

**THE ROLE OF POSITIVE CINEMATIC EXPERIENCE IN FOSTERING
EMOTIONAL AWARENESS AND SELF REFLECTION AMONG ADULTS**

*Dissertation submitted to Loyola College of Social Science (Autonomous) in partial fulfilment
of the requirement for the award of the degree of*

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By

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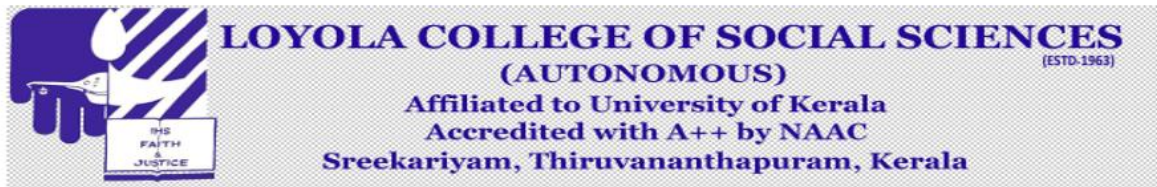
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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “ The Role of Positive Cinematic Experience in Fostering Emotional Awareness and Self Reflection among Adults” is an authentic work carried out by ALVIN GIGI under the guidance of ATHMAJA PANICKAR during the fourth semester of M.Sc Counselling Psychology programme in the academic year 2024 - 2026

Submitted for the examination held on: 14/07/2026

Examiner :

DECLARATION

I, Alvin Gigi , do hereby declare that the dissertation titled “The Impact of Positive Cinematic Experiences on Emotional Awareness and Self-Reflection in Adults” submitted to the department of counselling psychology, Loyola college of social sciences (Autonomous), sreekaryam, under the supervision of Atmaja panickar , Assistant professor in the department of counselling psychology , for the award of the degree of master of science in counselling psychology, is a Bonafide work carried out by me and no part therefore has been submitted for the award of any other degree in any university .

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Abstract

The present study aimed to explore the emotional and psychological impact of positive cinematic experiences on emotional awareness and self-reflection among adults using a qualitative pre–post research design. Cinema, particularly emotionally driven films, can provide opportunities for emotional engagement, empathy, personal reflection, and psychological insight. The objective of the study was to examine how exposure to a positive movie experience influences emotional awareness and self-reflective thinking among adults.

For the purpose of the study, *Inside Out* was selected as the cinematic stimulus due to its strong emotional themes, psychological depth, and focus on understanding emotions. Five adults between the ages of 18 and 25 years were selected using purposive sampling from Kerala. Participants who had not previously watched the movie were included in the study to maintain the novelty of the viewing experience and encourage authentic emotional responses.

Data collection was conducted through pre- and post-viewing semi-structured interviews and reflective responses. Before watching the movie, participants were asked questions related to emotional understanding, emotional expression, and self-reflection. Following the movie screening, participants shared their emotional experiences, reflections, and perceptions regarding the emotional themes presented in the film. The interviews were audio-recorded with participant consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The collected data were analysed using Braun and Clarke’s six-phase model of thematic analysis. Repeated reading of transcripts, coding of meaningful statements, and identification of recurring emotional patterns led to the development of major themes. The findings revealed themes such as Emotional Recognition and Awareness, Self-Reflection Through Cinematic Experience, Empathy and Emotional Connection with Characters, Reflection on Personal Relationships, and Positive Emotional Engagement Through Cinema. Each theme was

supported by participant narratives and interpreted in relation to emotional-awareness theories and media psychology literature.

The findings suggest that positive cinematic experiences can encourage emotional reflection, emotional understanding, and personal insight among adults. The study highlights the potential role of emotionally meaningful cinema as a medium for emotional exploration and reflective learning. It also provides implications for psychology, counselling, media studies, and emotional-learning approaches involving visual storytelling and cinema.

Keywords: Positive Cinema, Emotional Awareness, Self-Reflection, Adults, Emotional Engagement, Thematic Analysis, media Psychology, Reflective Learning

CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Movies have become an important part of everyday life and play a significant role in shaping human thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and social understanding. Cinema is not only a source of entertainment but also a medium through which individuals experience emotions, learn social values, and develop personal meaning from stories and characters. Over the years, films have evolved into a powerful psychological and cultural influence that affects people emotionally, cognitively, and socially (Bandura, 1977). Viewers often emotionally connect with movie characters, situations, and narratives, leading to emotional engagement, empathy, self-reflection, and behavioural influence.

Movies can be understood as visual narratives that communicate stories through moving images, sound, dialogue, and emotional expression. Different types of movies exist based on genre, emotional tone, and storytelling style. Common movie genres include action, comedy, thriller, horror, romance, fantasy, drama, animation, documentary, and psychological films. Each genre influences viewers differently depending on the emotional experiences and themes presented. Emotional and psychologically driven movies often encourage viewers to reflect on their own lives, relationships, and emotions, whereas violent or aggressive movies may influence attitudes and behavioural tendencies in a different way (McLeod, 2025).

Positive movies are films that promote emotional growth, hope, empathy, resilience, self-understanding, interpersonal connection, and constructive emotional experiences. These movies often contain emotionally meaningful narratives, moral learning, character development, and themes of healing or self-discovery. Positive cinematic experiences can create emotional comfort, inspire optimism, encourage empathy, and promote self-reflection among viewers. Emotionally meaningful films also help individuals understand emotions such as sadness, fear, anger, joy, and acceptance in a healthier and more reflective manner. Movies like *Inside Out* explore the complexity of emotions and emotional regulation in a

psychologically engaging way, making viewers more aware of their own emotional experiences and interpersonal relationships.

On the other hand, negative movies may contain excessive violence, aggression, crime, fear, emotional distress, or destructive behavioural patterns. Exposure to violent or aggressive cinematic content has been widely discussed in psychology and media studies because of its possible influence on behaviour and social learning. One of the most influential psychological explanations for media influence comes from Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory and the famous Bobo Doll Experiment. In this experiment, Bandura demonstrated that children who observed aggressive behaviour were more likely to imitate similar aggressive actions later (Bandura et al., 1961). The study highlighted the importance of observational learning and showed that individuals can learn behaviours through watching and imitating models around them.

The findings of the Bobo Doll Experiment became highly relevant in understanding the influence of movies, television, and media on human behaviour. According to Bandura (1977), repeated exposure to aggressive models may influence individuals to imitate behaviours they observe in media. Modern media research also suggests that repeated exposure to violent cinematic content may contribute to emotional desensitization, aggressive thoughts, and normalization of violence among viewers (Dahl & DellaVigna, 2008). Although the relationship between movies and real-life aggression is complex, several researchers have explored how violent media may affect emotional responses, attitudes, and social behaviour. At the same time, some studies argue that media influence is not always direct and may depend on social, psychological, and environmental factors.

Movies may differ greatly in terms of story, genre, narrative style, emotional tone, and visual presentation. Some movies focus on action and excitement, while others emphasize

emotions, relationships, psychological struggles, fantasy, humour, or social realities. Genres such as romance, drama, animation, thriller, horror, and comedy create different emotional experiences for audiences. However, beyond the genre or storyline, the content presented to viewers plays a highly important role in influencing emotions, thoughts, attitudes, and behaviour. The emotional messages, character portrayals, values, conflicts, and behavioural models shown in movies can shape the way audiences emotionally interpret situations and relate them to their own lives. Therefore, the psychological impact of cinema is not determined only by the type of movie, but also by the nature of the content and the meaning viewers attach to it (Bandura, 1977).

In contemporary society, movies and web series have become more emotionally immersive and psychologically influential due to digital streaming platforms and increased accessibility. While positive cinema can encourage empathy and emotional reflection, concerns have also been raised regarding the portrayal of violence, crime, and unethical behaviour in modern films. Increasing exposure to violent cinematic content has often been associated with discussions around aggression, emotional numbness, imitation, and normalization of crime-related behaviour in society (The Guardian, 2024).

An example often discussed in relation to cinema and behavioural influence is *Drishyam*. The film became widely popular for its intelligent storytelling and crime-based narrative involving concealment of evidence and manipulation of investigation procedures. Although the movie was critically appreciated for its screenplay and emotional depth, public discussions and media reports later highlighted instances where crimes were allegedly inspired by methods shown in the film. Such discussions reflect how cinema can strongly influence public imagination, behavioural thinking, and emotional engagement. However, cinema does not affect all individuals in the same manner, as personal interpretation, emotional maturity, social background, and psychological factors also influence audience responses.

Despite concerns about negative cinematic influence, positive and emotionally meaningful movies continue to be studied for their beneficial psychological effects. Emotionally driven films may help viewers understand emotions more deeply, improve empathy, encourage emotional expression, and stimulate self-reflection. Self-reflection refers to the process of examining one's thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and personal experiences to gain better self-understanding and emotional insight. Emotional awareness, similarly, refers to the ability to recognize, understand, and express emotions in oneself and others. Positive cinematic experiences may encourage both emotional awareness and self-reflection by allowing viewers to emotionally engage with characters and situations that resemble real-life emotional experiences.

The present study focuses on understanding the impact of positive cinematic experiences on emotional awareness and self-reflection among adults. Using *Inside Out* as the cinematic stimulus, the study attempts to explore how emotionally meaningful cinema may influence emotional understanding, emotional expression, empathy, and reflective thinking among adults through a qualitative pre–post exploratory approach.

Emotional awareness

Emotional awareness is one of the critical elements of psychological health and human functioning. Emotional awareness means the capacity of an individual to perceive, interpret, identify, and express both his/her own and other people's emotions. The concept of emotional awareness contributes significantly to the enhancement of awareness regarding emotions of oneself and how they affect one's life on various levels, including thinking processes, actions, interpersonal relations, and decision-making. People who are emotionally aware tend to be able

to detect emotional shifts in themselves, deal with their emotions properly, and express their emotions effectively (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

Emotions are a fundamental element of human existence and affect how people perceive themselves and the world around them. Emotions include feelings of happiness, sadness, anger, fear, guilt, and pleasure and define our experiences both individually and socially. All individuals are not equally emotionally self-aware. Whereas one person can readily recognize and articulate his or her emotions, another may be unable to do so. Consequently, emotional awareness becomes central to emotional management, empathy, self-knowledge, and interpersonal interaction (Goleman, 1995).

The relationship between emotional awareness and emotional intelligence is very close. Salovey & Mayer (1990) define emotional intelligence as being comprised of perceiving, understanding, managing, and using emotions effectively. Being emotionally aware is essential for one to develop emotional intelligence since it is only when emotions are perceived that an individual can control them effectively. Emotionally aware people tend to be more successful at coping with stressful situations and developing healthy relationships with other people.

In everyday activities, emotional awareness plays an important role in the development and growth of the person. Emotional awareness enables people to take time to reflect on their emotions, emotional responses, and life experiences. Emotional awareness allows people to gain empathy, sensitivity, and awareness towards oneself and other people. In addition, emotional awareness assists people in making decisions, communicating, and coping emotionally in tough times. Emotional awareness has positive effects on people's mental well-being, according to research (Lane & Schwartz, 1987).

