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Does Movie Viewing Cultivate Unrealistic Expectations about Love and Marriage?

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DOES MOVIE VIEWING CULTIVATE UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS ABOUT
LOVE AND MARRIAGE?

By

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Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
August 2011

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts in Communication Studies

Department of Communication Studies
Greenspun College of Urban Affairs
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ABSTRACT

Does Movie Viewing Cultivate Unrealistic Expectations about Love and Marriage?

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The present study examines the association between consumption of media messages via movie viewing and endorsement of ideals and expectations about romantic relationships in a university-based sample of 228 respondents. Frequent viewing of romantic comedy and drama films was significantly and positively correlated with idealized notions that love conquers all, greater expectations for intimacy, and endorsement of the eros love style. Viewing preference for romantic movies was also significantly and positively correlated with fantasy rumination and marital intentions. However, participants who frequently watched romantic movies did *not* endorse beliefs in sexual perfection, mindreading, or disagreement disallowance. Implications of the findings are addressed.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Marriage is generally considered a key social indicator of psychological, child, and societal well-being (Gottman, 1994; Kim & McKenry, 2002). The pledge to stay wed until death has perhaps faded into antiquity as the Center for Disease Control and Prevention puts the nation's 2009 crude divorce rate at 9.7 per 1,000 people for women and 9.2 per 1,000 people for men (National Center for Health Statistics, 2012).¹ While the marriage rate fell from 9.9 in 1987 to about 6.8 in 2009, the divorce rate has persisted at half the nuptial value, equaling 4.8 per 1,000 people in 1987 and 3.4 per 1,000 people in 2009 (National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, 2012b; National Center for Health Statistics, 1990; 2010).

For *first* marriages, the trend persists. In 2009, women saw 1,979 of 5,534 first marriages (about 36%) end in divorce or separation while 1,218 of 3,734 marriages (33%) ended in divorce or separation for men (National Center for Health Statistics, 2012).² Remarriage is a viable choice for the newly unwed. Of all divorced people aged 25 and over in 2007, 55% of men and 44% of women remarried (National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, 2012a).³ Yet, remarriages show higher divorce rates than first marriages, surpassing them at an increase of five percent within just five years (National Healthy Marriage Resource Center, 2012a).

Of course, the real life effects of divorce are no secret. Marital status predicts psychological well-being apart from relationship quality due to its key role in “determining family resources, relationships and processes” (Kim & McKenry, 2002, p. 888). The perceived stability of marital relationships reduces vulnerability to

psychological disorders such as depression (Brown, 2000; Gove, Style, & Hughes, 1983; Ren, 1997). Individuals also stand to gain a number of resources from their marriage, including supplementary income, emotional and social support, and many legal rights and protections. Separation and divorce, then, potentially threaten the preservation of these privileges. Rejection by one's intimate partner can give rise to feelings of failure, personal incompetence, loss of self-esteem, a decreased sense of life satisfaction and health problems (Amato, 2010; Williams, 1988). Children of divorced families often have poorer mental health, fare poorly in school, and have difficulty functioning in their own personal relationships as compared to children whose parents remain married (Amato, 1994).

Contemporary studies substantiate *positive* consequences of divorce including changes in identity, new opportunities for personal development (Bevino & Sharkin, 2003), and higher levels of personal growth for separated or divorced women (Marks, 1996). In some contexts, children feel more empowered and relationship-savvy after their parents' divorce (Sever, Guttman, & Lazar, 2007). Divorce can even be redemptive as in the case of spousal domestic abuse. Concurrently, adverse consequences exist for the children of dyads who experience "severe marital disharmony" but never separate (Morrison & Coiro, 1999, p. 626). Nevertheless, helplessness, aggression, sadness, guilt, and loneliness often accompany even the most liberating divorces (Angelisti, 2006). Those who experience marital dissolution and remain single afterward experience high levels of depression that persist beyond the projected initial adjustment period (Kim & McKenry, 2002). With knowledge of the consequences of divorce and no concrete sign of any substantial decrease in divorce rates,

information concerning marriage and that which brings about its end begs the questions of why people get divorced and why they marry in the first place.

Prior to marriage, even before arrangements are made for the ceremony, people often concoct images and expectations of married life, as well as what they may profit from it. These images typically include mention of true love, a notion that concentrates our efforts and fancies and reflects underlying motivations for seeking companionship. In Western and Westernized cultures, love is prerequisite to the establishment and maintenance of a strong marriage (Levine, Suguru, Hashimoto, & Verma, 1995; Lindholm, 2006). According to Illouz (1997), the theme of “true love” is strongly associated with the prospect of marriage and justifies its occasion.

While many scholars agree that the concept of (true) love is communally amended over time to fit within the confines of a society’s institutionalized vision, Swidler (1980) avers that an ideology of love is an essential part of the American social order, “one of the central anchors of our culture’s view of adult life” (p. 120). In a study conducted by Barich and Bielby (1996) on marriage expectations, love and affection were overwhelmingly identified as the most important constituents of marriage in preference to other factors, such as moral and religious unity, maintenance of a home, and a respected place in the community. The modern Western notion of love is intimately tied to the sexual experience (Lindholm, 2006), with the marital relationship deemed “the most socially approved context for sexual activity” (Christopher & Sprecher, 2000, p. 1001). Barich and Bielby (1996) found anticipation of love and affection in marriage were positively correlated with beliefs in romantic ideals and passionate sexual character: “an image suggesting that marriage is considered a haven, the place of romantic expression,

physical attachment, and nurturing, particularly as done by women” (p. 159). In the visage of such an intimate relationship, idealism—impracticality by virtue of thinking of things in terms of ideals as opposed to their true forms—is to be expected (Segrin & Nabi, 1992).

Despite divorce statistics and widely held truisms regarding the rate of divorce, relatively stable marriage and remarriage rates, in conjunction with the pro-marriage ideology that permeates Western culture, speak to the potency of these beliefs and, quite possibly, the desire to make expectations a reality (Byrne & Carr, 2005; Felberg & Kohen, 1976). This might explain why myths about Cupid’s arrow or the inseparability of Tristan and Isolde remain a part of our general definition of love, albeit in varying degrees. Barich and Bielby (1996) concluded that esteem for love and affection in marital relationships lended support to the persistence of traditional Western cultural myths as contemporary guides to married life. The consistency of marriage expectations rankings between their 1967 and 1994 undergraduate samples further suggested that institutions and traditions have long-lasting effects on the definition of marriage and “are not strongly (or at least immediately) influenced by social change” (p. 161). As our beliefs about love and romance cohere, we begin to use those beliefs not only to gain an understanding of what marriage should be like, but also as a base upon which to establish marital criteria. According to Barich and Bielby (1996), we use our resultant “understandings” of the place of love in marriage to “create strategies of action or feasible scripts that we can invoke in setting a course of action,” whether this action be the pursuit of matrimony, marital maintenance, or connubial termination (p. 142).

Scholars in a range of academic disciplines have cited unrealistic expectations of sex, love, and marriage as influential forces on satisfaction in romantic relationships. Often referred to as unreasonable (Baucom & Epstein, 1990), dysfunctional (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982), irrational (Epstein & Eidelson, 1981) or idealized (Segrin & Nabi, 1992), unrealistic expectations regarding relationships comprise myth endorsement and fantastic beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors concerning a range of romance-related subjects from courtship rituals to sexual encounters (Galician, 2004). With the deification of romance by popular media, the banalities of intimate relationships leave much to be desired. *Real* life and *real* love appear boring and unfulfilling in comparison to forever “feeling fascination, passion burning, love so strong.”⁴ Not that fancies or fantasies are bad per se; in fact, some scholars have confidence that they can serve practical purposes, if managed constructively (Baucom & Epstein, 1990; Galician, 2004). The problem is when these fancies evolve into “wishful thinking”—a belief or expectation that is influenced by one's wishes to the extent that relevant, consciously known facts are subconsciously ignored or distorted. Idealistic beliefs oblige standards of perfection—a person's view about the way people and relationships *should* be as opposed to how they *are*—and almost impel the holder to compare partners accordingly (Baucom & Epstein, 1990; Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Epstein & Eidelson, 1981). The construction of these expectations reflect life experiences yet tend to neglect that any relationship takes work, and that humans are indeed flawed.

Though studies suggest that in recent years non-Western youth are wont to accept a romanticized view of love, collectivistic cultures retain a largely pragmatic view of matrimony. Writes Lindholm (2006):

[I]n most of the complex societies for which we have records of romantic passion [Japan, China, India, and the Middle East], conjugal love between husband and wife was considered both absurd and impossible. The reason for this seeming paradox becomes evident if we make a comparative analysis of the social organizations of these societies....[P]atrilineal ties provided the political and economic affiliations that were crucial for survival and status. Only through membership in a patrilineage could men make claims to property, or assert leadership; women relied on their patrilineage for protection and honor. But lineages did not exist in isolation; they were tied to other lineages through the exchange of women—that is, through marriage....In these societies, men and women alike viewed marriage as a duty and a necessity; romantic attraction was not a part of the bargain. (p. 11)

Concurrently, some societies denounce sexual intercourse as an expression of true love deeming it restrictive, demeaning, “polluting, repellent, and risky” (Lindholm, 2006, p. 12). Rather, sex is distractive and undermines a spouse’s familial duties. Stories of romantic love certainly do exist in these cultures, yet their influence on social practice remains limited.

The appeal of fantastic love stories is undeniable. Bachen and Illouz (1996) refer to contemporary portrayals of romantic love as a “visual affair,” stressing the fact that where the written word may fall short, images impressed upon us can elicit strong emotional arousal. They explain that mediated images and representations—such as those used on television, in films, and in advertisements—“evoke strong mechanisms of identification, are intensely realistic, and are the privileged discourse of sexual and romantic desire,” giving them an air of credibility (p. 285). On film, love is (more often than not) set in utopian environments and is associated with happiness and affluence, cultural themes that have become tantamount to personal and social success (Bachen & Illouz, 1996; Illouz, 1997). Additionally, “veracious” fictional presentations are imaginative re-creations of real human situations. Because viewers will typically assume that fanciful television plots transpire in a real world setting, “representational realism”

prevails (Gerbner, 1969). Furthermore, stories of quick and beautiful romances are *sometimes* true, though these are few and far between (Galician, 2004).

Reality television shows follow suit; they bare “real” weddings and love stories for all to see, amplifying the impression that they are exempt from subjective tinkering even as behind-the-scenes investors downplay relational troubles (Engstrom, 2007b). Therefore, the pervasiveness of the market’s visual imagery and its association with personal fulfillment and happiness in marriage seems to provide undeniable proof that that which we desire is indeed attainable if we believe and act accordingly. Galician (2004) also points out that the source of much appeal is the absolution of any real personal responsibility in a romantic relationship. Triumph means not having to work very hard as sex should be easy and life together, a fairy tale in the flesh. If a relationship fails miserably, then obviously “this one” was not “the one” and individuals must continue to wait patiently for their damsel-in-distress or knight-in-shining-armor.

The notion of true love has become a significant part of American popular culture and media representations of romance have come to structure people’s relational routines (Illouz, 1997). For this reason, studies linking media influence and human action can be considered necessary, especially if subsequent behavior, attitudes, or beliefs occasion adverse consequences for one’s relationships or prove detrimental to one’s physical, psychological, and/or emotional health (Baran, 1976a; Baran, 1976b; Beullens & Van de Bulck, 2008; Eidelson & Epstein, 1982; Laner & Russell, 1995). In spite of this need, the pervasive nature of media messages coupled with various influential internal and external factors on behavior complicate empirical testing of a trajectory from belief and intention to social conduct.

