrimination and stigmatization. Accompanying reading this dissertation with a look at her work, can help to open perspectives beyond those represented here, and a wider, unique perspective is always a promising idea.

In March 2020, I and many other academics returned home from campus and did not know when we would come back. For me personally, the biggest immediate fallout of the pandemic was a lack of in-person conferences. I will not go into the supportive network I praised myself lucky enough to have (as I did so already in my acknowledgements), but I will discuss one setback that was directly related to the pandemic, even if it only influenced me indirectly. For our fifth study, I originally designed a field experiment where we would study viewing and entertainment experiences in a panel of people watching the second season of *Taboe*. This season was originally planned to be broadcast in the fall of 2020. The human-interest scenes were filmed, but similar to many comedians at the time, the crew postponed filming stand-up comedy until an audience could be present. I have already discussed the added value of having the audience in the picture, and fully agree that this production decision was the right one to make in search of quality. For me as a researcher, however, trouble was ahead. Due to postponing recordings of comedy till regulations were lifted (or at least less restrictive), broadcast of the programme was postponed until fall of 2021. As I am writing this section, the first episode of *Taboe* season 2 has not yet been aired, making it difficult to fit a field study within this dissertation without drastic, time concerning decisions. Research

pragmatics and realities require creativity, and with the support of my supervisors and committee, I managed to set up another study over the summer of 2021. I am fully convinced that the actual fifth study in this dissertation is equally valuable as the originally planned field study would have been.

It is simply a different ending to an entertaining narrative.

5   Conclusion

This dissertation offered a combined perspective and mixed method approach to a real-world phenomenon, namely the concept of humour interest, and specifically what it can contribute to the conversation about minorities on the television screen in Flanders. By considering our case study through multiple theoretical lenses, and subsequently focusing on different steps from production to reception, this dissertation contributed to the theory and research practices of entertainment experiences, entertainment-education and to understanding the creation and experiences of comedy about minorities. I cannot summarize how valuable this time spent researching, studying, critiquing, and writing about entertainment media was to me, both personally and professionally, and hope to continue this journey along with other researchers. If allowed to dream, I even hope to meet some that I managed persuade, just a little bit, into seeing the value of entertaining narratives. But for now, if you'll excuse me, I have a lot of television to catch up on.

People sometimes get uncomfortable when you talk about disability. And I know why that is, it's because you've not experienced it every day. It's a bit unusual. I cannot stand the fact that I have to tailor the way I talk. People say to you, "disability is never funny, never funny." What the fuck are you talking about? Disability can be hysterical. **You just have to make sure that you're on the right side of the laughter.**

If you're laughing at the disabled person, congratulations, you're a pile of shit. But if you're laughing with them, what a joy.

But to say disability is never funny, to me, that is dehumanizing.
You are saying that these people are not capable of doing something which you are capable of doing and that's laughing at the situation you're in.
Of course, they're able to do that, they're human beings.

-    Dark, Daniel Sloss (2015)

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Appendices

1   Science communication: media contributions

Dumon, P. (2021, April 21). Waarom is dertigers zo'n success? "Het is een soort ramptoerisme." *De Morgen*. Retrieved from https://www.demorgen.be/tv-cultuur/waarom-is-dertigers-zo-n-succes-het-is-een-soort-ramptoerisme~b8be35fc/

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2   Science communication: Talks and awards

Winner ICA-flair competition "Best Video presentation" (2020, May). Due to covid-19 restrictions, the annual edition of the International Communication Association conference took place online. In an effort to increase online engagement, virtual awards were given to outstanding video presentations.

Word je een beter mens door naar televisie te kijken? (2021, March 19). 3rd place in Press > Speak, the annual competition for short scicomm presentations by PhD students, hosted by the University of Antwerp.

Taboe: het succes ontrafeld. (2021, April 27). Talk at the VRT 'profieldag', a yearly training and inspiration day for employees of public service media company VRT. Talk in cooperation with Tom Baetens from Panenka.

3   English summary

Departing from the research on entertainment experiences, entertainment-education and comedy studies, this dissertation contains the results of five research studies on the destigmatizing outcomes of watching hybrid television programmes about minorities. The research of entertainment-education and narrative persuasion has long established that entertaining elements contribute value to narratives, and can support those narratives in their potential to persuade the audience to change their attitudes, beliefs or even behaviour. Alongside the work done in those areas, the study of entertainment has evolved over recent decades, questioning the idea of entertainment as only pleasurable or fun. Especially in the case of media entertainment, recent developments have allowed us to consider how and why people consume entertainment content for experiences beyond enjoyment alone. The main research purpose of this dissertation was to study the role that entertainment experiences play in the prosocial outcomes of watching hybrid television that merges humour and human-interest (humour interest) about several minority outgroups. In this dissertation, a multi-perspective approach is taken by combining different methodological and theoretical approaches to one case study, namely Taboe (2018).