Modern social contexts and media worlds also have their roles to play when it comes to emotional awareness. Movies, stories, music, and visuals produce an experience that makes

one think and reflect about one's emotions and relationships with others. Emotionally moving films can make individuals identify, comprehend, and relate to emotions and emotional conflicts that might arise in them.

But, in recent times, researchers have shown that there has been an increased level of research regarding the impact of emotions from media and films, which is essential in terms of developing an understanding of one's own emotions and exploring them. Emotionally positive experiences in movies help an individual become emotionally conscious, through situations that involve emotions and emotional people. This will enable the individual to understand emotions such as sadness, fear, anger, joy, empathy, and acceptance within himself and other individuals.

The current research will center on emotional awareness in relation to positive film experience. Through examining the emotions that participants feel prior to and after watching an emotionally evocative film, the study intends to shed light on how cinema may play a role in promoting emotional awareness and self-reflection.

Self reflection

Self-reflection is the act of contemplating one's own thoughts, emotions, behaviors, experiences, and identity. Self-reflection entails analyzing personal emotions and experiences to have a deeper understanding of oneself. By engaging in self-reflection, people become more conscious of their strengths, weaknesses, emotions, values, and behaviors. Self-reflection is deemed as a vital process in psychology that leads to personal growth and emotional development (Grant, Franklin & Langford, 2002).

In reality, one usually becomes involved in the act of self-reflection in a conscious manner or even subconsciously. One might reflect on the various occurrences that occur when he or she experiences certain emotions, conflicts, successes, failures, and even decisions made

in life. This helps an individual become aware of reasons why he or she behaved in a particular manner. Through self-reflection, one is able to learn from such emotions.

Self-reflection has close ties to emotional awareness since the realization of one's emotions leads to reflective thoughts regarding personal experiences and behavior. Once a person starts to realize certain emotions like sorrow, anger, fear, joy, and guilt, he or she may start thinking about the cause of these emotions and how they impact his/her life. It can also help individuals become more emotionally intelligent, empathic, and learn to control their emotions. Boyd & Fales (1983) suggest that reflective thinking involves interpreting experiences and attaching personal meaning to them.

Self-reflection is also a significant element in self-development and psychological health according to psychologists. Self-reflection allows people to assess their goals, beliefs, relationships, and emotions in a healthy manner. It may lead people to become more accepting of themselves, balance their emotions, solve problems, and enhance their relationship skills. But self-reflection becomes effective when it leads to gaining insight and not overanalyzing everything.

The media and storytelling might also play a role in self-reflection. Films, stories, and narratives that resonate with people's emotions and feelings have the ability to inspire reflection regarding one's life experiences, emotions, relationships, and feelings. When an individual empathizes with a character in a movie or a situation presented within the narrative, he or she may end up comparing such experience with his or her personal emotional journey.

Positive film experiences, in particular, emotional movies, may trigger reflection through relatable emotional scenarios and psychological aspects presented within them. Such films can prompt viewers to reflect on themselves more deeply because they deal with emotions, relationships, personal dilemmas, and personal growth. Reflecting on one's emotions

and behaviors becomes possible through identifying oneself with the characters and the story depicted in the movie.

This research explores the process of reflection in terms of positive film experience for adults. Analyzing the reflections made by participants both prior and after watching an emotionally significant movie allows exploring ways in which cinema impacts emotions and reflective processes.

Media psychology

Media psychology refers to the study within the field of psychology of the association between media and human behavior, thinking, emotion, attitude, and social interaction. It tries to understand the impact that various media like movies, television, social media, advertisements, computer games, news, etc., have on human beings from a psychological and emotional perspective. Media psychology analyzes both the benefits and drawbacks of media consumption by people and societies. With media becoming an integral aspect of our lives, the significance of media psychology has been growing in recent years (Dill, 2009).

Media is highly influential in determining the manner in which individuals perceive reality, comprehend emotions, generate opinions, and engage socially. Individuals are bombarded with imagery and emotion from movies, web series, social networking sites, and various online forms of entertainment. This bombardment can affect emotional reactions, attitudes, beliefs, behavior, decisions, and human relations. Thus, media psychology is concerned with how individuals emotionally respond to media content, and how repeated exposure to particular ideas or stories could affect their psychological processes.

Another significant aspect of media psychology relates to the power of emotions generated through media content. The media industry frequently produces media content that

is capable of triggering emotions like joy, sadness, fear, excitement, empathy, rage, and inspiration in viewers. Emotional response to media content might assist people in connecting with the characters, events, and stories depicted in such media content.

Observational learning and behaviour modification constitute another important facet of media psychology. The concept of observational learning was introduced in Albert Bandura's theory of Social Learning. According to the Social Learning Theory proposed by Bandura, individuals are able to learn through the observations of their models on media and imitation of those actions (Bandura, 1977). The Social Learning Theory gained prominence in connection with the impact of media on aggression, attitudes, and social behavior. Individuals might imitate certain behaviors, emotional reactions, or social attitudes seen in movies, TV shows, and internet media.

The area of media psychology also involves an investigation into the influence of cognition by media, including how media impacts on attention, memory, perception, reasoning and interpretation of data. Media messages have the potential to affect people's perceptions of themselves, others, and society. Unrealistic standards presented through media messages may impact on self-image and social perception of youth.

Over the last decade, media, particularly digital media and streaming channels, have increased their impact on people's lives through their increasing prevalence. The movies and series people watch today have turned into emotionally involving entertainment that involves extended emotional investment in fictional characters. Watching positive media can promote the development of empathy, emotional competence, hopefulness, resilience, and self-reflection. On the contrary, consuming too much media content that is violent, disturbing, or emotionally damaging can result in aggression, emotional numbness, fear, anxiety, or misperception of reality (Dill, 2009).

Media psychology also recognizes the therapeutic and educational value of the media. Films and stories that carry some form of emotional content are now widely employed for counseling purposes, psychotherapy, teaching, and emotional learning. The media provides avenues for expressing emotions and gaining insights through self-reflection and interpersonal communication. People watching movies and reading stories find that they can identify emotionally with the characters in them.

However, the effect that media has on the person differs based on a number of different variables, including personality, level of emotional development, age, social environment, personal experience, and the nature of media consumption. Not everyone reacts to media in the same manner. In some cases, the person will become emotionally engaged by media content and will have an emotionally enriching experience, while in other cases, a person may become negatively influenced by media content.

When it comes to this particular research paper, media psychology becomes an integral tool used to explore the effects that positively perceived movies might have on one's emotional intelligence and self-reflection in adulthood. Emotional movies provide the person with an opportunity to emotionally engage and reflect upon his/her feelings, relationships, and personal experiences in general.

Statement of the Problem

Cinema has emerged as a significant force in contemporary life, exerting considerable influence on the emotional, psychological, and social experiences of individuals. With the growing accessibility of films through theatrical screenings, television broadcasting, and digital streaming platforms, adults are continuously and extensively exposed to a diverse range of emotional and behavioural content. While certain cinematic experiences have been associated with adverse psychological outcomes — including heightened aggression, fear responses, and

maladaptive behavioural patterns — positive and emotionally meaningful films hold the potential to foster emotional understanding, empathic engagement, self-reflection, and personal growth. Despite the pervasive presence of cinema in everyday life, however, insufficient scholarly attention has been directed toward understanding how positive cinematic experiences specifically influence emotional awareness and self-reflection among adults, particularly within the Indian and Kerala sociocultural context.

Emotional awareness and self-reflection are fundamental psychological processes that enable individuals to recognise, understand, and regulate their emotional states, while simultaneously facilitating deeper personal insight and emotional growth. In contemporary society, a significant proportion of adults encounter emotional stress, affective confusion, and difficulties in emotional expression arising from academic, social, and interpersonal demands. Positive cinematic experiences may create meaningful psychological opportunities for individuals to engage emotionally with characters and narratives, thereby encouraging emotional reflection and expanding emotional understanding. Nevertheless, qualitative research examining the specific ways in which emotionally meaningful cinema contributes to these processes among adults remains limited.

The existing body of literature on cinema and psychology has predominantly centred on themes of media violence, behavioural influence, aggression, and general entertainment-based emotional responses. Comparatively few studies have investigated the role of positive and emotionally resonant films in enhancing emotional awareness and self-reflection through personal engagement with cinematic narratives. A further gap exists in the use of qualitative pre–post exploratory designs to capture the subjective emotional experiences of adults before and after engaging with emotionally meaningful films — a methodological approach that is particularly well-suited to exploring the depth and complexity of individual emotional responses.

In light of these gaps, the present study seeks to explore the impact of positive cinematic experiences on emotional awareness and self-reflection among adults, using *Inside Out* as the cinematic stimulus. Specifically, the study aims to understand how emotionally meaningful cinema may influence emotional understanding, empathic engagement, emotional expression, and reflective thinking among adults — as expressed through their lived emotional experiences and personal interpretations of the film.

Need and Significance of the Study

In contemporary society, cinema and digital media have become deeply embedded in the everyday lives of adults. Individuals devote substantial time to engaging with films, web series, and emotionally driven audio-visual content through theatrical screenings and online streaming platforms. Cinema can no longer be regarded merely as a source of entertainment; it has increasingly emerged as a culturally and psychologically significant medium that shapes emotions, cognitions, behaviours, interpersonal relationships, and processes of self-understanding. The emotional experiences evoked through cinematic engagement are often enduring, with the potential to meaningfully influence the manner in which individuals perceive both themselves and the world around them.

Despite this pervasive influence, the existing body of research has disproportionately concentrated on the adverse psychological effects of media including the facilitation of aggression, desensitisation to violence, behavioural imitation, and emotional dysregulation. Comparatively limited scholarly attention has been directed toward the positive psychological dimensions of cinematic experience, particularly its capacity to foster emotional awareness, empathic understanding, and self-reflective thinking among adults. This gap in the literature points to a clear and pressing need to examine cinema not solely as a recreational medium, but

as a psychologically enriching and emotionally meaningful experience that may contribute to individual well-being and personal growth.

Emotional awareness and self-reflection are foundational to psychological health and emotional development. Emotional awareness enables individuals to identify, comprehend, and express their affective states in adaptive ways, while self-reflection facilitates deeper engagement with one's thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and lived experiences. In the contemporary context, a considerable proportion of adults encounter emotional stress, communication difficulties, and emotional suppression arising from academic, occupational, and interpersonal demands. Emotionally meaningful cinema may offer a safe and contained psychological space within which individuals can process emotions and examine personal experiences mediated through identification with characters and emotionally resonant narratives.

The present study is significant in that it seeks to explore how positive cinematic experiences influence emotional awareness and self-reflection in adults. The use of *Inside Out* as the cinematic stimulus is particularly purposeful, as the film presents discrete emotional states in a manner that is both psychologically informed and affectively accessible. This makes it especially well-suited for facilitating emotional understanding and reflective thinking in adult viewers. By focusing on participants' emotional responses before and after watching the film, the study aims to capture the subjective psychological impact of a positive cinematic experience in a meaningful and contextually grounded way.