While studies along this vein have focused largely on the cultivation of idealistic expectations for romantic relationships via television (Eggermont, 2004; Radway, 1983; Segrin & Nabi, 2002), the literature does include investigations of cinematic portrayals and other media that romanticize partners, love, and marriage (Dempsey & Reichert, 2000; Holmes, 2007; Johnson, 2007; Johnson & Holmes, 2009). Additionally, unrealistic attitudes can be linked not only to romantic movies, but non-romantic films as well (Galician, 2007). Thus, the current project examined the relationship between preferences in movie genres and expectations of romantic partners. First, I will review relevant literature in the fields of communication, sociology, psychology, psychotherapy, journalism and mass communication, and cognitive therapy. I will then discuss the method used to measure media consumption and endorsement of romantic ideals, the study's findings, and their implications.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory, which postulates that assumptions about public interaction are ensconced by television, assists my inquiry into dysfunctional expectations for marriage and their relation to media exposure.⁵ Namely, the theory offers an explanation for why some people hold fast to idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships even in the midst of relational turmoil. Owing to the nature of the hypothesized trajectory from media messages to marital disturbance, a word on mass media effects is warranted. Potter (2011) offers this formal definition: “a mass media effect is a change in an outcome within a person or social entity that is due to mass media influence following exposure to a mass media message or series of messages” (p. 903). Mass media organizations aim to maintain, if not maximize, revenue while they remunerate the costs of attracting wide audiences (Morgan & Shanahan, 1991). Hence, repeated and regular exposure to their products is crucial to both their profit and the socialization process.

Cultivation theory, developed by George Gerbner, argues that mass message systems are vessels by which “communities cultivate shared and public notions about facts, values and contingencies of human existence” (Gerbner, 1969, p. 138). Televised messages are easily disseminated to mass publics, traversing age, ethnicity, economic class and geographical location, so long as the receiver owns a television set. These messages need not be unreservedly true; networks are riddled with informative shows like the evening news, as well as fantasy or escape programs for pure entertainment.

Instead, according to the theory, television defines the mainstream of American culture, “it is an agency of the established order and as such serves primarily to extend and maintain rather than to alter, threaten, or weaken conventional conceptions, beliefs, and behaviors” (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 175). Verisimilitude of the established order notwithstanding, images, messages, and values are incessantly reiterated via various viewing options. Television, then, cultivates a social consciousness, instilling in consumers “basic assumptions” about reality and “standards of judgment on which conclusions are based” (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 175). To the extent that people share the same assumptions, social interaction can occur.

Studies conducted in light of cultivation theory focused primarily on television violence (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Signorelli, Morgan, & Jackson-Beeck, 1979). Message analysis of various television programs revealed the prevalence of symbolic pugnacity committed by express types of people (usually white, male “good guy” characters). Controlling for education and related characteristics, respondents classified as heavy television viewers tended to accept the television world-view of violence over a more accurate estimation of violent occurrences. The Violence Profile denotes cultivation of the “mean world syndrome,” conceptual lenses of exaggerated fear, threat, and danger through which consumers view their surroundings. The “net result” then is “a heightened sense of risk and insecurity” which “is more likely to increase acquiescence to and dependence upon established authority and to legitimize its use of force” (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 194).

Research linking television viewing and effects on consumers has broadened in focus, analyzing political orientation (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorelli, 1982),

sexism (Gross & Jeffries-Fox, 1978; Morgan & Shanahan, 1991), adolescent body image (Tiggemann, 2005), desire to undergo plastic surgery (Nabi, 2009), expectations of romantic partners (Eggermont, 2004), and future marital behavior (Signorelli, 1991). Other scholars have taken various media channels into account, focusing on how exposure to “popular media”—multiple vessels of hegemonic messages (television programs, movies, music, books, magazines, tabloid newspapers, music videos, news programs)—may affect one’s view of the world. This research incorporates such contexts as adolescent sexual behavior (Brown, L’Engle, Pardun, Guo, Kenneavy, & Jackson, 2006), intentions to take risks in traffic (Beullens & Van den Bulck, 2008), and intimate relationships (Shapiro & Kroeger, 1991). A recent venture into the world of online gaming and perceptions of violence has also made use of cultivation theory’s postulates (Williams, 2006).

Notes on Cultivation Theory

Cumulatively, decades of research have pointed to the conclusion that heavy television viewers, who are deeply engrossed in conventional media messages, whatever they may be, see the television-world as “naturalistic” and real-world events as reflective of corresponding dramatic renderings (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorelli, 1986). The ensuing identification between reality and fantasy leads people to act in accordance with this habituated “wealth of incidental ‘knowledge’” (Gerbner & Gross, 1976, p. 179).

Despite the theory’s popularity, three prevailing critiques are worthy of note.

Nonselective viewing. Viewing patterns are highly ‘individualistic’ and have “the effect of fragmenting viewing and thereby reducing the chance that all heavy viewers are seeing the same message” (Potter, 1993, p. 574). With so many viewing

choices and technological advances that permit immersion in any one distinct genre, particular types of media content can become more salient than others. For example, people who immerse themselves in romantic media might latch onto mythic beliefs about love but may retain a largely experience-based view on local violence.

Differences among genres. Correspondingly, scholars have contended a second issue: the haphazard collapse of program variety into an all-inclusive content measure. Hawkins and Pingree (1981) argue, “if differences in patterns of action do exist between types of programs, and if these mesh with any patterns of viewing, then quite different cultivations can occur within a single population, and total television viewed is not the only independent variable” (p. 292). The same applies to movies. Dill and Dill (1998) illustrate the illogicality of this conflation, likening it to “lumping films like *The Little Mermaid* with *Pulp Fiction*,” with the expectation that such a random “‘movie viewing’ variable [would] predict increases in aggressive behavior” (p. 423). The idea here is that children who watch movies intended for their age group will develop different perspectives on violence than children who watch movies intended for mature audiences, though both varieties feature physical aggression. In so many words, such measures ignore an attention to context.

While overall viewing will unquestionably intensify the reception of mediated messages, enculturation of particular assumptions likely arise from heavy viewing of programs that concentrate on related subjects. To illustrate, while few animated shows present sexually explicit material, action-packed dramas and romance-based programs stress idyllic sexual relations and thus have a greater propensity to cultivate beliefs about sex. For someone who watches cartoons all day (namely children, adolescents, and in

some cases unemployed adults) assessments of acceptable or desirable sexual behavior may be the result of extraneous variables such as personal experience or peer advice. Thus the assumption that messages are uniform is questionable (Potter, 1993; Potter & Chang, 1990), triggering recent investigations to utilize measures of genre-specific viewing in their inquiries (Holmes, 2007; Rössler & Brosius, 2001; Segrin & Nabi, 2002).

Differences among audiences. Gerbner and his colleagues (1986) conceived of cultivation as a “gravitational process,” with messages that pull groups of viewers, regardless of lifestyle, toward the “mainstream of the world of television” (p. 24). Detractors challenged the theory’s neglect of variation among viewers, regarding not only what they watch but how intended effects impinge on different types of people (Newcomb, 1978; Potter, 2011). Causation, of course, cannot be inferred because of the unremitting, cyclical nature of mass media influence. This note is not meant to undermine decades of work in the field. Rather, the interplay of media influence and other variables should be taken into serious consideration (Potter, 2011). There is evidence that certain groups may receive slightly different messages or may respond differently to media implications and to the extent that groups are predisposed in some manner to the ideology of romanticism, effects of cultivation may fluctuate (Baran & Davis, 2003).

Unrealistic Expectations and Marriage

Societal portrayals of love and marriage may engender unrealistic expectations in those who are exposed to them. According to Bachen and Illouz (1996), symbols and representations that “mold” a child’s “romantic imagination” become “resources” used

later in life to satisfy experiences and shape understanding of the child's personal relationships (p. 281). As a result of their ubiquity, mass media portrayals can become a spectator's primary model for romantic dealings with others.

As Galician (2004) pointed out, when we model a model, we train and mold ourselves to a precise mode of life or behavior complete with some form of excellence after which we as imitators strive (models are typically exemplars of sorts). Mediated stories about love—fed to us through various channels such as books, magazines, music, television, movies, and the Internet—are “mythic, stereotypic and archetypal” representations of a hegemonic world view (p. 70). They are sources of inadequate and unrepresentative relational role models since mediated avenues “often portray colorful characters and relationships which may be quite unlike the average person or marriage” (Baucom & Epstein, 1990, p. 56). Mediated accounts of mundane marriages are not as lucrative as fantastic portrayals of love; therefore these angles are stressed to the neglect of other tedious yet momentous aspects of a coupleship. Media reinforce “the established order” by making the idea and assumptions of the predominant influence appear “commonsensical and normal” and thus somehow worthy of emulation (p. 85).

Galician (2007) cautioned against the personal as well as the societal costs of holding fast to dysfunctional beliefs. Unreasonable standards for judgment of one's partner or marriage can prompt invalid or dysfunctional appraisals of occurrences within the relationship. Holders of unrealistic expectations can become intolerant of the conflict, humdrum routines, and other features of close, proximal living that often characterize real coupleships, especially those that immensely contradict their beliefs about love and marriage. This can contribute to an increase in marital disturbance—

accompanying dysfunctional emotions like anger and dysfunctional behaviors such as verbal abuse—as some individuals refuse to accept the reality of dissatisfaction with his or her marriage (Baucom & Epstein, 1990). As high levels of marital satisfaction reduce the likelihood of divorce or separation, the converse is probably true for high levels of dissatisfaction (Kim & McKenry, 2002).

Complications are further exacerbated when *both* partners sanction a particular unrealistic standard for their relationship (Baucom & Epstein, 1990). According to Gottman (1994), distressed couples tend to exchange higher rates of negative behavior, use more aversive communication to express their thoughts and feelings, and use more coercive methods for attempting to change their partners' behavior than do couples who are not contending with any sizeable marital disturbance. Spouses, however, often cling to their criteria, even if this dedication noticeably hampers marital interactions (Baucom & Epstein, 1990; see also Ellis, 1986). The consequential unwillingness to resolve relational strain may cause couples to terminate the relationship, and marriages to end in divorce (Gottman, 1994).

Kurdek (1993) considered the maintenance of dysfunctional expectations to be a relatively stable, intrapersonal distal (existing prior to the relationship) risk factor indicative of “a general lack of preparation for or doubtful competency in performing marital roles or resolving interpersonal conflict constructively” (p. 238). The issue, then, lies in the fact that mass media depict neither romantic relationships nor married life accurately, making renderings unsuitable for real life comparison, education, or imitation. Many real life accounts for separation and divorce overtly defy mediated myths of love and interminable marital bliss. Argument starters ranked most prevalent by married and

engaged couples include money, communication, sex, household chores, jealousy, friends, careers, in-laws, alcohol and drug abuse, recreation, children, and religious differences (Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2002). This list sheds light on common predictors of marital disruption, all of which may stem from persistent destructive conflict: domestic violence, diminishing love, low levels of trust between spouses, and extramarital affair (Cohen and Finzi-Dottan, 2012; Lawrence & Bradbury, 2001). The top-ranked reasons for marital breakdown compiled by Kitson, Babri, and Roach (1985) from divorce and separation surveys appear intimately tied to both topics of conflict and predictors of marital disruption: personality, home life, authority, differences in lifestyle/values, conflicts over roles and responsibilities, sexual incompatibility, sexual deprivation, extramarital sex, lack of communication/communication difficulties, financial problems, mental cruelty, neglect of home/children, physical abuse, feelings that one is “no longer in love,” emotional problems, interest in another person, drinking, and a hypercritical or belittling spouse.