The first study analysed production and its translation to the screen through the use of in-depth interviews with creators and production stakeholders, and content analysis of the programme. The results of the study showed the value of entertainment, and more specifically comedy, for public service media institutions as a way to reconsider how normative values such as universality and diversity can be translated into the current public value approach. The second study was a qualitative audience study that used in-depth interviews to find that viewers praised the programme for its combination of difficult topics with a positive perspective, which they attributed to the mix of humour and human-interest in the programme. Additionally, they shared mixed affect feelings of being moved, a sense of elevation, being inspired to think, and reflected on their own past and future experiences with challenges and intergroup interactions. A third study applied a mixed-

method approach to an analysis of tweets sent in response to Taboe as it was being broadcast. The findings confirmed the results of the previous study, and contributed that both hedonic and eudaimonic experiences were being shared online. The study considers these tweets as a form of social sharing of entertainment experiences, bringing a multimedial perspective to the way that audience members can experience entertainment content. Based on these insights, we hypothesized that Taboe appealed to both hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences, and that those experiences would lower the audience's resistance to persuasion, resulting in more positive attitudes toward the represented minorities and an increased willingness to engage in intergroup contact after watching the programme.

Based on the results of an online experiment, we were able to conclude that humour interest can in fact lead to both hedonic and eudaimonic experiences, which in turn lower trivialization and counterarguing responses, compared to their separate components. By lowering counterarguing, the content can also contribute to more positive attitudes and increased perceptions of self-efficacy regarding future intergroup contact. Finally, a fifth study explored a different route to overcoming resistance, namely by conducting an online experiment that considered the influence of comedy type and outgroup approval on source liking. We hypothesized that comedians would be more liked if they engaged in comedy about minorities that was adaptive in style and was approved of by the group they were targeting. The study was able to confirm this hypothesis, and confirmed previous studies that had identified enjoyment of comedy as a crucial mediator in the influence of humour on source liking.

Overall, the research in this dissertation shows that entertainment experiences of humour interest are crucial to understanding its potential prosocial outcomes and destigmatizing potential. By doing so, it contributes to the research fields of public service media, television studies, entertainment-education, and media psychology. That being said, the potential of humour interest does come with certain considerations, which are discussed in the form of recommendations for

future programme makers and broadcasters who hope to contribute to the increased qualitative representation of minorities and stigmatized groups on Flemish television.

Appendices

4 Nederlandstalige samenvatting

Televisieprogramma's confronteren ons met ideeën en mensen waar we in ons dagelijkse leven niet zo vaak mee in contact komen. Onderzoek binnen de velden van entertainmentervaringen, entertainment-educatie en comedy studies hebben daarbinnen een speciale rol toegeschreven aan entertainende elementen en narratieve vormen. Entertainende *content* kan mensen ertoe overtuigen om hun attitudes en gedrag aan te passen, ook ten opzichte van minderheidsgroepen. Daarnaast is het onderzoek naar entertainmentervaringen de afgelopen decennia sterk geëvolueerd. De visie op entertainment ging van "puur plezier" (hedonische kijkervaring) naar een meer complexe ervaring (eudaimonische kijkervaring), die inzichten biedt in de motivaties en belevingen die verder gaan dan enkel positief vermaak.

Het doel van dit doctoraat was om te onderzoeken welke rol entertainmentervaringen spelen in de prosociale gevolgen van het bekijken van een televisieprogramma dat humor en human-interest (*humour interest*) over minderheidsgroepen combineert. Dit doctoraat bevat de onderzoeksresultaten van vijf studies die verschillende methodologische en theoretische perspectieven toepassen op een case study, namelijk Taboe (2018).

In een eerste studie analyseerden we de productie en de vertaling naar het scherm. We rapporteren de resultaten van diepte-interviews met de programmamakers en andere betrokkenen bij de productie en uitzending, in combinatie met een inhoudsanalyse van het uiteindelijke programma. Uit de resultaten blijkt dat openbare omroepen entertainment en comedy als tools kunnen gebruiken om hun normatieve waarden, zoals universaliteit en diversiteit, te vertalen naar een modernere aanpak van publieke meerwaardecreatie. De tweede studie was een kwalitatief publieksonderzoek, waarbij diepte-interviews met kijkers ons meer inzicht verschaften in de populariteit van het programma. Taboe werd in dit onderzoek geprezen omwille de combinatie van moeilijke onderwerpen met positieve perspectieven, wat volgens deze studie voortvloeide uit de mix van humor en human-interest. Daarenboven deelden deelnemers van het onderzoek complexe

emotionele ervaringen, zoals ontroering en *elevation* (positieve verhevenheid), maar ook dat ze zich geïnspireerd voelden om na te denken over de inhoud, en te reflecteren op hun eigen ervaringen in het verleden en hun toekomstig contact met minderheidsgroepen.

