2010

How T.V. Promotes an Unrealistic Image of Romantic Relationships

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Running head: UNREALISTIC IMAGES OF ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

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Thesis Project

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Media Communications and Training

Governors State University

University Park, IL

2010

Abstract

This study aims to explore and prove that media (as defined in T.V. sitcoms and dramas) portrays an unrealistic expectation that is placed on romantic relationships. More specifically, it can affect the way people think and behave when it comes to marriages and serious relationships. Some may begin to compare their present relationship with a romantic relationship within the sitcoms and dramas. This study will be used to promote awareness when making conscious and sensible decisions in regards to choosing partners. This will be done by conducting surveys that will exhibit the direct emotional effect of sitcoms and dramas on adolescents ranging from 15-18 years of age and young adults 20-23. The findings used are derived from current T.V. sitcoms and dramas, with further consideration as to its effects on age, gender, race, and marital status.

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Introduction

The media has played a major role in American society, especially within family households. Comparing marriage to now and 30 years ago, the American traditional morals and values have changed and the fear of commitment has developed and increased. 30 years ago, sex before marriage and having a child outside of marriage was stigmatized and was not discussed in the home or anywhere else. Now, unmarried sex on T.V. is seen on almost every sitcom and/or drama and there are many characters playing the single parent role. Characters on sitcoms and dramas 30 years ago were married couples that were in committed long-term relationships usually had families, as in *The Brady Bunch* a 1970s TV sitcom as well as *The Cosby Show,* a late 1980s sitcom. The media overall has portrayed these romantic relationships and/or marriages in both positive and negative ways, but have "glorified" unreasonably idealistic romantic relationships and marriages. This area of research has not been ignored. "There are several scholars Furman & Simon, 1999; Larson, Clore, & Wood, 1999; Laursen & Jensen-Campbell, 1999, [who while] investigating adolescent's romantic development have mentioned the potential influence[s] of [romantic relationships] media portrayals" (as cited in Eggermont, 2004, p.245). This study will demonstrate how the media's role (specifically television sitcoms and dramas) helps form adolescents' and young adults' romantic misconceptions. The intention to this study is to help explain why people look to the media for answers when it comes to relationships. Also, the study helps explains why the media portrays romantic relationships unrealistically.

Literature Review

T.V. sitcoms and dramas have been a part of television history since the television box was created. Television sitcoms and dramas have become very popular. According to Kim and Oliver (2006), "Love themes in media entertainment are very prevalent and appeal to many media audience[s] across various age groups" (p.2). That is why it is believed that television promotes unrealistic images of relationships. "Media seem[s] to play supporting and assisting roles for coping and buffering against negative affective states eliciting from unstable romantic relationships" (Kim & Oliver, 2006). When people watch unstable romantic relationships they may feel that they can relate to those characters or may even feel that their unstable relationships are supposed to be the way they see the characters on television. Because it is on television so it must be true.

The fact that romantic relationships are portrayed unrealistically on T.V., only confirms what we are told as children by family and friends how our future will and should be. In some cases we are told fantasy stories in which people begin to develop a structured way on how a romantic relationship is supposed to work. Once people are exposed to television sitcoms and dramas, they began to believe and fantasize how their relationships should be because most people (depending on time spent watching television) begin to believe what they see on television as well as being told the fantasy stories from our family members and friends.

Conversely, it is still uncertain why and how people in continual romantic relationships may perhaps apply media content in television sitcoms and dramas to their own lives. "For example, it could be that viewers use romantic media content as one way

to fulfill their emotional needs and therefore, exposure to romantic TV content could at the same time promote the development of vicarious romantic relationships with favorite mediated character[s]" (Rehkoff, 2005). On average when people watch sitcoms and/or dramas, the sitcom or drama can bring clarity to a person's romantic relationship that may be having problems. Subsequently when watching a specific show of characters that are in a romantic relationship and having the same or similar problem, it may negatively affect the person watching it. If this reasoning is correct, Zillmann's mood management theory (1988) nicely fits into these affect-dependent media selections and enjoyment. When couples are watching a sitcom and/or drama, the show is typically about a couple that is romantically involved with each other and experiences a fairytale event. It may be found that women are falling into mood management theory because now the woman in the relationship is telling her spouse or partner that she wants their relationship to be exactly what they have seen in the show that they were watching.

