

Effect of love stories on real life



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How do love stories (in the media) affect our understanding of romance in real life?

Romance is something that exists all around us. It can be said that many of us grew up with hearing epic love stories such as Cinderella, Snow White and the likes. Romantic movies have played a significant role in the entertainment industry. According to a recent survey carried out by the U. S. Bureau of Labour Statistics, romance is the third highest grossing genre coming behind adventure and action which are 1st and 2nd respectively (USBLS, 2013). However these romantic movies and love stories have played a part in the distortion of the understanding and expectation of love in real life. According to Jake and Melissa Kircher, “ because of media and technology, the ways in which people fall in love, connect within relationship and experience sexuality are different than any other generation before this one.” (Kircher, 2011). They go ahead to point out that the root of any romance is love. This over-emphasis on love in this generation is encouraged by the media that tells stories, sings songs and writes books about how true love conquers all, is ultimately fulfilling, brings a never-ending wealth of happiness and is rarely marred by significant conflict. As beautiful a picture that is, it does not happen that way in real life. However, the tantalising and intriguing images which are seen by these people give them a certain picture on how romance should be. These people get disappointed when they realise that sometimes romance gets boring.

The appeal of fantastic love stories is undeniable. (Galloway, 2011).

According to Bachen and Illouz, the contemporary portrayals of romantic
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love are a “ visual affair”, reiterating the fact that where the written word may fall short, images impressed upon us can elicit strong emotional arousal. They go ahead to explain that mediated images and representations-such as those used on television, in films and adverts- “ evoke strong mechanisms of identification, are intensely realistic and are the privileged discourse of sexual and romantic desire “ giving them an air of credibility.” (Bachen & Illouz, 1996). Galican points out that the source of much appeal is the absolution of any real personal responsibility in a romantic relationship. (Galician, 2009). 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 armour as is in the case of stories like Rapunzel, Snow White and so on. As people get attached to these images of romance from the media, they begin to yearn for a romance that is filled with happiness and personal fulfilment. When it does not happen this way, these people believe that love is gone and this has led to the end of beautiful relationships that would have created ultimate happiness for both parties (Kircher, 2011).

I will investigate, using relevant literature, and find out to what extent epic love stories affect our understanding of love in real life. I will then outline my proposed methodology which will be used and I will give the potential implications.

Literature Review

Movies as mass communication

Many epic love stories are produced to the public in the form of movies. When one thinks of movies, the cinema immediately springs to mind. Over the years the cinema has been a neutral destination where couples go on dates, single people look for romance, friends go to relax, or to just have good family fun. According to Matzkin (1999) cited in Galloway (2011) movie audiences have become more “fragmented” and “homogenous” since the cinema’s inception and are “largely composed of young movie goers between the ages of 12 and 29” (Galloway, 2011). In the USA and Canada alone, multitudes numbering approximately 1, 343, 000, 000, visit the cinemas each year. (Motion Picture Association of America, 2013). However more and more people are beginning to reduce their movie going because they would rather rent movies and stay at home for free rather than pay at the cinema. Also staying at home saves time and energy as mobility is reduced.

The advancement of technology has made the movie watching experience a lot better and more engaging. With the creation of 3D TV screens and surround sound system, movie viewers are able to have and enjoy the cinema experience in the comfort of their homes. According to Anne Jackel ‘... powerful players in the film industry argued that a larger number of screens would provide greater diversity and more choice. (Albertazzi & Cobley, 2010). She goes on to point that digital distribution offers a wider choice and has the capability to promote cultural diversity. The use of the internet is another way people are able to access these movies. With the ability to stream videos online, infrequent theater goers are able to watch newly released movies in the comfort of their own homes. With the furtherance of

digital technology, viewers are susceptible to watch these movies and allow themselves be fed with different love myths.

Love Myths

“ A basic function of the media is the creation of representation or simulations- reproduced versions of reality” (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002).

There are certain themes or rather myths that are usually present in romantic stories which has an effect on the audience. Cassady Green (2013) points out that the audience often leaves the movie theatre yearning for a love similar to the one on the silver screen. She goes ahead to explain the problems involved as women and adolescents begin to expect similar qualities in their own love life, many of which are improbable or even unobtainable in reality.

One prevalent myth in love stories is the notion of the soul mate. Two parties being “ destined” or “ made” for one another. These stories or movies leads to both soulmates finding each other. In the movie “ *Down To Earth* (Weitz & Weitz, 2001), Lance played by Chris Rockrides is riding on his bike when he spots Sontee(Regina King). They both share a moment of attraction.

Unfortunately he is hit and killed by a truck, prematurely. To fix the mistake he is offered the body of an old grouchy unloving billionaire. When he sees Sontee at the billionaire’s house, he believes that Sontee is his soulmate and hence agrees to take the body of Charles Wellington III, – just to be with her.

In the short while before he is killed, Lance and Sontee fall in love while Lance is still in the body of the old man. Even after he is killed and he comes back as another person, Joe Guy, who is not supposed to remember anybody

from Lance's past, he is still able to make some sort of connection with Sontee and the movie ends with both of them going out for coffee. This reiterates the myth of soulmates: no matter what happens both parties are destined to end up together. Cassidy Green (2013) observes that "soulmates is a notion that can be particularly detrimental to real life relationships. This is because viewers are led to believe that they can have a one of a kind relationship which is special and unlike no one else's. The likelihood of this happening is very slim and this goes a long way in explaining the impact these stories have on the viewer. Also there are instances where one person has incredibly strong feelings for someone, a "love epiphany" so to say. These movies give viewers the impression that it is not strange for someone to suddenly get strong feelings of love for another person. This has the power to lead to the dissatisfaction of one's own love life due to the high expectations that viewers have for their relationships which are demonstrated in popular films.