The qualitative pre–post exploratory design adopted in this study further strengthens its significance. Unlike quantitative approaches, this methodology allows participants to articulate their emotions, thoughts, and reflections in their own words, yielding richer, more nuanced data on the personal meanings attached to cinematic engagement. The application of thematic

analysis as the primary analytic framework enables a deeper examination of recurring emotional patterns, reflective themes, and experiential connections that emerge from the viewing experience.

The findings of this study are anticipated to contribute meaningfully to the fields of psychology, counselling psychology, media psychology, and emotional learning. The research has practical relevance for counsellors, educators, psychologists, and mental health professionals who may wish to utilise emotionally resonant cinema as a facilitative tool for emotional expression, empathy development, self-exploration, and reflective learning in both clinical and non-clinical settings. The study may also encourage further academic inquiry into the therapeutic and educational applications of cinema as a medium for psychological growth.

Finally, the study carries cultural significance within the Kerala context, where cinema occupies a particularly prominent role in social, emotional, and everyday life. Exploring how adults in this sociocultural setting engage with positive cinematic experiences offers valuable insight into the relationship between media, emotional functioning, and psychological well-being a relationship that is both locally meaningful and broadly relevant to contemporary understandings of cinema and the human mind.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This foundational experimental study was conducted in the United States, primarily with undergraduate university students. Using randomized controlled lab experiments, Fredrickson tested participants across positive, negative, and neutral emotional conditions using short film clips. Participants assigned to films inducing joy and contentment listed significantly more thought-action responses compared to those in neutral or negative conditions. The study concluded that positive emotions actively broaden cognitive awareness and build lasting personal resources such as resilience, openness, and reflective capacity forming what became known as the Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions. (Fredrickson, 2001)

The Broden and build theory of positive emotions shows theoretical review consolidated evidence from multiple experimental studies conducted across North American populations. The research synthesised data from adults in laboratory and naturalistic settings. Fredrickson reviewed findings from over a decade of empirical work showing that positive emotional states widen attentional scope and promote exploration, creativity, and integrative thinking. The study demonstrated that these broadened mindsets, over time, build durable psychological, physical, and social resources, increasing overall wellbeing and emotional functioning. (Fredrickson, 2004)

Goleman (1995) *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. this seminal book was authored by American psychologist and science journalist Daniel Goleman and drew on neuroscientific and psychological research conducted primarily in the United States and Europe. It synthesised decades of research from diverse populations including school children, adults in professional settings, and clinical groups. Goleman proposed a model of emotional intelligence comprising five core dimensions: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. The book demonstrated through case studies and

empirical data that these emotional competencies often predicted life success more powerfully than cognitive intelligence, making a compelling case for intentional emotional development. (Goleman, 1995)

Mayer, Salovey & Caruso (2004) *Emotional Intelligence: Theory, Findings, and Implications* an empirical synthesis was conducted by researchers at the University of New Hampshire and Yale University in the United States. Drawing on studies with adult samples across universities and general population groups, the authors refined the four-branch model of emotional intelligence perceiving emotions, using emotions to facilitate thought, understanding emotions, and managing emotions. Their findings confirmed that emotional intelligence is a measurable cognitive ability distinct from personality traits, and that higher EI scores were associated with greater social competence, well-being, and prosocial behaviour in adults. (Mayer et al., 2004)

Ventura et al. (2022) *Through the Looking Glass: A Scoping Review of Cinema and Video Therapy*. This scoping review was conducted by researchers based in Portugal and published in *Frontiers in Psychology*. The authors systematically analysed 38 peer-reviewed studies on the use of cinema and video in therapeutic contexts, covering populations including adults with depression, anxiety, relationship difficulties, and personality disorders across Europe and North America. Of the 38 studies reviewed, 36 reported positive therapeutic outcomes from cinematherapy. The review identified three primary mechanisms emotional identification with characters, narrative transportation, and post-viewing reflection as the core drivers of therapeutic change. It called for more rigorous empirical designs and cross-cultural studies. (Ventura et al., 2022)

Niemiec & Wedding on 2014 shows *Positive Psychology at the Movies* this widely cited book was authored by American researchers and published by Hogrefe Publishing. Drawing on a broad base of empirical psychology research and film analysis across hundreds of films

from Western cinema, the authors constructed a systematic framework for using commercial films as tools to identify and strengthen character virtues such as hope, courage, creativity, love, and transcendence. The work demonstrated that films could serve as accessible vehicles for promoting psychological strengths in both clinical and non-clinical populations, laying a practical foundation for positive cinematherapy as a distinct therapeutic approach. (Niemiec & Wedding, 2014)

Powell, Newgent & Lee (2006) Group Cinematherapy: Using Metaphor to Enhance Adolescent Self-Esteem. This interventional study was conducted in the United States with a sample of at-risk adolescents in a school-based group counselling setting. The researchers implemented a structured group cinematherapy programme over multiple sessions using carefully selected films with emotionally resonant themes. Results demonstrated statistically significant improvements in self-esteem, emotional expression, and peer connectedness among participants. The study identified the use of film characters as metaphorical mirrors allowing young people to process their own emotions at a safe psychological distance as the primary mechanism of therapeutic change. It established group film-based interventions as viable and effective tools in school counselling. (Powell et al., 2006)

Granthaalayah Publications (2025) Therapeutic Impact of Cinematherapy on Emotional Stability. This recent study, published in an Indian visual and performing arts journal, investigated the use of cinematherapy as a structured intervention for improving emotional stability among adults experiencing emotional dysregulation. The study was conducted in India with adult participants from educational and community settings. Using a pre-test and post-test design, the researchers measured emotional stability, mood regulation, and self-awareness before and after structured film-viewing sessions. Results indicated significant improvements in emotional regulation and self-reported emotional clarity following the intervention,

establishing cinematherapy as a culturally accessible and cost-effective mental health support tool in Indian contexts. (Granthaalayah, 2025)

ResearchGate (2024) The Impact of Inside Out on the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents. This review article examined the psychological impact of Pixar's Inside Out on children and adolescents, drawing on clinical observations, therapist reports, and existing empirical literature from the United States and Europe. The study focused on how the film's emotional characters Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust helped younger audiences identify, name, and validate their own emotional experiences. Findings showed that the film improved emotional literacy, reduced stigma around difficult emotions, and was widely used by therapists and educators as a psychoeducational tool. The study specifically noted clinical psychologist Lisa Damour's consultation role and called for future research on adult populations. (ResearchGate, 2024)

Shrivastava (2019) Disney's Inside Out: Insights on Emotions and Emotional Intelligence examined Inside Out as a cinematic case study in emotional intelligence education. The study used textual and narrative analysis of the film's storytelling elements, character development, and emotional themes, referencing Goleman's EI framework and Mayer and Salovey's ability model. The analysis concluded that the film effectively communicates all four branches of emotional intelligence perceiving, using, understanding, and managing emotions in accessible narrative form. It argued that Inside Out holds particular value as a teaching tool for adults seeking to develop greater self-awareness, especially for those from cultures where emotional expression is discouraged. (Shrivastava, 2019)

Picturing the Autobiographical Imagination in Inside Out this academic film analysis was published in Film-Philosophy, an international peer-reviewed journal based in Edinburgh, United Kingdom. The author conducted an in-depth textual and phenomenological analysis of

Inside Out's narrative architecture, examining how the film constructs relationships between memory, emotion, and self-identity. The study found that the film functions as a metacognitive text representing not just what emotions feel like, but how they interact with autobiographical memory to construct a sense of self. It argued that Inside Out offers adult viewers a unique opportunity to reflect on their own emotional history and identity formation, making it an unusually rich tool for self-reflection. (Film-Philosophy, 2021)

Inside Children's Emotions: Thoughts on Pixar's Inside Out shows psychological commentary was published by two French clinical researchers on ResearchGate. The authors analysed Inside Out from a child and adolescent psychiatry perspective, examining how the film's representation of emotions particularly the co-existence of Joy and Sadness maps onto developmental psychological theory and DBT principles. The study noted that the film challenges cultural norms that privilege happiness while pathologising sadness, and found that its narrative directly mirrors concepts such as radical acceptance, emotional validation, and the functional value of all emotional states. The authors recommended the film for use in therapeutic settings for both younger clients and adults exploring emotional complexity. (Benarous & Munch, 2016)

This experimental study the Role of Transportation in Narrative Persuasion was conducted by American researchers at Ohio State University and published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. Using adult undergraduate participants, Green and Brock designed a series of controlled experiments exposing participants to narrative texts and measuring their degree of psychological transportation the experience of being absorbed into a story world.

Highly transported readers showed greater belief change, more positive evaluations of story characters, Green & Brock (2000)

and fewer counter-arguments to story content. The study established narrative transportation as a distinct psychological mechanism explaining how stories influence beliefs, emotions, and self-reflection, forming the theoretical cornerstone of narrative persuasion research. (Green & Brock, 2000)

Cohen proposed a rigorous definition of audience identification with media characters distinguishing identification from parasocial interaction, imitation, and similarity. He argued that identification involves temporarily adopting a character's perspective, goals, and emotions, producing a temporary shift in self-perception. The paper laid the conceptual groundwork for empirical research on how viewers emotionally and cognitively merge with on-screen characters, a process central to understanding how films like *Inside Out* trigger self-reflection and emotional awareness. (Cohen, 2001)

McAdams (2001) *The Psychology of Life Stories* is influential theoretical paper was written by American personality psychologist Dan McAdams of Northwestern University and published in the *Review of General Psychology*. The paper drew on research with adult participants across multiple longitudinal studies in the United States examining how individuals construct personal narratives to make meaning of their life experiences.

