

Valuable movies and valued movies may be two different things

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Action movies may drive box office revenues, but dramas and deeper, more serious movies earn audience acclaim and appreciation, according to a team of researchers.

"Most people think that [entertainment](#) is just a silly diversion, but our research shows that entertainment is profoundly meaningful and moving for many people," said Mary Beth Oliver, Distinguished Professor in Media Studies and co-director of Media Effects Research Laboratory, Penn State. "It's not just types of entertainment that we usually think of as meaningful, such as poetry and dance, either, but also movies, television shows, video games—or Youtube videos."

The researchers examined the critical and financial success of 582 films released during the past 30 years. To study the [financial success](#) of the movies, they used U.S. domestic gross box-office revenues. Critical acclaim was measured through awards and award nominations, along with online ratings from Internet sites, to determine how regular viewers and non-critics responded to the films. In addition to examining the genre, the researchers also recorded the way people described how silly, dark, thoughtful, or emotional the movies were on websites such as the Internet Movie Database.

Oliver said that action and adventure films tend to sell more tickets and have a better chance of being blockbusters, but they are less likely to earn popular or critical acclaim. On the other hand, movies that are more emotional and contain darker portrayals earn thumbs-up from critics and

favorable ratings from viewers.

"What we see is that movies that encourage you to think may be seen as more moving and emotional, even if they tackle troubling issues or darker aspects of life," said Oliver. "You may not necessarily enjoy the movie, but you might deeply appreciate it."

The study points to the idea that entertainment can be more important than a simple diversion, providing audiences with ways to grapple with important and meaningful questions such as the purpose of life, according to the researchers, who report their findings in the online version of *Mass Communication and Society*.

Oliver said there are several possibilities to explain why highly acclaimed movies, though be deeply appreciated, do not fare as well as action flicks at the box office. Moviegoers may be less likely to see serious movies multiple times, for example. Thrillers and comedies may be more enjoyable with larger groups of people in bigger theaters.

"The difference between viewership and acclaim may be due to how people watch movies in theaters," Oliver said. "Movies that are more fun to watch with a large group of people—like an action movie—may be popular in that venue, but more serious movies might be more enjoyable when they are watched in smaller, more private settings."

However, that does not mean that audiences do not enjoy serious movies. Rather, they appreciate them on another level.

"They may not watch these [movies](#) over and over, but more serious films may be more valuable, in a sense, and also will be memorable to audiences," Oliver said. "They may stick with them for a longer time."

The researchers examined Academy Award and Golden Globe Award

winners and nominees released between 1980 and 2010. To test acclaim from common audience members, they used ratings from IMDB and Rotten Tomatoes, two popular Internet sites for movie reviews.

While the researchers used the popular sites to compare the reactions of common movie fans to those of critics, they found that both groups generally agreed on the merit of films.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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