Television sitcoms and dramas like *The Game, Sex and the City, and Girlfriends* etc. are geared towards women who are experiencing romantic relationship problems. However, some of the problems may be unrealistic. For example, *Girlfriends* is a TV sitcom that revolves around the friendship of four African-American women that live four different lifestyles. Throughout the seasons these women explore different trials and tribulations that most women face today, such as relationships, family, friends and other hot-topics that universally interest women. Some of the women in the sitcom sometimes portray realistic romantic relationship issues that real women face in today's society, but when it comes to solving the issue, it becomes very unrealistic. For example, in season 7 episode 18 of *Girlfriends*, William and Monica, a newlywed couple, separated right after

their wedding because William told Monica that he had doubts about them getting married before the wedding but he told her those feelings soon went away once they had gotten married. Monica got very upset and decided to go back to Chicago, which is her hometown, to recollect her thoughts and decide if she wanted to stay married. The main characters, Joan, Lynn, and Mya, who are Williams' close female friends, decided to help William by flying to Chicago to go help save their friends' fledgling marriage and fly her back to L.A. Monica was convinced to fly back to L.A. by William's friends also because Monica had been cut off from her parents' money and had nothing to lean on besides her marriage. Once they all were in L.A. Monica tried talking to her husband William but it did not go well because she did not want to admit that she was also in the wrong for just leaving without working out their situation. Eventually, at the end of the episode, Joan (the main lead character) called a meeting with William and Monica (as well as Lynn and Mya as support) to explain to William and Monica that they should be together because they love each other. The newlywed couple listened to their friends and agreed and the couple was back together again all within one episode. In real life situations, couples cannot expect that their friends will be their relationship counselors. Real people do not have that kind of time, money, or resources.

Real women and some men have taken these shows and the episodes that they have seen and try to relate it to their lives and may try to emulate a similar situation that they may have seen on an episode of *Girlfriends*. Segrin and Nabi (2002) reported that adults who watch programs that contain many references to romantic relationships hold more idealized beliefs about marriage. Eggermont (2004) found in one study conducted by Haferkamp (1999) that "heavy viewers expect that partners need to empathize perfectly

with each other and read each other's thoughts for their romantic relationship to stand and succeed" (p. 246). Zillmann (1985) found that "individuals select media content to maximize pleasure or gratification and minimize pain or aversion, but their selections are made impulsively and mindlessly without awareness of choice criteria and without deliberate consideration of desirable effects" (Kim and Oliver et al., 2006). As a result, when someone has just had a tumultuous break up with a boyfriend and/or girlfriend, he/she makes media choices that relate to the recent break up without thinking about it. People tend to choose certain sitcoms or dramas that may relate to their life at that particular time. Rekhoff (2005) has found that it has also been suggested that "people who hold idealized views of marriage could be selectively exposing themselves to more romantic media content that is consistent with their already established ideas, indicating that audiences choose exposure to media messages that satisfy their social or emotional needs" (Hawkins, Pingree, Hitchon, Gorham, Kannaovakun, Gilligan, Radler, Kolbeins & Schmidt, 2001).

As adolescents go through their teenage years stages of life, that is when they begin to learn about being in love as well as learning how to deal with their emotions. "Emotional experiences are adaptive responses to various social events so young people's dynamic romantic relationships should be one of the major elicitors of various positive or negative affective reactions in their everyday lives "(Anderson & Guerrero, 1998). In other words, there should be some predictable patterns between individuals' romantic situations and their uses of various film genres featuring happy versus sad romance or non-romance (Kim and Oliver, 2006). Because adolescents are frequently the main target of a lot of sitcoms and certain dramas, they are far more susceptible to the unrealistic

messages.

From *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* to *Gossip Girl* the television portrayals of romantic relationships had some type of unrealistic chain of events. The *Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*'s main character, Will, was always known as a lady's man. Will had many unrealistic romantic situations. For example, in season 3 episode 5, Will goes to confront his baby cousin Nicky's boxing instructor Helena. He wanted to know why she is so nice to Nicky when he drops him off but so mean to him. While at the gym where Will drops of Nicky for a martial arts class Helena explains that men are jerks and he is intimidated by her because of her boxing profession. Will and Helena get into a slight boxing match at the gym, where Will blocks all of her throws. Helena was turned on by Will's defeat against her and says "that was really impressive, take me now!" Will and Helena became a monogamous couple for that episode. This can have an impact on adolescent because the show targets young adolescents and that is the age were they believe a lot of thing they see on television. So, they may think that "love at first sight" can happen anytime and anywhere.

According to a more current study by Simon, Bouchey, & Furman (2000), "Acquiring appropriate romantic skills and gaining confidence in sexual activities are believed to be significant developmental functions of adolescence" (Eggermont, 2004). Therefore, adolescents are looking to the media to learn how to understand the roles of a romantic relationship. Because adolescents are still in the early stages of learning about love and relationships, they are easily influenced and to imitated what they have learned from television. Research done by Osborn (2007) describes that television delivers its messages and reality into the homes of people from virtually every sub-cultural group,