McAdams argued that personal identity is fundamentally narrative in nature that people understand themselves through the stories they tell about their lives. The study demonstrated that identifying with characters in stories, including fictional film characters, activates the same narrative identity processes through which people develop self-understanding and emotional coherence. (McAdams, 2001)

The empirical study was conducted by a collaborative team of German and Italian researchers and published in PLOS ONE. Participants were adult audience members ($n = 62$) who watched emotionally engaging films either alone or in a social group while wearing biosensors measuring galvanic skin response, heart rate, and cardiac vagal activity. Results showed that watching emotionally resonant films in a group setting significantly modulated physiological emotional responses compared to solo viewing. Social film viewing enhanced emotional synchrony between viewers and increased vagal activity, demonstrating that cinematic experiences produce measurable physiological emotional engagement and that the shared viewing context amplifies emotional and empathic processing. (Kaltwasser et al., 2019)

Winkler & Appel (2024) Measuring Dynamic Emotional Experiences in Response to Media
this methodological study was conducted by German researchers and published in *Frontiers in Psychology*. The study explored how emotional experiences during film viewing unfold dynamically over time rather than as static end-state responses, using adult participants in controlled laboratory settings. Employing continuous self-report measures and reviewing theoretical frameworks including affective disposition theory and excitation transfer theory, the researchers demonstrated that emotional responses to films are temporally complex, building and shifting throughout viewing. The findings offered important methodological guidance for researchers studying cinema-induced emotional processing and highlighted the role of narrative pacing in shaping emotional awareness. (Winkler & Appel, 2024)

Sigamani (2024) Emotional Experiences and Mental Health Awareness Through Film Media

This study was conducted by an Indian researcher and published in the *International Journal of Scientific Research and Analysis (IJSRA)*. The research examined how mainstream commercial films influence emotional experiences and mental health awareness among Indian adult audiences, using survey-based methodology with participants from urban educational

institutions. The study found that emotionally themed films significantly increased self-reported emotional awareness, reduced stigma surrounding mental health, and prompted reflective thinking about personal emotional experiences in a majority of participants. The study recommended the integration of emotionally rich films into psychoeducational programmes for Indian adults and noted that Bollywood and global films both showed comparable impact. (Sigamani, 2024)

This qualitative study was conducted by American researchers and published in the *Journal of Adolescence*. Using a sample of 32 young adult participants from a US university, the researchers collected and analysed personal trauma narratives to examine how patterns of self-reflection influenced identity development and psychological wellbeing. Findings distinguished between adaptive self-reflection in which individuals explored and integrated emotional meaning and maladaptive rumination, which involved repetitive negative thought without resolution. Young adults who engaged in adaptive self-reflection showed greater identity coherence and emotional wellbeing, while ruminative narrators showed fragmented self-understanding, establishing self-reflection quality as a critical variable in emotional development. (Berman et al., 2019)

This large-scale quantitative study was conducted at Stanford and the University of California, Berkeley in the United States. The researchers surveyed adult participants (n = over 1,300 across multiple studies) to examine two primary emotion regulation strategies cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Results showed that individuals who used reappraisal consciously reinterpreting emotional situations reported greater positive affect, more authentic social relationships, and higher levels of wellbeing. Suppression, by contrast, was associated with reduced emotional awareness and poorer interpersonal outcomes. The study provides a foundational framework for understanding why cinematic experiences that facilitate reappraisal, such as *Inside Out*, may enhance emotional awareness. (Gross & John, 2003)

Thomas & Manalil (2025) Framing Emotions: Using Cinema as a Tool for Emotional Intelligence in Education this study was co-authored by researchers affiliated with Marian College Kuttikkanam, Kerala, and published in *Frontiers in Psychology*. The research was conducted with university students in Malaysia, examining how structured film-viewing sessions incorporating reflective discussion improved emotional intelligence outcomes. Pre- and post-assessments of EI dimensions including self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation showed statistically significant improvements after the cinema-based intervention. The authors recommended pre-viewing orientation, active note-taking on character arcs, and post-viewing reflective writing as best practices. The study is particularly relevant as it represents one of the few educational cinema studies authored from a Keralite institutional perspective. (Thomas & Manalil, 2025)

The researchers analysed data from multiple epidemiological and clinical studies conducted across Kerala's districts, examining gender-based differences in the prevalence of depression, anxiety, and related mental health conditions. The review found significant disparities, with women in Kerala showing disproportionately higher rates of internalising disorders, emotional suppression, and help-seeking barriers. The study identified cultural norms around gendered emotional expression particularly the expectation that women manage emotions privately as key contributing factors, making it directly relevant to understanding emotional awareness barriers in Keralite adult populations. (PMC, 2024)

IJEDR (2025) Mental Health Representation in Indian Regional Cinema this content analysis study was published in the *International Journal of Engineering Development and Research* and examined the representation of mental health themes in Indian regional language cinema, including Malayalam, Tamil, and Telugu films. The researchers analysed a sample of 40 films

released between 2015 and 2024, coding for emotional themes, character portrayals of mental health, and stigma-reducing narratives. Results showed that regional cinema increasingly portrayed mental health struggles authentically and empathetically, reflecting and shaping audience attitudes toward emotional awareness and help-seeking. Malayalam cinema was identified as among the most progressive in South India for mental health representation, suggesting a culturally receptive audience for emotionally themed films. (IJEDR, 2025)

Braun & Clarke (2006) Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology

This highly cited methodological paper was authored by New Zealand and UK researchers and published in *Qualitative Research in Psychology*. The paper provided the first comprehensive and systematic framework for conducting thematic analysis the most widely used qualitative data analysis method in psychology. The authors outlined a six-phase process involving familiarisation with data, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting. The paper is applicable to interview, focus group, and reflective journal data and is particularly suitable for applied qualitative research in counselling, health psychology, and educational settings. It remains the standard reference for thematic analysis in Indian and international psychological research. (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

This widely cited work by American educator Donald Schon was published by Basic Books in the United States. Drawing on observational studies of practitioners across fields including architecture, medicine, and education, Schon developed the concept of reflective practice the capacity to pause, notice, and examine one's own thinking and emotional responses in the midst of and after experience. The book distinguished between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, arguing that genuine learning and self-development require deliberate reflective engagement. In the context of cinematic experience, Schon's framework supports the

mechanism by which post-film reflection deepens emotional insight and self-awareness in adult viewers. (Schon, 1983)

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Research methodology refers to the systematic and scientific approach adopted to conduct a study, collect and analyse data, and address the research objectives and questions, encompassing the overall strategy and rationale underlying the choice of design, sample, and procedures used to investigate a research problem (Coolican, 2019). An appropriate methodology provides a clear framework for selecting the research design, participants, sampling technique, data collection instruments, procedures, and analytic methods. It also contributes to the systematic conduct, trustworthiness, and ethical integrity of the research process.

This chapter presents the methodology adopted for the present study on the role of positive cinematic experiences in fostering emotional awareness and self-reflection among adults. It describes the research design, participants, sampling technique, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the tool used for data collection. The chapter also presents the data collection procedure, ethical considerations, and the analytic approach employed for analysing the data and addressing the research questions of the study.

3.1 Research design

The present study adopted a qualitative exploratory research design to understand the role of positive cinematic experiences in fostering emotional awareness and self-reflection among adults. As the objective was to explore participants' subjective emotional experiences and personal meaning-making in depth, rather than to test predetermined hypotheses or establish statistical generalizability, a qualitative design was considered appropriate. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with each participant. The qualitative method was chosen because the study aimed to explore subjective emotional experiences associated with cinematic engagement; unlike quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews allow a deeper understanding of personal interpretations, emotional reflections, and lived

experiences. Beyond describing participants' individual accounts, thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns of meaning across participants' narratives relating to emotional awareness, empathy, and self-reflection.

3.2 participants

Population

The population of the present study comprised young adults with regular exposure to movies or web series, drawn from adults in Kerala. The population included individuals who were regular viewers of cinematic content and were able to reflect on and articulate their emotional experiences related to such content.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample of the present study consisted of six young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 years who met the specified eligibility criteria and provided informed consent to participate in the study. The small sample size was considered appropriate for an exploratory qualitative study focusing on detailed personal experiences rather than statistical generalization.

A non-probability purposive sampling technique, with an element of convenience sampling, was used for participant recruitment. Participants were purposively selected on the basis of their regular engagement with movies or web series and their willingness and ability to reflect on and discuss their emotional experiences related to cinematic content, and were additionally drawn from those accessible and available to the researcher within the target population.

3.2.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

- 1) Young adults between the ages of 18 and 25 years who regularly watched movies or web series.
- 2) Participants who were able to reflect on and articulate their emotional experiences related to cinematic content.
- 3) Participants who provided informed consent and were willing to participate in the study.
- 4) Individuals who watch animated movies
- 5) Individual who watches English movies

Exclusion Criteria

- 1) Individuals with no regular exposure to movies or web series.
- 2) Individuals who were unwilling or unable to discuss their personal emotional experiences openly.
- 3) Individuals who did not provide informed consent or withdrew before completing the interview.
- 4) Individuals who did not watch animated movies

3.3 Data Collection Tool

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Data were collected using a semi-structured, in-depth interview guide developed by the researcher to explore participants' engagement with movies and web series and the role of

cinematic experiences in emotional awareness and self-reflection. The interview guide was designed to address the general research question of how positive cinematic experiences influence emotional awareness and self-reflection among adults, and was structured around four specific areas of inquiry: (a) how participants perceive, understand, and manage their emotions prior to engaging with a cinematic experience; (b) how participants emotionally engage with and relate to the characters, emotions, and narratives presented; (c) how the cinematic experience contributes to emotional awareness and understanding; and (d) how the cinematic experience facilitates self-reflection and personal meaning-making.

The guide followed a flexible format comprising open-ended questions, beginning with general questions on viewing habits and favourite genres before progressing to emotionally reflective questions concerning emotional understanding, empathy, and personal insight gained through movies and web series. Probing questions were used wherever necessary to elicit deeper and more detailed accounts of participants' emotional experiences. The guide was designed to allow participants to freely express their experiences in their own words, while ensuring that the major areas relevant to emotional awareness and self-reflection were consistently covered across interviews.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data for the present study were collected through face-to-face and through , semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted individually with each participant. Interviews were conducted in quiet and comfortable settings chosen based on participant convenience, in either Malayalam or English according to participant preference. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded with informed consent, and later transcribed verbatim for analysis. Field notes were maintained during and after each interview to capture observations and contextual details relevant to the analysis.

The researcher followed the semi-structured interview guide while remaining flexible during the interview process, allowing participants to freely express their experiences while ensuring that all major themes relevant to emotional awareness and self-reflection were addressed. The confidentiality of the information shared by participants was maintained throughout the data collection process.

3.5 Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is the systematic process of organising, coding, interpreting, and identifying patterns of meaning within narrative data in order to address the research questions of a study. Unlike quantitative analysis, which relies on numerical summarisation and statistical inference, qualitative analysis is concerned with the depth, richness, and contextual understanding of participants' subjective experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The data collected in the present study were analysed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2013) six-phase framework, in accordance with the objectives and research questions of the study. The phases of analysis were as follows:

- **Familiarisation with the Data:** Interview transcripts were read and re-read repeatedly to allow the researcher to become deeply familiar with participants' narratives regarding their emotional experiences, emotional awareness, and personal reflections.
- **Generating Initial Codes:** Meaningful features of the data relevant to emotional engagement, awareness, and self-reflection were systematically coded across the data set.

- Searching for Themes: Codes were examined and grouped to identify recurring patterns and candidate themes across participants' accounts.
- Reviewing Themes: Candidate themes were reviewed against the coded data and the full data set to ensure coherence, distinctiveness, and relevance to the research questions.
- Defining and Naming Themes: Themes were refined, clearly defined, and named to accurately capture the essence of the patterns identified in the data.
- Producing the Report: The final themes were organised into a coherent narrative, supported by illustrative extracts from participants' accounts, to address the research questions of the study.

Themes relating to awareness and understanding of emotional experiences, emotional engagement with cinematic narratives, enhanced emotional awareness through positive cinematic experiences, and self-reflection and personal growth emerged from the data. The findings remained grounded in participants' narratives and experiences throughout the analysis, and interpretations were continually checked against the original transcripts to ensure coherence and relevance.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully maintained throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without consequence. As the discussions involved personal emotional experiences, the researcher ensured a respectful, empathetic, and non-judgemental interview environment throughout the research process.

