

What makes a great movie?

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A film that wins critical acclaim is likely to be an R-rated drama, adapted from a prize-winning play or book and based on a true story, with the original author or director involved in writing the screenplay.

It is unlikely to be a sequel or remake, a comedy or musical, a summer release, a big-budget project, have a PG-13 rating, open on numerous screens or do a big box office on the first weekend. It probably has an excellent score, but it may not have an award-winning song.

But box-office hits may have entirely different profiles.

Dean Simonton, a professor of psychology at UC Davis, has subjected thousands of feature-length, English-language, narrative films to a battery of statistical tests – including Pearson product-moment coefficients and hierarchical regression analyses – to get at the formula for cinematic creative triumph and box-office success.

He will summarize his research at the annual meeting of the American Psychological Association on Friday, Aug. 17.

Simonton, an expert on human creativity, is the author of "Origins of Genius: Darwinian Perspectives on Creativity." He is at work on a new book, "Great Flicks: Scientific Studies of Cinematic Creativity and Aesthetics."

"Exceptional creativity is frequently viewed as a highly individualistic phenomenon," Simonton said. "But there is at least one type of artistic expression that is extremely prominent, often highly profitable and inherently collective in nature: the feature film. Motion pictures provide a valuable research site for investigating group artistic creativity under real-world conditions."

Source: UC Davis

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