

Can watching sad movies make you happier?

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Next time you're down in the dumps, perhaps *Steel Magnolias* or *Terms of Endearment* are better mood lighteners than comedy flicks. At least that's what a team of researchers thinks at Ohio State University, where a new study found that sad films tend to make people happier, *Science Daily* reports.

The study reveals that most people enjoy watching tragedies because it forces them to reflect on their own relationships, which are generally a major source of happiness in life. Associate Professor Silvia Knobloch-Westerwick, who led the study, said when people watch tragic movies it conjures up a "count your blessings" mentality about their relationships with loved ones, and brightens moods in the short-term.

"People seem to use tragedies as a way to reflect on the important relationships in their own life," Knobloch-Westerwick told *Science Daily*. "That can help explain why tragedies are so popular with audiences, despite the sadness they induce." But those who were more selfish-minded, with a "my life isn't as bad as this" perspective, did not see an increase in a more positive outlook.

Showing an abridged version of *Atonement*, the 2007 flick depicting two war-torn lovers who fall victim to casualties of conflict, to an audience of 361 college students, the team monitored responses before, during and after the screening. Students were asked a series of questions measuring their happiness as well as rating the emotions they were feeling throughout the film. The findings conclude that people are suckers for fictional heartbreak because it evokes self-reflection and assessment, and ultimately leads to more positive attitudes about life after the movie ends.

The team connects their research with previous psychological studies that suggest negative moods cause people to be more thoughtful. Happier attitudes usually align with stability, while melancholy moods makes people more critical of their lives, Knobloch-Westerwick said. Of course, if your life is in shambles, perhaps sticking to the comedy section is a good idea.

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