CHAPTER 4

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the present study and discusses their significance in the context of the research objectives. The aim of this qualitative investigation was to explore the impact of positive cinematic experiences on emotional awareness and self-reflection among adults. Data were collected through semi-structured pre-viewing and post-viewing interviews with six participants who watched the animated film *Inside Out* (2015). The responses were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2013) six-phase thematic analysis framework.

Table 4.1

Personal profile of the adults watched movie

Case	Age	Gender	Geographical location
P1	22	M	Rural
P2	22	M	Urban
P3	21	F	Rural
P4	24	F	Urban
P5	25	M	Rural
P6	23	M	Urban

Each participant has responded about their emotions and self reflection

P1 was a 23-year-old male participant from Kerala. On the question of his relationship with his emotions before watching a film, the interviewer asked:

"Before watching a movie, how would you describe your relationship with your emotions in everyday life?"

P1 answered: *"Before watching a movie, my emotions are normal... Once I start watching, I move along with the emotions of the film."*

On self-reflection, when asked if any character felt like a reflection of himself, he replied: *"Yes, there was one character. He was an introvert, but when he was with his close friends, he was very happy and jolly... I can reflect myself in him."*

P2 was a 22-year-old male participant who loves psychological thrillers. When asked whether he could identify his own emotions before starting a movie, he confirmed:

"I do understand what my emotion is before watching a movie, and I choose a movie based on that emotion."

On self-reflection, when the interviewer asked if he ever saw himself in characters, P2 said:

"Yes, I have... I tend to notice negative characters or negative aspects more... if I see a negative trait of mine in a movie, I notice it immediately."

P3 was a female participant with a stated preference for feel-good, romantic films. When asked to describe her relationship with her own emotions in daily life before watching a film, she said: *"Generally, there isn't anything specific, but if a movie has emotional scenes, it can make me feel happy or impact me."*

On self-reflection, when asked whether the film helped her reflect on her personality, she answered: *"Looking at my own life, I was very rebellious during my teenage years, just like what is seen in this movie... I can personalize the mixed emotions she feels because at some point, these things happened in my life too."*

P4 was a 23-year-old female participant who preferred English-language rom-coms and fantasy films. Asked whether she was aware of her emotional state before watching a movie, she explained: *"If you ask if I'm aware, I don't usually pay that much attention... if I'm not in a happy mood... I won't watch it."*

On self-reflection, P4 distinguished herself from other participants by initially rejecting personal identification with films: *"Usually, I don't take movies personally... I see it only as a movie."*

However, post-viewing, this shifted, and when asked whether she could reflect on real-life examples of her own behavior through the film, she said: *"Yes, I was able to do that... I related to Joy and Sadness. I think I also related to Anger and Fear to a certain level."*

P5 was a young adult male participant, watching movies primarily in Malayalam and English. When asked about self-awareness before watching a film, the interviewer asked: *"Before you watch a movie, how aware are you of your own emotions? Can you understand your mood before the movie starts?"*

P5 responded: *"I choose a movie based on my mood. Sometimes I feel like watching a thriller, or if it's night, I might want to watch a horror movie."*

On self-reflection through characters, when asked if any scenes felt personally meaningful, P5 said: *"I related to him so much, I don't know why... I felt tension inside and started overthinking about whether this is how the world works."*

P6 was a 23-year-old male participant who preferred feel-good and thriller genres. Asked whether he was aware of his emotions before watching a movie,

he responded: *"I would be aware, but I don't remember it clearly when talking about it now... I am aware."*

On self-reflection through characters, when asked how relatable a film character felt to him, P6 said: *"When I saw that, I felt a small connection... Just like I did things."*

The analysis yielded four major themes, each reflecting a significant dimension of emotional and psychological experience reported by the participants.

These themes are:

- 1 Awareness and Understanding of Emotional Experiences,
- 2 Emotional Engagement with Cinematic Narratives,
- 3 Enhanced Emotional Awareness Through Positive Cinematic Experiences,
- 4 Self-Reflection and Personal Growth.

Together, these findings illuminate the ways in which a positive cinematic experience can serve as a meaningful catalyst for emotional awareness, empathic understanding, and self-reflective thinking among adults

Table 4.2

Shows the major themes and subthemes

Major themes	Sub themes
Theme 1 : awareness and understanding of emotional awareness	• Recognition of personal emotional states • Managing and regulating emotion through movies
Theme 2: emotional engagement with cinematic narratives	• Emotional engagement with characters and story line • Personal resonance and reliability
Theme 3 : enhanced emotional awareness through positive cinematic experiences	• Understanding the complexity of emotions • Acceptance and validation of emotion • Transformation in emotional perspective
Thema 4 : self reflection and personal growth	• Reflection on personal experiences and identity • Development of self u derstanding • Increased empathy and human understanding

Theme 1 : Awareness and understanding of emotional experiences

The first and most foundational theme that emerged from the data captures the participants' pre-existing relationship with their own emotions how they recognised, understood, and managed their emotional states in everyday life, and how cinema functioned as a tool for emotional regulation even before watching *Inside Out*. This theme reflects the participants' baseline emotional awareness and the natural role that film already played in their inner emotional lives.

Most participants demonstrated a meaningful level of awareness of their emotional states before the study began. They could identify when they were sad, bored, anxious, or happy, and this awareness often directly shaped their media choices. Rather than watching films passively, many participants actively selected movies that matched or counteracted their current mood suggesting that cinematic engagement was already an emotionally intentional act in their daily lives.

Sub – theme 1.1 recognition of personal emotional state

Several participants described a clear and often intuitive awareness of their emotional states before watching a film. Deva spoke about how he would read his own mood before choosing what to watch, selecting thrillers when he felt alert and horror movies specifically at night for the right emotional effect:

"I choose a movie based on my mood. Sometimes I feel like watching a thriller, or if it's night, I might want to watch a horror movie. Because if you watch horror at noon, you don't get that same feeling as you do at night. So the film is selected based on the mood."

Another similarly described a clear internal reading of his emotions before viewing:

"I do understand what my emotion is before watching a movie, and I choose a movie based on that emotion. If I'm sad, I'd choose a happy movie. If I'm happy, I can watch anything."

P4 described emotional awareness as a precondition for watching movies at all, noting that a shift in mood could entirely change her decision to watch a film that evening. For P5, emotional awareness was more physical and energy-based he noted that when he was in a low mood, his energy would drop and he would simply lie on his bed, while happiness brought higher energy and engagement.

These accounts collectively suggest that emotional awareness is not a passive state but an active, lived process one that participants were already practising in meaningful ways before engaging with the film stimulus.

Sub – theme 1.2 : managing and regulating emotion through movies

A closely related finding was that participants frequently used cinema as a conscious and deliberate tool for emotional regulation. When faced with sadness, loneliness, boredom, or emotional overwhelm, many described turning to films as a way to shift, process, or cope with these feelings. This use of cinema was not escapism in a shallow sense it was purposeful emotional self-management.

"If I'm bored or sad and have nothing to do, watching a movie changes my mood. It gives my mind something else to think about. Sometimes I watch feel-good movies when I'm very sad to make myself feel happy."

P6 described experiencing what he called a 'blank' feeling an emptiness without purpose or social connection and consciously choosing a film to move through that state. P1 spoke of using self-motivation alongside media engagement to manage emotional overwhelm, while P3

described how she only watched movies when in a stable or positive mood, avoiding films altogether if she felt angry or upset, as the emotional disturbance would disrupt her viewing experience.

These patterns are consistent with existing research on mood management and media use, which suggests that individuals selectively engage with media content to regulate their affective states. The findings indicate that participants entered the viewing experience with an already developed intuitive emotional intelligence one that was further deepened and made more conscious through their engagement with *Inside Out*.

Theme 2 : emotional engagement with cinematic narratives

The second major theme captures the emotional experience of watching *Inside Out* itself the depth of feeling, identification, and personal resonance that participants experienced while engaged with the film's characters and story. This theme reflects the powerful capacity of emotionally meaningful cinema to draw viewers into a shared emotional world, allowing them to feel alongside the characters and, by extension, alongside their own inner lives.

What was particularly striking in the participants' accounts was the quality of their engagement. It was not detached or purely intellectual it was felt. Participants described being moved, unsettled, connected, and emotionally activated in ways that extended well beyond the duration of the film itself.

Sub – theme 2.1 : emotional engagement with character and storyline

All six participants reported strong emotional engagement with the characters and narrative arc of *Inside Out*. The film's anthropomorphised representation of emotions as distinct characters Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust was described as particularly accessible and emotionally resonant. For many, seeing emotions depicted as living, active entities made their own internal emotional world feel more tangible and easier to understand.

"When these emotions were objectified as individual characters, it was very interesting and easier to understand quickly. I liked it. It was easy to understand what their specific jobs were."

P6 described feeling genuine emotional tension during the film, particularly during the sequences where Riley's core memory islands began collapsing:

"When Joy and Sadness were trying to get back to headquarters and those islands started collapsing, I felt tension. I was worried for the character what

would happen if they didn't make it back? When they finally succeeded, I felt happy that her life was becoming okay again."

P1 described a fluid emotional experience of moving along with the film's emotional shifts feeling sad during moments of sadness, joyful during moments of joy, and experiencing a complex emotional mix during the anger sequences. P2 became particularly moved by the film's depiction of emotional stages, reflecting on how negative situations in his own life moved through anger, then sadness, and eventually back to a sense of balance.

Sub – theme 2.2 : personal resonance and reliability

Beyond emotional engagement with the story, participants consistently described moments where the film felt personally familiar where the experiences of the characters, particularly Riley, mirrored their own life circumstances, memories, or emotional journeys. This sense of personal resonance was one of the most consistently expressed experiences across all six participants.

P1 connected strongly with Riley's experience of moving homes and losing a sense of belonging, drawing a parallel to his own experience of being unable to continue football after his situation changed:

"I used to go for football selections and played well, but now I can't do it. Those old memories came back to me while watching. I connected with that because I used to go for football selections and played well, but now I can't."

P5 similarly connected with the chaos Riley experienced during her move to a new city, relating it to the emotional turbulence he felt when transitioning to another place :

"When I joined University College, the chaos and problems in my mind wondering whether to join or just continue with UPSC studies I felt that chaos personally, just like the chaos in Riley's mind."

P3 related to Riley's rebellious and emotionally turbulent teenage years, acknowledging that she too had been emotionally complex and difficult during that stage of her life, and that she eventually found her way through just as Riley did. These moments of personal resonance are central to the mechanism by which cinema facilitates emotional awareness: by seeing one's own emotional experience reflected in a fictional character, viewers are given the rare opportunity to observe themselves from a safe, external perspective.