These real life explanations raise questions regarding the major mass mediated myths exposed in Galician’s work (2004; 2007) as well as the dysfunctional beliefs outlined by Eidelson and Epstein (1982). If humans are destined to wed their one and only perfect partner, how can separated and divorced couples claim their love for one another has diminished, that they are “no longer in love” or have interest in another person? If your true soul mate intuitively knows what you are thinking and feeling, and acts on these insights, how can one accuse him or her inattention to communication needs, much less cite it as an impetus for divorce? How can there be sexual

incompatibility in a predestined partnership? If sexual perfection *is* attainable, why, then, do so many marriages end as a result of infidelity?

Unrepresentative Models in the Media

It is one thing to *say* that mass media focus love and marriage through rose-tinted lenses, but what exactly goes on in them? Specifically, what messages and images do mediated channels portray in regards to romantic relationships? What expectations might they be cultivating? Romanticism deals less in veracity than in mythmaking, while its ensuing ideology has “definite, predictable components” (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1993, p. 61). Mythologies of love might, consequently, “function as a cognitive schema for organizing and evaluating one’s behavior and the behavior of a potential or actual romantic partner” (Sprecher & Metts, 1989, p. 388). As previously mentioned, negative appraisals stemming from unrealistic standards can lead to marital dissatisfaction and, ultimately, divorce.

Love myths from the media. Galician (2004; 2007) compiled a list of twelve mass media myths that buttress the “romanticization” of love in intimate relationships. In magazines, on television, in romantic and nonromantic films, there is substantial “evidence” of Myth #1: “your perfect partner is cosmically pre-destined, and so nothing/nobody can ultimately separate you” and your beloved (Galician, 2004, p. 55). Moreover, the tale of Cupid’s arrow is given life in filmic depictions of love (Myth #2). In the “reel” world, there is, in fact, “such a thing as love at first sight” (p. 55). A fleeting gaze exchanged in a minute’s time registers as a moment of revelation, foreshadowing the fulfillment of an otherworldly bond between two strangers whose fates are

inextricably intertwined. Often visual portrayals of these two myths emphasize the loneliness and lack that plagues one's life prior to finding his or her "one and only."

Near the end of Galician's list, we find Myth #9 (as famously lyricized by the Beatles): "all you need is love." The mythic quality that accompanies this portrayal is the intrinsic neglect of personal and relational values. Characters in television shows and movies give up or alter their own systems of belief in exchange for affection. At other times, when relational strains are high, characters resolve that problems will work themselves out in the name of love. Galician's (2004) tenth myth, "the right mate 'completes you'—filling your needs and making your dreams come true," rightfully follows and connotes each partner was, and would forever be, lacking in some way were it not for the amity of the other. These four myths described by Galician characterize the romantic ideal: "love at first sight," "love conquers all," "true love is perfect," and "we should follow our feelings and base our choice of a partner on love rather than on other (more rational) considerations" (Sprecher & Metts, 1989, p. 389). Based on these assumptions, conferral and receipt of human love is unconditional and everlasting, two attributes many by experience know to be inaptly ascribed.

Research by Eidelson and Epstein (1982) showed the expectation of mindreading and sexual perfectionism, among other dysfunction beliefs about intimate relationships, correlated with signs of marital maladjustment and desire to end the marriage. Galician (2004) observed media portrayals supportive of these beliefs such as Myth #3—"your true soul mate should KNOW what you're thinking or feeling (without your having to tell)"—and Myth #4—"if your partner is truly meant for you, sex is easy and wonderful" (p. 55). Galician deems the mind-reading dysfunction "one of the most destructive in

love relationships (and indeed in any interpersonal relationships)” for it advocates forbearance from open communication, a necessary constituent of intimacy.

As for Myth #4, media portrayals fail to differentiate sex and love. Magazines like *Cosmopolitan* bombard subscribers with sex tips and “ways to look even hotter naked,” advice that is sure to dazzle any man in the bedroom and land a woman a solid place in her beau’s heart (Hearst Communications, 2012). Likewise, on-screen duos rarely have *bad sex*, save incidents in humorous contexts. Reliance solely on passion and physical pleasure, in (love researcher) Robert Sternberg’s view, will not suffice in the development of strong, long-term relationships (as cited in Galician, 2004).

Idealized couples and gender roles. Kirkham and Thumim (1993) maintain mannish qualities are asserted and subsumed in the construction and development of manly characters. Customarily, leading men must embody all the visual and auditory cues—actions, dress, voice and composure—that attest to their masculinity and sexual prowess. In a phrase redolent of the title of Kirkham and Thumim’s (1993) book, Galician (2004) states “Me-Tarzan, You-Jane” couples are standard depictions, complete with a masculine savior and a feminine damsel-in-distress (p. 165). More often than not, mediated depictions of coupleships assert “the man should NOT be shorter, weaker, younger, poorer, or less successful than the woman” in order for a relationship to be successful and the rescue fantasy realized (p. 55). Media reinforce lucidly delineated gender roles, setting the stage for an imbalance of power such as in heterosexual dating scripts which seem to prescribe, if not commend, situations in which the man “pays” and the woman “owes” (Emmers-Sommer, Farrell, Gentry, Stevens, Eckstein, Batocletti, & Gardener, 2010; Laner & Ventrone, 2000).

Media outlets also play upon the fantasy that “the love of a good and faithful woman can change a man from a ‘beast’ into a ‘prince’” (Galician’s Myth #7). Violence is merely a sign of a man asserting rightful dominance with the minute flaw of not being able to contain his aggression (Kirkham & Thumim, 1993). Not only does this absolve the “mean or abusive character” of responsibility for harmful and hurtful behaviors, but it places culpability on the woman who cannot tame her beastly husband (Galician, 2004, p. 179).

Gender roles and expectations intertwine with myths about love. Galician’s (2004) Myth #5, reads “to attract and keep a man, a woman should look like a model or a centerfold” (p. 55). *The Beauty Myth* (Wolf, 1992), as well as research conducted in the fields of psychology (Tiggemann, 2005) and communication studies (Nabi, 2009) have documented the effects of media emphasis on aesthetic perfection in women.

Real life vs. “reel” life. Healthy respectful disagreement is a sign of open communication and intimacy (Galician, 2004). However, the belief that “bickering and fighting a lot mean that a man and women really love each other passionately” is an illusion commonly exhibited in romantic sitcoms and dramas. Constant quibbles, according to Gottman (1994), signal detachment in the relationship. Excesses of negative interaction indicate partners experience infrequent contact and may not truly “know” one another.

Galician’s (2004) eleventh myth reads, “In real life, actors and actresses are often very much like the romantic characters they portray” (p. 55). Two words of rebuttal: Rock Hudson. According to Dyer (1993), Hudson is “the last guy you’d have figured” to diverge from his cinema persona. Considering Hudson’s cinematic portrayals of

conventional masculinity, Dyer (1993) explains the “surprise” effect following the actor’s revelation that he was an “off-screen” homosexual. The source of this mystification: “there was nothing gay about Rock as performer or image” (p. 28). It is not that actors and actresses aim to deceive viewers and fans. In fact, it was Hudson’s agent, Henry Wilson, who concocted his virile persona (Hofler, 2005). But with much at stake for media investors, it behooves all parties involved to participate in the maintenance of Myth #11. Galician (2004) warns against this particular befuddlement of fiction and reality as such may be a sign of general acceptance of mediated myths.

Finally, Myth #12, which pronounces “since mass media portrayals of romance aren’t ‘real,’ they don’t really affect you,” clashes with the foundation of media effects research (Galician, 2004, p. 55). Social cognitive and cultivation theories fundamentally oppose this myth. Whereas Bandura’s (2001) social cognitive theory advances the notion that individuals actively reference media and mimic behaviors that produce positive results, cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 1986) conceives of a passive process of socialization via television. As with Myth #11, people who accept this myth as true are highly susceptible to the influence of mass mediated depictions.

Galician’s (2004) extensive analysis of stock media messages reveals an intricate network of myth espousal. The abovementioned representations of romance enshrine an idealistic view of the way love and marriage *ought to be* as opposed to what they truly are. In the next section, I will explicate my appraisal of filmic depictions of sex, love, and marriage as noteworthy sources of cultivation.

Movies as Mass Communication

When one thinks of movies, theaters are often the first conduit to come to mind. Trips to the movies remain a comfortable (and expected) destination for first dates, a courting ground of sorts for single people seeking romance, and a relatively cheap source of family entertainment. According to Matzkin (1999), movie audiences have become more “fragmented” and “homogenous” since the cinema’s inception, and are “largely composed of young moviegoers between the ages of 12 and 29” (p. 90). Throngs of people flock to U.S. and Canadian movie theaters each year (approx. 1,285,000,000), attracting more customers than all theme parks and major U.S. sports events combined (Motion Picture Association of America, 2012a).

Though nickelodeons preceded commercial availability of the television by nearly a century, Gerbner and Gross (1976) believed the latter would “remain for a long time the chief source of repetitive and ritualized symbol systems cultivating the common consciousness of the most far-flung and heterogeneous mass publics in history” (p. 174). Modern technologies would merely “enrich the choices of the choosy” rather than replace the ubiquity of televised messages (p. 173). Also, visits to the theater required mobility and a few dollars while television could be enjoyed in one’s home for free.

Gradually, more Americans are spending their money on video rentals than at local theaters, altering if not enmeshing the dynamics of two historically distinct forms of popular leisure. In 2010, video rentals accounted for 51% of studio video revenue, with box office income following at 26% (Electronic Merchants Association, 2012). While consumers spent \$18.8 billion on the rental and purchase of DVDs, Blu-ray Discs and digital content in 2010, box office performance garnered close to \$10.6 billion, the highest amount in the last six years (Motion Picture Association of America, 2012a).

Technological advances have based the “big screen” in the home and reasons for its exclusion from Gerbner’s consideration have been all but eclipsed. Even Potter (2011) commented that the digitization of messages has blurred the differences across traditional media channels such as television and film insofar as communication channels work to “create and *maintain* an audience” with repeated exposure to their messages (emphasis in original, p. 905).

Today, films can be viewed with increasing ease. VCRs and TiVo are regular additions to many American households and faster turn-around times for DVD releases have made movie-viewing all the more convenient (Taylor, Funk, & Craighill, 2006; Motion Picture Association of America, 2012b). More than 90 million U.S. households own a DVD player with an estimated 20.2 million sold to U.S. consumers in 2010; Seventy percent of those households boast more than one system (Electronic Merchants Association, 2012; Digital Entertainment Group, 2011).