In een derde studie werd een combinatie van kwantitatieve en kwalitatieve inhoudsanalyse toegepast om tweets te analyseren die verzonden werden als reactie op de uitzending van Taboe. De resultaten bevestigden de inzichten van de voorgaande studie, maar voegden daar aan toe dat amusements- en complexe ervaringen beide gedeeld werden in een online setting. Deze studie beschouwde tweets als een activiteit waarbij entertainmentervaringen sociaal gedeeld werden, wat een multimediale visie toevoegt aan de manier waarop het publiek omgaat met entertainment *content*. Deze inzichten brachten ons tot de hypothese dat Taboe zowel hedonische als eudaimonische kijkervaringen oplevert, en dat deze ervaringen ertoe zouden kunnen leiden dat kijkers meer openstaan om overtuigd te worden door de boodschap van het programma. Dat zou er op zijn beurt dan toe leiden dat het bekijken van Taboe kan resulteren in positievere attitudes ten aanzien van de minderheidsgroepen in het programma, en meer bereidwilligheid om in de toekomst met hen contact te hebben. De resultaten van het experiment bevestigden dat Taboe inderdaad zowel hedonische als eudaimonische kijkervaringen kan opleveren. Daarnaast vonden we dat, in vergelijking met comedy of human-interest apart, kijkers minder actief argumenteren tegen de inhoud van het programma en daarbij de inhoud niet trivialiseren. Doordat er minder wordt geargumenteerd tegen de inhoud, kan het programma ook bijdragen aan positievere attitudes en mensen een boost geven in hun zelfvertrouwen om zelf contact met minderheidsgroepen aan te gaan.

In een vijfde en laatste studie verkenden we een andere route naar het overwinnen van weerstand tegen overtuiging. In een online experiment testten we hoe comedy types en goedkeuring door de mensen die het doelwit van de comedy vormen, invloed hebben op meningen over de comedian. Onze hypothese was dat een comedian beter geëvalueerd zou worden wanneer die meer positieve en adaptieve

comedystijlen gebruikt, en wanneer die comedy ook goed en leuk bevonden werd door de groep waar de grappen over gaan. Deze studie bevestigde onze vermoedens, en bevestigde daarenboven ook voorgaand onderzoek waarbij het plezier een cruciale mediërende rol speelt in de invloed van humor op evaluaties van comedians.

In conclusie, het onderzoek in dit doctoraat toont aan dat entertainmentervaringen een cruciale rol spelen in het begrijpen van de prosociale uitkomsten en het destigmatiserende potentieel van humor interest. Dit doctoraat biedt inzichten voor het onderzoek naar publieke omroepen, televisiestudies, entertainment-educatie en mediapsychologie. Het potentieel van humor interest brengt enkele interessante, doch uitdagende mogelijkheden met zich mee, die besproken worden in de vorm van aanbevelingen voor toekomstige programmamakers en zenders die hopen bij te dragen aan een meer kwalitatieve representatie van minderheden en gestigmatiseerde groepen in televisieprogramma's in Vlaanderen, en daarbuiten.

Appendices

5 Author contributions

Chapter 5: Humour as an inroad to qualitative minority representation: The case of *Taboe*, a humorous human-interest-program

Anouk De Ridder (first author): conception of the study (50%), data collection (100%), data analysis and interpretation (100%), writing of the research paper (60%)

Hilde van den Bulck and Heidi Vandebosch (co-authors): conception of the study (50%), writing of the research paper (40%)

Chapter 6: Humour and human-interest: combining hedonic and eudaimonic experiences for a more positive representation of stigmatized groups

Anouk De Ridder (first author): conception of the study (50%), data-collection coordination and training (100%), data-analysis and interpretation (90%), writing of the research paper (80%)

Alexander Dhoest and Heidi Vandebosch (co-authors): conception of the study (50%), data-analysis and interpretation (10%), writing of the research paper (20%)

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Chapter 7: Live tweeting as a social sharing practice of hedonic and eudaimonic entertainment experiences

Anouk De Ridder (first author): conception of the study (60%), data-collection (50%), data-analysis and interpretation (90%), writing of the research paper (70%)

Tim Kreutz (co-author): conception of the study (10%), data-collection (50%), writing of the research paper (10%)

Alexander Dhoest and Heidi Vandebosch (co-authors): conception of the study (30%), data-analysis and interpretation (10%), writing of the research paper (20%)

Chapter 8: Achieving destigmatizing outcomes by overcoming resistance to persuasion through combined entertainment experiences
Anouk De Ridder (first author): conception of the study (70%), data-analysis (20%), interpretation of the data analysis (70%), writing of the research paper (70%)
Sara Pabian (co-author): data-analysis (80%), interpretation of the data-analysis (30%), writing of the research paper (20%)
Heidi Vandebosch and Alexander Dhoest (co-authors): conception of the study (30%), writing of the research paper (10%)

Chapter 9: Kicking upside down: the role of comedy type and in-group approval in enjoyment and acceptance of disability comedy by non-disabled comedians
Anouk De Ridder (single author): conception of the study (100%), data collection and coordination market research agency (100%), data-analysis and interpretation (100%), writing of the research paper (100%).