Theme 3: Enhanced emotional awareness through positive cinematic experiences

The third and arguably most central theme of the study reflects the most direct impact of the film on participants' emotional understanding. Following their engagement with *Inside Out*, all six participants reported a noticeably deepened awareness of emotions not only in terms of identifying what emotions they were feeling, but in understanding how emotions function, interact, and carry meaning. This shift was not merely cognitive; it was experiential and felt, arising organically from the act of watching emotionally rich narrative content.

The film's distinctive framing presenting five core emotions as characters with specific roles, motivations, and consequences gave participants a psychological vocabulary and a conceptual framework through which to understand their own inner lives. Many described the film as offering them something they had not quite had before: a way of making sense of the complexity of emotional experience.

Sub – theme 3.1 : understanding the complexity of emotions

One of the most significant shifts reported by participants was a growing recognition that emotions are complex, layered, and often co-present. The film's depiction of how different emotions interact sometimes cooperating, sometimes in conflict resonated deeply with participants' own lived experiences. Many acknowledged that they had previously held simpler, more binary views of emotions, and that the film expanded and complicated these in meaningful ways.

P5 reflected on how the film illuminated the relationship between apparent positive emotions and their hidden emotional underpinnings:

"In the movie, the emotion of sadness was initially isolated, as if sadness wasn't a good thing. But by the end, I realized sadness has its own importance. When

we remember sad moments, we understand the value of things like family. I thought about my own interactions with my parents and friends even though we go through sad times, they have their own value when we look back."

P2 articulated a nuanced understanding of how emotions move through stages rather than existing in isolation:

"If I go through a negative situation, I might feel anger first, but then sadness brings a feeling of regret. This leads me back to my comfort zone and eventually back to happiness. It creates a balance."

P3 described a moment of initial confusion when Joy, an emotion associated with positivity, began to experience sadness before arriving at a deeper understanding that emotions do not operate in isolation:

"It felt very confusing to me at one point because an emotion like Joy, when reaching a certain point, feels sadness or disappointment. Even Sadness, at one point, gets a feeling of happiness."

This complexity that emotions contain contradictions, shift into one another, and cannot always be cleanly categorised was a key insight that emerged for many participants through their engagement with the film.

Sub theme 3.2 : acceptance and validation of emotions

Perhaps the most emotionally significant shift reported by participants was the development of greater acceptance toward emotions they had previously tried to suppress, dismiss, or avoid particularly sadness, anger, and fear. For many participants, the film offered a kind of implicit permission to feel the full range of human emotions without judgment or guilt. This represented

a genuine movement toward emotional validation: the recognition that all emotions, including the difficult ones, serve an important function.

P5 reflection captured this shift clearly:

"I understood that all emotions are important. You can't say any emotion is 'bad.'

In the film, Joy tries to keep Sadness from touching the memories... but it's only when Sadness is involved that empathy, connection, and emotional healing happen."

P4 described a meaningful personal realisation that arose directly from watching the film:

"If I am feeling an emotion, I should allow myself to feel that. I should allow myself to experience it to get over it. It helps you understand that emotion and others, rather than always trying to be happy in an insincere way."

P3 spoke about a habitual pattern of suppressing sadness in favour of focusing on the positive and how the film challenged and shifted this tendency:

"If anything happens to me generally, I think it's okay and try to think of the positive side, usually trying to push sadness aside. But now I realised it doesn't have to be seen that way. Even if it's a small sadness or a small sorrow, there's no problem with it. I've come to the realisation that space should be given to that emotion."

These accounts reflect a significant movement toward what psychologists describe as emotional acceptance the willingness to experience emotions as they arise, without avoidance or suppression a dimension of emotional well-being that is strongly linked to psychological health and resilience.

Sub – theme 3.3 : transformation in emotional perspective

Beyond acceptance, many participants described a broader transformation in the way they thought about and related to emotions – a shift in their overall emotional framework or perspective. This was not merely a recognition of something they already knew; it was a qualitative change in understanding that they attributed directly to their experience of watching the film.

P6 expressed this beautifully in terms of the universality of emotional experience:

"I realised I'm not the only one who sometimes can't control my emotions. I used to think, 'Why does this only happen to me?' But the movie shows this is a universal language that many people go through. I felt like I'm not alone."

P2 noted that the film prompted him to begin thinking about each emotion individually and separately – as distinct entities with their own characteristics and purpose rather than as an undifferentiated emotional mass:

"After watching this movie, I started thinking about each emotion separately. I realised that emotions come in stages when we go through a situation."

P4 observed that the film's framing – where Joy holds near-total dominance over the other emotions – accurately mirrored how she had been operating in her own life, and that recognising this pattern was itself transformative:

"There is usually one emotion that is given focus, and we are constantly trying to stay in that emotion while not allowing others to take place. I found that aspect of the movie very nice."

These transformations in perspective are consistent with theoretical accounts of narrative transportation and emotional processing through cinema, whereby deep engagement with

fictional narratives can produce genuine shifts in viewers' beliefs, values, and self-understanding.

Theme 4 : Self – reflection and personal growth

The fourth and final theme captures perhaps the most personally meaningful dimension of the participants' experience: the process of self-reflection and personal growth that was set in motion by their engagement with *Inside Out*. Across all six participants, the film provoked genuine introspection – a turning inward that brought personal memories, relationships, life experiences, and aspects of identity into new focus. The cinematic narrative served not only as entertainment or emotional experience but as a mirror through which participants began to examine and understand themselves more deeply.

What distinguishes this theme from the previous ones is its longitudinal quality: where Theme 3 captures shifts in how participants understood emotions in general, Theme 4 captures how participants began applying those shifts to their own lives, histories, and sense of self. The film, in this sense, functioned as a catalyst for a process of meaning-making that continued well beyond the viewing experience itself.

Sub – theme 4.1 : reflection of personal experiences and identity

All six participants described moments during or after watching the film when they found themselves thinking about their own life experiences – childhood memories, family relationships, personal transitions, or difficult periods – with a new quality of attention and emotional understanding. This reflective process was often spontaneous and sometimes surprising to the participants themselves.

P6 found himself reflecting on the concept of 'Core Memories' and what this meant in the context of his own significant relationships:

"The concept of 'Core Memories' like the worlds of friendship and family really stayed with me. Also, the idea of creating new memories that are mixed memories that have both aspects of joy and sadness felt like a strong message."

P3 connected Riley's rebellious teenage years directly to her own adolescent self:

"Looking at my own life, I was very rebellious during my teenage years, just like what is seen in this movie. I can personalise the mixed emotions she feels because at some point, these things happened in my life too. But eventually, just like she came out of it, I also dealt with it well."

P5 reflected on the emotional chaos he experienced during his own major life transition joining University College while simultaneously facing uncertainty about his academic and professional path:

"When I joined University College, the chaos and problems in my mind wondering whether to join or just continue with UPSC studies I felt that chaos personally, just like the chaos in Riley's mind."

These reflections were not merely intellectual comparisons between the film and one's life. They were emotionally alive they brought participants into contact with aspects of their personal history that carried real feeling, and they did so through the safety and distance provided by fictional narrative.

Sub – theme 4.2 : development of self understanding

Beyond recalling specific memories or life events, participants described a broader deepening of self-understanding a sense that they now understood themselves better as emotional beings than they had before engaging with the film. This included insights about their own emotional patterns, habitual responses, and the ways in which unacknowledged emotions had been shaping their behaviour.

P1 reflected on how watching Anger as a character helped him see his own short-temperedness with greater clarity and compassion:

"I connected with Anger. I am someone with a short temper sometimes, so seeing that character felt very relatable. Each part and scene reflected my character a little bit. It helped me with self-reflection and understanding how I behave."

P5 articulated a particularly significant insight one that speaks directly to the normalising function of emotionally meaningful cinema:

"I can reflect on situations where I've been very angry, perhaps because I was actually very sad or lost something I liked. The movie shows it's better to keep them balanced. When the emotions worked together, she could take better decisions."

P3 described a shift not just in emotional awareness but in her thought processes themselves suggesting a deeper level of cognitive and emotional reorganisation:

"Not exactly about the emotions themselves, but I gained an awareness about processing emotions. You could say my thought process changed."

These accounts suggest that positive cinematic experiences can serve as genuine vehicles for self-discovery and psychological insight, particularly when the film's emotional content is sufficiently resonant and personally meaningful to prompt sustained inward reflection.

Sub – theme 4.3 : increased empathy and human understanding

The final sub-theme reflects the outward movement of self-reflection from turning inward to turning toward others with greater understanding and compassion. Several participants described how their engagement with Inside Out not only deepened their understanding of their own emotional life but expanded their capacity to understand and empathise with the emotional experiences of those around them.

P6 described how the film helped him understand sadness not as a weakness or inconvenience, but as a source of empathic connection a vehicle through which human beings share meaning and support one another:

"When we remember sad moments, we understand the value of things like family. I thought about my own interactions with my parents and friends — even though we go through sad times, they have their own value when we look back."

P5 reflected on a specific scene where Joy and Sadness are ejected from Headquarters and Fear, Anger, and Disgust take control and found himself extending this understanding beyond himself to consider the emotional inner lives of others:

"That stayed in my mind and made me tense I wondered if this happens to others, or if it's what happens to those under mental pressure. So you tried to emotionally understand other people. Yes."

P3 observation about the film's depiction of Riley's parents who noticed their daughter's distress but did not address it directly until it was almost too late prompted a reflection on the importance of emotional communication within relationships:

"The parents only communicate their feelings to Riley at the very end. Even though they identified from the beginning that Riley had some problem and was behaving differently, they didn't sit down and talk. If they had sat and talked from the beginning and given more clarity, things could have been different."

These observations suggest that the empathic function of cinema extends beyond individual self-awareness to foster a broader social and relational understanding a recognition of the shared emotional humanity that connects all people, regardless of the specific details of their personal circumstances.

Discussion

The results of this study provide valuable insights into how positive experiences with films can influence emotional awareness and self-reflection in adults. Throughout all four themes, a clear pattern was observed: interaction with the emotionally engaging and psychologically significant storyline of *Inside Out* promoted a genuine enhancement of emotional comprehension, a shift towards increased self-acceptance, and a reflective process that continued well after viewing the film.

The first theme showed that participants already had a significant level of emotional awareness in their daily lives. They were also using film as a natural way to manage their emotions before the study started. This indicates that engaging with positive cinema does not create emotional awareness out of nowhere; instead, it builds on and brings to light an emotional intelligence that the viewer already has. The film offered a way to express, explore, and deepen this existing awareness.

The second theme demonstrated the powerful role of character identification and narrative transportation in facilitating emotional engagement. Participants did not merely observe the characters of *Inside Out*—they moved with them, felt alongside them, and found their own memories, experiences, and emotions reflected back to them through the story. This quality of personal resonance is consistent with Green and Brock's (2000) theory of narrative transportation, which proposes that deep immersion in a narrative produces genuine shifts in beliefs, attitudes, and emotional understanding.