and this reality is often inconsistent with the "objective" reality of the "real world." Osborn (2007), Eyal & Kunkel (2008), Sergin & Nabi (2002) and other researchers have provided evidence that television promotes unrealistic ideas of romantic relationships and that the viewing patterns of emerging adults view these unrealistic ideas and compare them to their real world. As identity development is rarely achieved by late-adolescence, the period of emerging adulthood is characterized by increased opportunities for self-exploration, especially in the areas of love, work, and worldviews (Eyal & Kunkel, 2008). "Baran (1976) contends an investigations [sic] on how several authors have hypothesized that young adolescents may even have few options other than to search for televised examples" (as cited in Eggermont, 2004, p. 246). The reason for this is that adolescents go through many different experiences when it comes to their sexuality and talking to their parents about sex and relationships is very hard to do. Adolescents even have a hard time talking to their peers because they don't want to seem inexperienced and immature. Adolescents and young adults turn to television as a sex and relationship advisor. Young adolescents should have programs at school that are about sex and relationships and how to cope within a romantic relationship because the majority of the time schools only teach about sex health and scientific sex classes.

There are not too many television sitcoms and dramas geared toward adolescents that do depict realistic situations about romantic relationships. For the most part, television shows that are geared towards adolescents have some type of impractical romantic relationship that adolescents may mimic or try to relate to the characters in those shows. The television show *Gossip Girl* is a show about a group of wealthy celebrity teens or kids of celebrities that live in New York. The first season of the first

three episodes of '*Gossip Girl*' show romantic relationships between groups of friends. The majority of these episodes portray about two to three unmarried monogamous unrealistic romantic relationships. These portrayals are unrealistic because they show romantic adolescent relationships that are so advanced, monogamous, and experienced. With past research, it has been learned that when children emerged into adolescents they are at the beginning stages of learning about sexuality, the opposite sex, and romantic relationships, quite the opposite of what is being portrayed.

When watching television that is marketed towards adolescents and young emerging adults, Greenberg (1993) found that television might consequently have a high functional value regarding sex and relationships (Eggermont et al., 2004). Family values are frequently superseded by romantic impulses. Therefore, adolescent and emerging adults are being influenced by what they see on television and may begin to think that is how a romantic relationship should be. Accordingly, the handfuls of studies on television's contribution to romantic conceptions that have been published suggest that a relationship between both variables may exist (e.g., Bachen & Illouz, 1996; Illouz, 1998; Signorielli, 1991). As a result, it's not just women looking at television and believing unrealistic ideas about romance but some men may be affected by it as well.

According to Eggermont (2004), adolescents look at romantic relationships as a new context for several significant features of an individual's personal life, such as affiliation, attachment, and sexuality. Eggermont (2004) also explained adolescents may be especially [pre]occupied with attempts to find out what to expect from romantic partners. As identity development is rarely achieved by late-adolescence, the period of emerging adulthood is characterized by increased opportunities for self-exploration,

especially in the areas of love, work, and worldviews (Eyal and Kunkel, et al., 2008). Many adolescents and young adults might turn to the media to look for answers for their curiosity. The media can be and has been a major influence on life choices.

Sherry (2005) found that "one of the implications of adolescents watching several hours of relationship-saturated television everyday [sic] is that they may learn about relationships from television" (p.4). Adolescents may look to television sitcoms and dramas for answers about their own personal romantic relationship without realizing that the sitcoms and/or dramas are unrealistic. Unrealistic is dealing with thoughts or dreams that are unreasonable. Bachen and Illouz (1996) conducted a survey in which they found that 94% of young people looked to television, and 90% to the movies to learn about romantic love. In contrast, only one third said they looked to their mothers and 17% looked to their fathers to learn about romance (Sherry, et al., 2005, pg.4).

A theoretical explanation for how the media affects viewers is provided by the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001), which explains that people learn by imitating the behaviors of people they like or admire, and that this connection is particularly strong when the model is attractive to the person as is frequently the case in teen programming (Sherry, et al., 2005, pg.4). Many teens of the 1990s watched and indulged themselves in the television sitcoms *"Save by the Bell"* as well as *"Family Matters"* and within those shows there was always a main character who was very attractive and had many different romantic relationships, which teens tried to emulate. For example in *Family Matters* Eddie, one of the main characters, was the cool popular teen who always had different romantic relationship with different girls. Adolescents can be negatively affected because they want to be like that character Eddie who always had perfect romantic relationships

that never seemed to fail on his end.

