

Scientists study mystery stories

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A U.S.-German study suggests people with lower levels of self-esteem prefer mystery crime stories that confirm their suspicions in the end.

However, Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick of Ohio State University, the study's co-author, says people with higher self-esteem enjoy a story that goes against their expectations, thereby providing a surprise ending.

"Personality plays a role in whether a person wants to be confirmed or surprised when they read mysteries," said Knobloch-Westerwick.

"People with low self-esteem like to feel they knew all along who committed the crime, probably because it makes them feel smarter."

But she and Caterina Keplinger of Germany's Hanover University agree everyone seems to enjoy mystery stories in which there are no strong hints of how the story will end.

Although researchers know little about what makes various forms of crime fiction popular or appealing, the genre draws large audiences to novels, TV programs and movies. The study, said Knobloch-Westerwick, was an attempt to discover more about how such a classic genre of fiction appeals to various people.

The research was recently detailed in the journal *Media Psychology*.

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