

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION: ROMANTIC
COMEDIES FROM THE MALE PERSPECTIVE

By

TERESA TACKETT

Bachelor of Arts in Public Relations

Oklahoma State University

Stillwater, Oklahoma

2011

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
May, 2016

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION: ROMANTIC
COMEDIES FROM THE MALE PERSPECTIVE

Thesis Approved:

Dr. Danny Shipka

Thesis Adviser

Dr. Cynthia Nichols

Dr. BobbiKay Lewis

Name: TERESA TACKETT

Date of Degree: MAY, 2016

Title of Study: LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION: ROMANTIC COMEDIES FROM THE
MALE PERSPECTIVE

Major Field: MASS COMMUNICATIONS

Abstract: Romantic comedies are cited as the highest-viewed film genre of the twenty-first century, yet there is a lack of academic research concerning film consumers' attitudes toward the genre and the plausibility of learning and adopting behavior because of romantic content. This thesis addresses those gaps in the literature. A qualitative interview analysis was conducted with ten male film consumers who reported their ideas, opinions and experiences with the top ten highest-grossing romantic comedies from 2009-2015. As a result, five main themes emerged, which are (a) men cite romantic comedies as setting unrealistic expectations for relationships; (b) men are put off by the predictability of the genre; (c) men do not consume the genre with other men; (d) men use romantic comedies as a learning tool; and, (e) men cite drama in relationships as the most relatable aspect of romantic comedies. The data set was rich and descriptive in nature and the qualitative interview analysis supported the advancement of four theories, including Social Cognitive Theory, Cultivation Theory, Third-person Effect Theory and Spiral of Silence Theory. The romantic comedy genre will continue to illuminate the silver screen for 90-minute stretches and the light-hearted stories will continue to resonate with audiences. This thesis hopes to shed light on why romantic content deserves more than a fleeting glance in academic research.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	5
Social Cognitive and Cultivation Theory	9
Research Questions	11
III. METHODOLOGY	15
Subjects	16
Instrument	17
Procedures.....	17
Limitations and Strengths	17
Analysis of the Data.....	19
Credibility of the Data	20
IV. FINDINGS.....	21
Emergence of themes	22
Research Question One	22
Theme One Analysis	23
Theme Two Analysis	27
Research Question Two	30
Theme Three Analysis	30
Research Question Three	37
Theme Four Analysis	38
Theme Five Analysis	41

Chapter	Page
V. CONCLUSION.....	45
REFERENCES	48
APPENDICES	52
Demographic Questionnaire	52
Interview Script.....	54
Consent Form.....	57
Recruitment Form	58
Institutional Review Board Approval Letter	59

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The romantic comedy genre has long been a staple of American cinema. The genre's frothy outlook on love and life provides a refreshing movie-going experience for audiences, allowing the mundane demands of daily life to slip away for 90-minute runs. Romantic comedies were introduced to the masses during the early twentieth century and rose to unprecedented popularity, reaching a peak in the late 1930s. During this time, more young adults watched romantic comedies in movie theaters than any other genre (Edman, 1940; Hefner & Wilson, 2013). Despite the formulaic plot lines, the genre's popularity carried through to the twenty-first century, averaging as the highest-viewed film genre according to Hall's (2005) study on media consumption. Between 1995 and 2015, romantic comedies ranked as the sixth highest-grossing genre, earning 9.2 billion dollars at the box office and accounted for 4.98% of the market share (Nash, 2015). Among the top 10 highest-grossing romantic comedies, "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" came in at number one, earning a lifetime gross of nearly 2.5 billion. At number 10, "As Good as it Gets" respectably brought in nearly 1.5 billion dollars in revenue, solidifying the genre's notoriety among the masses (Gray, 2015).

In an effort to understand the popularity of the genre among consumers, research often cites learning as a motivator for consumers to seek out romantic content in the media. In Zurbriggen and Morgan's (2006) study on reality dating programs (RDPs), the researchers found men reported viewing RDPs for the purpose of learning about romantic relationships more often than women. More importantly, the study noted a statistical difference did not occur across gender when RDPs were consumed strictly for entertainment purposes. As a result of the surveys, the correlation between viewing an RDP and learning about romance was validated. Similarly, Bachen and Illouz (1996) found young adults ages eight to 18 cited romantic comedies during in-depth interviews when asked to describe their ideal relationships. The findings demonstrate young people not only learn from the romantic content, but also cultivate these ideas as their own (Similarly, Bachen & Illouz, 1996; Hefner & Wilson, 2013).

Taking the sparse literature into account, Hefner and Wilson (2013) aimed to address specific gaps concerning romantic beliefs in relation to exposure to the genre. The study was the first to look at the association between consuming romantic comedies and learning about romance in the context of the romantic ideal construct, which suggests (a) love can overlook flaws; (b) love can seek out that one perfect mate; (c) love can happen instantaneously; and, (d) love can overcome all obstacles (Bell, 1975; Knox & Sporkowski, 1968; Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Sprecher & Metts, 1989). The study included two parts; a content analysis of the 52 highest-grossing romantic comedies from 1998-2008, which identified four expressions of love grounding within the romantic ideal construct as well as a large-scale survey analyzing consumption of romantic comedies in relation to the respondents beliefs about love and romance (Hefner & Wilson, 2013). The survey sample included men and women, so using a qualitative approach with a male-only sample and a more recent movie list in this thesis builds upon Hefner and Wilson's (2013) research and while also addressing gaps in the literature. Hefner and Wilson's (2013) findings were as follows:

First, romantic ideals and challenges are prevalent in romantic comedy films. Second, ideals are more often rewarded than punished, whereas the opposite was true of challenges. Third, there is an association between romantic comedy viewing and endorsement of beliefs, particularly the endorsement of the idealization of other belief. Fourth, viewing romantic comedies with a motivation to learn is positively associated with endorsement of all romantic beliefs (Hefner & Wilson, 2013, p. 23).

These studies demonstrated learning about romance as well as the cultivation of beliefs were motivating factors of consumption, presenting an opportunity for this thesis to draw deeper parallels between romantic content in the movie industry and how the content influences male film consumers' beliefs about love and romance norms within a theoretical lens. The framing of Social Cognitive Theory and Cultivation Theory in a qualitative context is critical in understanding male film consumers' motivations to potentially adopt behavior based on the representation of romantic ideals portrayed in the romantic comedy genre of film (Baran & Davis, 2013). Specifically, this thesis addresses the affect of romantic content in films in relation to the ways men learn about relationships from the romantic comedy genre. It also identifies whether these movies shapes their ideas on love through the observation of film or whether they feel pressured by society to behave in a socially acceptable manner. As stated above, a qualitative research approach was used to collect data, which included in-depth interviews with male film consumers ages 18 to 34, who were affiliated with a midwestern research university. Conducting 10 in-depth interviews with a total of 10 participants helped discern the connection between the prevalence of romantic ideals and, as a result, the consumers prescribed beliefs.

Using qualitative research to analyze male consumers' beliefs about love as demonstrated in the content portrayed in romantic comedies advanced Hefner and Wilson's (2013) findings, supporting a better understanding of individual viewer differences among a specific gender. The data also revealed film consumers' motivations for exemplifying cognitive behavior learned through the observation of acceptable romantic ideals portrayed in the medium of film more conclusively, adding to the foundation Hefner and Wilson's (2013) study laid.

The remainder of the thesis includes a comprehensive literature review examining Social Cognitive Theory and Cultivation Theory in conjunction with film consumers' perception of romance as well as their motivations to demonstrate cognitive behavior learned through observation of film. Three proposed research questions are based on the gaps of knowledge identified during the literature review, which include (a) does the representation of romance regarding the prevalence of ideals in romantic comedies impact men's expectations in a relationship; (b) do romantic idealizations affect men's exchange of information and ideas throughout their communities; and, (c) do men subconsciously aim to emulate characters portrayed in romantic comedies and does this adherence to social conventions cultivate unrealistic attitudes toward romance? The qualitative interview analysis aimed to address the research questions put forth, grounding the findings thematically and within a theoretical framework..

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

A limited amount of academic literature exists referencing romantic beliefs in relation to exposure to the romantic comedy genre, especially within the field of mass communications and from a male perspective. A general review of the literature noted much of the research focused on gender representation in film including wage inequality, perceptions of gender differences in the workforce, gender norms and ideology variations. For the purpose of this thesis, the literature review will focus on the scholarship citing gender within the realm of television, film and other visual media common in popular culture. More narrowly, the literature review will account for the small body of academic literature specifically addressing the romantic comedy genre concerning people's belief systems.

As noted above, gender studies prevalently focus on women's experiences in or with the movie industry, which is important to note when analyzing the popularity of the romantic comedy genre. Research has shown the representation of women in film is skewed in comparison to reality. An examination of leading ladies in films ranging from 1937-2006 found a woman's appearance was a highly-valued commodity and their aspirations lacked foresight, meaning

women often sought superficial, romantic relationships and cast aside other ambitions (Smith & Cook, 2008). Perhaps, the misrepresentation of women concerning romantic content contributes to men's opinions and beliefs about the romantic comedy genre. Although the distorted view of women is significant, it is imperative to realize the misrepresentation was established within the subject matter of the films.

Smith, Granados, Choueiti, Erickson and Noyes (2010) conducted a qualitative analysis of 108 content creators of 122 popular films from 2006 to 2009, which sought to have a better understanding of the slanted characterization concerning men and women. When asked to estimate the number of speaking female characters from the selected sample of movies, male content creators assessed the number to be 32.4% and female content creators assumed 30.7% to be true. In reality, a content analysis found 29.2% of speaking characters were female, not far from the assumptions of the content creators (Smith et al., 2009). The content analysis demonstrates that a bias against women does exist in the movie industry. It is posited that the notion of women only seeking superficial, romantic relationships on screen (Smith & Cook, 2008) in conjunction with an overwhelming bias against women concerning allotted screen time (Smith et al., 2009) may have an effect on men's attitudes in relation to the consumption of romantic comedies.

Although this knowledge has done little to shift the paradigm in terms of industry leaders, it is essential to garner a better understanding of how the representation of gender affects consumers. A study confirmed that 78% of male speaking characters in the sample selected held a specialized occupation and 72.5% of white-collar jobs were occupied by a man (Smith et al., 2010). The data suggests a bias against women concerning career aspirations in film compared to their male counterparts. The researchers interpreted the data to mean, "there is a shortage of diverse and exciting role models for girls and young women" which results in "a heavy diet of stereotypical occupational content in G-rated films [that] may teach and reinforce that girls have

fewer employment options than do boys” (Smith et al., 2010, p. 2). The finding is important concerning the romantic comedy genre because much of the content portrays men in a dominating role. If more men than women are responsible for writing, producing and directing content for romantic comedies, the genre is framed within the male gaze, which places the audience in the mind frame of a heterosexual male (Mulvey, 1975). As a result, women who consume romantic comedies look at themselves through the eyes of a male, as do male consumers, which may also contribute to the deep-held beliefs men hold concerning the genre.