Some television sitcoms and dramas, like *"The Game"* are geared towards late adolescences and young adults. The show is about three women, Melondy, Tasha, (who are African-American) and Kelly (who is Caucasian). These three women have three different types of relationships with well-known football players. Kelly is married to the veteran football player, Melondy is the girlfriend of the rookie who became his fiancée within the later seasons, and Tasha is the manager of her son who is always with a lot of women and also lives with her. The situations that the romantic couples went through were more realistic, but unfortunately demonstrated very unrealistic problem solving situations. For example, during season four's last episode, Melondy finally gets her dream wedding even though she went through some trials and tribulations with her soon to be husband Derwin. Derwin in previous episodes had cheated on Melondy and also got his ex-girlfriend pregnant (who he was dating when he and Melondy split for a little while). During Melondy and Derwin's wedding, his cell phone rings and it is his pregnant ex-girlfriend telling him that she is in labor. Derwin decides in the middle of the wedding to stop the entire wedding and attends his son's birth. At the end of the episode the couple got married at the hospital and they live happily ever after. Realistically, getting married in a hospital right after the grooms baby was born by another woman is not something a bride would have happen, especially after spending thousands of dollars to have a wedding.

Sherry (2005) found in her research that the world of adolescent television provides a notable set of norms about romantic relationships and that romantic couples generally do not experience conflict, suggesting that relationships are easy to maintain. "Assuming

that romantic TV's portrayals of relationships are based on some of the most popular myths about love and romance (e.g., love at first sight, love conquers all), it is feasible to think that the more true-to-life people perceive TV's portrayals of romantic relationships to be, the more romantic expectations they will develop" (Rehkoff, 2005). People want to live the happily ever after princess stories that we have been told as a child. Television sitcoms and dramas have shown those happily ever after portrayals and have shown them in a more true-to-life adult content. More sexual content has been shown in monogamous romantic relationships on television sitcoms and dramas, which also makes things more believable and real.

It was found in Sherry's (2005) research that in television sitcoms and television dramas, females are more likely to use evaluative behaviors that paint their partners negatively through patronizing comments, chastisement, or defensive actions. Males respond by using integrative behaviors such as apologizing or changing their behavior (Sherry, 2005). For example, when a woman sees an idealized romantic relationship on television, she may make comments to her partner about how she wants her relationship to be like the one that is played on TV or may even bring up a situation when her partner may have hurt her in the past and he needs to change and be more like the couple on television. Consequently the male will usually respond back by apologizing or changing their behavior just so he can avoid conflict with his partner. Many people look at television to learn about things that may happen throughout their own lives. "In fact, there are multiple indicators of idealized romantic expectations, and one of them is the amount of time people spend ruminating about romance" (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). Ruminating about romance can happen when a group of women or men that are close

friends talk about their past, present, or future romantic relationships and explains how they would like their relationship to be and will bring up characters from a television show they have seen and compares their relationships to the characters on television. These situations tend to happen all the time over and over again throughout peoples' lives.

Rehkoff (2005) discovered in previous studies that argue exposure to specific media content might influence individuals' romantic expectations and concluded that media in general, and more specifically romantic TV shows (e.g., romantic comedies, reality shows on relationships) depict idealized images of romantic relationships (Rehkoff, et al., 2005, pg.3). Earlier a television drama call *"Gossip Girl"* was brought up. *"Gossip Girl"* is a prime example on how romantic expectations can be falsely advertised. Romance in *"Gossip Girl"* shows a lot of lust, love, and money. It is mostly targeting young women between the ages of 16-25 and giving them a romantic expectation that most men that you date will be rich and a socialite and the romance that people go through is easy. Some of the situations that the couples go through on the television series seem to have it easy and if they do have problems the problems are solved within a day or two. "Assuming that romantic TV's portrayals of relationships are based on some of the most popular myths about love and romance (e.g., love at first sight, love conquers all), it is feasible to think that the more true-to- life people perceive TV's portrayals of romantic relationships to be, the more romantic expectations they will develop" (Rehkoff, 2005).

Taylor (2005) found evidence that suggests that sexual television content influences viewer[']s knowledge, attitudes and beliefs. Attitudes and beliefs about sex are also

apparently linked to media use. People who watch more sexual television content make elevated estimates of the real-world frequency of sexual behaviors depicted on television, including extramarital affairs, sex without love, bragging about sex (males only), being parent to illegitimate children, and using sex for favors (Taylor, 2005, pg.1).

Researchers Adoni & Mane (1984) and Gerbner (1972) found that televised representations of social realities reflect ideological bents in their portrayal of human nature, social relations, and the norms and structure of society (Bandura, 2001, pg. 281). Television gives you an overall view and expectation of how life can be. Even though TV sitcoms and dramas are dramatically portrayed unrealistically but it is entertaining for people to watch, believe and fantasize. In pervious laboratory studies done by Flerx, Fidler, & Rogers (1976) and O'Bryant & Corder-Bolz (1978) that had "converging evidence that television portrayals shape viewers' beliefs" (Bandura, 2001, pg. 282). Through his social cognitive theory of mass communications research study done in 2001 Bandura explained; "that to see the world as the televised messages portray it is to harbor some misconceptions". "Verification of personal conceptions against televised versions of social reality can thus foster some collective illusions" (Bandura, 2001,pg. 282). Television has influenced us all one way or the other when it comes to romantic relationships. Romance is just like shopping for clothes, you see it, you begin to imagine it if you had it, you being to desire it, then you end up buying it because you believe it will make you look and feel good that you are in the norm of fashion.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This study was created to examine why adolescents and young adults think and behave in certain ways once they watch programs with romantic relationships played on

television. More specifically, it looks at TV sitcoms and dramas, and how the characters relationships are portrayed unrealistically, the sexual content, and how people use these unrealistic relationships and relate them to their own personal lives.