Another love myth is the notion of 'love at first sight'. According to Gallician (2004) cited by Galloway (2011), "In the "reel" world, there is, in fact, "such a thing as love at first sight". 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." (Galloway, 2011). This myth already conditions the mind of the viewer to believe that if in real life, a scenario where they come in contact with other people for the first- if that moment does not contain

characteristics of a “ love at first sight” moment, then the relationship is not meant to be.

Another myth that we are shown in romantic stories is the idea that ‘ all you need is love’. (Galician, 2009) This is when people begin to behave out of reason just because of love. According to Galloway (2011), “ characters in television shows and movies give up or alter their own systems of belief in exchange for affection”. Characters in these stories believe that ‘ problems will work themselves out in the name of love’ (Galloway, 2011). An example is *The Little Mermaid* (Clements & Musker, 1989) where the protagonist, Ariel chooses to trade her voice for human parts just because she fell in love with Prince Eric. At the end of the movie, she gets her voice and still stays a human. This gives viewers the idea that because of love, you are able to have your cake and eat it. In the story of *Snow White*, where she had eaten the fruit and had gone into a deep sleep. It was an act of love, a kiss from a prince that broke the spell and woke her up and the “ lived happily ever after”. The 2013 film “ *Frozen*” is another example of how love is the ultimate. After plunging the kingdom into a never ending winter, Elsa finally realises that love is the way to end the problem. (Buck & Lee, 2013).

Another myth that is portrayed in the romantic stories is the idea that “ the love of a good woman can change a man from a “ beast” in to a “ prince” (Galician, 2009). An example is the movie *Beauty and The Beast* (Trousedale & Wise, 1991). Through the ‘ power of love’ and the “ goodness of her heart” Belle was able to change the scary, abusive, monstrous Beast into a handsome loving prince. According to Mary-Lou Galician, (2009), “ Belle’s attempts to reform her captor would be most unwise in real life. We cannot

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change others- especially not abusive “ heroes” who have a good heart inside if only the woman can be “ good enough” to bring it out. This fallacy underlies much domestic violence.”

Social Cognitive Theory

This is a theory that suggests that individuals commit to memory behaviours they have observed to be later used as models on which to base their own behaviour. (Green, 2013). These behaviours are more likely to be modeled when they have been modeled by accomplished people whom the world agrees with and if the outcome of the behaviour appeals to the audience. When we talk about romantic stories in this case, the theory suggests that the audience may actively observe the behaviour within relationships depicted by the media in order to gain understanding in how they themselves could behave in their own relationships. (Green, 2013). This theory works for fashion trends also. If a celebrity decides to make a fashion choice, chances are that trend will take off and everyone will begin to dress as such. An example is David Beckham. Over the years, he has managed to set trends for young men, especially in the UK when it comes to hairstyles. According to SS, (SS, 2009)“ Beckham’s different hairdos are talked about just as much as his soccer skills, and a new season often means a great new style.”

Proposed Methodology

I plan to organise a focus group comprising of people from different courses at my university. In this focus group, the main theme will be my topic: How love stories affect our understanding of love and romance in real life. We

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would also be discussing other questions like “ what do you think is the reason why people believe the notions embedded within these stories and also what they feel about the importance of language within stories. I plan to do this because I would like to find out

According to Galloway(2011) content analyses of romantic media are useful. I would implement this methodology because one may find that the nature of modern movies has evolved to represent realistic relationships or regressed, depicting only mythic love stories (Galloway, 2011).

Also I am planning to conduct an interview with members of a book club and get their views on romance from romantic books they have all read. In addition to organising the focus group, I plan to make use of questionnaires to carry out a survey. My aim of the questionnaires is to find out which gender is easily persuaded or more prone to believe the romantic myths given to us by media producers. I intend to utilise the questionnaire used by Lauren Galloway (2011) in her article. ‘ Does Movie viewing cultivate unrealistic expectations about love and marriage’ as a guideline in building my own survey questionnaires.

I would use the results and findings I have gathered to develop a series of recommendations concerning love stories and their ability to deceive us into believing something that we are not supposed to.

So these are the three methodologies I intend to use to tackle this research: focus group and interviews, content analysis and discourse analysis. The Association of Qualitative Research (AQR, 2013) defines the Focus group/interviews as a “ term often applied to a group discussion carried out

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for market research purposes. Participants unknown to each other are brought together, in a particular neutral location, for the specific purpose of discussing an issue, or responding to ideas or materials of interest to the client of the research.” In this case, focus groups are important because they are useful in finding out an audience’s opinion on the representation of romance in movies. Content analysis is another interesting way because it shows how often something is represented. Satu Elo and Helvi Kyngas (2007) define content analysis as a method of analysing documents. Content analysis allows the researcher to test theoretical issues to enhance understanding of the data. (Elo & Kyngas, 2007) In this case, it is important to know how often romance is represented in the movies and stories. Finally, discourse analysis/semiotics can be defined as explicit, systematic account of structures, strategies or processes of text or talk in terms of theoretical notions developed in any branch of the field. (Dijk, 2013) exists to find out what the representation means.

Videography

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