The movie industry’s solution to the inequity women often face in popular film genres is the romantic comedy genre. Research validates the notion that the genre attracts more women consumers than men and, as a result, romantic comedies focus on relationships in which both partners discuss the relationship on screen (Fischhoff, Antonio, & Lewis, 1997; Hefner & Wilson, 2013). Romantic comedies typically revolve around a heterosexual couple with equal screen time allotted for a male and female character. However, if men primarily write, direct and produce films in a genre known to target women as its audience, then by default the female gaze is passive and the male gaze is active throughout the content. Although women are allotted equal screen time in romantic comedies compared to their male counterparts, an inequity continues to exist within the genre due to the framing of the film’s perspective (Mulvey, 1975). To garner a better understanding of men’s beliefs about the romantic comedy genre, it is important to understand the foundation of inequity women continually contest because of content producers.

Although it is important to understand how the gender disparity is accounted for, Wilson and Hefner (2013) uncovered even more interesting data concerning gender. The researchers found male and female characters each have a different set of expressions of love within the content of these films. A content analysis found that men were rewards-focused concerning ideals and challenges, 52% and 48% respectively. In comparison, women’s ideals focused on punishment 17% of the time and challenges 83% of the time. This research aligns with much of

the gender-based research prevalent in the field. However, Hefner and Wilson (2013) were less interested in gender equality and more interested in the cultivation and learning that occurs among consumers when viewing film within the genre. It is of merit to note the differences in roles concerning men and women in romantic comedies, especially in relation to the demographics' belief systems as a result. However, understanding the foundation academic literature devoted to studying this genre in particular is more noteworthy.

Previous research found people who consume romantic content often do so for the purpose of learning. A content analysis found heavy viewers of romantic content on television and in film were more likely to hold idealistic beliefs than light consumers of the romantic content (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). Similarly, high consumers of reality dating programs (RDPs) endorsed beliefs they encountered during the program in their personal lives (Ferris, Smith, Greenberg & Smith, 2007) and heavy users were more likely to hold more traditional values in relationships (Rivadeneira & Lebo, 2008). The studies support the notion that cultivation of romantic beliefs occurs in heavy viewers of romantic comedies.

A correlation between viewing romantic comedies and endorsing beliefs may be supported, but there is a gap in knowledge concerning qualitative research. Young adults agreed in interviews that they encountered love stories often (Bachen and Illouz, 1996), but an opportunity was missed to explore the demographics belief system as a result of those encounters. Other qualitative research has focused on identifying myths associated with the genre, (Johnson, 2007), but again no prescribed belief systems were explored.

Recognizing the gap in the literature, Hefner and Wilson (2013) conducted a content analysis and identified four common expressions of love in romantic comedy films (love conquers all, idealization of partner, soul mate/one and only, love at first sight). These four expressions of love appeared on screen every 14 minutes on average across 52 films. Of these

four expressions, soul mate/one and only accounted for 40% and one-third of expressions were associated with idealizing the other (Hefner & Wilson, 2013). Ironically, Hefner and Wilson (2013) found a ratio of 2:1 concerning the expression of challenges versus the expression of ideals. The finding is noteworthy because many scholars believe the genre puts forth unrealistic ideas due to the nicely packaged happy ending. In actuality, more romantic challenges than ideals are faced in the content (Hefner & Wilson, 2013). The conflict between an expression and an ideal is an interesting dynamic that could be further explored within a qualitative framework.

It is posited that the application of Social Cognitive Theory and Cultivation Theory in a qualitative framework will help determine whether there is a meaningful connection between the content of these movies and the beliefs that certain viewers endorse. Research hardly cites the negative impact of romantic ideas, but typically focuses on the positive outcomes. Hefner and Wilson (2013) were the first to explore the negative context within the genre, but were not able to do so on an individual-viewer basis. If society is failing nearly 50% of the time concerning the institution of marriage (Hefner & Wilson, 2013), then what is the true impact of idealistic beliefs on romance? Do men feel pressured to rush into marriage based on what they learn through romantic comedies, despite the lack of validity in the four expressions of love Hefner and Wilson (2013) put forth? Answering these questions through the use of qualitative methods will build upon the foundation Hefner and Wilson (2013) laid, addressing individual reactions to the ideals and challenge expressions common in the genre while gaining a better understanding of whether these expressions impact men's prescribed beliefs on romantic ideals.

Social Cognitive and Cultivation Theory

Social Cognitive Theory postulates that people observe behavior and create symbolic representations of the perceived mannerisms in order to replicate the conduct in future scenarios (Baran & Davis, 2013). According to Hefner and Wilson (2013), the content analysis did not

support a correlation between watching the genre to learn and the exposure to the four expressions relating to beliefs. However, they did find, “motivation to learn was an independent and significant predictor of the endorsement of ideals, irrespective of exposure” (Hefner & Wilson, 2013, p. 168). This finding coincides with Social Cognitive Theory and this thesis provided a deeper exploration on a more individual basis, drilling down into the data.

The theory also acknowledges that behavior is cognitive and does not necessitate reinforcement to be learned by an observer. Three methods of cognitive learning are associated with Social Cognitive Theory and the method of observational learning is most applicable. Observational learning happens when a person accumulates specific traits that a model possessed based on observation. If people are continuously exposed to four expressions of love that are used as a representation for all romantic relationships, negative results may occur. Men will learn that unrealistic standards must be met in order to have a successful relationship. Men may also feel that they may not measure up to the men they see in the movies they watch. Men learn through observation of film what society deems as acceptable, which may lead men to take extreme actions in order to achieve a certain level of perfection (Smith & Cook, 2008). The potential for male film consumers to subconsciously aim to emulate characters portrayed in film concerning romantic content aligns with the theory. The ramifications of such actions are not heavily addressed in academic literature and the qualitative focus of this thesis strives to fill the gap while advancing theory.

Similarly, Gerber (1998) found that viewers who were consistently exposed to media begin to cultivate ideas as their own over a period of time. If media content is formulated and continuously presented thematically to viewers, they will come to adopt such beliefs as reality. Hefner and Wilson’s (2013) study did not support this idea, which is inconsistent with previous work. The researchers cited an outdated movie list and inconsistency in screening behaviors as predictors of the null hypothesis.

Using the framework of the four expressions of love common in films, a qualitative method – more specifically, in-depth interviews – boded well for collecting this type of data. Further, the thesis was able to identify romantic content is so over saturated in Western culture and that consumption of these films has little to do with the endorsement of beliefs. Hefner and Wilson (2013) were unable to answer this question in their study, but their findings support the notion that motivation to watch films predicted belief endorsements.

Hefner and Wilson's (2013) findings also helped shape interview questions that draw individual experiences from film consumers. The researcher was able to identify exposure frequency and used probing questions to dig deeper into the ideal romantic content causing consumers to cultivate ideas about reality. Grounding the qualitative data in Social Cognitive and Cultivation Theory produced further implications for the suppositions Hefner & Wilson (2013) put forth. Ideally, the findings of this thesis will spur a need for an accumulation of work that examines the romantic comedy genre more specifically, laying the groundwork for future researchers.

Research Questions

Romantic comedy films have entertained audiences for 90-minute stretches since rising to popularity with audiences during the 1930s (Edman, 1940; Hefner & Wilson, 2013). Despite the genre's popularity among the masses, a modest amount of literature is devoted to the study of the romantic comedies. Hefner and Wilson (2013) were the first to explore the prevalence of romantic ideals portrayed in the genre in relation to the consumers' endorsement of romantic beliefs. Their findings partially supported the association between consumers' exposure to romantic comedies in relation to their romantic belief endorsements (Hefner & Wilson, 2013), and with limited efforts being made to understand the paradigm, further research was required to redress the disparity in the literature.

The thesis explored the connection between the content portrayed in romantic comedies and the endorsement of romantic beliefs among educated male film consumers, ages 18 to 34, affiliated with a midwestern research university. A qualitative approach was used to build upon Hefner and Wilson's (2013) findings, focusing on gender-specific outcomes, which aimed to achieve a more in-depth approach in collecting and analyzing the data. This led to the first research question to be addressed.

RQ 1: Does the representation of romance regarding the prevalence of ideals in romantic comedies impact men's expectations of their partner in a relationship?

Research partially supports an association between viewing romantic comedies and endorsing romantic beliefs. Hefner & Wilson (2013) conducted a content analysis of romantic ideals consisting of the four romantic ideal constructs, and specifically coded for four categories of expressions within the themes. These expressions included, (a) love conquers all; (b) idealization of partner; (c) soul mate/one and only; and, (d) love at first sight. Of the four expressions, simply viewing romantic comedies resulted in a higher probability of endorsing the "idealization of the other" belief (Hefner & Wilson, 2013). Knowing men consume romantic comedies more inconsistently than women, there is great significance in findings concerning men's perception of their partners. Qualitatively exploring how the representation of romance in the genre affects men's expectations of romantic partners aided in advancing Gerbner's (1998) Cultivation Theory concerning the genre.

Second, this thesis examined men's beliefs concerning endorsements of romantic ideals in an attempt to understand the circulation of information among the male population. Gaining insight into the male demographics' ability to share ideas and information among their peers aided in understanding whether men learn about romantic ideals through the medium of film or if

film portrays male characters based on pre-existing beliefs prevalent within the population. This posed a second research question.

RQ 2: Do romantic idealizations affect men's exchange of information and ideas throughout their communities?

Hefner and Wilson's (2013) content analysis research found men and women equally discussed relationships in the romantic comedy genre, but the expression of ideas differed vastly among each gender. Women were predominantly coded as speaking to the challenges of relationships whereas men talked inherently about romantic ideals. Research also supports the notion that women value romantic ideals while also recognizing that maintaining romantic relationships can be challenging (Meier, et al., 2009; Hefner & Wilson, 2013). In contrast, men often idealize romantic beliefs in comparison to women (Sprecher & Metts, 1989, 1999; Hefner & Wilson, 2013). Hefner and Wilson (2013) suggested character belief structures in romantic comedies were a reflection of men and women's romantic beliefs in reality. To explore the notion further, additional research was needed to understand how romantic belief structures impact the sharing of ideas among a population of men.

Finally, Wilson and Hefner (2013) found romantic ideals were most often rewarded on screen rather than punished, which led the researchers to conclude that consumers were more likely to learn the behavior. Social Cognitive Theory postulates that people observe behavior and create symbolic representations of the perceived mannerisms in order to replicate the conduct in future scenarios (Bandura, 1965; Baran & Davis, 2013). Thus, the final research question was crafted to advance theory.