RQ1: Why and what makes us look at media for answers about romantic relationships and marriages?

Additionally, this study examines whether or not adolescents and young adults go to the media to look for answers about romantic relationships and to get ideas on how their relationship should be. It is known that people turn to television and watch romantic relationships that are similar to their own, and to mimic the characters that are in these romantic relationships. It was found in a study done in 1983 by Rubin when examining people's motivations for TV viewing, it was argued that "sometimes people watch TV to get away from their problems, tasks or other people, and he concluded, this escapist viewing could lead [viewer's] them to vicarious participation in the lives of fictional characters through the development of parasocial relationships" (as cited in Rehkoff, 2005, p.12).

RQ2: Why does the media portray romantic relationships and marriages in certain ways?

The media tends to give the viewers romantic situations that may seem ideal but gives you what the reality really is and how hard it can be when it comes being in a romantic relationship. Certainly, most people, when they are young children, grow up learning fairytale stories about love and marriage. It is known that the media shows these stories and people watch these stories. But, the media gives many people false hope about romantic relationships while getting outstanding ratings because that is what people are

interested in. Some people may began to believe what they see on television. How much a person watches television may also have an effect on their romantic beliefs.

RQ3: Does the media have an effect on the way we think and behave when it comes to our own personal romantic relationships and/or marriages?

Previous findings indicate that romantic relationships in TV sitcoms and dramas might have an effect on people in their romantic beliefs. It was also indicated that discrepancies between romantic beliefs and real romantic experiences generated strong feelings of discouragement in one or both partners because people holding more romantic expectations tend to evaluate their current relationships in terms of these expectations (Murray and Holmes, 1997).

Methodology

Participants

Half of the participants are high school students from the ages of 15-18 years, at a medium size, diverse high school in the Midwest of the United States. The other half of the participants are undergraduate students that are enrolled in the communications program, ages 19-22 years, from a small, diverse university in the Midwest of the United States.

Procedure

The research that has been designed is a pre-survey and a post-survey about what individuals watch, about their personal romantic and marriage relationships, and how the media affects them when watching T.V. shows containing romantic relationships. The

survey is a self-administered questionnaire that will take about 10-15 minutes to complete. It will determine how people feel when watching television sitcoms and dramas that have romantic relationships and how it may affect them when it comes to their own past, present, and/or future romantic relationship and/or marriage.

A workshop has been created where small and large groups watch a variety of television sitcoms and dramas that have a focus on characters in a romantic relationship and/or marriage and to see if the workshop will have an affect on how they perceive romantic relationship on television. Thru viewing TV shows, lecture, and discussions (both small and large group); we will determine what is real versus fantasy so that it will help us make better life decisions. The surveys will also help determine if the media portrays unrealistic images of romantic relationships.

Discussion

It was found that the media in general portrays romantic relationships unrealistically. It is found that many people tend to watch certain television sitcoms and dramas that relate or are very similar to their own lives. It was also found that people watch unrealistic romantic relationships on television because they tend to fantasize about having a relationship like the one that is being portrayed on television. Adolescent and young adults seem to be most influenced by programs. The results from these studies can help people by teaching and educating students about the differences between realistic romantic relationships and unrealistic romantic relationships on television and how they affect their expectations.

Previous studies argue that "exposure to specific media content might influence

individuals' romantic expectations (Alexander, 1985; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Signorielli, 1991) and concluded that media in general, and more specifically romantic TV shows (e.g., romantic comedies, reality shows on relationships) depict idealized images of romantic relationships" (Alexander, 1985; Segrin & Nabi, 2002).

The results found will help students that take the workshop understand why the media tends to portray romantic relationships unrealistically. In order for people to understand this, there could be workshops' and classes throughout high school years as well as college years. These workshops will be for students that are interested in learning about media communications as well as learn about romantic relationships. The class will be entertaining and keep students attention throughout because group projects and discussion will be conducted as well as videos shown about romantic relationships within the media. Most people enjoy talking about their romantic relationships and the media (especially television) has become a part of everyone's lives regardless of how much of it is being watched. Having a class will help educate and also be something exciting to take and to enjoy.

Conclusion

Overall, television is a part of the majority of people's mainstream entertainment. Television has been known as an educator that teaches people about different types of subjects. To go back and answer research question 1 it asks: Why and what makes us look at media for answers about romantic relationships and marriages? According to the evidence in research studies, people look to the media as a teacher to help answer questions about their own relationships. Although romantic relationships are portrayed

unrealistically, they began to believe that is how all-romantic relationships either works or should work.