Cable and satellite video-on-demand (VOD), available without the trip to the local video rental store, are viable sources of entertainment indulgence that literally combine the traditional notion of “watching television” with that of “watching a movie.” Internet video-on-demand (iVOD) allows for online streaming, a newer trend in movie viewing brought about by such creations as Netflix and Hulu, and permits even infrequent theatergoers to watch newly released movies in the comfort of their own homes.

Sex, Love and Romance in the Movies

Movie genres. The delineation of movie genres follows the central focus of a film’s content. A cumulative list amassed from the American Film Institute and American Movie Classics websites details fifteen total genres⁶: action/adventure;

animation; comedy; courtroom drama; epic/historical; fantasy; gangster/crime; horror/thriller; musicals/dance; mystery; romantic comedy; romantic drama; science fiction; sports films; and westerns (see Appendix A). Though there exist specific romance-related genres (romantic comedies and romantic dramas), unrealistic portrayals of sex, love, and marriage surface in non-romantic movies as well.

Several recent analyses of popular films elucidate the messages imparted to consumers. Dempsey and Reichert (2000) examined portrayals of sex between married couples in a sample of 25 top movie rentals. These movies ranged in genre from comedy (*Austin Powers*) to thriller (*I Know What You Did Last Summer*). In their findings, portrayals of sexuality in these movies tended to be “unrealistic” with respect to both married and unmarried dyads. Unmarried couples engaged in implicit or explicit sexual behavior six times more frequently than married couples in the films; behaviors of the latter were largely restricted to passionate kisses. Spouses that did engage in sex were young, successful, and depicted in high-quality relationships. Dempsey and Reichert also noted that, interestingly, “children, the natural result of sexual intercourse, are virtually nonexistent in the relationships of characters portrayed in sexual behaviors in the popular movies” suggesting “that the consequences of sex are rarely presented” (p. 31).

In a content analysis of 40 high-grossing romantic comedies, Johnson and Holmes (2009) set out to determine exactly what messages and depictions these particular films may pass on to viewers. They observed the majority of films analyzed featured newly formed, fledgling affairs and stressed the initiation stages of the relationship over maintenance strategies. Relationship-oriented incidents such as kissing, affectionate touching, and cuddling were plentiful in the sample. Undesirable representations were

also present, albeit to a lesser degree, and were often romanticized such that it appeared there were no real consequences for objectionable or detrimental behavior. For example, in *The Wedding Planner* (2001), a female character admits to a male character (who was then engaged to someone else) that her ex-fiancé had been unfaithful. Yet, at the time of the confession, the two characters are involved in emotional affair with each other. Hence this fact masquerades under the guise of “simply two people falling in love” rather than infidelity on the part of the male character (Johnson & Holmes, 2009, p. 367). In another instance, the protagonist in *Never Been Kissed* (1991) makes known in a magazine article that she has deliberately deceived the other characters, but most importantly, the man with whom she has fallen in love. After only a short time apart, however, their romance “continue[d] as though no transgression ha[d] occurred” (Johnson & Holmes, 2009, p. 363).

An analysis by Johnson (2007) centered on portrayals of sex, love, and romance in popular wedding films such as *American Wedding*, *The Wedding Singer*, and *Just Married*. Wrote Johnson, “the films advance the myth that because two people love each other, they can get married and everything will work itself out” (p. 362). Sex is easy and wonderful for on-screen spouses, considering the ideal male or female partner is physically flawless and attraction expected. Predestined partners are inseparable in wedding films despite “seemingly insurmountable odds” and conflicting values, if these hindrances are at all mentioned.

Johnson (2007) ends his discussion by scrutinizing two myths exclusive to wedding films. First is the message that “you can have the wedding of your dreams and afford it, too.” While many of the films he analyzed featured lavish, resplendent

ceremonies and pricey honeymoons, average real-life weddings cost just over \$20,000. Many people go into to debt trying to attain movie-like extravagance. Second, “financial struggles have nothing to do with the relationship” in wedding films. This is portrayed despite reports of money as “the most frequently reported issue that couples argue about in first marriages” (Stanley, Markman, & Whitton, 2004, p. 659). In sum, wedding films legitimize a common truism concerning love and marriage: “you can’t have one without the other.” That is, when people fall in love, movies tell us that marriage naturally follows and the individual, upon declaration of their wedding vows, becomes “whole.”

Movies and cultivation of unrealistic expectations. Gerbner’s (1969) cultivation theory provides the basis for examining how idealized and unrealistic portrayals of sex, love and marriage in filmic depictions may, in turn, result in the socialization of dysfunctional standards for romantic relationships. A handful of studies have tested for correlations between media consumption of idealized love and sex relations and potential effects on those who consume them (Baran, 1976a; 1976b; Holmes, 2007; Signorelli, 1991; Shapiro and Kroeger, 1991). These studies revealed a link between a partiality towards romantic media, perception of accuracy of mediated portrayals, and participant endorsement of unrealistic beliefs about intimate relationships. Likewise, real-life departure from these beliefs contributed to frustration and dissatisfaction with one’s sex life and one’s romantic relationship.

Segrin and Nabi’s (2002) study provides a basis for the present inquiry concerning cultivation of unrealistic expectations for marriage by way of movies. Depictions of sexual relations, love, and married life on television overemphasize characteristics of Hendrick and Hendrick’s (1986) eros love style, presenting an overly

romanticized view of romance and stressing idyllic physical compatibility. Television messages accentuate happiness and validate myths of “love at first sight” and physical beauty. These portrayals coupled with the exclusion or minimization of a representative illustration of married life culminate in what the researchers termed “idealized images of marriage” (Segrin & Nabi, 2002, p. 249). Exposure to these images might lead to the cultivation of unrealistic and dysfunctional expectations for romantic relationships that “accompany, if not propel people into marriage” (p. 247). Immediate and idealistic intentions to marry likely “predict actual marriage behavior, thus generating a population of marriages from which future divorces will come” (p. 250).

In order to examine the potential link between media consumption, idealistic beliefs about love and marriage, and marital intentions, Segrin and Nabi (2002) posed two research questions. The first concerned the relationship between television viewing and idealistic expectations about marriage, and the second addressed the association between holding idealistic expectations about marriage and immediate intentions to marry. They distributed a questionnaire to 285 undergraduate student participants who were asked to detail their own generalized expectations about marriage, and self-report the extent to which they fantasized about romantic relationships. Tornstam’s (1992) “Expectations for Intimacy” scale and the “eros love style” subscale developed by Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) were included in the questionnaire to measure participants’ endorsement of idealistic expectations for romantic relationships. The questionnaire elicited additional information about participants’ intentions to marry soon and stay married, television viewing habits, genre-specific television viewing preferences, and perceived accuracy of television portrayals.

Their findings revealed that heavy viewers of romantic television programming such as romantic comedies and soap operas tended to spend time fantasizing about getting married and married life. Greater exposure to these two types of programming was also positively associated with endorsement of the eros love style, high expectations for intimacy, and more immediate intentions to marry. They concluded that the development of idealistic expectations of marriage and resultant marital intentions can be attributed to the dynamics of media socialization. Given the pervasiveness of movies, the content and genre of films can be similarly examined for their relationship to viewers' expectations of coupleships and marriage.

Hypotheses and Research Question

The present study endeavors a replication of some key findings from the literature on media socialization to determine if media play a part in cultivating unrealistic expectations about romantic relationships in a college-aged population. Specifically, the current project tested for the existence of a relationship between (1) exposure to and partiality for watching romantic films (both dramas and comedies) and (2) idealistic expectations and marital intentions. This study extends Segrin and Nabi's (2002) work in (1) focusing on participants' selective movie viewing habits as primary catalysts to cultivation; (2) comparing distinct movie types to better delineate the messages communicated; and (3) utilizing measurement scales in addition to those provided by Segrin and Nabi to ensure examination of the full gamut of relational beliefs. The current project also extends cultivation theory by examining the "flip side" of Gerbner's "mean world" as fashioned by media messages. The converse is a "wonderful world" in which

true love is perfect, everlasting, and ostensibly devoid of major conflict, and to an extent, personal responsibility.

Based on previous findings from Segrin and Nabi (2002), H1 and H2 predicted a correlation between watching romantic movies and endorsement of dysfunctional beliefs regarding romantic relationships. These include expectations of sexual perfection, mindreading, romantic passionate love and intimacy as well as beliefs that disagreement in relationships is destructive and that “love conquers all.” To test for correlations between romantic drama movie viewing and dysfunctional beliefs, the following hypotheses were posed:

H1a: Romantic drama movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with the belief that sexual relations will be perfect.

H1b: Romantic drama movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with endorsement of the mindreading expectation.

H1c: Romantic drama movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with disagreement disallowance.

H1d: Romantic drama movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with endorsement of the belief that true love conquers all.

H1e: Romantic drama movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with greater expectations for intimacy.

H1f: Romantic drama movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with endorsement of the eros love style.

To test for correlations between romantic comedy movie viewing and dysfunctional beliefs, the following hypotheses were posed:

H2a: Romantic comedy movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with the belief that sexual relations will be perfect.

H2b: Romantic comedy movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with endorsement of the mindreading expectation.

H2c: Romantic comedy movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with disagreement disallowance.

H2d: Romantic comedy movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with endorsement of the belief that true love conquers all.

H2e: Romantic comedy movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with greater expectations for intimacy.

H2f: Romantic comedy movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with endorsement of the eros love style.

Segrin and Nabi (2002) found that participants who reported greater exposure to romantic television programming also (1) scored higher on the marital intentions scale and (2) reported spending more time thinking about romantic relationships. To test the correlation between romantic movie viewing and these beliefs, the following hypotheses were posed:

H3: Romance-based movie viewing frequency correlates significantly and positively with greater intentions to marry.

H4: Romance-based movie viewing frequency correlates significantly and positively with fantasy rumination.

Certain groups may be predisposed in some way to the ideology of romanticism and thus respond quite differently to mediated messages. Research has found men

consistently more likely than women to idealize their partner and relationship, to have faith that love overcomes even the most heinous obstructions, and to endorse the myth of love at first sight (Kephart, 1967; Knox & Sporkowski, 1968; Sprecher & Metts, 1989). One study reports the opposite (Sprecher & Toro-Morn, 2002); still others reveal no significant relationship between biological sex *or* gender and romantic beliefs (Hendrick & Hendrick, 1986; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Shapiro & Kroeger, 1991). To explore the association between idealized expectations and gender, the following research question was posed:

RQ1: Which gender holds more idealized expectations about love and romance?

CHAPTER 3

Method

Participants

Participants in the study were 228 undergraduate students taking introductory communication courses at a large southwestern university. Participants earned one extra credit point upon completion of the survey. The sample was 64.5% female ($n = 147$) and 35.5% male ($n = 81$). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 50 years old and had a mean age of 22.11; two participants did not specify age. Approximately 1% of respondents identified themselves as American Indian/ Alaskan Native ($n = 2$); 22% were Asian/Pacific Islander ($n = 50$); 7% were Black/African American ($n = 17$); 44% were Caucasian/European American ($n = 100$); 17% were Hispanic ($n = 38$); and 9% identified themselves as “other” ($n = 21$).

