

## Why Do Women Always Fall Asleep During Movies?

Explosions, car chases, awesome fight scenes... and she's fast asleep. Is it something psychological, or is she just tired?

By Anneli Rufus,

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Why Do Women Always Fall Asleep During Movies?

You're 20 minutes into the DVD you started watching with your partner, and that soft rumble you hear isn't on the [sound track](#); it's her snoring away. Why do women seem to conk out no matter what's on screen?

#### Automatic reaction

"We're tired," says psychologist Janet Kennedy, who runs [NYCSleepDoctor.com](#). "We lead busy lives, we don't get enough sleep and we're usually trying to stay up later on weekends. So when we get cozy on the couch in front of the TV, we relax and get sleepy... The mere act of sitting down to watch a [movie](#) can become a cue to fall asleep. Think of Pavlov's dogs." Having been fed every time a bell rang, the dog became conditioned to drool upon hearing bells.

"In this case, the movie is the bell and sleep is the conditioned response."

"If you're sleep-deprived, you'll get drowsy earlier than others do," says neurologist David Duhon at the [Sleep Disorders Center of Central Texas](#). "Many working adults are sleep-deprived. The vast majority of the high school and college populations are chronically sleep-deprived as well."

#### Are women more tired?

But are women more sleep-deprived and more susceptible to conditioned response than men?

Studies say yes. On a 10-point "fatigue scale," 78% of women and 73% of men in one study checked at least one item; twice as many women as men checked all 10. According to that study, complaints of [fatigue](#) are consistently reported as "between two or three times more prevalent in women than men. Although some have found the difference to be explained by higher rates of psychiatric disorder among women, this has not been confirmed."

Noting that 10.6% of women and 10.2% of men suffered "substantial fatigue," another study concluded: "Women were more likely to complain of fatigue than men, even after adjustment for psychological distress."

"Women report feeling tired more than men," asserts yet another study, blaming housework. Women spend on average 27 hours a week at their jobs and 33 hours doing [domestic work](#), the study found; men spend 41 and 12 hours, respectively. Mothers "take a larger share of the planning of family life... whereas men appear to have a larger freedom of choice about when and how to do their share. Women with very small children who also have jobs that require them to [lift weights](#) may be lifting more weight in a day than their male colleagues."

Ouch.

Could the movie itself put her to sleep? Find out next...

## Page 2: Why Do Women Fall Asleep So Easily?

"There are plenty of men who conk out when the TV goes on," Kennedy counters. To determine which gender conks out more consistently and why, "we'd have to do a controlled study involving [chick flicks](#) compared with action movies and using documentaries as a control group. My guess is that it has at least something to do with content."

### It's a man's world

Ouch again. Popularized by lesbian comic artist Alison Bechdel in the 1980s, the Bechdel Test asks three things of a film: Does it include at least two female characters? Do they speak to each other? Do they speak about anything besides a man?

It's no joke, as revealed by a new study conducted at USC.

According to the study, which examined a random sampling of 122 films, "a higher percentage of females than males (24% vs. 4%) are shown in sexy, tight or alluring attire. Females are more likely than their male counterparts to be physically attractive (14% vs. 3.6%) and portrayed with some exposed skin between the mid-chest and upper thigh regions (18.5% vs. 5.6%). A higher percentage of females than males are depicted under 21 (20.5% vs. 12.5%)."

And that's because men make films.

"Only 7% of directors, 13% of writers and 20% of producers are female... These numbers calculate into a ratio of 4.88 males to every one female in key production occupations."

To keep things fair and keep her awake, the USC scholars would advise selecting more films from among the scant 8.2% directed by women and the 32% scripted by at least one female writer.

### More factors

Kennedy also suggests skipping [alcohol](#).

"If both partners are drinking the same amount over dinner and then sitting down to watch a movie, the alcohol will affect the woman more."

Other strategies?

"Start the movie earlier in the evening. If you [got up early](#) and worked a tough day, it will be hard to stay up later than usual to watch a movie. Watching on Saturday instead of Friday can also help if you tend to sleep later on Saturdays... If you find yourself nodding off, pause the movie and stretch or drink a cold glass of water. And don't watch a movie lying down."

## **be a gentleman**

"If she falls asleep," Duhon adds, "she needs sleep. The loving thing to do is to let her sleep. To be even more loving, get her up and put her into bed."

Resources:

- [ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](http://ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)
- [bmj.com](http://bmj.com)
- [journals.cambridge.org](http://journals.cambridge.org)
- [usc.edu](http://usc.edu)