RQ 3: Do men subconsciously aim to emulate characters portrayed in romantic comedies and does this adherence to social conventions cultivate unrealistic attitudes toward romance?

Qualitatively gathering a body of knowledge on the topic allowed for the application of a theoretical lens, which helped strengthen existing literature regarding the connection between the content portrayed in romantic comedies and men's endorsements of romantic beliefs. In addition, this thesis identified additional theories during the research analysis, which shed light on future research opportunities to understand romantic ideals, not only in relation to romantic comedy movies, but across other sectors of media entertainment.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This thesis addresses whether a significant connection exists between the content of the top 10 highest-grossing romantic comedy movies from 2009-2015 and the endorsement of romantic beliefs among male movie consumers. Further, an analysis of how the connection impacted the circulation of information and ideas among educated, male film consumers, ages 18 to 34, affiliated with a midwestern research university was conducted. The research analysis focused on men's perception of four romantic ideals (i.e. love can overlook flaws; love can seek out that one perfect mate; love can happen instantaneously; and love can overcome all obstacles) and four romantic expressions in movies (i.e. love conquers all; idealization of partner; soul mate/one and only; and love at first sight) within a theoretical lens through the use of in-depth interviews (Bell, 1975; Knox & Sporakowski, 1968; Sprecher & Metts, 1989; Hefner & Wilson, 2013). The research study accumulated qualitative data demonstrating how romantic beliefs in these films established unrealistic expectations for men concerning romantic relationships. Men's attitudes toward romantic ideals were analyzed to help determine whether men may adhere to social conventions in relation to cultural practices that make meaning within the demographic due

to the unrealistic expectations romantic comedies put forth. The thesis findings informed the impact of romantic beliefs in film in relation to advancing theory.

Subjects

A total of 10 male film consumers, ages 18 to 34, affiliated with a midwestern research university, was selected as the sample based on the level of access to the community as well as a need to understand the societal implications concerning the dissemination of information and ideas throughout this population. Subjects included participatory individuals who viewed at least three of the top-grossing romantic comedy films from 2009-2015 during the past year. Individuals were recruited using word-of-mouth referrals.

Originally, 30 men were sought for participation in a series of focus groups. During the two-week recruitment period, two men were identified as participants. What may be considered a challenge resulted in interesting research finding because men did not feel comfortable discussing their ideas, thoughts and opinions in a group setting. As a result, the methodology shifted to one-on-one, in-depth interviews.

Once subjects were identified, 10 participants were selected using randomizing software to partake in the interview process. Satterfield (2002) stated that a cross-selection of subjects guarantees an equal chance of being chosen. Selecting the subjects at random ensured a more representative interpretation of the data was collected.

Once Institutional Review Board approval was obtained, the researcher reached out to the identified subjects for their participation in one of 10 in-depth interviews. No identified subject selected at random refused to participate in the interview process.

Due to the location of the research university, the sample was geographically challenging. Only men from Oklahoma and Texas participated in the research study for this thesis, which may

impact the data due to the highly masculinized nature of the geographical area. However, the participants were demographically diverse considering the small sample size. Of the 10 participants, five identified as single, two were in a relationship, two were married and one participant was in a civil union. Additionally, eight of participants were heterosexual and two were homosexual. Finally, seven participants identified as Caucasian, two as African American and one as Hispanic. All of the men could be considered moderated to heavy users concerning the consumption of romantic comedy films.

Instrument

A total of 10 in-depth interviews were conducted with 10 participants. The primary researcher recorded the audio of each session and transcribed the interviews upon completion. See the appendix for primary questions used during the interviews, which highlights the top 10 highest-grossing romantic comedies from 2009-2015.

Procedures

The researcher was granted approval from the Institutional Board of Research ensuring the safety of human subjects. All subjects were asked to sign a consent form and fill out a demographic questionnaire prior to their participation in the in-depth interviews. The in-depth interviews were conducted at a midwestern research university with predetermined dates selected based on the availability of the participants. The setting was comfortable in nature, creating an environment conducive to participants sharing their lived experiences with the researcher. The interview session also included creature comforts such as refreshments.

Limitations and Strengths

Grounding the research questions within the context of Hefner and Wilson's (2013) existing framework on romantic beliefs in connection to film consumption is a noted strength of

the thesis. Further, choosing a qualitative approach for data collection offered a more in-depth analysis of existing research as well as addressed the limitations of Hefner and Wilson (2013) study. The researchers could not address individual viewer differences when singularly framing research questions in a quantitative capacity as this thesis did.

Second, no research has looked at the connection between the endorsements of romantic ideals among men within the context of the romantic comedy genre. This thesis not only delved into uncovering individual viewer differences, but also exposed men's beliefs about of four romantic ideals in relation to the four romantic expressions in the genre's content. In doing so, the in-depth interviews helped establish that romantic comedies set unrealistic expectations for men concerning romantic relationships in terms of learning about romance and cultivating ideas.

Possible limitations for the study include the small, targeted sample size. The data lacks generalizability because the attitudes of men, ages 18 to 34, are only being analyzed based on the consumption of one type of genre within the medium of film. The narrow data set provided a limited scope in understanding male film consumers' attitudes toward romantic ideals, which offered a limited understanding of the participants' motivations in relation to Social Cognitive Theory or Cultivation Theory. Therefore, the researcher also addressed consumption patterns and attitudes toward romantic comedies during the in-depth interviews.

Although the targeted sample was cause of concern in some instances, the age demographic is also a noted strength in terms of media consumers' habits. A majority of the participants (seven) in the in-depth interviews were a part of a generation known as the "digital native generation" and are leaders in consuming digital media, including film (Jackson, 2013, p. 1). People aged 18 to 24 make up the largest population to consume media, with 77% owning cell phones or tablets that are used for consuming media on a daily basis. In the same vein, 29% claim to have not read printed newspapers within the past year (Jackson, 2013). Understanding how

this age group interprets the media they consume will help scholars and industry leaders better understand the demographics' motivations to imitate portrayed romantic ideals, which is critical in advancing theory as well understanding the impact on society concerning the endorsement of these beliefs.

Analysis of Data

The researcher transcribed the audio from each interview and the data from the transcripts were reduced to topics. Analysis of the qualitative data was framed using Corbin and Strauss' (2008) concept of grounded theory, working to construct themes for the purpose of building theory. Once the researcher identified thematic commonalities among the topics of the 10 in-depth interviews, Social Cognitive Theory and Cultivation Theory (as well as Third-person Effect and Spiral of Silence Theories not previously accounted for in the research questions) aided in the creation of five themes. The themes suggested male consumers were motivated by observations and perceived mannerisms of the portrayal of film characters. Therefore, the research findings were consistent with theory. The spoken word of the in-depth interviews rendered both social and psychological needs, which are key components of Social Cognitive Theory and Cultivation Theory.

Triangulation was used to verify the data collected by (a) asking a subject who participated in the in the interview process to review the common themes found during the study, while also offering feedback on the data; (b) asking a film consumer who meets the study's criteria and who did not participate in the study to review the themes the researchers found and offer commentary; and (c) analyzing the emerged themes in context to existing literature and compare existing refrains with those found during the in-depth interviews. Using multiple observers as well as existing literature to cross-reference the data helped the researcher identify the various ways in which the data could be interpreted (Cohen, 2006).

The data analysis aided in a better understanding of Social Cognitive and Cultivation Theory in relations to emerging themes as well as additional theories not previously considered. Therefore, the data set advanced knowledge in the mass communications field.

Credibility of Data

In presenting the data, the researcher used Cohen's (2006) standards for credibility. The qualitative interview analysis justified the findings by exploring the (a) credibility, or truth in the qualitative data; (b) transferability, or application of the data in other contexts; (c) dependability or demonstration of consistency within the data; and (d) confirmability or determination that the findings were solely formed by the respondents rather than the researcher's bias. As a result, the qualitative approach provided a better understanding of men's beliefs about romance within the genre, resulting in a better understanding of the motivations to demonstrate cognitive behavior or cultivate ideas learned through observation of romantic comedies. Insights provided from the in-depth interviews contributed to the limited amount of scholarly attention romantic comedies receive as well as addressed any gaps in the existing findings of Hefner and Wilson's (2013) research. The outcome of this thesis may also result in future research opportunities addressing similar research questions among populations of various demographical backgrounds. Ultimately, the research advanced the knowledge of Social Cognitive, Cultivation, Third-person Effect and Spiral of Silence Theory in relation to film consumption, aiding in a better comprehension of the role that motion pictures will continue to play in the future of communications.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Hefner and Wilson's (2013) research centered on the romantic ideal construct which involves four ideals; (a) love can seek out that one perfect mate; (b) love can happen instantaneously; (c) love can overlook flaws; and, (d) love can overcome all obstacles (Bell, 1975; Knox & Sporkowski, 1968; Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Sprecher & Metts, 1989). Using the construct as a framework, the researchers completed a content analysis of the top 52 highest-grossing romantic comedy movies between 1998 and 2008, categorizing content into four categories of expressions (or themes), which were (a) love conquers all; (b) idealization of a partner; (c) soul mate/one and only; and (d) love at first sight. After conducting the qualitative research, Hefner and Wilson's (2013) data was validated.

During the interviews process, the totality of participants alluded to the prevalence of the romantic ideal construct within the romantic comedy genre. Some of the participants specifically categorized experiences with the genre, whether negative or positive, within the framework of Hefner and Wilson's (2013) categories of expressions. Affirmation for existing data concerning

the romantic comedy genre as well as additional themes that emerged from the qualitative data will be explored below.

The data set was rich and descriptive in nature. Much of the participants were “insider-oriented,” meaning the in-depth interviews allowed for sense making at the individual’s level, with little prompting or guidance from the interviewer (Warr, 2005). A qualitative interview analysis explored the emergence of five thematic findings in relation to the consumption of the romantic comedy genre, which addresses gaps in academic research that focuses on romantic content analyses.

Emergence of Themes

Research Question One. The first research question asked if the representation of romance regarding the prevalence of ideals in romantic comedies impact men’s expectations in a relationship. A qualitative interview analysis of 10 interviews revealed men were not only aware of the romantic ideal construct prevalent in romantic content, but also categorized romantic content within the categories of expressions outlined in Hefner and Wilson’s (2013) content analysis study. Specifically, five participants’ ideas, expressions or opinions acknowledged the romantic ideal construct. As a result, six participants alluded to the notion of an increase in their partner’s expectations of them to behave in a certain way in a relationship, rather than their own. In contrast, two participants said they set higher expectations for themselves in a relationship because of the prevalence of romantic ideals and themes in the romantic comedy movie genre. As a result, two thematic findings became apparent.

Theme One. Men cite romantic comedies as setting unrealistic expectations for relationships and therefore may shift expectations of themselves, not their partner.

