

# NO TEARS IN HEAVEN: Did the media create the pseudo-phenomenon “altitude-adjusted lachrymosity syndrome (AALS)”?

## INTRODUCTION

Celebrities, airlines, and the media have suggested that **films watched on an airplane are more likely to cause you to cry** than films watched on the ground. If true, this could inform how we think about uncontrollable emotional outbursts in medical conditions like ALS/MND, MS, and dementia.

In some social media this phenomenon has been described as “altitude-adjusted lachrymosity syndrome” (AALS).

“I have found myself crying, just literally weeping at (movies I’d be embarrassed to confess that I’d watched)”  
Quentin Tarantino (2015)

## METHODS

Our objective was to determine whether watching a film on an airplane is really more likely to induce involuntary, uncontrollable, or surprising crying than watching one on the ground, or whether this is a pseudo-phenomenon.

Amazon Mechanical Turk survey participants (N=1,084) living in the United States who had watched a film on a plane in the past 12 months were invited to complete an online survey.



## RESULTS

### RISK FACTORS

We tested for a number of putative risk factors.

#### SIGNIFICANT PREDICTORS OF CRYING:

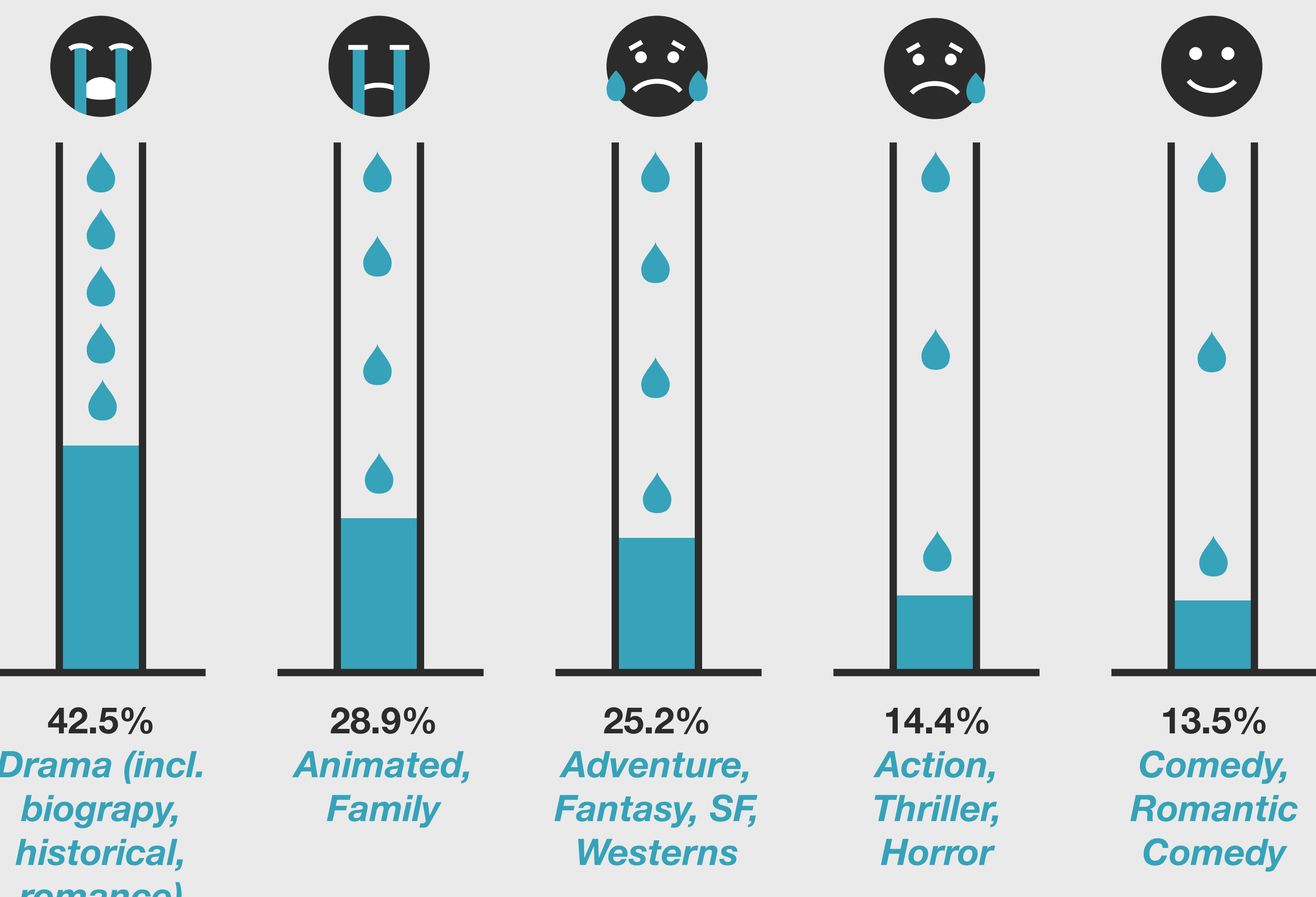
- ☒ Female gender
- ☒ Watching dramas, animated/ family films, or adventure/ fantasy/sci-fi films
- ☒ Experiencing a recent emotional life event
- ☒ Watching a “guilty pleasure” film
- ☒ Watching a high quality (“10 star”) film

#### NON-SIGNIFICANT PREDICTORS OF CRYING:

- ☐ Whether they were on a plane or on the ground
- ☐ Alcohol
- ☐ Age
- ☐ Jet lag or feeling tired
- ☐ Income

### FILM GENRES

Film genres identified as the highest risk factors for crying while watching:



## CONCLUSION

People reporting the pseudophenomena of AALS are most likely experiencing “dramatically heightened exposure”, **watching as many films on a plane in a week’s return trip as they would in a year at the cinema**, and choosing to watch more drama films. Such perceptions are probably magnified by confirmation bias and further mentions in social media.