

Are all movie viewing experiences enjoyable?

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We've all been there: we are watching a movie with a parent or relative when a steamy love scene appears. A new study published in *Applied Cognitive Psychology* shows that all of that squirming and averting of eyes is normal, especially when you are accompanied by your parents. The authors of the study assert that not all movie-watching experiences are enjoyable or positive. Some movies make us feel downright uncomfortable or disturbed in their content and delivery, while others are inspirational, touching, or have us rolling on the floor. However, your movie watching companion also determine how much you will enjoy a particular film; this includes your parents, your first date, or someone you do not know very well.

According to the findings if a film is especially unenjoyable to us, containing gratuitous graphic sex or violence, profane language, or a troubling theme, we are not likely to want to run out and buy the DVD. However, we are more likely to desire to see a difficult movie again if it made us feel sad rather than disgusted. Additionally, we may be open to seeing the film again later, perhaps with different co-viewers. The authors also point out that we at times can be simultaneously repulsed and perversely drawn to an extreme depiction or emotion while watching a film.

The first section of the two-part study employed a survey of a pool of over 335 undergraduates attending a large Midwestern U.S. university. The students were asked to answer eleven questions related to past movie viewing experiences. Recurring movies with negative associations included "Brokeback Mountain," "American History X," "Borat," and

"Crash." The results indicated that dramas were the most likely to elicit a [negative response](#) or discomfort, followed by comedies.

Lead author Dr. Richard Harris, "Sometimes a normal [emotional reaction](#) may be overridden by other factors. For example, although watching an athlete get hurt in a ball game would normally elicit an empathic response from a fan, if that player is a member of the hated opposition team, there may be a dispositional override, where the fan may not only fail to empathize but may actually feel positive affect at seeing the injury. Applying this to affect induced by co-viewers, although watching a comedy with a lot of sexual banter and raunchy language might normally elicit amusement and general positive affect in many young adults, these responses may be overridden by concern over the presence of young children as co-viewers." According to the study college students were the most repulsed by the idea of watching a movie with sexual content with their parents.

The second part of the study assessed the students' movie viewing experiences by how they responded to a high level of discomfort. When watching a negative movie, women were much more likely to express their distaste to their movie-watching partner, whereas men were more avoidant of the situation and were more likely to pretend they were enjoying a movie. Harris, "When we experience this discomfort while watching a movie, there are various ways we can deal with these difficult emotions. We can be silent, fidget in our seat, or initiate a new topic of conversation in order to distract our co-viewer. It turns out our sense of enjoyment of media depends on numerous cognitive and social factors."

More information: "How content and co-viewers elicit emotional discomfort in movie viewing experiences: Where does the discomfort come from and how is it handled?"; Richard Jackson Harris and Lindsay Cook. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*; Published Online: November 5, 2010 ([DOI: 10.1002/acp.1758](https://doi.org/10.1002/acp.1758)).

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