Theme Two. Men are put off by the predictability of the genre, specifically when the content can be categorized within the romantic ideal construct or identified themes of Hefner and Wilson's (2013) content analysis.

Theme One Analysis

A total of 10 participants were asked questions during a one-on-one interview process, allowing for descriptive responses concerning the pressure or expectations placed on a relationship as a result of the romantic comedy genre. Interview participants said if expectations did shift, it was a result of the men feeling as if their romantic partner would expect them to behave a certain way based on the content, not necessarily because the content added pressure for them to alter their behavior. The finding aligns with Third-person Effect Theory, which was not accounted for prior to data collection.

Consistent with the theory, the participants assumed romantic comedies affected others but did not affect them. Third-person Effect Theory research validates the idea that people tend to overestimate the effect the media has on others. As a result, the assumption that media will affect others is often incorrect (Davison, 1983). In relation to the research question as well as a newly identified theoretical basis, the first thematic finding concluded from the text is as follows.

Of the 10 participants, six viewed the pressure set for a relationship as a response to the possibility of their significant altering expectations after viewing romantic content. As a result, the participants felt they may need to shift their behavior in a relationship to meet their partner's newfound expectations more in line with common ideologies expressed in romantic content.

Participant One: I think it depends on the other person in the relationship. If they see it and they're like "You never do that for me," she may have a valid point, but she may not also have a valid point. Things like that are just not common. I think it would more or less impact her, which when then, in turn, impact me.

Participant one suggests romantic content does not impact him. However, he does state romantic content would impact his romantic partner, which would cause him to shift the expectations he set for himself in a relationship. Interestingly, participant one does admit to having certain expectations of women because of the romantic comedy genre.

Interviewer: How do you think watching romantic comedies effect the expectations you set for yourself in romantic relationships?

Participant One: Way too much. It's like Santa Claus. You want to think Santa Claus is real, but you know he's not. You want to believe that that's how the world works because it would be so much easier and it would be so nice to have a how-to book, but the truth is, every relationship is different.

Participant four distinguishes between the idea of feeling pressure in a relationship and garnering certain expectations due to romantic comedies. Although he does not feel pressure to alter his behavior while in a relationship, he does admit viewing romantic content allows him to learn what women expect in relationships. As a result, participant four shifts the expectations he sets for himself based on the portrayal of what a woman seeks in a romantic partner, per the context of the romantic comedy genre.

Interviewer: Do you ever feel pressured to behave certain way in a relationship because of these types of movies?

Participant Four: I would say not really... Not necessarily how males are portrayed but from the expectations that women might have in romantic comedies that might influence me more.

Interviewer: How so?

Participant Four: I'd be more – tend to measure myself toward the women's expectations in the film than how the man is portrayed in the film because that's your end result in your objective, your romantic quest, I guess is to be in a relationship, so you want to be a desirable companion.

Similar to participant one, participant six's answer aligns with Third-person Effect Theory. Even more, he alludes to the idea of making decisions in romantic relationships based on his assumptions, and acknowledges his expectations may be unfounded.

Participant Six: ... I can see women wanting more or having higher expectations because of it, but I can also see me watching a romantic comedy and thinking, "oh that's a good idea, I should do that." Stuff like that. I don't know if it would really affect the relationship that much. I wouldn't say it really affects it unless I'm saying, "well now she expects this." Maybe like, it affects me because I'm thinking it affects her... maybe it would raise her expectations as far as like date nights or something like that goes. Then I would go ahead and take her out on more dates or something like that.

When asked the same question about expectations, participant three's answers also align with the previous statements of the participants. He feels affected in the sense that his partner is affected, which results in a behavioral shift during courtship. He also expressed concern for expectations set after the relationship moves past courting because of romantic comedy movies.

Participant Three: For myself, like when I was dating, and before we were actually like together, I would try to do big dates and like the "wow" thing you know, and I'd just keep her interested.

Sometimes I think if I'm watching a movie and my expectations are here, and then there's like... exceeds that, I'm like, "What if she's not happy with the way things are going?" They [romantic comedies] make everything seem so perfect and it's not perfect all the time. I wonder if she like expects things to be perfect all the time...

Participant seven's response is unique because he states a partner's potential expectations affect his current love life. He is the only participant to touch on the idea of foregoing a romantic relationship due to unrealistic expectations romantic comedy movies may set for women.

Participant Seven: I'd say it definitely raises my expectations of what I should be doing. That also leans back to, then it almost makes me nervous in a relationship, getting into a relationship and thinking, "I have these high expectations, but am I really going to be able to pull that off for this girl, or am I going to disappoint her, or what? Am I not going to be able to do enough?" and things like that. It makes me nervous to commit.

In contrast, participant eight shifts his behavior specifically to please his partner and demonstrate his commitment to her.

Participant Eight: When you see a guy that's working really hard, going out of his way to send flowers to his wife, doing the impossible to try to make her happy, of course. With your wife watching it with you, who doesn't want to try to do things?

Participant five and two were the only two participants who were self-portrayed romantic comedy fans. In contrast to the responses above, romantic comedy movies altered their expectations on a personally level, not due to a partner's perceived shift in expectations. The only two participants to stray from Third-person Effect Theory, their responses aligned more with the theory of Social Cognitive Theory. As male film consumers who are inclined to adopt behavior based on the representation of romantic ideals in the romantic comedy genre, their responses are grounded within the framework of Social Cognitive Theory (Baran & Davis, 2013). The participants are watching romantic comedy films and learning what actions to take in reality to garner a successful relationship.

Participant Five: I personally do expect more. I leave thinking, "Okay. I'm not trying hard enough to talk to someone." Like even if it's randomly in Food Pyramid line and there's a cute girl in front of you, just say like, "Oh yeah, getting some eggs tonight?" Just to kind of put yourself out there. I think those movies inspire you and then raise your expectations of, "Hey, I should probably put myself a little bit more out there..."

Rather than attributing Third-person Effect Theory in relation to his behavior, participant five raises personal expectations to attract a potential partner because of content he has viewed in romantic comedies. Similarly, participant two indicates high status in society as an expectation placed on him when hoping to allure women.

Interviewer: How do you think that romantic comedies effect the expectations that you set for yourself in a relationship?

Participant Two: Not good. A lot of these movies, they're either rich or they're famous. You don't usually have some dude coming off the streets... like, you need to have money to woo a lady or what not.

Overall, it has been established that six of respondents equate a shift in expectations as a result of viewing romantic comedy content. The respondents below specifically used the word “unrealistic” in their answers, supporting the proposed research question.

Interviewer: Do you think that romantic comedies help or hurt your relationships?

Participant One: ... I think they hurt because they set unrealistic expectations for what you should expect...

Participant Eight: Yeah, unrealistic standards. And you had one guy who's a surgeon, one guy who just got out of a mental hospital for bipolar disorder. You had a guy that was bussing table and things like that. Those are all possibilities of things; it's just that I don't think it's very realistic.

Participant Nine: I feel like sometimes it can hurt [your relationship] because it can set unrealistic expectations. You're not going to get all these grand gestures. He talks about [in Crazy. Stupid. Love.]. He's like, “My son believes in these grand gestures.” Blah, blah, blah. That's not always a thing.

Theme Two Analysis

Many participants cited the lack of creativity and predictability as deterrence for consumption. Interestingly, the participant's stance on the genre did not factor into negative opinions concerning the formulaic plot lines, but rather determined viewing patterns among the demographic. In relation to Hefner and Wilson's (2013) categories of expressions based on the romantic ideal construct, men typically viewed these expressions in a negative manner when citing consumption choices.

For instance participant one held a negative attitude toward the genre. He would not actively seek a romantic comedy for personal viewing pleasure. In contrast, participant five said romantic comedies were his favorite genre of film. Despite the difference in views pertaining to the genre collectively, each participant cited predictability in the form of romantic expressions as a hindrance to enjoying the film. As a result, a predictable and feasible plot contributed to the lack of romantic comedy consumption among men.

Participant One: I think they're pretty formulaic. They vary in the method in which they tell the story, but I feel like the same key things are always there no matter what the story. There's only a few movies that I can think of where I felt like it was different or more realistic. Yeah, I think there's a lot of just very basic things that are present in all movies, all romantic movies.

Although participant one and participant five held different opinions on the likeability of the genre, participant five also cited the formulaic, predictable plots as a downfall of the genre.

Participant Five: They're sometimes too cliché. They're kind of... you can predict it. Most times, they're always getting together, too. Like, I mean you know from the start of the movie that, "hey, they're probably going to end up together." There's not – very rarely a movie where they're not going to get together. Those are always the shocking ones. Basically, predictability. You kind of know what's going to happen.

Exploring the genre's faults from this participant's perspective was warranted because he cited the genre as his favorite type of film. To delve deeper, participant five was asked to address why he felt predictability was an issue in the romantic comedy genre. Interestingly, participant five specifically mentioned Hefner and Wilson's (2013) category of expression, "soul mate/one and only," as an expression in the romantic comedy genre that does not translate to reality.

Participant Five: What do you think ... Oh man what do they get wrong? I don't know honestly. Sometimes you're not going to have a soul mate. Put it that way. I think sometimes you may like really like somebody... I mean I have some teachers that have never been married, I guess teachers from high school, that are forty-five, fifty years old and they're probably never going to be married. They're always like, "Oh there's someone out there for you. There's a soul mate out there." Yeah there may be, but you may not ever find them. That's kind of what's wrong is that on those movies they always seem to find them. Like no one's ever left alone. You're always with somebody at the end, which sometimes that doesn't work out like that.

Additional categories of expressions concerning romantic content and the interviewees' experiences were cited during the qualitative interview analysis. Of the 10 participants, five either mentioned a category of expression or the romantic ideal construct when referencing romantic content in the genre. Specifically, participants mentioned "love at first sight" and "soul mate/ one and only" (Hefner & Wilson, 2013) as well as the romantic ideal constructs "love can happen

instantaneously” and “love conquers all” (Bell, 1975; Knox & Sporkowski, 1968; Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Sprecher & Metts, 1989).

Participant Four: Some movies portray the ideas that I don’t necessarily agree with of ... I just don’t personally agree with things of love at first sight or ideas of sometimes how relationships might just occur very quick.

Participant Five: Sometimes you’re not going to have a soul mate...

Participant Seven: I think sometimes they make it too fantasy-like and set unreal expectations for relationships, for the good and the bad, really, on both sides. But really big over-the-top things that are going on – it doesn’t always have to be that way. Not everyone’s the same. For the most part, they don’t always show the different ways that people react in relationships to being wooed in them.

Participant Nine: That was one thing that I noticed, or the way that ... It’s hard to describe, but the way that they figure things out, I guess, to me is weird. It wouldn’t just fall into place like it sometimes happens in the movies. You would go without speaking with each other. You would have this type of a fight, or this type of more of a development, I guess, than some of the movies allow.

