

True story? Men prefer 'chick flicks' when they are explicitly fictionalized

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Characterized by a heart-tugging plot, emotional melodrama is a subtype of dramatic entertainment that fosters deep emotional reactions on the part of the consumer. Often labelled “chick-flicks,” “tearjerkers,” or “human interest stories,” the importance of this form of entertainment is underscored by the popularity and success of movies like *Titanic* and the “Oprah Winfrey Show.” However, despite the apparent popularity of melodramatic entertainment, scant academic attention has been paid to the genre.

Now, new research in the *Journal of Consumer Research* examines emotional melodrama and finds a significant difference between how men and women view stories about protagonists who overcome challenges through sacrifice and bravery. While women tended to prefer stories that seem to be true, men enjoyed stories more when they were specifically told that they are fictionalized.

“Providing explicit information that the story is make-believe may have enabled low empathizers (males in this case) to relax emotion norms and become more involved in the story, in turn resulting in more favorable evaluations of the entertainment,” explain Jennifer J. Argo (University of Alberta), Rui (Juliet) Zhu and Darren W. Dahl (both University of British Columbia). “The more empathetic a person is, the more s/he will be involved and immersed into the story and transported into the world of the narrative.”

In fact, the researchers found that men were less likely to endorse gender

stereotypes, such as “men should not cry,” when they thought the story was fictitious versus true, supporting this idea that they were temporarily discarding social norms and allowing themselves to enjoy the story, according to the researchers.

“At a practical level our research findings speak to an increasingly popular trend in the entertainment industry wherein publishers and producers indicate at the outset of the story or program its level of fictionality (i.e., whether it is based on actual facts),” the researchers write. “Signaling the nature of the fictionality of a story or program may be one possible way of targeting specific segments in audiences.”

Source: University of Chicago

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