The majority of the sample (92%) identified themselves as heterosexual/straight ($n = 210$); 3% identified themselves as bi-sexual ($n = 7$), 2% as lesbian ($n = 4$), 2% as gay ($n = 5$), and 1% as questioning ($n = 2$). Thirty-six percent of the sample indicated that they were single and not in a dating relationship ($n = 83$); 16% were single and in a dating relationship (a year or less, $n = 37$); 31% were single and in a dating relationship (more than 1 year, $n = 71$); 5% were engaged ($n = 11$); 8% were married (for the 1st time, $n = 18$); 2% were divorced and single ($n = 4$); 1% were divorced and remarried ($n = 2$); and 1% were seriously dating multiple partners ($n = 2$).

Procedure

A brief description of the study was posted to the university’s Communication Studies Research Participation website. Students were directed to the web portal by their

instructors, and were required to create an online account for the purpose of receiving research credit. To participate in this particular survey, students selected an “appointment time” from available slots. At the start of the “appointment time,” students received an email which again detailed a brief introduction to the survey, provided directions on how to participate in the study, and included a unique web link to the survey. Students who followed the link were transferred to the university’s survey distribution portal where they were presented informed consent forms. Upon consenting to participate, students could then proceed to complete the online questionnaire by self-reporting demographic information (sex, age, ethnicity, family character, religiosity, current relationship status, and socioeconomic status in the form of an income item) as well as responses to the measures described below (see Appendix B).

Measures

Fantasy Rumination. To assess the extent to which respondents think about marriage, the 4-item fantasy rumination scale developed by Segrin and Nabi (2002) was used. The measure consists of the following items: “I think my wedding day will be the happiest day of my life,” “I often catch myself thinking about how nice it would be to be married,” “I have put a lot of thought into what kind of wedding I would like to have,” and “I often find myself talking about romantic relationships.” Responses were indicated along 5-point Likert scales (1= *strongly disagree* to 5= *strongly agree*) (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .77$).

Dysfunctional beliefs about relationships. Dysfunctional beliefs pertaining to romantic relationships were assessed using the Relationship Beliefs Inventory (RBI) (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982). Twenty-four items measured respondents’ agreement with

beliefs that disagreement is destructive in relationships (“I would get very upset if my partner and I could not see things the same way,” Cronbach’s $\alpha = .71$), mind-reading is expected (“A partner should know what you are thinking or feeling without you having to tell,” Cronbach’s $\alpha = .76$), and sexual relations are supposed to be perfect (“If I did not seem to be performing well sexually, I would get upset,” Cronbach’s $\alpha = .64$).⁷ All items used 5-point Likert scales.

Love finds a way. Weaver and Canong’s (2004) revised, 4-item version of the “Love Finds a Way” subscale from Sprecher and Metts (1989) measured endorsement of the belief that true love conquers all. Items were altered slightly resulting in such statements as “if I loved someone, I would find a way for us to be together regardless of the opposition to the relationship, physical distance between us or any other barrier” and “if a relationship I have was meant to be, any obstacle (e.g., lack of money, physical distance, career conflicts) can be overcome.” Responses were indicated along 5-point Likert scales for consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84$).

Expectations for relationships. Opinions about what romantic relationships entail were measured using the “Expectations for Intimacy” subscale developed by Tornstam (1992). Participants indicated agreement or disagreement with statements such as “you should know each other’s’ innermost feelings” and “you should be able to talk openly about everything” (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .80$).

Eros love style. Additional beliefs about love, which mirror love myths from the media, were assessed using seven items from Hendrick and Hendrick’s (1986) “eros love style” subscale. Following Segrin & Nabi (2002), items were stated as expectations. Sample items include “my partner would fit my ideal standards of physical

beauty/handsomeness,” and “our lovemaking would be very intense and satisfying.” Items used 5-point Likert scales. The original scale had an internal consistency of $\alpha = .70$. Because of low consistency with the other items, “my partner and I would become physically involved very quickly” was dropped, resulting in a Cronbach’s $\alpha = .80$.

Marital intentions. Segrin and Nabi’s (2002) 8-item instrument was used to gauge respondents’ intentions to get married and maintain the marriage once it comes to pass. Sample items include “when I get married, I intend to stay married until I die or my spouse dies,” and “I will have one and only one marriage in my lifetime.” Items used 5-point Likert scales (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .73$).

Movie viewing. An instrument created by the author assessed general movie-viewing habits. Respondents reported frequency of theater visits, movie rentals, the number of times they watched a movie on cable and/or network television and online, gave an estimation of overall monthly movie-viewing, listed top three favorite films, and indicated the person(s) with whom they typically watched movies. Approximately twenty-two percent of participants reported they typically watched movies alone ($n = 49$), 22% with friends ($n = 51$), 36% with a romantic partner ($n = 83$), and 18% with family members ($n = 41$).⁸ Respondents yielded a list of 376 movie titles. The most frequently cited film titles were *The Notebook* ($n = 23$, 6%), *Harry Potter* ($n = 20$, 5%), *Batman: The Dark Knight* ($n = 13$, 4%), and *Twilight* ($n = 11$, 3%) (see Appendix C).

Genre-specific movie viewing. A genre-specific measure created by the author using lists found on American Film Institute and American Movie Classics websites was used to determine the degree to which participants regularly watched (N= *never* to U= *usually*) each of 15 types of films (see Appendix A). Items used 5-point Likert scales.

The most frequently watched movie genres were Comedy ($M = 4.12$), Romantic Comedy ($M = 3.75$), Action/Adventure ($M = 3.64$), and Romantic Drama ($M = 3.39$). The least frequently watched genre was Western films ($M = 1.83$).

CHAPTER 4

Results

A bivariate correlation matrix was computed among criterion variables to determine the potential existence of multicollinearity. Stephens (1996) argues a bivariate correlation over .80 and a variance inflation factor (VIF) over 10 may be cause for concern. Pearson bivariate correlation coefficients ranged from -.02 to .47 (see Appendix D). The VIF of the variables ranged from 1.10 to 1.44, indicating that multicollinear relationships were not of concern.

Demographic analyses were conducted first to determine if ethnicity, family character, religiosity, current relationship status, and/or socioeconomic status appeared to have a direct influence on this population's romantic beliefs. For this sample, religiosity emerged as the only statistically significant demographic grouping variable. Pearson correlations revealed significant and positive association between religiosity and (1) faith that love conquers all, ($r(227) = .146, p < .05$); (2) expectations for intimacy, ($r(227) = .134, p < .05$); (3) marital intentions, ($r(227) = .191, p < .05$); and (4) fantasy rumination, ($r(227) = .241, p < .001$).

H1 (a-f) posited significant associations between watching romantic comedy movies and endorsement of idealistic expectations for romantic relationships. H2 (a-f) postulated significant associations between watching romantic drama movies and beliefs. H3 and H4 theorized that frequency of viewing romance-based movies would correlate with greater intentions to marry and the extent to which one fantasizes about marriage, respectively.

Romantic Drama Movie Viewing and Idealistic Expectations

H1a posited that more frequent view of romantic drama movies would be significantly and positively associated with belief that sexual relations should be perfect. A Pearson bivariate correlation revealed no significant association between romantic drama movie viewing and expectations of sexual perfection ($r(226) = -.010, p = .886, ns$). Thus, H1a was not supported.

H1b posited that romantic drama movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with endorsement of the mindreading expectation. No significant associations were found between romantic drama movie viewing and participant scores ($r(226) = .060, p = .367, ns$). H1b was not supported.

H1c posited that romantic drama movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with disagreement disallowance. The Pearson bivariate correlation coefficient indicated no significant relationship between the two variables ($r(226) = .012, p = .857, ns$). Thus, H1c was not supported.

H1d posited that romantic drama movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with endorsement of the belief that true love conquers all. As expected, watching the romantic drama genre correlated positively with faith that “love will find a way” ($r(226) = .205, p < .005$). H1d was supported.

H1e posited that romantic drama movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with greater expectations for intimacy. There was a significant and positive correlation between romantic drama movie viewing and participant intimacy scores ($r(226) = .156, p < .05$). H1e was supported.

H1f posited that romantic drama movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with endorsement of the eros love style. A Pearson bivariate

correlation revealed an association between romantic drama movie viewing and the eros style of love ($r(225) = .255, p < .001$). H1f was supported.

Romantic Comedy Movie Viewing and Idealistic Expectations

H2a posited that more frequent viewing of romantic comedy movies would be significantly and positively associated with belief that sexual relations will be perfect. A Pearson bivariate correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the two variables. No significant association emerged between romantic comedy movie viewing and expectations of sexual perfection ($r(288) = .021, p = .747, ns$), thus H2a was not supported.

H2b posited that romantic comedy movie viewing frequency would be significantly and positively associated with endorsement of the mindreading expectation. A Pearson bivariate correlation indicated no significant relationship between the variables ($r(228) = .054, p = .427, ns$). H2b was not supported.

H2c posited that romantic comedy movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with the belief that partner disagreement damages the relationship. A Pearson bivariate correlation indicated no significant relationship between viewing romantic comedy movies and endorsement of disagreement disallowance ($r(228) = -.026, p = .693, ns$). H2c was not supported.

H2d posited that romantic comedy movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with endorsement of the belief that, whatever the obstacle, love will keep the coupleship afloat. A Pearson bivariate correlation coefficient was computed and revealed a positive and significant relationship between watching romantic comedies and

endorsement of the “love conquers all” myth ($r(228) = .177, p < .05$) Thus, H2d was supported.

H2e posited that romantic comedy movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with greater expectations for intimacy. A Pearson bivariate correlation indicated a statistically significant positive relationship between the two variables ($r(228) = .232, p < .001$). H2e was supported.

H2f posited that romantic comedy movie viewing frequency is significantly and positively associated with endorsement of the eros love style. A Pearson bivariate correlation revealed an association between romantic comedy movie viewing and the eros style of love ($r(227) = .231, p < .001$). H2f was supported.

Romantic Movie Viewing, Marital Intentions, and Fantasy Rumination

H3 posited that romance-based movie viewing frequency correlates significantly with greater intentions to marry. A statistically significant association was found between romantic comedy and drama movie viewing and marital intentions ($r(228) = .270, p < .001$). Thus, H3 was supported.

H4 posited that frequency of romance-based movie viewing would correlate significantly with rumination about one’s wedding and romantic relationships. A statistically significant association was found between romantic comedy and drama movie viewing and scores on the marital intentions scale ($r(228) = .330, p < .001$). H4 was supported.

Gender Differences and Idealized Expectations

Preliminary demographic analyses were conducted through a series of independent *t*-tests comparing men to women on total number of movies watched and

frequency of viewing the romance-based genres. Women ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 1.024$) viewed the romance-based genres more frequently than men ($M = 2.75$, $SD = .905$), ($t(226) = -9.23$, $d = 1.30$, $p < .001$). There emerged no statistically significant sex differences in terms of number of movies watched (women, $M = 10.82$, $SD = 10.58$; men, $M = 10.55$, $SD = 7.43$, $t(226) = -.20$, $d = .02$, $p = .836$, *ns*).

RQ1 asked which gender held more idealized expectations about love and romance. As previously indicated in the Method section, possible scores for the following dependent variable scales ranged from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). An independent *t*-test revealed a significant difference between women and men regarding (1) expectations for intimacy (women, $M = 4.51$, $SD = .438$; men, $M = 4.40$, $SD = .546$), $t(226) = -2.10$, $d = .28$, $p < .05$; (2) fantasy rumination (women, $M = 3.72$, $SD = .891$; men, $M = 3.32$, $SD = .806$), $t(226) = -3.42$, $d = .47$, $p < .05$; and (3) marital intentions (women, $M = 4.21$, $SD = .469$; men, $M = 3.95$, $SD = .641$), $t(128) = -3.09$, $d = .46$, $p < .05$.

