
Why our favourite film choices are all in the mind

Sophie Freeman

Pessimists enjoy watching thrillers but people high in energy prefer musicals and comedy, a study suggests.

Psychologists who studied men and women of all ages found that natural disposition, or “temperamental traits”, could predict taste in films. Temperamental traits are regarded as the “biological core” of personality; we are born with them and they remain stable throughout our lives, although they are fine-tuned through experience.

These “genetically conditioned styles of emotional reaction can predict film preferences”, the researchers said.

“Individuals with high scores in the depressive temperament trait are pessimistic, feel inadequate and are guilt-prone,” they said. Such people tended to prefer thrillers and disliked animations.

When the film choices of people with “irritable” temperament traits were analysed, they preferred horror films and disliked romantic ones.

And those with more “hyperthymic” traits — high-energy, sensation-seeking and extroverted — liked musicals and comedies. “Hyperthymic temperament was inversely associated with depressive symptoms and this could explain the association with more cheerful genre,” the researchers said.

An anxious temperament predicted a liking for horror films and a dislike of documentaries.

Researchers from Messina University in Italy, Columbia University in New York, and Seton Hall University, New Jersey, asked 689 people to complete a survey. The findings were published in the journal *Personality and Individual Differences*.