The third theme revealed the most direct psychological impact of the film: a tangible enhancement in emotional awareness characterised by a deeper understanding of emotional complexity, a movement toward acceptance of difficult emotions, and a transformation in the participants' overall emotional perspective. Of particular significance was the consistent

finding that the film challenged participants' tendency to suppress or dismiss negative emotions such as sadness, fear, and anger and encouraged instead a more integrated and accepting relationship with the full spectrum of emotional experience. This finding aligns with existing literature on emotional acceptance and psychological flexibility, which identifies the willingness to experience emotions as they arise rather than avoiding or suppressing them as a cornerstone of emotional well-being.

The fourth theme captured the self-reflective and personally transformative dimensions of the cinematic experience. Participants used the film as a lens through which to examine their own past experiences, emotional patterns, and interpersonal relationships with new clarity and compassion. Many described gaining concrete insights into their own behaviour and emotional responses insights that they had not arrived at through other means. The film also expanded participants' capacity for empathy and human understanding, suggesting that positive cinematic experiences have the potential not only to deepen self-awareness but to foster greater relational and social understanding.

Taken together, these findings support and extend existing research on the positive psychological functions of cinema, including the growing body of literature on cinematherapy and emotionally enriching media engagement. The study demonstrates that a carefully selected, emotionally meaningful film even in a single viewing can serve as a genuine catalyst for emotional growth, self-reflection, and psychological insight among adult viewers. The results carry meaningful implications for counsellors, educators, and mental health professionals who may wish to incorporate positive cinematic experiences into their practice as accessible, engaging, and psychologically powerful tools for emotional learning and personal development.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The present study titled "The Role of Positive Cinematic Experiences in Fostering Emotional Awareness and Self-Reflection Among Adults" was undertaken to explore how engagement with a positive and emotionally meaningful film influences emotional awareness and self-reflection among adults. Emotional awareness encompassing the recognition, understanding, and expression of one's own emotions and self-reflection the capacity to consciously examine one's thoughts, feelings, and personal experiences are increasingly recognised as foundational dimensions of psychological well-being and emotional development. While emotional awareness and self-reflection have been explored through various psychological and educational frameworks, comparatively limited research has examined their development through positive cinematic experiences, particularly within the Indian and Kerala sociocultural context. Recognising this gap, the present study aimed to qualitatively explore how engagement with an emotionally resonant film contributes to these processes among adults.

The study adopted a qualitative pre-post exploratory design to capture the subjective emotional experiences and personal reflections of the participants. A total of six adults from Kerala, aged between 18 and 25 years, were selected using purposive sampling. The animated film *Inside Out* (Docter & Del Carmen, 2015) was used as the cinematic stimulus, selected on account of its psychologically informed and emotionally accessible portrayal of five core human emotions. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted both before and after the viewing experience, which allowed participants to express their emotional states, personal reflections, and interpretations of the film in their own words. The rich narratives generated were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2013) six-phase thematic analysis framework, which provided a structured yet flexible method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting recurring patterns of meaning across the data.

The analysis yielded four major themes that collectively captured the breadth and depth of participants' emotional and reflective experiences: 1) Awareness and Understanding of

Emotional Experiences, 2) Emotional Engagement with Cinematic Narratives, 3) Enhanced Emotional Awareness Through Positive Cinematic Experiences, and 4) Self-Reflection and Personal Growth. Each theme was further supported by relevant sub-themes and enriched by participants' verbatim accounts, offering nuanced insight into how positive cinematic engagement facilitated emotional understanding, character identification, emotional acceptance, and meaningful self-reflection.

In essence, the study not only confirms the psychological potential of positive cinematic experiences but presents cinema when emotionally rich and personally resonant as a meaningful and accessible vehicle for emotional growth and self-discovery among adults. The findings demonstrate that when individuals engage deeply with emotionally meaningful narratives, they naturally begin to reflect on their own emotional lives, develop greater acceptance toward the full spectrum of human emotion, and arrive at personal insights that extend well beyond the viewing experience itself. The results affirm that positive cinematic experiences are not merely sources of entertainment, but can function as psychologically enriching and transformative encounters that foster emotional awareness, empathic understanding, and deeper self-reflection in adult viewers.

General research question

How do positive cinematic experience influence emotional awareness and self reflection among adults ?

The findings of the study collectively demonstrate that engagement with Inside Out meaningfully influenced participants' emotional awareness and capacity for self-reflection across several interconnected dimensions:

- The film presented an emotionally secure environment: As a movie, the viewing experience created a secure emotional setting for the participants in which they could experience many different types of emotions, whether it was the emotions of the characters or their own. The fictional element of the story ensured there was enough emotional distance for the participants to be able to connect with challenging emotions like sadness, anger, and fear without feeling threatened personally.
- There was increased sensitivity to personal emotional states and patterns because the viewing experience made participants aware of their own emotional states and patterns. This is due to the fact that by observing how the characters' emotions clash and react with each other and noticing similarities between them and their own emotional state, participants were able to gain an insight into their emotional patterns and tendencies.
- The film supported the notion of acceptance and validation of all emotions: One of the most frequent results mentioned in the discussion of the impact of Inside Out was the increase in the level of acceptance of emotions that individuals had been trying to ignore, hide or deal with before mainly feelings of sadness, anger, and fear. The key message of the movie that all emotions are important, and balance, but not the domination of any emotion is the basis for emotional health was heard very clearly by some participants.

Character recognition helped participants understand through perspective taking: Participants often related to the characters in the film, specifically Riley and the characters representing emotions. Through the use of the fictional characters, participants gained a better understanding of themselves and other people around them by recognizing their feelings and situations reflected in these characters.

The film experience provided the impetus for self-reflection and meaningful personal interpretations: Apart from the ability to connect with one's emotions, all six participants reported that the film had inspired self-reflection where they engaged in remembering personal experiences, reflecting on previous relationships, analyzing their own emotional processes, and gaining insight into their life experiences and identities.

- This research reveals the value of positive films as an instrument of emotional learning and personal development: All results taken into account confirm that one positively oriented film can actually function as a true catalyst for emotional awareness and introspection of adults. Film as a media is easily accessible to everyone which makes it a very useful instrument for emotional learning, therapy, and psychological development.

Specific research questions

1. How do adults perceive , understand , and manage their emotions before engaging with positive cinematic experience ?
- Most of the participants had the capacity to recognise their emotions before viewing the film. It was observed that the participants were able to describe their emotions of being sad, lonely, bored, and excited reasonably well when asked to think about them.
 - There was a high correlation between emotions and the choice of media. Most of the participants had the tendency to choose movies depending on how they were feeling at the time, opting for feel-good movies if they were feeling sad and thrillers/horror movies if they were feeling alert and attentive.
 - Cinema had been serving as a medium for the regulation of emotions before the experiment. The subjects reported using movies as a means of changing their negative mood states, dealing with the feeling of loneliness or emptiness and creating emotional equilibrium. This means that the subjects were equipped with emotional intelligence in regard to their media consumption before the experiment.
 - Emotional awareness was expressed through physical and behavioural cues as well as cognitive ones. For some participants, awareness of emotion was felt through the body lower energy, reduced motivation, or a desire to withdraw rather than through explicit cognitive labelling.
 - There were some people who admitted that they tended to distract themselves from challenging emotions rather than confront them directly, and that films served as a tool to do so. This emotional disposition prior to the experience allowed for comparing its effects on the individual later on.

2. How do adults emotionally engage with and relate to the characters, emotions, and narratives presented in a positive cinematic experience ?

- Participants experienced strong emotional reactions in response to the storyline presented in the film, which included feeling tense, happy, sad, relieved, and emotionally vulnerable during certain scenes in the film. This storyline was experienced not as an abstract story but as an actual experience.
- The way that the movie made emotions into characters with their own personalities was considered by many to make emotions more concrete and easy to understand. It helped the participants understand their emotions because they were presented in the form of characters in a story.
- There was a very strong connection between the viewer and the characters. The participants could relate to Riley, who is the human protagonist of the story, as she goes through change, confusion, and finally growth. They were able to relate to certain emotion characters such as Anger and Sadness.
- Life experiences and memories came out automatically through watching the movie. Riley undergoing a life transition made viewers recall their own experiences and memories of transitioning, which included moving schools/colleges or moving places and adapting to new environments.
- The movie helped create an experience of emotional universality. The subjects were able to realise that the emotions portrayed by the film confusion, loss, the complex emotion were not something unique to their own experience, but rather common human experiences. This experience in itself was emotionally fulfilling.

3. How does appositive cinematic experience contribute to emotional awareness and understanding among adults

- A deeper level of awareness of the complexity of emotions was gained. Through the portrayal of emotions as interacting and contradictory forces in the movie, participants became able to transcend the binary concept of emotion where some emotions are ‘good’ while others are ‘bad’. This has led to a better awareness of their inner emotional landscape.
- A change in the direction of accepting and acknowledging emotions that used to be controlled and managed by participants occurred. The emotions of sadness, anger, and fear, which some participants were trying to keep under control, have become meaningful through the movie. They acquired new meaning through recognizing the value and importance of these emotions for our psyche.
- A transformation in emotional attitude after viewing the movie happened. It included, for example, the realization that people's problems with emotions are universal and not individual failures; that controlling emotions will not solve the problem; that any emotion needs room to exist; and that the key to well-being is emotional balance and not positivity. These transformations in attitude are significant emotional shifts.

4. How does a positive cinematic experience facilitate self – reflection and personal meaning making among adults ?

Each participant noted the process of reflecting on their life experiences and the development of their emotional journeys due to watching the film. This kind of reflection

occurred spontaneously and unexpectedly, resulting from watching the movie and identifying with the emotions of its characters.

- The film encourages participants to critically reflect on their own emotions and emotional patterns. Some participants said that watching the movie made them recognize some of the ways they used to deal with their emotions that needed reconsideration.
- The participants gained valuable personal insights about themselves, their emotions, relationships and life experience as a result of working with the film.
- In addition, the movie expanded the participants' ability to empathize and understand other people. They mentioned that the movie made them understand how complicated emotionally other people are and how they need empathy and compassion in their relationships.
- Personal meaning making through the movie did not stop at the time of watching the movie. The participants mentioned feeling the insights and emotions associated with the film even after the interview session was over, indicating that reflecting on the movie can have long-lasting psychological effects.

Implications of the study

The findings of this study carry meaningful implications across the fields of psychology, counselling, education, media psychology, and mental health promotion. These implications are outlined below:

Implication of counselling psychology and mental health practice

The results provide a strong foundation for the use of positive and emotionally meaningful cinema as a facilitative tool within counselling and psychotherapeutic practice. The study demonstrates that film viewing — particularly of emotionally resonant and psychologically informed content such as *Inside Out* — can serve as an accessible and engaging medium for promoting emotional awareness, facilitating emotional acceptance, and initiating self-reflective processes that are central to therapeutic growth. Counsellors and mental health professionals may consider integrating cinematherapy approaches into their practice, particularly for adult clients who experience difficulty with verbal emotional expression, emotional avoidance, or limited self-awareness. The non-threatening, narrative distance provided by cinema may lower psychological defences and create meaningful entry points for emotional exploration and personal insight.