However, no statistical differences emerged between gender and either endorsement of (1) beliefs in sexual perfection (women, $M = 3.02$, $SD = .576$; men, $M = 3.12$, $SD = .484$), $t(226) = 1.31$, $d = .18$, $p < .190$, *ns*; (2) the mindreading expectation (women, $M = 2.83$, $SD = .602$; men, $M = 2.81$, $SD = .607$), $t(226) = -.16$, $d = .03$, $p < .866$, *ns*; (3) disagreement disallowance (women, $M = 2.22$, $SD = .531$; men, $M = 2.25$, $SD = .556$), $t(226) = .34$, $d = .05$, $p < .732$, *ns*; (4) faith that “love conquers all” (women, $M = 4.10$, $SD = .754$; men, $M = 3.98$, $SD = .841$), $t(226) = -1.15$, $d = .15$, $p < .251$, *ns*; or (5) the eros love style (women, $M = 4.08$, $SD = .596$; men, $M = 3.92$, $SD = .598$), $t(225) = -1.88$, $d = .26$, $p < .060$, *ns*.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

This study sought to analyze the association between romantic movie viewing and romantic beliefs. Specifically, participants were asked to report what movie genres they frequently watched and their expectations regarding sex, love, and marriage. First, the project aimed to update the existing body of research to include an examination of films and selective exposure to the predominant messages of romantic genres. Secondly, with the popularity of such movies as *The Notebook* (2004) and the *Twilight Saga* (2008-2012), it behooves individuals and practitioners alike to recognize possible correlates between constant absorption of romantic messages and beliefs that endorse relational dysfunction. Revelatory information regarding potential media effects might impede ill-starred marriages and hopefully prevent divorces.

Research conducted by Segrin and Nabi (2002) in light of cultivation theory provides evidence that “idealized images of marriage” as represented on television contribute to the enculturation of love myths and, quite possibly, a desire to fulfill beliefs (p. 249). Galician (2007) reminds us of the detriments of endorsing media-created unrealistic expectations. Eidelson and Epstein (1982) correlate affirmation of dysfunctional beliefs with the desire to terminate the relationship. Therefore, the current study was designed to verify whether or not unrealistic expectations regarding romantic relationships were related to film consumption, particularly movies in the romantic genre. To test these conjectures, a survey was distributed to undergraduate students enrolled in introductory communication courses which asked them to report their movie viewing habits and beliefs about sex, love, and marriage.

Romantic Movie Viewing and Idealistic Expectations

The hypotheses predicted that greater viewing frequency of romance-based movies would be significantly correlated with a proclivity for the eros love style, greater expectations for intimacy in one's coupleship, greater intentions to marry, and more time spent fantasizing about romantic relationships. A positive relation was posited between romantic drama viewing and dysfunctional beliefs (H1a-f). Viewing romantic comedy movies was expected to be significantly and positively associated with endorsement of romantic ideals (H2a-f). With H3 and H4, a relationship was expected to emerge between overall romantic movie viewing and romantic beliefs, specifically greater marital intentions and fantasy rumination, respectively.

Among this sample of young adults, viewing of both romantic comedies and dramas was significantly and positively correlated with (1) faith that love conquers all; (2) greater expectations for intimacy; and (3) endorsement of the eros love style. That is, frequent viewing of romantic films seems intimately tied to affirmation of idealistic expectations for romantic relationships. These findings support the supposition that media play a part in reinforcing beliefs about coupleships. For those who confound fact with fiction, and rely on fantastic notions as standards for conduct in romantic relationships, frustration and relational turmoil may ensue.

Romantic Movie Viewing, Marital Intentions, and Fantasy Rumination

Participants who reported watching romantic movies, both dramas and comedies, indicated a desire to get married and spent more time fantasizing about marriage and romantic relationships. These findings evidence a "wonderful world" view of love and marriage as portrayed by media as well as personal aspirations to bring romantic ideals to

fruition. Extant media effects theories help expound this conclusion. Uses and gratifications theory advances the idea that individuals actively and purposely select particular programs in order to satiate one's needs (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). Gratification of those needs can be motivational, and/or consequential of mass media use (Rubin, 1981). Thus, it may be the case that individuals seek reinforcement of romantic beliefs in mediated messages as these symbols simultaneously prompt pursuit of the proper means to realize one's convictions.

This study's findings point to the need to consider as well the tenets of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001). Fundamentally, people draw upon "personal and vicarious experiences" as models from which they abstract likely trajectories of particular behaviors (Bandura, 2001, p. 267). Through processes of attention, retention, behavioral production, and motivation, individuals then identify prominent symbols and perform learned behaviors, especially when observed outcomes are positive. Mediated representations of love and romance, which are almost always positive, afford exemplars of relational excellence and inspire consumer imitation. These theories evidence transfusion of a relentless media socialization cycle—demonstration, reinforcement, and motivation—to which heavy consumers are greatly exposed.

Participants who frequently watched romantic movies did *not* endorse beliefs in sexual perfection, mindreading, or disagreement disallowance as measured by the Relationship Beliefs Inventory (Eidelson & Epstein, 1982). The RBI scales tap performance of relational activities, the failure of which may signify disunity. The other measures of idealistic beliefs used in this study—"love finds a way," expectations for intimacy, and eros love—tap broader, cosmic convictions. Thus, there appears to be a

disconnect between real-life, routine considerations (sexual relations and communication) and universal, mythic romantic values. I offer two explanations for this outcome.

First, it may be the case that, at least for participants of this study, the more mythic romantic ideals override or supersede other relational demands. Lower-tier needs, once met, are then subordinated in the pursuit of intimacy, love and belongingness. For instance, if one trusts that true love conquers all, imperfect sex, arguments, and communication difficulties lose significance. Partners need only rely on the power of love and relational disruptions can be overcome.

Second, perhaps for this sample, personal experience and constant exposure to family dealings are more salient with respect to idealistic expectations of quotidian relational tasks. Anyone who has dated, for example, is surely familiar with disagreements over even the smallest matters. Undeniably, conflict is imminent in close, intimate relationships (Wilmot & Hocker, 2011). Further, observing parents, grandparents, and other mentors in their coupleships provides individuals clues as to how a typical relationship might unfold. These “authentic” intimations about love and marriage might counter media messages that promise perfection.

Gender Differences and Idealized Expectations

To date, evidence that biological sex influences an individual’s disposition to endorse romantic ideals is ambiguous. Structural differences may arise when discriminating by gender *rather than* by sex, the latter of which implies divergence at the biological or evolutionary level. According to Duck (1995), gender is the proper term to use “when discussing social expectations and also behaviors that can be presumed to result from socialization into masculine and feminine identities” (p. 56). Recall that

Galician's (2004) analysis of mediated love myths exhibited specific tasks or requirements for "men" and "women," not "males" and "females."

The research question probed the correlation between gender and tendency to hold unrealistic expectations for romantic relationships. Though the demographic survey item asked participants to indicate whether they were male or female, it was written with the intention of determining respondents' gender. Significant differences emerged between men and women regarding expectations for intimacy, fantasy rumination, and marital intentions. Namely, women in this study expected intimate romantic relationships, imagined being married and daydreamed about their weddings, and anticipated getting married and staying married more than men. These findings imply gendered expectations and roles of men and women (to be a wife, for example) still hold, even in 2013. Romantic movies and romantic ideals, then, might constitute broader gender schemas, "packets of gender-relevant information, understanding, knowledge, and beliefs," which guide gender scripts and expectations (Levy and Fivush, 1993, p. 132).

Similarities and Differences Between Television Viewing and Movie Viewing

Segrin and Nabi's (2002) study provided the impetus for construction of the current project. Several scales were pulled from their original study including the fantasy rumination scale, the marital intentions measure, the eros love style subscale, and the expectations for intimacy subscale. To ensure the questionnaire items tapped the full battery of idealistic expectations about sex, love, and marriage, three subscales from the Relationship Beliefs Inventory (sexual perfectionism, disagreement is destructive, mindreading is expected), and the "love finds a way" subscale were included.

Based on the researchers' findings, significant and positive correlations between watching romantic films and endorsement of love myths were expected in an undergraduate student population. For the scales used from the original study and the "love finds a way" subscale, associations between participants' scores on measures of idealistic expectations and frequency of viewing romantic movies emerged. No correlations, however, were found between participants' scores on the RBI and romantic movie viewing. This conclusion likely follows from participant characteristics. Both investigations, nevertheless, connect genre-specific viewing to endorsement of particular romantic ideals.

The tenets of cultivation theory provide an ideological link from frequent romantic movie consumption to endorsement of idealistic expectations about love and marriage. This study's findings reiterate the implications of genre-specific viewing; participants who indicated higher frequencies of watching romantic movies, both comedies and dramas, tended to also endorse the idea that true love conquers all and the eros love style. However, not all dysfunctional beliefs regarding romantic relationships were endorsed; results indicate a disregard for or modulation of on-screen relational turmoil that is characteristic of romantic movies. Thus, stories of love in the movies and other media sources such as television may not completely supplant one's reservoir of real-life observations and personal experiences to which he or she might refer for guidance in romantic relationships. The cultivation of beliefs regarding ideal romance might not be sweeping, but might be inculcated in a *piecewise* fashion. Affirmation of certain aspects of the "wonderful world" view might end where salient models of routine relational dealings exist.

The need for content analyses to augment the findings of this survey of movie viewers would help to learn if a “wonderful world” is indeed fashioned by romantic comedy and drama films. Do films—along with other sources of love stories—accentuate and cultivate myths of everlasting and pure, unconditional love that, ideally, transcend relational issues and concerns? Addressing how movie and media versions of romance could provide more realistic and “do-able” relationships may cultivate healthier models for relationships.

Limitations

One limitation of the current study is reliance on data collected from undergraduate students. A number of anthropologists and psychologists have realized potential drawbacks to studying who Henrich, Heine and Norenzayan (2010) refer to as WEIRDos: people from Western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic cultures. Because cultures fundamentally differ in regards to family, responsibility, and views on marriage, my conclusions do not speak to patterns of general human behavior. Also, due to the low volume of bisexual, gay, lesbian, questioning, and transgender participants, the conclusions reached assume heteronormativity.

A second limitation involves the use of survey design. The questionnaire asked respondents to report sensitive information regarding sexual expectations (“I could feel OK about my lovemaking even if my partner did not achieve orgasm”) and beliefs about marriage (“I will have only one marriage in my lifetime”) just to name a few. Though this method affords confidentiality, issues of social desirability might arise. Also, survey data might not relay the strength of relationships between media consumption and idealistic beliefs as accurately as direct observation or experiment. Lastly, cross-

sectional study permits only glimpses of the effects of genre-specific media consumption. It is entirely possible that an individual's romantic beliefs will evolve over time as he or she becomes more familiar with what does and does not "work" in the courtship process.