From the television sitcom shows *"I love Lucy"* and *"The Cosby Show"* to *"The Game"* and *"Gossip Girl"* romantic relationships have been portrayed in some way unrealistically. Research question 2 asked: Why does the media portray romantic relationships and marriages in certain ways? As a child we are told the popular fairytale stories and learn at a young age about the popular myths (love at first site, etc.), love has been a part of life. The media likes to imitate or recreate what we have learned as children by creating characters in romantic relationships. In most television shows and dramas those shows have shown a couple that is in a romantic relationship, and the show may revolve around that particular romantic relationship or many different type of romantic relationships.

When talking about the affects of television sitcoms and dramas with the aspect of romantic relationships, research question 3 asks: After watching a television program that has a romantic couple does the media have an affect on the way we think and behave when it comes to our own personal romantic relationships and/or marriages? There has been evidence found that states it does. It has been shown in past researches that television has given its audience the idealized romantic relationships that makes some people feel that is how a romantic relationship should be.

Television has been a big part of everyone's lives for at least the last 50 years and has influenced us all one way or the other. Romantic relationships have been around for as long as mankind has been known. In the Twenty First Century, Television Drama has changed in the way in which sexual affection is displayed in relationships on television.

Women and men are wearing less clothing, exhibiting more graphic sexual behavior on television. Many adolescents and young adults believe this is the type of behavior that is accepted in public because it is seen on television. Adolescents and young adults must be provided with the appropriate influences and information in order to have a successful relationship. I strongly believe that the options I have outlined previously, will serve as a guide and road map for adolescents and young adults in understanding the difference between unrealistic and realistic expectations in a romantic relationship. In today's society, it is important to educate our younger generation on the reality of being in a romantic relationship. Entering relationships with realistic expectations should go a long way in increasing healthy, stable unions and significantly lower the divorce rates.

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Romantic Relationships In The Media

And How They Are Portrayed

Workshop

Tonoah P. Merritt

Romantic Relationships Workshop
THE TRAINING PROGRAM:

Introduction to the Course, Attendance, and Workshop Objective (20 minutes)

-Introduction of the Lecturer and short overview of the course.

    A. Take attendance

    B. Opening Exercise participants will complete pre-survey.

    C. General explanation of breaks, bathrooms, start/end times etc.

-Introduction: Students will go around the room and introduce themselves.

    A. Name?

    B. Educational Background?

    C. Why did you choose this class?

    D. What are your expectations for the class?

    E. What do you want to benefit from the class?

Module Overview (10 minutes):

-Ask students: Why are romantic relationships so important in our lives? Why do we watch television that has romantic relationships?

We are going to......

    1. Learn about the different types of romance relationships.
    2. Learn about differences between television sitcoms and dramas.
    3.We will discuss why television sitcoms and dramas portray romantic relationships in an unrealistic way.
    4. We will discuss why people relate and compare their real life relationships to the ones on television
    5. Learn how to have a healthy realistic romantic relationship without turning to the media for answers.

Discussion of the Syllabus and Assignments (10 minutes)

Terminology Discussion (40 minutes)
We will begin with learning and discussing the different types and definitions of romantic relationships.

> ***Romantic Relationship:*** usually implies an expression of one's love, or one's deep emotional desires to connect with another person.

> For Example: A Man and Woman who is dating one another and nobody else. (Boyfriend/Girlfriend is usually the term used)

> ***Monogamous Relationship:*** is the state of having only one sexual partner at any one time.

> ***Social monogamy:*** refers to two persons/creatures who lives together, have sex with each other, and cooperate in acquiring basic resources such as food, clothes, and money. Also Known as: Cohabitation

> ***Sexual monogamy:*** refers to two persons/creatures who remain sexually exclusive with each other and have no outside sex partners.

> ***Genetic monogamy:*** refers to two partners that only have offspring with each other.

> ***Marital monogamy:*** refers to marriages of only two people.

We will now discuss and learn about the different types of media and what part of the media this workshop will focus on.

> ***Media:*** is a source of information and entertainment that reaches a large audience.

> ***Television:*** is a widely used telecommunication medium for transmitting and receiving moving images that is accompanied by sound.

> ***Television Sitcoms:*** Typically a 30 minute seasonal television show, that is a scripted comedy drama that have one or two main characters. Sometimes the sitcoms have serious dramatized moments but are more entertaining and fun to watch.

> For example: *"Friends", "Girlfriends", "Everybody Loves Raymond", "The Game", "Everybody Hates Chris", "Seinfeld"*

> ***Television Dramas:*** Typically a 1 hour show that is scripted and (normally) fictional. Dramas are usually soap operas or 1-hour series.