I’ve never ran just run into somebody out in the middle of nowhere and been like, “two years later, we’re still in love and it’s great.” I guess to me that is part of the unrealistic side. Sometimes the way they meet people and the way the relationship starts. I guess it frustrates me...

Participant Ten: Like connections happen quick. Because movies are an hour and a half, and so just the timing it takes to actually have a connection to someone can take years. It can’t happen in a one sitting at a restaurant, you know, and you fall in love. That’s just not how it happens. That would be kind of the biggest thing. It’s not realistic. It’s one of those things. Like love at first sight, like I don’t know if that really ever happens. I mean there’s people you’re like, “oh,” but it’s not love at first sight.

The participants are keenly aware of the romantic ideal construct in which romantic content is written and identify Hefner and Wilson’s (2013) categories of expression in relation to their own experiences with the genre and in life. The predictably of plot that coincides with romantic content is off-putting, yet men continue to consume the film. Whether consumption occurs to appease a romantic partner, despite the formulaic content, or because the genre is enjoyable remains unknown. In relation to research question one, it can be inferred the prevalence of romantic content does not impact expectations. However, as noted above, the participants say

to some extent romantic comedies do affect relationships whether personally or by extension through a partner's expectations. Further research may expand on this finding to garner a deeper understanding as to why men choose to consume content they consider being unrealistic.

Research Question 2. The second research question asked whether romantic idealizations affect men's exchange of information and ideas throughout their communities. Participants were asked to answer questions about consumption patterns to gain a better understanding of the people the participants chose to view the genre with on a regular basis. As a result, three participants last watched a romantic comedy alone. More than half of participants (six people) watched a romantic comedy with a woman and only one respondent last watched a film in the genre with a man. It is important to note the one respondent who reported watching a romantic comedy with other men was referring to the movie "Trainwreck" and said their girlfriends suggested they watch the film together. Based on the analysis of consumption behavior, a third thematic finding emerged.

Theme Three. Men do not consume the genre with other men.

Theme Three Analysis

Each of the participants was asked some iteration of the question, "How often do you watch romantic comedies with men compared to watching them with women?" In all but two scenarios, men said they do not watch films in the romantic comedy genre with other men (eight participants). The prevalence of men citing the lack of consumption with other men is a significant finding. Below are each participant's responses to the question, with each person often assigning a numerical value of the time spent viewing romantic comedies with men. The varying demographics make the finding more compelling because of the group's difference in relationship status and sexual orientation.

Participant Two: I watch with women probably about 85% of the time. My dad doesn't like watching them, and I don't feel comfortable watching them with anybody else. Yeah, that's maybe a little higher than 85%. I'm not 100% sure, really.

Interviewer: Okay. How often do you watch romantic comedies with men compared to watching them with women?

Participant Three: Never.

Interviewer: Never?

When asked to expand on his answer, the participant admitted to feeling pressure from his peer group as a motivating factor to avoid consuming the genre.

Participant Three: Kind of like the pressure thing- If you say, "Hey I want to watch this movie," they'll be like, "Are you serious? That's a girly movie," but in reality, even if it's not, that's just like the label that they stamp it with, you know? That's probably like the biggest thing.

Participant Four: I don't think I've ever watched a romantic ... Like I said, pretty much all movies have some element of romance, but I've never watched something I would consider a romantic comedy with a group of guys or with one other male. However, I've watched romantic comedies with groups of people, male and female, but tenfold difference. I don't think I've ever done that before.

Currently, nine times out of 10, I'm watching a romantic comedy with my wife. Depending on the situation previous to being married, it wouldn't be uncommon to go with a girlfriend or if it's just on TV, I might watch it. I don't think I've ever purchased, rented or gone to a romantic comedy movie on my own. It's typically a one-on-one thing if I'm seeing a romantic comedy. I can't think of many situations where that hasn't been the case.

Participant Six: I would say probably never, maybe once or twice but I don't think I've ever just sat down with a group of guys and just watched, maybe *Silver Linings Playbook*. I think I watched that with some guys. Stuff I would consider romantic comedies like *Eat, Pray, Love* or something like that, we wouldn't sit down and watch those.

Participant Seven: Probably one in 10 might, maybe once every 10 times. It might be upwards of once every fifteen times... I'd say I guess when it comes to romantic comedies; it might be [watching the films] 70% with other people, 30% by myself. The 30% is more like the ones that look like they've done something different or something like that. If it has intrigued me, I'll watch it.

Interviewer: Do you watch them [romantic comedies] with other friends or other guys, females, specifically?

Participant Seven: Yeah, pretty much females exclusively

Participant Eight: Like I said, I don't really watch romantic comedies with guys very much... Something like "About Time," where it's literally about a guy meeting the girl of his dreams and being able to go back in time, it's not something I watch with my guy friends.

Participant Nine: I don't think I watch them very often with other guys at all. I think the only way that I would do that would be if I was on a date or if it was another gay man. I can't think of a time where I've watched a movie like this with any of my straight friends. I think, for me, I would be uncomfortable because I would feel like they were judging me for watching the movie.

Participant Ten: I would say it's like 99% of the time [I'm watching romantic comedies] with other – with girls, with women. Not men. Like even like gay friends, we don't sit around and watch romantic comedies.

Interviewer: Well, why do you think that is? How do you think that the experience of watch a film between the two audiences would shift?

Participant Ten: I think when you're with a girl doing it, of course most of my guy friends are gay, and so for us, it's always like, "That's so hetero. Those are hetero people, that's not how gay relationships work." But when you're watching it with girls, you're their friends, and so you're watching it as if, "oh, boys are all like that."

Interviewer: Oh.

Participant Ten: It's like you sit and talk about how their boyfriends are just like this character or – and it's so weird now that I think about it. Just because we wouldn't – I mean as a guy – like my guy friends, we wouldn't sit around and talk about that.

In contrast, two participants said they had watched a movie in the romantic comedy genre alone with a man or in a group of men. However, only one of the two participants seemed to actively watch films in the genre with other men.

Participant One: I think that if I'm with a guy we're more likely to gang up and call out the bull crap... I think it's different when I view it with a guy versus a girl but I don't know that I'd ever keep track of who I would be viewing it with more likely.

During the interview, participant five self-identified as someone who enjoyed the romantic comedy genre and participant one did not. For the duration of the interview process, participant

five appeared to have a general carefree demeanor. He was conversational and appeared comfortable with his genuine self. Due to this behavior, his answer was telling because he stated he watched the romantic comedy genre with his male friends.

Participant Five: How often? Probably, honestly, twice as many times I watch it with guys than I do girls just because of my friends. I think my friend group is understanding and they know that like some of those movies are good. I don't really have a lot of I guess, I don't want to say douchebags because that's just not a, but guys that are like, "Oh screw that movie. It's too girly." Like I don't have many of those friends there. They're all kind of open to seeing those kind of movies. If I ever want to see one and it looks funny then they're going to see it to. Probably two to one, three to one. It's at least double, I guarantee you that for sure, I've seen it with guys to girls.

Participant five is an anomaly in the data set, but his response is worth noting because he is watching romantic comedies with other men, which does not align with the data collected.

Although participant five is the only man in this data set who chooses to consume the genre specifically with men, his answers results in an opportunity for future research to further explore consumption patterns.

The consistency of the participants' answers to consumption patterns aligns with the other themes from the data set. Men find romantic comedies as unrealistic in relation to content and expectations set for reality, ultimately viewing the film to appease a romantic partner or a group of friends. The most relatable aspect of romantic comedies for men is seeing a relationship fraught with drama, which will be explored later in the text. Therefore, men use romantic comedies as a learning tool to navigate their own personal shortcomings in relationships or for ideas (i.e. dating protocol, communication, sense of self, etc.) on how to avoid issues with romantic partners. As a result, men do not consume the genre with other men because the content is not applicable to those relationships. Therefore, romantic idealizations do not affect the exchange of information in their communities, but only affect their personal ideas concerning love.

The lack of information exchange among men can be related to Spiral of Silence Theory, which argues people will not express their opinions if they perceive they are in the minority concerning said opinions (Noelle-Neumann, 1974).

Participant One: I can't say that I watch them [romantic comedies] with people all that often. I'm not going to say it hasn't happened, but it's not something I would usually strive to do.

Interviewer: How often do you watch romantic comedy movies with men compared to watching them with women? Do the experiences differ when you shift your audience?

Participant One: I think they do. I think if I'm with a guy, we're more likely to gang up and call out the bull crap. Whereas if I'm with a girl, she's watching it the same way I would watch an action movie. That guy would not fall off a bridge and land on that van moving at ninety miles per hour in real life. He would die. She's watching it [romantic comedy] for entertainment, or at least I assume she is, so I'm not going to ruin it for her by saying, "This is such a load of crap." Although, it would be nice if she'd be like, "That was not realistic."

Participant one clearly believes romantic comedies are unrealistic, but he refuses to express his opinion specifically to members of the opposite sex. In contrast, he would not express any opinions with members of the same sex other than to "call out the bull crap." No real ideas or opinions are shared, resulting in participant one to withdraw from public debate concerning the romantic comedy genre.

Participant two clearly enjoys the genre, and it is likely he will continue to feel favorable toward romantic comedies. However, because he feels threatened by his father's opinion, he may choose to forgo expressing his opinion about the genre in the company of other men. As a result, participant two will feel his high opinion of the genre is in the minority among men, which in turn, attributes to the fear of rejection.

Participant Two: ... I've actually really enjoyed them [romantic comedies]. When I see them come out in theaters, that's something I'll go out of my way to go and see.

Interviewer: Can you elaborate on that? Why?

Participant Two: I don't know. It's just something that's really intriguing to me. My dad says it's because I'm a sissy, but I actually really enjoy it. They kind of relate to me.

Similarly, participant five cites "chick flicks" as his favorite genre. However, because he categorizes himself as pathetic for enjoying these types of movies, it is likely participant five believes himself to be in the minority, which also aligns with Spiral of Silence Theory.

Interviewer: What type of films do you gravitate toward today?

Participant Five: Today, chick flicks for sure... I watch Lifetime movies all the time...

Interviewer: Really?

Participant Five: Yeah. It's pathetic.

Participant five's personal opinion of viewing romantic content as "pathetic" is a direct result of his consumption behavior, or lack thereof, with other men. Contradicting his comments earlier in this section, participant five's comments below indicate why men may feel unable to share ideas and opinions concerning the romantic comedy genre.

Participant Five: I mainly watch those alone just because no one really wants to watch those often. It really depends on my friend list, too. I mean sometimes I have a few friends that are still straight gentlemen and like those types of movies. I have some gay friends that will always watch those movies with me, too. I really think heterosexual; it kind of is harder to get those kinds of guys to watch them with you.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

Participant Five: I think men are just too... they don't want to let down their guard sometimes. They're just too like, "Oh, I don't like those types of movies." – Basically, I think it's kind of a wall that they put up that they don't want to admit that they like those types of movies.