Suggestions for Future Research

Researchers should evaluate non-university samples in the quest to understand and explain cultural notions of sex, romantic love and marriage. Individuals in these groups are more ethnically and socioeconomically diverse and typically have had more real-life experiences than samples of undergraduate college students. However, additional factors might have affected respondents' perceptions of love and romance by virtue of exposure to the Las Vegas environment. For instance, the fast-paced, tourist-directed milieu ensures student residents (82% of the university population) are bombarded daily with sexually-infused advertisements which may incite an air of cynicism about the validity or acceptability of messages regarding sex (University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2013; see Engstrom, 2007a). Also, with 24% of the student population aged 25 and older, the city's university customarily houses more non-traditional students than similar institutions (University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2013). As demonstrated in Segrin and Nabi's (2002) investigation of television viewing and affirmation of idealistic expectations, age may affect disposition to romantic ideals.

Comparison between Western and non-Western groups and/or films could elucidate the forces of media socialization as well as the different ways in which visual messages color romantic ideals. Generally targeting diverse populations also allows researchers to parse social factors that may impinge on one's ability, need and/or desire to marry and deconstruct environmental elements that work in opposition to potent media

messages. For example, social currency and status often accompany heterosexual coupleships, especially those on the trajectory to marriage and procreation (Elia, 2003). As a result, homosexual, bisexual, and lesbian individuals, in the face of institutional discrimination, may think more practically about relational adversities and, indeed, expect them.

Researchers should also look to gather qualitative and quantitative data from a larger sample which includes young and old participants. An investigation of young people's romantic models and ideals can help pinpoint the age at which people need to start thinking realistically about love. For instance, Bachen and Illouz's (1996) study of school children uncovered already crystallized notions of love and romance perpetuated by the media such as how and where a date should unfold, and what is supposed to happen after two people fall in love. An investigation of an elder population's romantic beliefs would illumine whether people's ideas about love evolve into more realistic reflections of personal experience, or if we hold fast to romantic beliefs as we age. Doing so also helps attend to problems in generalizability and informs inquiries about the ways different people talk, learn about, and "do" love.

An assessment of gender role beliefs in tandem with longitudinal study would help researchers better gauge the potency of romantic ideals. Do individuals hold their partners to unrealistic standards later in life? Do idealistic expectations negatively affect the relationship? Content analyses of romantic media are also useful. One may find the romantic nature of modern movies has evolved to represent realistic relationships or regressed, depicting only mythic love stories.

This study examined viewing frequency of the romantic genres exclusively. Future research might compare idealistic expectations to preference for other types of films such as action/ adventure, horror/thriller, or animation. Making these comparisons would help determine if genre-specific viewing or genre preference even matters in shaping romantic beliefs. Also, because genres were pulled from the American Movie Classics and American Film Institute websites, viewing frequency of the pornographic movie genre was not assessed in this study. With the emphasis popular media place on sex in romantic relationships, frequent viewing of sexually explicit content likely influences consumers' thoughts about its "proper" place and performance in the context of a coupleship or marriage.

It is unlikely that the mythology of love will disappear completely from our culture. Indeed, for most Westerners "love is a many splendored thing."⁹ However, the fact that *The Notebook* was the most frequently cited movie title suggests that not only might romantic movies act as models for love, but they remain extremely popular. Thus, we must deconstruct myths that narrow-mindedly impose a "wonderful world" perspective of romance. We must also learn to discriminate the *act* of intercourse from heartfelt expressions of affection. Lastly, we must be aware of how media reinforce hegemonic cultural messages, perpetuating behavioral and ideological conformity to the established "norm." Once we make these crucial distinctions, we can effectively reassess our relational habits and standards, and begin to write our own realistic love stories.

APPENDIX A

Movie Genre Definitions and Definition Sources

1. Action/adventure films “have tremendous impact, continuous high energy, lots of physical stunts and activity, possibly extended chase scenes, races, rescues, battles, martial arts, mountains and mountaineering, destructive disasters (floods, explosions, natural disasters, fires, etc.), fights, escapes, non-stop motion, spectacular rhythm and pacing, and adventurous heroes” (retrieved from <http://www.filmsite.org/actionfilms4.html>).
2. Animated films are movies “in which individual drawings, paintings, [figures,]or illustrations are photographed frame by frame (stop-frame cinematography)” (retrieved from <http://www.filmsite.org/animatedfilms7.html>).
3. Comedies are “films designed to elicit laughter from the audience” (retrieved from <http://www.filmsite.org/comedyfilms7.html>).
4. The courtroom drama is “a genre of film in which a system of justice plays a critical role in the film's narrative” (retrieved from <http://www.filmsite.org/afi10toptennoms9.html>).
5. Epic/historical films deal with “an historical or imagined event, mythic, legendary, or heroic figure” (retrieved from <http://www.filmsite.org/epicsfilms3.html>).
6. Fantasy films: “Unlike science fiction films that base their content upon some degree of scientific truth, [fantasy films] take the audience to netherworld, fairy-tale places where events are unlikely to occur in real life...[and often] transcend the bounds of

- human possibility and physical laws” (retrieved from <http://www.filmsite.org/fantasyfilms4.html>).
7. Gangster/crime films are “developed around the sinister actions of criminals or gangsters, particularly bank robbers, underworld figures, or ruthless hoodlums who operate outside the law” (retrieved from <http://www.filmsite.org/crimefilms3.html>).
 8. Horrors/thrillers are “unsettling films designed to frighten and panic, cause dread and alarm, and to invoke our hidden worst fears” (retrieved from <http://www.filmsite.org/horrorfilms5.html>).
 9. Musicals/dance movies are “cinematic forms that emphasize and showcase full-scale song and dance routines in a significant way” (retrieved from <http://www.filmsite.org/musicalfilms7.html>).
 10. Mysteries are “films that focus on the unsolved crime” as well as “the deductive ability, prowess, confidence, or diligence of the detective as he/she attempts to unravel the crime or situation by piecing together clues and circumstances, seeking evidence, interrogating witnesses, and tracking down a criminal” (retrieved from <http://www.filmsite.org/mysteryfilms3.html>).
 11. The romantic comedy is “a genre in which the development of a romance leads to comic situations.” Examples were retrieved from a list of top grossing romantic comedies found at <http://boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=romanticcomedy.htm>.
 12. Romantic Dramas are films that center on the “obstacles and the hazards of hardship, finances, physical illness, racial or social class status, occupation, psychological

- restraints, or family that threaten to break [the main characters'] union and attainment of love” (retrieved from <http://www.filmsite.org/romancefilms5.html>).
13. Science Fiction movies are films that “are usually scientific, visionary, comic-strip-like, and imaginative, and usually visualized through fanciful, imaginative settings, expert film production design, advanced technology gadgets (i.e., robots and spaceships), [or other] scientific developments” (retrieved from <http://www.filmsite.org/sci-fifilms7.html>).
14. Sports films are “those that have a sports setting (football or baseball stadium, arena, or the Olympics, etc.), competitive event (the 'big game,' 'fight,' or 'competition'), and/or athlete (boxer, racer, surfer, etc.) that are central and predominant in the story” (retrieved from <http://www.filmsite.org/sportsfilms2.html>).
15. Westerns are defined as “nostalgic eulog[ies] to the early days of the expansive, untamed American frontier (the borderline between civilization and the wilderness)” (retrieved from <http://www.filmsite.org/westernfilms.html>).

3. The statements below describe the ways a person might feel about a romantic relationship or marriage with another person. Please circle the number next to each statement according to how strongly you agree or disagree with it. When answering, please use the following scale to indicate your opinions:

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

	SD	D	N	A	SA
If your partner expresses disagreement with your ideas, s/he probably does not think highly of you.	1	2	3	4	5
I would not expect my partner to sense all of my moods.	1	2	3	4	5
I would get upset if I thought that I had not completely satisfied my partner sexually.	1	2	3	4	5
I could not accept it if my partner disagreed with me.	1	2	3	4	5
If I had to tell my partner that something is important to me, it would not mean that s/he is insensitive to me.	1	2	3	4	5
If I were not in the mood for sex when my partner was, I would not get upset about it.	1	2	3	4	5
I would take it as a personal insult if my partner disagreed with an important idea of mine.	1	2	3	4	5
I would get very upset if my partner did not recognize how I was feeling and I had to tell him/her.	1	2	3	4	5
A good sexual partner can get him/herself aroused for sex whenever necessary.	1	2	3	4	5
I would like it if my partner presented views different from mine.	1	2	3	4	5
People who have a close relationship can sense each other's needs as if they could read each other's minds.	1	2	3	4	5
If I couldn't perform well sexually whenever my partner is in the mood, I would believe that I have a problem.	1	2	3	4	5
I would get very upset if my partner and I could not see things the same way.	1	2	3	4	5
It would be very important to me for my partner to anticipate my needs by sensing changes in my moods.	1	2	3	4	5
I could feel OK about my lovemaking even if my partner did not achieve orgasm.	1	2	3	4	5
I could tolerate it if my partner argued with me.	1	2	3	4	5

	SD	D	N	A	SA
A partner should know what you are thinking or feeling without you having to tell.	1	2	3	4	5
If my sexual partner did not get satisfied completely, it would not mean that I have failed.	1	2	3	4	5
If my partner and I disagreed, I would feel like our relationship was falling apart.	1	2	3	4	5
People who love each other know exactly what each other's thoughts are without a word ever being said.	1	2	3	4	5
Some difficulties in my sexual performance would not mean personal failure to me.	1	2	3	4	5
I would not doubt my partner's feelings for me if we argued.	1	2	3	4	5
If you have to ask your partner for something, it shows that s/he was not "tuned into" your needs.	1	2	3	4	5
If I did not seem to be performing well sexually, I would get upset.	1	2	3	4	5
My partner and I would be attracted to each other immediately after we first met.	1	2	3	4	5
My partner and I would have the right physical "chemistry" between us.	1	2	3	4	5
Our lovemaking would be very intense and satisfying.	1	2	3	4	5
I would feel that my partner and I were meant for each other.	1	2	3	4	5
My partner and I would become physically involved very quickly.	1	2	3	4	5
My partner and I would really understand each other.	1	2	3	4	5
My partner would fit my ideal standards of physical beauty/handsomeness.	1	2	3	4	5
I consider what a person is going to become in life before I commit myself to him/her.	1	2	3	4	5
I try to plan my life carefully before choosing a lover.	1	2	3	4	5
It is best to love someone with a similar background.	1	2	3	4	5

A main consideration in choosing a lover is how s/he reflects on my family.	1	2	3	4	5
An important factor in choosing a partner is whether or not s/he will be a good parent.	1	2	3	4	5
If I love someone, I know I can make the relationship work, despite any obstacles.	1	2	3	4	5
If I loved someone, I would find a way for us to be together regardless of the opposition to the relationship, physical distance between us or any other barrier.	1	2	3	4	5
If a relationship I have was meant to be, any obstacle (e.g., lack of money, physical distance, career conflicts) can be overcome.	1	2	3	4	5
I believe if another person and I loved each other we would be able to overcome any differences and problems that may arise.	1	2	3	4	5

4. For the next set of statements, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree that each of the following is important in order for you to have a happy marriage.