> For example: *"General Hospital", "One Life to Live", "Day of Our Lives", "CSI", "Nip Tuck", "Sex in the City"*

Reality TV: Reality television is a genre of television programming in which the fortunes of "real life" people (as opposed to actors, or fictional characters) are followed.

For example: *"MTV Real World", "Keeping Up With the Kardashians", "The Real House Wives of New York", "MTV True Live", "Survivor", "The Apprentice"*

Movies: A showing of a film that is typically 2 or more hours long.

For Example: *"Titanic", "Dreamgirls", "Precious", "Dude Where's My Car?" "Fast and Furious"*

****Ask students if they have any questions on the terminology that was just discussed.

Activity 1- Small Group Discussion: "The effects of the Media" **(30 minutes)**
(PASS OUT INSTRUCTION GUIDE FOR STUDENTS)

The purpose of this group discussion and project is to see if students understand the terminology discussed previously. As well as learn about themselves and others on why we turn to the media for answers about our own personal romantic relationships and how it affects real romantic relationships.

- Form small groups to discuss how romantic relationships on TV sitcoms affect real romantic relationships. (Sharing personal stories)

- Participants create a poster board (provided by the instructor) the participants will divide poster board in half. One side will have TV sitcoms and dramas that portray unrealistic romantic relationships and the other side with TV sitcoms and dramas with realistic romantic relationships. The participants will then put under each program and explain why they chose those programs.

- The groups will also present their poster board

BREAK (15 minutes)

Activity 2-Video: "What love looks like in the media" **(80 minutes)**

The purpose of this activity is for students to be able to identify and see different romantic relationships on television sitcoms and dramas. We will discuss the different situations shown and discuss why they are portrayed unrealistically.

A. Participants will watch different video clips of romantic relationships with various TV sitcoms (participants will be required to take notes)

B. Participants will then watch different video clips of romantic relationship with various dramas

C. As a group participants will discuss reactions and thoughts of each clip.

BREAK FOR LUNCH (60 MINUTES) .

Interactive Lecturette: "Processing romance from television" **(50 minutes)**

1. Media Roles

According to Kim and Oliver (2006), "Love themes in media entertainment are very prevalent and appeal to many media audience[s] across various age groups" that is why it is believed that television sitcoms and dramas portray romantic relationships unrealistically.

2. Life Experiences within the media

People tend to watch television sitcoms and dramas that similarly relate to their life or how they dream of their life being. Rekhoff in 2005 had found that it has also been suggested that people who hold idealized views of marriage could be selectively exposing themselves to more romantic media content that it is consistent with their already established ideas, indicating that audiences choose exposure to media messages that satisfy their social or emotional needs.

Ask the class:
1.Do you believe this is true? If so, why?
2.Why is the media showing that being in a romantic relationship such an easy task for people?

I found an article online that I thought was very interesting and made some valid points on romantic relationships in the media.

Pass out Article Handout: Love at First Sight.....Is it Really? (Blogroll Entertainment Thoughts On Society Media)

Have some students read the Article out loud to the class.

Activity 3- Acting "Acting for non-Actors" (60 minutes)

The purpose of this activity is to demonstrate clarity of understanding of what unrealistic and realistic romantic relationships are when played in the media.

A. The students will be divided into groups of 2-3 persons. They will have 15 minutes as a group to practice each scene.

B. The instructor will provide one realistic scenario and one unrealistic scenario from popular TV sitcoms and/or dramas.

C. The group will act out each scenario (as if they were actors and actresses on TV) without giving away to the class if the scenario is realistic or unrealistic.

D. The Group will then tell the class which on was realistic and unrealistic and from what TV sitcom/drama show.

Recap (60 minutes)

Overview of the workshop

    A. Homework Assignment (Love Letter)
    B. Pass out Post-Survey

Activity 4-Love Letter "Dear Love and Media," (Drop off Letter to Communications Dept.)

For the final activity, you will need to write a one-page paper. The paper will actually be written in a letter format as if you were writing this to a person that you are or use to be in love with.

-Within the letter you need to talk about how you will now view romantic relationships on TV sitcoms and dramas.

-Will you view TV sitcoms and dramas differently or will you continue to watch it the same?

-What you have learned from the workshop? (Use some of the terminology that has been learned from the workshop).

-Do you think this will help you have a more healthy relationship?

-How will you view your own relationship now?

Pre-Survey
Please fill in or circle each question.