The foundation of Spiral of Silence Theory is contributed to the idea that a person may feel like an unsupported individual. In time, the person will start to lose confidence and withdraw from publically sharing opinions. Participant six hits on this idea in his response below, claiming the romantic comedy genre targets women. As a result, he feels the intended audience is a rational reason for men choosing not to consume the genre together.

Participant Six: I would say never, maybe once or twice, but I don't think I've ever sat down with a group of guys and just watched [romantic comedies]... I think RomComs are aimed primarily at women. It's not at the top of our list to see and that's why guys never just sit down and watch a RomCom. But if it's something that when she suggests it, then yeah, you'll watch it.

When asked about the frequency of watching romantic comedies with other men, participant seven alluded to his guy friends allowing him to "poke fun" at the content.

Participant Seven: In the one in ten times [I'm watching a romantic comedy with men]... I only have enjoying the movie on my mind, so I would say it's a lot more lighthearted, a lot more poking fun at some of the romantic comedy stereotypes that happen throughout it, actually pointing them out, "Of course that happened." If I watch it with women, it's usually their choice to watch it. I don't want to offend or anything like that by making fun of the movie...

Again, when watching a film with a member of the opposite sex, participant seven says he would choose to not express his opinion, although his views about romantic comedies remain the same. Similar to participant one, this participant shares his ideas and opinions with other men only to the extent of mocking the content.

Participant nine chooses to keep his opinions to himself because he feels a part of the minority. He fears feeling uncomfortable around other men, and as a result, does not express his love of the genre unless in specific, controlled settings.

Participant Nine: I don't think I watch them very often with other guys at all. I think the only way that I would do that would be if I was on a date or if it was another gay man. I can't think of a time where I've watched a movie like this with any of my straight friends. I think, for me, I would be uncomfortable because I would feel like they were judging me.

A further indication of men's lack of information exchange concerning romantic content is directly related to their motivation to consume the genre. When men were asked whether romantic comedies were used as a precursor for sex, all of the participants said, "no." A few explained that romantic comedies may set the tone for the night, which may result in intercourse,

but all participants adamantly claimed they are not motivated to watch these types of films hoping it will lead to sexual activity.

Participant One: I would guess none. I feel like there's other things that are more likely to lead to that than a romantic comedy.

Participant Four: No, I don't think that's the reason why we would watch a romantic comedy. It's just how your emotions are after you watch one that probably leads to it, but I've never had the thought we should watch a romantic comedy for afterward. I've never had that thought before.

Participant Seven: I would say that there's definitely a slight underlining of that. I tend to actually just enjoy them for the most part. Usually the ones that it looks like I'm not going to enjoy, I turn down. I don't care to sit through a two-hour terrible movie just because I think it might lead to sexual activity.

In each of these scenarios, participants verbalized sexual activity was not an impetus of choosing to watch a romantic comedy with a romantic partner. However, their body language and lack of confidence when answering the question indicated they were not being truthful. Most men seemed to feel uncomfortable, shifting in their seat or breaking eye contact. As posited in Spiral of Silence Theory, the men felt uncomfortable publically sharing an opinion that might place them in a minority. Considering the researcher was a woman, the men may have feared having an opinion that did not align with the researcher. This question in particular was the only question from the interview that elicited this type of response from men. While the verbiage does not indicated a significant finding, the participants body language and mannerisms is noteworthy and aids in the advancement of theory.

Research Question Three. The third research question asked if men subconsciously aim to emulate characters portrayed in romantic comedies and does this adherence to social conventions cultivate unrealistic attitudes toward romance. Participants said consumption of romantic comedies may lead to ideation on how to interact with a romantic partner, but learning how to behave in a romantic relationship was not a motivation for viewing these types of films. The transcribed text in the following sections supports a relationship between Social Cognitive Theory

and Cultivation Theory in relation to the research question. As a result, two thematic findings emerged.

Theme Four. Men use romantic comedies as a learning tool, but not always in relation to romantic conquests.

Theme Five. Men cite drama in relationships as the most relatable aspect of romantic comedies.

Theme Four Analysis

Social Cognitive Theory argues people observe behavior and create symbolic representations of the perceived mannerisms in an effort to replicate the behavior in the future (Baran & Davis, 2013). In relation to this study, five participants cited a romantic comedy for making lifestyle decisions that personally affected them. An example of this includes participants choosing to emulate a similar style as Ryan Gosling's character, Jacob, in the film "Crazy. Stupid. Love."

The 2011 film was cited so often during the interviews, intrigued peaked when considering the interview transcriptions in relation to popular culture. Interestingly, a Google search of "Ryan Gosling Crazy Stupid Love" confirms an abundance of articles detailing the character's romantic conquests. The first search hit is a blog article titled, "How to Attract Girls Like Ryan Gosling in Crazy Stupid Love" (Google, 2016).

Two participants specifically cited the film in relation to making decision that impacted their lifestyle. While neither participant alluded to the character, Jacob, as having a profound impact on their romantic relationships, choosing to emulate a character's style suggests differently.

Participant Four: My favorite romantic comedy movie is "Crazy. Stupid. Love." Every time from now on I walk into the Gap I think, "I need to be better than the Gap," because that's what Ryan Gosling says, and he's the be-all, end-all for fashion in that movie.

Participant seven refers to romantic comedies as generally teaching him how to behave in relationships. He also shares participant four's opinion about the film "Crazy. Stupid. Love." directly citing Ryan Gosling's character as having a profound impact on a decision he has made.

Participant Seven: I do – if I'm actually serious about someone – like doing romantic things and big gestures and just things to make them happy. I guess I would say there's got to be at least a little bit back in the back of my head of all the things I've seen if film.

Ryan Gosling in "Crazy. Stupid. Love." I don't know. I'd say definitely dressing better. That marked – when I watched that, after that, I started paying attention to what I wore and stuff like that. I would say that's the impact it had, definitely.

In the film, Ryan Gosling uses style as a tool to attract potential romantic mates. Using inference, participant four and seven's decision to imitate the popular character's style may also be used as a tactic of attracting or keeping a romantic partner. Therefore, the stance of the participants – that they do not use romantic comedies as a learning tool – is null. If changing their style was brought about because of a character in the genre, and the character was scripted as a womanizer who also secures romantic conquests, what other motivation would be behind the participants' choice to enhance their personal style than to achieve success romantically?

Similarly to the two participants who cite "Crazy. Stupid. Love." as an impactful film, three participants cite additional romantic comedies as altering their lifestyle (five participants in total). The finding is statistically significant, with participants identifying the act of watching a film and imitating behavior observed in future scenarios, which aligns with Social Cognitive Theory.

Participant Five: You're going to laugh at this one. "Just Friends," as I mentioned, there's a line in that movie that says, "Call her right now. Change your day date to night. Kiss the girl at the end of the night because friends don't kiss." I still stick with that the whole time. Like still to this day, I don't like lunch dates because it's just too much of a friendly thing. Dinner dates are the key to go forward with that. If you have a great, then you kiss the date because you're not friends anymore. Like you actually went past that, even if it's a first date. I still stick to that in life right now. As soon as I heard that line.

When asked about movies impacting a decision or idea, participant nine had an example directly relating to his love life.

Participant Nine: I've been on a date with someone and we went to see a romantic comedy and I forget what it was but something happened in the movie and after that I was not interested. Completely shut down, was not into this person whatsoever. Something happened and it clicked. I was like, "No. This date's not going well. It's done."

In contrast, participant two said he does not feel pressured to alter his behavior while in a romantic relationship because he "knows better." However, he was able to pinpoint a time a romantic comedy movie impacted a lifestyle decision he made not relating to his romantic life.

Participant Two: ... He was an author. He wrote novels. It was a RomCom. It kind of made me think about if I wanted to eventually write a book and I looked into it.

Although not every participant cited romantic comedies as films in which they gleaned romantic advice, three participants (in addition to the five participants already established) broadly cited movies as having an impact on their life in the sense of learning. Statistically, eight participants directly relayed the process of viewing a film and emulating behavior in their own life. As a result, the research question is supported.

Participant Six: In high school, I watched James Bond a lot. I would buy suits and stuff and wear stuff like that. Not to school, but I would definitely be influenced by that.

Participant eight and participant ten drew from personal experiences and likened the viewing films as teaching tools in an outright manner. Each of their experiences are supported within the framework of Social Cognitive Theory.

Participant Eight: I think it does change you in a sense. To watch something and not take something away from it, I think is a waste of time.

Participant Eight: For me, I've always wanted to travel the world. That was why I did international business. Watching things when I was younger that went to mysterious places, highlighted a different culture, I think that I already had that interest, but it just furthered my interest in that subject. I did martial arts for two or three years in high school, and I can guarantee that watching "Crouching Tiger,

Hidden Dragon” got me even more fired up, got me even more interested.

Participant ten used film to teach him about his sexuality and learn about socially acceptable behavior. He adopted specific behaviors with the intent of being a part of the homosexual community.

Participant Ten: Being gay, there weren't gay movies and you didn't know a lot of gay people, so when you saw a gay movie and someone said something like, “Bye, Felicia,” in a movie, and it was a gay character, it automatically became a gay saying.

Each of these experiences, although unique, directly correlates with Social Cognitive Theory. Participants drew from knowledge viewed in film and applied certain behavior in their lives. With the majority of participant responses categorized in this theme, this is the most significant finding of the thesis.

Theme Five Analysis

Each participant was asked to answer some iteration of the question, “What do you think these movies get right about relationships?” and six of the participants cited dramatic content as a measurement for success when comparing the format to reality. Of the four who did not cite dramatic content and its relevancy, one person alluded to the idea of conflict. Two of those participants highlighted realistic content – which may include conflict, although the participants did not outright vocalize the sentiment – as an accolade of the romantic comedy genre. Ironically, of the four not citing dramatic content, which is arguable a negative development in the plot, one person did cite unrealistic expectations. Although this participant did not identify dramatic content, he did identify an additional negative aspect of romantic content as a notion the genre “gets right.”

Gerber (1998) found that viewers who were consistently exposed to media begin to cultivate ideas as their own over a period of time. If media content is formulated and continuously presented thematically to viewers, they will come to adopt such beliefs as reality. The findings in

relation to this theme align with Cultivation Theory and are statistically significant concerning men's ideas about the genre.

As mentioned, six participants were in agreement concerning dramatic content in the romantic comedy genre. Each of these participants related the content development to their lives or less indirectly to the reality of romance. Because this type of content is relatable for many participants, they are able to learn from these scenarios, cultivating ideas for solving romantic problems in their own lives. The following transcriptions support the cultivation of an idea in relation to dramatic content portrayal in romantic comedies.

