Abstract
One’s enjoyment of films has been shown to be influenced by gender, sensation seeking, as well as other personality factors. We predicted the complexity of a film to be related to various individual difference measures. We found a positive correlation between need for cognition and a preference for complex films.

Introduction
Entertainment—a film, a novel, or a piece of music—has the power to evoke new emotional states in the person experiencing it. People differ greatly in the types of entertainment they enjoy, most likely because of differences in personality and upbringing. However, some research seems to indicate that personality differences may be predictive of one’s entertainment preferences. For example, Rentfrow and Gosling (2003) found that our preferences for music were significantly related to a wide variety of personality variables. Some of those results appear to indicate that open-minded and verbally intelligent people tend to favor complex music. For instance, openness to experience, self-reported intelligence, verbal ability, and political liberalism were all positively correlated with music that is reflective & complex in nature.

Other researchers have studied related territory with regards to film. One such study looked into the film preferences for people of different genders and levels of sensation seeking. For their experiment, the mood and arousal level of the films the researchers described to subjects were changed, but characters and plot structures remained the same throughout the study (Banerjee, Greene, Kremar, Baglasaros, & Ruginyte, 2006). According to the results, people generally enjoyed happy films and high arousal films more than sad and low-arousal films. Happy/mood films were preferred more by female viewers than male viewers. High-arousal films were shown to be preferred more by males than females, while low-arousal films were favored more by females. In addition, high-arousal films were liked the most by people with high levels of sensation seeking (Banerjee et al., 2008). These findings seem to indicate that a connection between certain aspects of a person—gender and levels of sensation seeking—and film preferences exist.

Researchers also looked at how people’s ‘self-esteem affects how much they enjoy the conclusion of a mystery (Westerwick, Keplinger, et al., 2006). In this study, participants were separated into three groups for the experiment. Each group read through a mystery text that had two different sections: mystery development and mystery resolution. For the first sections, the story either had both suspects having the same chance to be the culprit (as the high uncertainty condition), or, in the low uncertainty condition, only one suspect was implied as being the culprit. The resolution section of the text exposed either suspect A or B as the culprit. The goal was to determine feeling confirmation, surprise, or denouement. Subjects were also given questionnaires about their enjoyment of the story and their personality. Participants felt higher levels of enjoyment in the conditions where the confirmation, surprise, or denouement. Subjects were also given exposure either suspect A or B as the culprit. This led to the reader feeling that some personality factors can have an effect on a person’s enjoyment of a story.

If the complexity affects music preference (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003), it is possible that it affects one’s preference for other forms of entertainment (e.g., film, literature) as well. The present study examined the relationship between certain film preferences and individual difference measures of one’s preference for complexity (e.g., need for cognition, openness, open-mindedness).

Methods

Participants:
60 research participants from Introductory Psychology classes volunteered to participate and were given class credit.

Measures:
At the beginning of the study, participants gave ratings for statements on scale designed to measure their preference for complexity in films. The statements will have subjects think about different aspects of their movie-watching preferences in order to determine the level of complexity of the films they watch. For example, “I enjoy films with a mixture of both positive and negative emotions.” The scale will be a 7-point Likert scale starting with “strongly disagree” and ending with “strongly agree.” To prevent response bias, some items will be reverse-scored.

In addition to the film preferences questionnaire, participants completed a ten-item personality scale and questionnaires about need for closure, need for cognition, response to uncertainty, and tolerance for uncertainty. Following this, participants will be free to leave and receive a debriefing statement.

Introduction Cont.

surprising end to the story was not liked by participants with low self-esteem; conversely, participants with high self-esteem liked an ending that took them by surprise (Knobloch-Westerwick, & Keplinger, 2006). This demonstrates that some personality factors can have an effect on a person’s enjoyment of a story.

Table 1: Correlations with Complex Film Preference (N = 60)

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<th>Need for Cognition</th>
<th>Closed-mindedness</th>
<th>Importance of Film</th>
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<td></td>
<td>r (59) = .420, p = .001</td>
<td>r (59) = -.311, p = .016</td>
<td>r (59) = .275, p = .033</td>
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Results
The results indicated that need for cognition was positively correlated with preference for complex films, (r (59) = .420, p < .001). The other primary significant correlation that was found involved the closed-mindedness factor: as predicted, participants who scored high on closed-mindedness tended to score low on the preference for complex films, (r (59) = -.311, p = .016). Therefore, it appears that people with high need for cognition and open-mindedness enjoy watching films that have more complex elements.

Preference for complex films did not correlate with any other personality variables. There was, however, a significant positive correlation between importance of film and preference for complex films, (r (59) = .275, p = .033). This indicates that people who strongly value their art of film in their lives have a propensity to enjoy more complex films.

Discussion
Although significant correlations were found and the hypothesis was somewhat supported, certain aspects of this study could be improved upon in order to help provide more accurate correlations. Further runs of this study could implement more film clips of varying levels of complexity. The participants will watch the film clip and subsequently answer questions concerning how much they enjoyed the clip, as well as the reasons why.

Following this, they will answer the movie preferences scale and answer the personality questionnaires. This will hopefully make the results more reliable since the participants are directly commenting on a film they have just watched, as opposed to just answering general questions about films as a whole. Likewise, the participants will most likely be more emotionally engaged by the questions asked in the study, since they have viewed an actual piece of film.

References