1. Please fill in your age: ____

2. Female or Male

3. Ethnic Background:
      Caucasian
      African American/Black
      Asian
      Native American
      Other:_____

4. Are you in a current romantic relationship?
____Yes, I'm married
____Yes, I'm currently in a serious relationship
____No, I'm just dating
____No, I'm not dating

5. What type of sitcoms do you watch?
      Comedy
      Drama
      Action
      Other:_____

6. How many hours do you spend watching television sitcoms a day?
      0-2 hours
      3-5 hours
      6-8 hours
      9-more hours

7. Do you think television sitcoms are real life scenarios?
      Yes
      Sometimes
      No

8. Do you relate television sitcoms to your own life **past romantic relationship** experiences?
      Yes
      Sometimes
      No

9. Do you relate television sitcoms to your own life **current romantic relationship** experiences?
      Yes
      Sometimes
      No

10. Do you think the characters that play in a romantic relationship on television sitcoms portray that relationship in a realistic way?
      Yes
      Sometimes
      No

Activity 1
The Affects Of The Media
Instructions

PART 1
1. Get into small groups of 3-4 persons

2. Discuss how romantic relationships on TV sitcoms and dramas affect real romantic relationships. You may share personal stories on the affects of your own romantic relationships.

PART 2
1. Create a poster board (provided by the instructor) and divide it in half. One side will be labeled realistic romantic relationships and the other side will be labeled unrealistic romantic relationships.

2. The group will come up with TV sitcoms and dramas that are believe to portray unrealistic romantic relationships and the other side with TV sitcoms and dramas with realistic romantic relationships.

3. Leave space under each TV sitcom and drama and explain in 3-4 sentences why they chose those programs.

PART 3
1. Groups will present their posters to the class once completed.

(Article 1)

A REFLECTION ON OUR SOCIETY…
A REFLECTION ON SOCIETY, HOW OUR SOCIETY IS DEPENDENT ON THE MEDIA IN ALL FORMS.

Love at First Sight … is it really?

Oh media … how I love thee. *sighs*

It is the oldest love myth we've all come to love and question.

Is there such a thing as *"love at first sight?"*

I've come to love Dr. Galician's research and once again, she nails it on the head. The media in all forms likes to convey this myth to the popular culture. Why? Sex sells. Emotion sells. Excitement sells. Plus they're far easier to portray and for the audience to follow then the slow progression of love.

A university survey towards men and women asked if there is such a thing as "love at first sight." Half agreed and the other didn't. The point is HALF did believe in the myth. On Bizjournal.com, they took an excerpt from the book "100% AMERICAN" by Daniel Evan Weiss and published by Poseidon Press. From that book there was a question of "love at first sight" and the statistic

showed 57% women believed in the love myth.

Dr. Galician mentions how the media would convey this myth by camera angles, panning in and out on the character slowly making the scene dramatic with emotion. Course we can't forget the multiple books, movies, music and shows on TV that has helped society underestimate what love is.

Here are some examples of "love at first sight" courtesy of the text "Love, Sex, & Romance in the Media."

Books – Gone with the Wind, Romeo & Juliet

Movies – Red of Roses; Cinderella; Snow White ... Bambie...etc; City of Angels; Coming to America; Footloose; The French Lieutenant's Woman; Moulin Rouge; Notting Hill; Out of Sight; Romeo & Juliet; South Pacific; Serendipity; Titanic; Wayne's World; The Wedding Planner; West Side Story

Recorded Music – Bewitched, Bothered, & Bewildered; I Love You; I Saw Her Standing There; Just One Look (That's All It Took); Lady in Red; Love at First Sight; Love in the Library

Television - 90210; Dharma & Greg; Family Matters; Full House; Mad About You; Melrose Place; Saved by the Bell; Sex and the City; Passions; Grey's Anatomy

Here's a blogger who as[has] absolute faith in "love at first sight." This blogger has been hearing "lust at first sight more often but won't deny that she still has faith, in fact she says, "I don't see why you can't fall in love at first sight. I guess I've **always been a believer** in it and no one has been able to change my mind about it."

There is one blogger who absolutely thinks "love at first sight" is a "crock of poop" in fact she says, "**love at first sight** is a shallow statement and should honestly be erased from the world's vocabulary." Gotta love that.

Post-Survey

Please fill in or circle each question.

1. Please fill in your age: _____

2. Female or Male

3. Ethnic Background:
    Caucasian
    African American/Black
    Asian
    Native American
    Other:_____

4. Are you in a current romantic relationship? (Please put an 'X' next to your answer)
____Yes, I'm married
____Yes, I'm currently in a serious relationship
____No, I'm just dating
____No, I'm not dating

5. Do you think the characters that play in a romantic relationship on television sitcoms portray romantic/marriage relationships in a **realistic** way?
    Yes
    Sometimes
    No
6. Do you think the characters that play in a romantic relationship on television sitcoms portray romantic/marriage relationships in an **unrealistic** way?
    Yes
    Sometimes
    No
7. When watching one of the TV sitcoms, did you relate that situation to your own past or current relationship?
    Yes

A little bit

Not at all

8. Do you judge your relationship based on what you have watched on television sitcoms?

Yes

Sometimes

No