Participant One: The idea that there's conflict. I think every relationship that's good has a conflict in it in some way. I just don't think how they resolve it or how easy it comes is right.

Participant Three: Conflict, like they're not always perfect. Every movie typically has a conflict. Not every real life relationship is perfect either, so I feel like the conflict is spot on.

Participant Six: The fact that there is always drama in the movies, I think that's something that just goes along with relationships. It's not always just smooth sailing. I think that's going to be a facet of every rom com. There's going to be some kind of bump in the road.

Participant Seven: I'd say it definitely gets it right about how complicated it can get and how difficult they can be, showing that it's not some easy process. There's a lot of things that go into it, a lot of things that pull you in different directions. I think they definitely get that right.

Participant Eight: I think that they get right that nobody's perfect. Everybody makes mistakes. It doesn't matter if you're the male, the female, the friend. Life has problems. Some of the films ends happily, and things work out. Sometimes it doesn't, but I think they get the relationship aspect right. It might not be realistic in how they do it, jet-setting and things like that, but the issues that are caused from say, having affair, or things like starting to date a friend, I think those are real things that come out of it.

Participant Ten: Well, they all have drama, and so every relationship has drama. It's usually not like movie drama, but there's always something. Something little.

Participant two alluded to both conflict and predictability when considering what the genre does well. The plot is predictable and, as validated by other participants, and often leads to

conflict between the main love interests. Therefore, participant two's answer alludes to the idea of conflict and how relatable the content can be, also.

Participant Two: A lot of these movies, it's like Bruce Almighty. The relationship throughout the movie. Something happens. She leaves. You have to go find her. Eventually, she'll come back. That happens ninety-nine percent of the time.

Participant four and five outlined realistic writing as the genre's strength in relation to their own experiences or the experiences of others rather than citing conflict. It is important to note that these participants are on different end of the spectrums concerning relationship status. Participant four is a newly wed, happily married and cites the varying stages of a relationship that romantic comedies portray. It can be inferred that participant four uses romantic comedies as a learning tool for navigating the newfound phase of his life. He is also cultivating ideas about romance and adopting them as his own.

Similarly, participant five confessed to never having a serious relationship, he is single and exhibits a carefree demeanor for the duration of the interview. He consumes the genre because he finds the content enjoyable. His answer suggests he also uses romantic comedies as a learning tool, which can be inferred because of his lack of successful relationships. The content validates the notion that anyone can find love, so he chooses to consume the content most applicable to his life, cultivating ideologies that support his opinions.

Participant Four: I think they get right especially like I mentioned, I like the ensemble movies because every couple in those types of movies is going through different phases and not one answer is always right. I think those types of romantic comedies get those movies right since they're right in saying that there's a lot of ways to go about a relationship, and you need to work as a partnership to figure that out. I think it's good that you see both the male and female or one person in the relationship

Participant Five: They get right ... I think you can find someone wherever you go. That's kind of what I feel that's right. I don't know if there's a certain someone out there for each person. I mean that whole statement. I mean I don't know if I'm going to find that one true love of my life that lives in California. You never know and I think no matter what opportunity, if you're on a plane to meet friends, or you're going to a bar, or if you are in

class, or interviewing someone like on "Trainwreck," you never know when that's going to stumble upon that person. That's completely accurate on all those levels for me.

Participant eight sites unrealistic expectations as his rationale of what the genre does well. Although dramatic content is not cited, participant nine cultivates ideas about love, and how a person can find happiness, because of the genre's content.

Participant Nine: I think from what everyone tells me about being in love, it's when you least expect it, it happens. It's not something you should go out and search for. It's something that should fall into place. If you think about a lot of the movies in this genre, they do. The story line does fall into place where they're like, "Oh." It just happened. It's nice. You know?

When cultivating ideas about relationships, the participants focus on the content that casts relationships in a realistic way. They relate this type of content as consistent with reality, therefore using the genre's content to validate their personal experiences. Wilson and Hefner's (2013) content analysis found a romantic ideal expression is written every 14 minutes during a romantic comedy. Ironically, the men in this study pick up on the less frequently expressed content – scenarios of conflict – cultivating these ideas as non-negotiable outcomes in reality.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The thesis used qualitative interview analysis to better understand how romantic comedies shape men's ideas about love and romance. As a result of the rich data set, five thematic generalizations can be concluded. First, men cite romantic comedies as setting unrealistic expectations for relationships and therefore shift expectations of themselves, not their partner. Second, men are put off by the predictability of the genre, specifically when the content can be categorized within the romantic ideal construct or identified themes of Hefner and Wilson's (2013) content analysis. Third, men do not consume the genre with other men. Fourth, men use romantic comedies as a learning tool, but not always in relation to romantic conquests. Fifth, men cite drama in relationships as the most relatable aspect of romantic comedies.

The thesis findings demonstrate the advancement of theory, as revealed during the qualitative interview analysis. The consumption of romantic comedies is grounded in Social Cognitive Theory, with five participants demonstrating the observed behavior from the genre in social settings. Viewing of romantic comedies led to a high admission of participants using film to learn about their social environment, using tactics observed in film to make sense

of their reality, whether in romantic scenarios or not. The findings support Bandura's (1970) Social Cognitive Theory, which postulated media is an agent of learning and therefore has powerful effects on an audience. In relation to Cultivation Theory, six of men agreed that dramatic content was the most relatable feature of the genre. Participants endorsed a relatable aspect of romance as most realistic, cultivating ideas about how to navigate relationships. All ten participants cultivated both positive romantic beliefs (as expressed by female characters on screen) and more relatable aspects of romance (men's idea of hardship, as often portrayed by male characters) concerning in romantic comedies (Hefner & Wilson, 2013). The findings align with Gerber's (1998) Cultivation Theory.

Much of the previous academic literature concentrating on romantic content focused on the medium of television rather than film, with the exception of Hefner and Wilson's (2013) large-scale survey and content analysis. This thesis is an important contribution of literature, detailing men's ideas, opinions and experiences with love and romance in relation to the genre, but future research is needed to accumulate an expansive body of research. The findings concerning Noelle-Neumann's (1974) Spiral of Silence Theory as well as Davison's (1983) Third-person Effect Theory could also be explored further in future research. The lack of information exchange among men was an interesting finding, which supports Spiral of Silence Theory, but needs to be investigated more generally. Future research could work to understand whether information exchange is impacted by gender, location, film genre or other variables.

Researchers may also focus on Third-Person Effect Theory and whether the finding among male participants is generalizable among females. Participants assumed romantic comedies affected their romantic partner's expectations, which in turn, affected their view of themselves. The finding supports theory, but a better understanding of whether this effect would translate across gender norms is needed.

Despite its popularity, the romantic comedy genre is often portrayed as unrealistic and lacking in creativity (Wilson and Hefner, 2013). However, the findings of this thesis demonstrate influence on learning in relation to film consumption as well as lack of information exchange due to the connotation romantic comedies hold in society. A deeper understanding of peoples' motivations to consume romantic content is needed, which may benefit the romantic comedy genre and academics interested in exploring the topic. Light-hearted, but high-spirited, the romantic comedy genre will continue to illuminate the silver screen, the stories resonating with audiences for years to come. This thesis hopes to shed light on why the content deserves more than a fleeting glance in terms of building a rigorous amount of scholarship reflective of romantic content in the media and impending implications among various demographics.

REFERENCES

- Bachen, C. M., & Illouz, E. (1996). *Imagining romance: Young people's cultural models of romance and love*. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, 13, 279-308.
- Bandura, A. (1965). Influence of models' consequence contingencies on the acquisition of imitative response. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1, 589-595.
- Baran, S. J., & Davis, D. K. (2013). *mass communication theory: foundations, ferment, and future* (7th ed.). Stamford: Cengage Learning.
- Bell, R. R. (1975). *Marriage and family interaction* (4th ed.). Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press
- Cohen D, Crabtree B. (2006, July) *Qualitative Research Guidelines Project*. Retrieved March 19, 2015 from <http://www.qualres.org/HomeTria-3692.html>
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Davison, P. (1983) The third-person effect in communication. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 47, 1-15.
- Edman, M. (1940). Attendance of school pupils and adults at moving pictures. *School Review*, 48, 753-763.

- Ferris, A. L., Smith, S. W., Greenberg, B. S., & Smith, S. L. (2007). The content of reality dating shows and viewer perceptions of dating. *Journal of Communication*, 57, 490-510.
- Fischhoff, S., Antonio, J., & Lewis, D. (1997, August). Favorite films and film genres as a function of race, age, and gender. Paper presented at the convention of the American Psychological Association, Chicago, IL.
- Gerbner, G. (1998). *Cultivation analysis: An overview*. *Mass Communication and Society*, 1, 175-194.
- Google (2016). *Ryan Gosling Crazy Stupid Love*. Retrieved from <http://google.com>.
- Gray, B. (2015). Romantic comedy (1978-present) total grosses. Box Office Mojo, Internet movie database. Retrieved September, 14 2015, from <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=romanticcomedy.htm>
- Hall, A. (2005). Audience personality and the selection of media and media genres. *Media Psychology*, 7, 377-398.
- Hefner, V., & Wilson, B. (2013) *From Love at First Sight to Soul Mate: The Influence of Romantic Ideals in Popular Films on Young People's Beliefs about Relationships*. *Communication Monographs*, 80:2, 150-175, DOI: 10.1080/03637751.2013.776697
- Jackson, J. (2013, August 30). Know your audience: How the digital native generation consume media. *The Media Briefing*. Retrieved from <http://www.themediabriefing.com/article/know-your-audience-how-digital-native-millennial-generation-consume-media>

- Johnson, K. A. (2007). Unrealistic portrayals of sex, love, and romance in popular wedding films. In M. L. Galician & D. L. Merskin (Eds.), *Critical thinking about sex, love, and romance in the mass media* (p. 355-366). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Knox, D. H., & Sporkowski, J. J. (1968). *Attitudes of college students toward love*. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 30, 638-642.
- Meier, A., Hull, K. E., & Ortyl, T. A. (2009). *Young adult relationship values at the intersection of gender and sexuality*. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 71, 510-525.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Film Theory and Criticism : Introductory Readings*. Eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen. New York: Oxford UP, 1999: 833-44.
- Nash, B. (2015). Top-grossing genres 1995 to 2015. *The Numbers: Box office data, movie stars, idle speculation*. Retrieved November 13, 2015, from <http://www.the-numbers.com/market/genres>
- Noelle-Neumann, E. (1974). The spiral of silence: The theory of public opinion. *Journal of Communication*, 24, 43-51.
- Rivadeneyra, R., & Lebo, M. J. (2008). The association between television-viewing behaviors and adolescent dating role attitudes and behaviors. *Journal of Adolescence*, 31, 291-305
- Satterfield, T. R. (2002, August). *Conducting Effective Focus Groups*. Retrieved March 25, 2015 from https://www.luc.edu/hr/pdfs/SHRMCONDUCTING_EFFECTIVE_FOCUS_GROUPS.pdf

- Segrin, C., & Nabi, R. L. (2002). Does television viewing cultivate unrealistic expectations about marriage? *Journal of Communication*, 52, 247-263.
- Smith, S., & Cook, C. (2008). Gender stereotypes: an analysis of popular films and tv. *The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media*, 1-12. Retrieved from http://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/GDIGM_Gender_Stereotypes.pdf
- Smith, S., Granados, A., Choueiti, M., Erickson, S., & Noyes, A. (2010). Changing the status quo: industry leaders' perceptions of gender in family films. *The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media*, 1-46. Retrieved from <http://seejane.org/wp-content/uploads/key-findings-status-quo-2013.pdf>
- Sprecher, S., & Metts, S. (1989). Development of the "Romantic Beliefs Scale" and examination of the effects of gender and gender-role orientation. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 6, 387-411.
- Sprecher, S., & Metts, S. (1999). Romantic beliefs: Their influence on relationships and patterns of change over time. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 16, 834-851.
- Warr, D. (2005). "It was fun... but we don't usually talk about these things": Analyzing sociable interaction in focus groups. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 11, 200-225.
- Zurbriggen, E. L., & Morgan, E. M. (2006). *Who wants to marry a millionaire? Reality dating television programs, attitudes toward sex, and sexual behaviors*. *Sex Roles*, 54, 1-17.