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

	SD	D	N	A	SA
You should be able to trust each other completely.	1	2	3	4	5
You should be able to talk openly about everything.	1	2	3	4	5
You should have a feeling of mutual understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
You should know each other's' innermost feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
You should be really interested in each other's problems.	1	2	3	4	5

5. Different people have different ideas about marriage. For each statement below, please circle the response that best represents your views. For these questions, please use the following scale to indicate your answer:

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

	SD	D	N	A	SA
I would not get married unless I was in love.	1	2	3	4	5
I would not stay in a marriage unless I was in love with my spouse.	1	2	3	4	5
When married, I expect to remain faithful to my spouse.	1	2	3	4	5
I will have one and only one marriage in my lifetime.	1	2	3	4	5
When I get married, I intend to stay married until I die or my spouse dies.	1	2	3	4	5
I expect to be engaged or married within the next five years.	1	2	3	4	5
When married, I expect to spend a lot of time with my spouse.	1	2	3	4	5
I do not expect to have a great deal of conflict with my husband/wife.	1	2	3	4	5

6. Now we would like to ask you some questions about yourself.

I am a: Male Female

What is your age (in years)? _____

What year are you in school? *(please check one)*

Freshman Junior Other *(please specify):*
 Sophomore Senior _____

What is your race/ethnicity? *(please check one)*

American Indian/Alaskan Native Asian or Pacific Islander
 Black/ African American Caucasian/ European American
 Hispanic Other *(please specify):*

What is your sexual orientation?

Bi-sexual Lesbian
 Gay Questioning
 Heterosexual/Straight Transgender
 Other *(please specify):*

I am currently (*please check one*):

- Single and not in a dating relationship
- Single and in a dating relationship (a year or less)
- Single and in a dating relationship (more than 1 year)
- Engaged
- Married (for the 1st time)
- Divorced and single
- Divorced and remarried
- Widowed and single
- Widowed and remarried
- Seriously dating multiple partners

7. For the following four questions, choose the number that best indicates your responses.

In general, how important are religious or spiritual beliefs in your day-to-day life? The numbers range from **1= “not important at all,” 3= “somewhat important,” and 5= “very much important.”**

1 2 3 4 5

How often do you attend religious services? The numbers range from **1= “never,” 3= “sometimes,” and 5= “most or all of the time.”**

1 2 3 4 5

When you do have problems or difficulties in your work, family, or personal life, how often do you seek spiritual comfort? The numbers range from **1= “never,” 3= “sometimes,” and 5= “most or all of the time.”**

1 2 3 4 5

In general, would you say you are a religious person? The numbers range from **1= “NO!” 3= “unsure or neutral” and 5= “YES!”**

1 2 3 4 5

How would you characterize your family growing up? (*check as many categories as needed*)

- Continuously intact (Biological parents are married and live together)
- Cohabiting (Biological parents are not married but live together)
- Divorced, single parent family
- Never married, single parent family
- Stepfamily (Biological parents are divorced and at least one parent is remarried)
- Adoptive family
- Guardianship (other than biological or adoptive parent)
- One parent is deceased
- Other (*please specify*): _____

In which social class would you say your family to be?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Upper class | <input type="checkbox"/> Lower-middle class |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Upper-middle class | <input type="checkbox"/> Working class |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Middle class | <input type="checkbox"/> Lower class |

Do you still live with your parent or guardian?

- Yes and they support me financially
- Yes, but they do not support me financially
- No, but they support me financially
- No and I support myself financially
- Other (*please specify*): _____

(If “Yes, but they do not support me financially” or “No and I support myself financially,” skip to question #80.)

What is your parents’ or parental substitutes’ total household income?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than \$9,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$75,000 to \$99,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000 to \$49,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100,000 to \$149,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 to \$74,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$150,000 or more |

What is your total household income?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than \$9,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$75,000 to \$99,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$10,000 to \$49,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$100,000 to \$149,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 to \$74,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$150,000 or more |

8. How often do you watch the following types of movies? When answering, please use the following scale to indicate your opinions:

1= Never, 2= Rarely, 3= Sometimes, 4= Often, 5= Usually

	N	R	S	O	U
Action/Adventure (e.g., Die Hard, Raiders of The Lost Ark)	1	2	3	4	5
Animation (e.g., Wall-E, Spirited Away)	1	2	3	4	5
Comedy (e.g., Zoolander, 40-Year-Old Virgin)	1	2	3	4	5
Courtroom Drama (e.g., A Few Good Men, The Crucible)	1	2	3	4	5
Epic/Historical (e.g., 300, Clash of the Titans)	1	2	3	4	5
Fantasy (e.g., Lord of the Rings series, Harry Potter series)	1	2	3	4	5
Gangster/Crime (e.g., Ocean's Eleven, Pulp Fiction)	1	2	3	4	5
Horror/Thriller (e.g., The Ring, Saw series)	1	2	3	4	5
Musicals/Dance (e.g., Moulin Rouge, Hairspray)	1	2	3	4	5
Mystery (e.g., Mulholland Dr., Memento)	1	2	3	4	5
Romantic Comedy (e.g., Hitch, Sweet Home Alabama)	1	2	3	4	5
Romantic Drama (e.g., The Notebook, Pride & Prejudice)	1	2	3	4	5
Science Fiction (e.g., The Matrix, Star Wars series)	1	2	3	4	5
Sports (e.g., Friday Night Lights, Million Dollar Baby)	1	2	3	4	5
Westerns (e.g., 3:10 to Yuma, True Grit)	1	2	3	4	5

9. Please list your three favorite movies:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

10. We would like to ask you some questions about your movie-viewing habits.

1. In an average month, how many times do you go see a movie in a theater? _____ times
2. In an average month, how many times do you rent a movie (e.g., video store, Netflix, Hulu)? _____ times
3. In an average month, how many times do you watch a movie on television (e.g., cable, pay-per-view, network programming)? _____ times
4. Overall, how many movies do you watch in an average month? _____ movies
5. Who do you typically watch movies with?

_____ Alone	_____ With a romantic partner
_____ With friends	_____ With family members
	_____ Other (<i>please specify</i>):

11. Finally, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement below.

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

	SD	D	N	A	SA
6. Movies show life as it really is.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Movies let me see how other people live.	1	2	3	4	5
8. If I see something in a movie, I cannot be so sure it really is that way.	1	2	3	4	5
9. My behavior is influenced by the movies that I watch.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Movies let me see what happens in other places as if I am really there.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX C

Table 1.

*Top Cited Movie Titles and Occurrence**

<u>Movie Title</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>%</u>
<i>The Notebook</i>	23	6.1
<i>Harry Potter**</i>	20	5.0
<i>Batman: The Dark Knight**</i>	13	3.5
<i>Twilight Saga**</i>	11	3.0
<i>A Walk to Remember</i>	9	2.4
<i>The Avengers</i>	9	2.4
<i>Lord of The Rings**</i>	9	2.4
<i>Bridesmaids</i>	8	2.1
<i>The Lion King**</i>	8	2.1
<i>The Titanic</i>	7	1.8
<i>The Fast and the Furious**</i>	7	1.8

* This list includes all titles referenced seven times or more.

**These titles have three or more sequels. The frequency reflects a reference to any title in the series.

APPENDIX D

Table 2.

*Correlation Matrix for Criterion Variables**

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Fantasy Rumination	___	0.27	0.21	0.46	0.34	0.07	0.06	0.14
2 Love Finds a Way	0.27	___	0.37	0.40	0.37	0.02	-0.11	0.24
3 Expectations for Intimacy	0.21	0.37	___	0.46	0.40	0.07	-0.04	0.13
4 Marital Intentions	0.46	0.40	0.46	___	0.47	0.13	-0.02	0.15
5 Eros Love Style	0.34	0.37	0.40	0.47	___	0.10	0.04	0.25
6 Sex Perfectionism	0.07	0.02	0.07	0.13	0.10	___	0.23	0.24
7 Disagreement Disallowance	0.06	-0.11	-0.04	-0.02	0.04	0.23	___	0.43
8 Mindreading	0.14	0.24	0.13	0.15	0.25	0.24	0.43	___

*Pearson r values above .80 indicate potential multicollinearity.

APPENDIX E



**Social/Behavioral IRB – Expedited Review
Approval Notice**

NOTICE TO ALL RESEARCHERS:

Please be aware that a protocol violation (e.g., failure to submit a modification for any change) of an IRB approved protocol may result in mandatory remedial education, additional audits, re-consenting subjects, researcher probation, suspension of any research protocol at issue, suspension of additional existing research protocols, invalidation of all research conducted under the research protocol at issue, and further appropriate consequences as determined by the IRB and the Institutional Officer.

DATE: December 02, 2012

TO: **Dr. Erika Engstrom**, Communication Studies

FROM: Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects

RE: Notification of IRB Action
Protocol Title: **Love Marriage, and Movies**
Protocol #: 1211-4302M
Expiration Date: December 1, 2013

This memorandum is notification that the project referenced above has been reviewed and approved by the UNLV Social/Behavioral Institutional Review Board (IRB) as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45 CFR 46 and UNLV Human Research Policies and Procedures.

The protocol is approved for a period of one year and expires December 1, 2013. If the above-referenced project has not been completed by this date you must request renewal by submitting a Continuing Review Request form 30 days before the expiration date.

PLEASE NOTE:

Upon approval, the research team is responsible for conducting the research as stated in the protocol most recently reviewed and approved by the IRB, which shall include using the most recently submitted Informed Consent/Assent forms and recruitment materials. The official versions of these forms are indicated by footer which contains approval and expiration dates.

Should there be *any* change to the protocol, it will be necessary to submit a **Modification Form** through ORI - Human Subjects. No changes may be made to the existing protocol until modifications have been approved by the IRB. Modified versions of protocol materials must be used upon review and approval. Unanticipated problems, deviations to protocols, and adverse events must be reported to the ORI – HS within 10 days of occurrence.

If you have questions or require any assistance, please contact the Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects at IRB@unlv.edu or call 895-2794

Office of Research Integrity -
Human Subjects
4505 Maryland Parkway • Box 451047 • Las Vegas, Nevada
89154-1047 (702) 895-2794 • FAX: (702) 895-0805

APPENDIX F

Footnotes

¹ From 2006-2010, only 68 of women's and 18 of men's first marriages ended due to the death of a spouse.

² The sample design of the National Survey of Family Growth (from which these statistics originated) is based on independent samples of women and men, not on couples.

³ These figures are consistent with other literature that claims divorced or separated women are more likely to remain unmarried than their male counterparts.

⁴ This line is taken from the song "(Keep Feeling) Fascination" by The Human League.

⁵ Bandura's (2002) social learning theory can also explain the dynamics of media socialization and how we "learn" values regarding love. The theory postulates that when people observe the behaviors of others, especially behavior that is positively reinforced, they construct guidelines for participation in similar social contexts. Because the focus of this study is on film genre and the messages contained within, and because the method employed precludes observation of actual human activity ("production"), cultivation was used instead of social learning theory as a theoretical framework.

⁶ Examples for each genre (with the exception of romantic comedy) were chosen based on list ranking and year of release (2002 or later) to adapt to younger audiences.

⁷ The alpha value for the sexual perfectionism subscale was well below the traditionally accepted .8 goal. However, George and Mallery (2003) argue that alpha values between .7 and .6 might be acceptable (p. 231). I do recognize that this alpha value might signal a need to revise several items for use of the scale in the future.

⁸The additional 2% of participants selected “other.” A review of the accompanying textual responses revealed “other” implied typically viewing movies in combinations of romantic partners, family members, friends, and/or alone.

⁹*Love Is a Many Splendored Thing* (1955) is American romantic drama film. It is also the title of a song (written for the movie) by The Four Aces.

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