Implication of education and emotional learning

The findings suggest that emotionally meaningful cinema can serve as a valuable educational tool for emotional learning and psychological development among adults. Educational institutions, particularly colleges and universities in Kerala and across India, may consider incorporating structured film-viewing experiences into their wellness, life skills, or counselling programmes. Such initiatives could provide students with an engaging and culturally accessible means of developing emotional awareness, empathic understanding, and reflective thinking —

skills that are essential not only for personal well-being but for academic collaboration, interpersonal functioning, and professional development.

Implication of media psychology and film studies

The study contributes to the growing body of literature in media psychology that examines the positive psychological functions of cinema beyond entertainment. The findings demonstrate that emotionally rich films — particularly those that present psychological content in an accessible and relatable manner — can produce genuine and meaningful shifts in viewers' emotional understanding and self-awareness. This supports the value of studying cinema as a psychologically significant cultural practice and encourages further scholarly attention to the role of specific cinematic elements — such as character design, narrative arc, and emotional representation — in facilitating psychological growth among viewers.

Implication for the Kerala context

Given the prominent role of cinema in the social, cultural, and emotional life of Kerala, the findings of this study carry particular local relevance. Malayalam cinema has long been recognised for its emotionally nuanced storytelling and its capacity to engage viewers on a deeply personal level. The present study's findings suggest that this cultural relationship with cinema may already be functioning, in many instances, as an informal vehicle for emotional awareness and self-reflection. Mental health professionals, counsellors, educators, and community practitioners working in the Kerala context may find particular value in leveraging this existing cultural engagement with cinema as a starting point for more intentional emotional learning and psychological support.

Limitations of the study

Although the present study contributes meaningful insights into the impact of positive cinematic experiences on emotional awareness and self-reflection among adults, it is important to acknowledge several limitations that may have influenced the scope, depth, and generalisability of the findings. Recognising these limitations allows for a more balanced and transparent interpretation of the results and highlights important directions for future research.

The study's sample size was limited to six participants, all drawn from the adult population of Kerala within a narrow age range of 18 to 25 years. While the depth and richness of qualitative data allowed for meaningful exploration of individual experiences, the small and relatively homogeneous sample restricts the generalisability of the findings to broader adult populations. The experiences reported may not reflect those of older adults, individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds, or those with different cultural or media consumption patterns.

The research relied entirely on self-reported data collected through semi-structured interviews. While this approach enabled participants to express their emotional experiences and reflections in depth and in their own words, it is inherently subject to potential biases including social desirability, selective recall, and the limitations of verbal emotional expression. Participants may have emphasised certain experiences while minimising others, and some emotional content particularly around personal vulnerability or difficult memories may not have been fully disclosed despite efforts to ensure a safe and non-judgmental interview environment.

A further limitation concerns the use of a single cinematic stimulus. The study was designed around *Inside Out* as the sole film, which, while carefully selected for its psychological relevance and emotional accessibility, may not represent the range of positive

cinematic experiences available to adult viewers. The findings may therefore reflect something specific to this film's particular narrative and emotional content rather than to positive cinematic experiences more broadly.

The study also did not include a longitudinal follow-up component. While participants reported meaningful emotional shifts and reflective insights following the viewing experience, the durability of these changes over time remains unknown. Emotional awareness and self-reflection are developmental processes that unfold over extended periods, and a single viewing experience however meaningful may produce shifts that are transient rather than enduring without reinforcement or ongoing engagement.

The exclusively qualitative nature of the study, while well-suited to its exploratory aims, means that the findings cannot be compared against standardised measures of emotional awareness or self-reflection, nor can they be statistically evaluated for significance. The absence of validated quantitative instruments limits the ability to objectively measure the magnitude of change in participants' emotional functioning before and after the viewing experience.

The participants in this study were drawn only from Kerala. As people's emotional experiences and perspectives are often influenced by their cultural and social environments, the findings may primarily reflect the experiences of individuals from this region. Therefore, caution should be exercised when applying these findings to individuals from other states or cultural backgrounds.

Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable and meaningful groundwork for future research into the psychological impact of positive cinematic experiences, and paves the way for broader and more rigorous exploration of cinema as a tool for emotional and psychological development among adults.

Suggestions for further research

The findings of this study open several promising avenues for future scholarly inquiry into the role of positive cinematic experiences in fostering emotional awareness and self-reflection. While the present research provides rich and meaningful insights into the experiences of a small group of adults, further studies are needed to deepen, diversify, and expand the understanding of this phenomenon across broader populations and methodological approaches.

It is recommended that future research involve a larger and more diverse participant sample. Expanding the study to include adults of different age groups, occupational backgrounds, educational levels, and geographical regions both within Kerala and across India would allow for a more comprehensive and transferable understanding of how positive cinematic experiences influence emotional awareness and self-reflection in varying personal and cultural contexts.

Longitudinal studies would contribute significantly to this area of research. The present study captured immediate emotional shifts and reflective responses following a single viewing. Future research could include follow-up interviews or assessments conducted at multiple time points for example, at one month, three months, and six months post-viewing to examine whether the emotional insights and shifts in perspective reported by participants were sustained, deepened, or evolved over time.

It would be valuable for future research to adopt a mixed-methods design, integrating validated quantitative instruments for measuring emotional awareness, self-reflection, and related psychological constructs alongside qualitative interview data. Instruments such as the Levels of Emotional Awareness Scale (LEAS), the Self-Reflection and Insight Scale (SRIS),

or the Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS-20) could provide measurable pre- and post-intervention data that complement and enrich the depth of qualitative findings.

Additionally, comparative studies examining the impact of different types of positive films across genres, narrative styles, and levels of emotional complexity on emotional awareness and self-reflection would help identify which cinematic qualities are most conducive to psychological growth. Research could also compare the emotional impact of individual versus group film-viewing experiences, or examine whether facilitated post-viewing discussion enhances the reflective and awareness-building outcomes of cinematic engagement.

Future research could also explore the application of positive cinematic experiences as a structured intervention within specific populations, such as individuals experiencing emotional difficulties, adults in counselling settings, or young people in educational institutions. Understanding how cinema can serve as a targeted and intentional tool for emotional learning and psychological support across different clinical and community contexts would significantly broaden the practical applicability of the present findings.

Finally, there is scope for research to examine the role of cultural context in shaping how adults from different backgrounds engage emotionally with cinema and derive self-reflective meaning from it. Within the Kerala context specifically, studies exploring the emotional impact of Malayalam cinema with its distinctive narrative traditions and cultural resonances on adult viewers' emotional awareness and self-understanding would constitute a particularly meaningful and locally relevant contribution to this field.

Conclusion

The present study set out to explore whether and how a positive cinematic experience could meaningfully influence emotional awareness and self-reflection among adults. Through a qualitative pre-post exploratory design and the use of *Inside Out* as the cinematic stimulus, the study engaged six adult participants from Kerala in a process of pre-viewing and post-viewing reflection that revealed the profound psychological potential of emotionally resonant cinema.

The findings clearly demonstrate that positive cinematic experiences are far more than passive entertainment. When a film is emotionally meaningful, psychologically rich, and personally resonant, it can serve as a genuine catalyst for emotional growth — inviting viewers to encounter, examine, and deepen their understanding of their own inner emotional lives. Across all four themes that emerged from the thematic analysis, a consistent and meaningful pattern was evident: participants came away from the viewing experience with a greater awareness of their emotions, a deeper acceptance of the full spectrum of human feeling, a richer capacity for self-reflection, and an expanded sense of empathy toward others.

Perhaps most significantly, the study revealed that the shifts produced by this single positive cinematic experience were not superficial or transient. Participants described genuine and personally meaningful changes in their emotional perspective — insights that they carried with them beyond the interview room, and that they connected to real experiences, relationships, and aspects of their own identity. The film gave participants not only an emotional experience but a language and a framework for understanding themselves more honestly and more compassionately.

In a contemporary social landscape where many adults experience emotional stress, emotional suppression, and limited opportunities for meaningful self-reflection, the findings of this study carry an important and hopeful message. Cinema particularly positive, emotionally meaningful cinema represents an accessible, engaging, and culturally relevant resource for emotional learning and psychological well-being. It is available to virtually every adult, requires no clinical setting or professional training to access, and has the capacity to meet people exactly where they are in their emotional lives.

The study also holds particular significance within the Kerala context, where cinema occupies a deeply embedded role in cultural and emotional life. The findings suggest that this cultural relationship with film may already be functioning, for many adults, as an informal vehicle for emotional processing and self-understanding and that intentionally harnessing this relationship within counselling, educational, and community settings could yield meaningful psychological benefits.

For counsellors, educators, psychologists, and mental health professionals, the implications are clear: positive cinema merits serious consideration as a facilitative tool for emotional awareness, empathy development, and reflective growth. As the field of cinematherapy continues to develop, studies such as this one contribute to the growing evidence base that supports the thoughtful and intentional use of film as an instrument of psychological education and healing.

In conclusion, this study affirms that cinema, at its most meaningful, is not merely a mirror of human experience it is a window through which people can come to know themselves more deeply, accept themselves more fully, and understand others more compassionately. The experience of watching *Inside Out* opened that window for six adults in Kerala, and the insights they gained remind us that sometimes, the most powerful journeys of self-discovery begin not in a therapist's office or a classroom, but in the quiet, shared space of a story well told.

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Appendices

Appendices A. Participant Consent Form

Title of the study : The Role of Positive Cinematic Experiences in Fostering Emotional Awareness and Self-Reflection Among Adults

Name of the Researcher : ---

I hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature and purpose of the research study and my participation in it . I understand that :

Participation is voluntary

I can withdraw at any time without giving a reason

My identity and response will be kept confidential

The data will be used only for academic research purposes

Signature of the participant :

Name :

Date :

Appendices B. Semi – Structured Interview Guide

Some self made questions are used to assess the emotional awareness and self reflection of the participant

Pre – test questions :

1. Before watching the movie, how would you describe your relationship with your own emotions in everyday life ?
2. Can you describe how you usually make sense of emotions that feel difficult, confusing, or overwhelming to you ?
3. While watching any other previously were there any moments where you found yourself emotionally engaged, emotionallly distant, or emotionally uncomfortable. Please describe that experience ?
4. Were there any scenes, emotional interactions, or characters that felt personally meaningful or familiar to you in some way? How did you relate to them?
5. Did any previous movie bring forward any thoughts, memories, or reflections about your own life experiences or emotional journey? Please elaborate.

Post – test questions

1. How did you interpret the way different emotions were represented and experienced in this particular movie?
2. After watching the movie, did you notice yourself thinking differently about any aspect of emotions, emotional expression, or emotional experiences in your lifr ? If so, how?
3. Can you describe whether the movie influenced the way you reflected on yourself, your personality, or your personal experiences?
4. What aspects of the movie stayed with you emotionally or psychologically after the viewing experience, and why do you think they stayed with you?

5. If you were to describe the personal meaning of this movie in relation to your own emotional life, how would you describe it ?