APPENDICES

Appendix One

Demographic Details Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions in the spaces provided. Circle or check the most appropriate options.

1. What is your age? _____

2. Gender: Male Other (please specify) _____

3. Sexual Orientation: Heterosexual Homosexual
 Bisexual Not Applicable

4. What is your field of study or employment? _____

5. Race/Ethnicity

American Indian or Alaska Native Hispanic or Latino
 Asian or Asian American Non-Hispanic/Caucasian
 African American Other: _____
 Hispanic or Latino

6. Marital Status

Single Divorced
 In a Relationship Separated
 Married Widowed
 Civil Union Other: _____

7. What is your religious preference?

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Christian | <input type="checkbox"/> Protestant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Jewish | <input type="checkbox"/> Roman Catholic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mormon | <input type="checkbox"/> Unaffiliated |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Muslim | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |

8. Please check the following movies you have seen in the past seven years:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Crazy, Stupid, Love. | <input type="checkbox"/> Silver Linings Playbook |
| <input type="checkbox"/> It's Complicated | <input type="checkbox"/> Think Like a Man |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Just Go With It | <input type="checkbox"/> Trainwreck |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No Strings Attached | <input type="checkbox"/> The Ugly Truth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sex and the City 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Valentine's Day |

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

Appendix Two

Facilitator's Welcome, Introduction and Instructions to Participants

Welcome and thank you for volunteering to take part in this interview. As a participant, you possess important knowledge about experiences, needs or perspectives of the romantic comedy genre that I hope to learn more about. Your point of view is important and I'm looking forward to your contribution. I realize you are busy and I appreciate your time. Do I have your permission to audio record the discussion from this point forward? (*If yes, switch on the audio recorder*)

Introduction: The purpose of my research is to better understand how romantic comedies shape men's ideas about love and romance. Ultimately, I am here to learn from you. This interview discussion will allow you to express your thoughts and feelings about the romantic comedy genre from a male perspective. The discussion will take no longer than two hours.

Anonymity: Despite being audio recorded, which you all verbally agreed to, I assure you the discussion will remain confidential. The audio recording will be kept safely in a locked facility until they are transcribed word for word, and then they will be destroyed. Only I will know your name and only other researchers will have access to the transcriptions. The transcribed notes of the interview will contain no information that would allow individual participants to be linked to specific statements.

If there are any questions or discussions that you do not wish to answer or participate in, you do not have to do so. Your participation is voluntary and there are no consequences for refusing to take part in the study or to answer specific questions. If at anytime, you would like to withdraw from the interview discussion, please feel free to do so.

Please answer and comment as accurately and truthfully as possible. Please do not discuss the comments of other group members outside the interview. Does anyone have any questions so far?

Ground rules

- Confidentially is assured. "What is shared in the room stays in the room."
- It is important to hear your ideas and opinions. There are no right or wrong answers to questions – just ideas, experience and opinions, which are all valuable.
- It is important for me to hear all sides of an issue – both the positive and the negative.

Do you have any questions? (*answers*) OK, let's begin.

Warm Up

1. First, I'd like for you to introduce yourself. Can you tell me your name and what you're studying?

Introductory Question

2. I'm going to give you a few minutes to think about your experience with movies. When you're ready, please share any experiences or fond memories you have of film.

Guiding Questions

3. Can you describe your experience with movies prior to age 18.
- PROBE: Did you watch movies regularly during your childhood?
 - i. If yes, what types of movies did you watch?
 1. What movie was most influential?
 - ii. If no, what types of movies did you watch when interested/when allowed?
 1. What movie was most influential?
4. What kind of films do you gravitate toward?
- Do you watch these films alone or with others?
5. How would you define a romantic comedy?
- *For the purpose of this focus group, I would like to define a romantic comedy as a film that focuses on relationships in which both partners discuss the relationship on screen. Romantic comedies typically revolve around a heterosexual couple with equal screen time allotted for a male and female character.*
6. What are your thoughts about romantic comedies?
7. Tell me about your experiences with romantic comedies.
- Do you watch these films alone or with others?
8. When is the last time you saw a romantic comedy?
- Who did you watch it with?
9. What do you like about romantic comedies?
- What do you dislike about romantic comedies?
10. What is your attitude toward female movie characters based on their presence in romantic comedies?
- What is your attitude toward male movie characters based on their presence in romantic comedies?
11. How important is it for you to see women portrayed as strong, independent characters in romantic-comedy movies?
- How important is it for you to see men portrayed as strong, independent characters in romantic-comedy movies?

SHOW COMPILATION OF TRAILERS FROM THE TOP 10 ROMANTIC COMEDIES OF 2009-2015.

12. What are your initial thoughts about these movie trailers?
- What words come to mind when watching these clips?
13. What would hinder you from continuing to watch one of these movies once you began viewing the film?
14. How motivated are you by characters you see in these movie trailers? Why?
15. Do you feel pressured to behave a certain way in a relationship because of these types of movies?
16. What do you think these movies get right about relationships?
- What do you think they get wrong?
17. Tell me about a time a character in movie impacted a decision you made in your life.
- i.e. Did you ever buy a certain type of clothing, read a book, change career or make other lifestyle decisions because of something you watched in a film?

18. How often do you watch romantic comedy movies with other men compared to watching the movies with women?
 - How does watching romantic comedies with these two audiences shift your experience of watching the film?
19. Do you find that romantic comedies help or hurt your relationship?
20. If watching the movie with your significant other, how often does the act of watching the movie lead to sexual activity?
21. How does watching romantic comedies effect the expectations you set for yourself in romantic relationships?
22. In what ways does romantic comedies make you feel pressured to act a certain way while seeking a relationship?
 - How does the pressure to act a certain way change if you are in a relationship? Is it reduced or enhanced?
23. After watching a romantic comedy, have you ever felt differently about an idea than before watching the film?
 - PROBE: (If yes) Can you describe that experience?
 - i. Did you share this shift in thinking with others around you?
 - PROBE: (If no) Do you feel movies have the power to enhance or limit your way of thinking about certain ideas? How so?
24. If you were a writer for the one of the top 10 highest-grossing romantic comedies, what would you do differently?

Concluding Question

25. We've discussed many different ideas during this interview. Before we wrap up, is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience with watching movies that I forgot to address?

Conclusion

Thank you for participating. This has been a very successful discussion and your opinions will be a valuable asset to the study. I hope that you found the discussion interesting and if there is anything you are unhappy with or wish to complain about, please contact me teresa.tackett@okstate.edu or speak to me after we dismiss.

Again, I would like to remind you that any comments made during this interview will remain confidential. Before you leave, please hand in your completed personal details questionnaire and consent form and you are dismissed.

Appendix Three

Consent to Participate in a Research Study: “Lights, Camera, Action: Romantic Comedies and Endorsements on Love from the Male Perspective”

The purpose of the interview and nature of the questions have been explained to me.

I consent to take part in an interview about my experiences. I also consent to audio digital recording during this focus group discussion.

My participation is voluntary. I understand that I am free to leave the interview at any time. If I decide not to participate at any time during the interview, my decision will in no way affect my affiliation with Oklahoma State University.

None of my experiences or thoughts will be shared with anyone outside of the interview unless all identifying information is removed first. The information that I provide during the interview will be grouped with answers from other people so that I cannot be identified.

Please Print Your Name _____
Date

Please Sign Your Name _____
Date

Witness Signature _____
Date

Appendix Four

You are invited to take part in a research interview process as a male, ages 18-35, who is affiliated with Oklahoma State University. You have been selected to participate in this study because you possibly meet the criteria of the research study.

Would you be willing to meet for one 30-minute interview to discuss your experience with romantic comedy movies? I am interested in your honest impression of the genre – what works and what doesn't work in relation to your opinion about love and romance. Please be assured that nothing you say will be revealed to your professor or employer. Even your participation in the interview will remain confidential.

In order to participate, you must have viewed at least three of the following films from 2009-2015, identify as a male who is between ages 18 and 35 and be affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

- Crazy, Stupid, Love.
- Silver Linings Playbook
- It's Complicated
- Think Like a Man
- Just Go With It
- Trainwreck
- No Strings Attached
- The Ugly Truth
- Sex and the City 2
- Valentine's Day

If you are interested in participating, please email teresa.tackett@okstate.edu. Thank you for your consideration.

Appendix Five

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Wednesday, March 16, 2016
IRB Application No AS1622
Proposal Title: Lights, camera, action: Romantic comedies and endorsements on love from the male perspective
Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt
Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 3/15/2019
Principal Investigator(s):
Teresa Tackett Danny Shipka
Stillwater, OK 74078 Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI advisor, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of the research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Dawnett Watkins 219 Scott Hall (phone: 405-744-5700, dawnett.watkins@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,



Hugh Crethar, Chair
Institutional Review Board

VITA

Teresa Tackett

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION: ROMANTIC COMEDIES FROM THE MALE PERSPECTIVE

Major Field: Mass Communication

Biographical: Research interests include gender and media effects within the confines of popular culture.

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Mass Communications at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2016.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Public Relations at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2011.

Experience:

Communications Coordinator, Oklahoma State University, August 2015 – present

Digital Media Specialist, Oklahoma State University, September 2013 – August 2015

Assistant to Director, Oklahoma State University, August 2012 – September 2013

Professional Memberships:

Oklahoma College Public Relations Association