

He Should Not Have Gone to Jared's: A Content Analysis Of 'Jared The Galleria of Jewelry' Commercials

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As the human race is diverse, romantic love takes on different characteristics for different people. In the 21st century, society is more accepting and understanding of the varying forms of romantic love that arise in reality, yet the media often show only one version. In a society so engulfed by media, many culturally accepted norms and values are frequently established and reinforced by the media's agenda. These norms and values are instilled within the psyche of the audience, consciously or not. Jewelry commercials are a prime example of how the media portrays romantic love. By studying the way Jared The Galleria Of Jewelry depicts romance in its commercials, this research concludes what people are taught by the media to expect in their own romantic relationships.

Romantic love is oft-introduced as a concept at a very young age. Children grow up watching many different Disney movies, all with the same plot: a beautiful damsel in distress is rescued by the handsome prince, they fall in love and live happily ever after. Cue the sunset and singing birds. Because these movies are widely regarded as classics, they may be considered part of the cultural identity to those that initially saw it and the children that the movies are passed down to. As viewers mature, there is little variation of this narrative with movies, with *The Notebook* (2004) and *Everything, Everything* (2017) serving as prime examples. In my research, I will analyze how romantic love is depicted in the commercials of Jared The Galleria of Jewelry.

Romance is made out to be a big deal in American culture. It is portrayed as being a key component to experiencing true happiness. As a result of the perceived bliss that derives from a romantic relationship, individuals make being in a romantic relationship one of their primary goals (Galloway,

Engstrom and Emmers-Sommer 2015). While the media plays a big role in creating these desires, they also impact what people expect once they are in a romantic relationship. Because of the lack of varying tales, people generally believe the representation of romance in media to be realistic instead of hyperbolic. If that is the case, many are out of luck.

Literature Review

Romantic love is a big area of interest in our society. There are many industries that tap into that appeal: books, advertising and film. Although people are constantly exposed to representations of romance, there is not much research about the effects of such exposure. The available research, however, indicates that portrayals of romance in the media perpetuate gender stereotypes (Galloway et al. 2015). It also reveals that depictions of romance create unrealistic expectations in the minds of viewers. Most of the research on this topic is quantitative and focuses on young teens and college students. Results

of this research show that there may be negative consequences to the media's presentations of romantic love (Eggermont 2004 and Johnson and Holmes 2009 and Galloway et al. 2015).

A. Role of Media

Media constantly surrounds people's lives. It has become one of the biggest influences in determining what behaviors and attitudes are socially acceptable. Potter (2011) defined the mass media effect as a change in outcome within a person or group due to the impact of a mass media message or messages. Such an effect deeply impacts the development of love (Hendrick and Hendrick 1986). Research demonstrates that imitations of romantic love in mass media can produce impractical ideas about the realities of love (Galloway et al. 2015). Researchers debate over whether this is due to cultivation theory or social cognitive theory. Cultivation theory proposes that people who watch television begin to believe it reflects the real world. Social cognitive theory suggests that people actively watch television to look for ways to behave. Eggermont (2004) found that, overall, television watching caused adolescents to have specific expectations for romance, which supports cultivation theory. However, Johnson and Holmes (2009) found that genre-specific exposure created such expectations, which supports the social cognitive theory. Currently, there is not enough research to determine which theory is most accurate.

B. Gender Stereotypes

Media does more than just create values; they also have the ability to reinforce and perpetuate hegemonic worldviews (Potter 2011). This can be observed in the perpetuation of stereotypes. In Johnson and Holmes' content analysis of Hollywood romantic comedies, they determined that male characters were almost always the ones to take the lead in the relationships by always being the ones to initiate interactions, give compliments, and make grand gestures of affection (2009:360). Women are conditioned to expect these behaviors from men. This explains why even though women have a more pragmatic love style – rational, practical – they still dream and fantasize about marriage more than men (Hendrick and Hendrick 1986 and Ogletree 2010 and Galloway et al. 2015). Ogletree discovered that

pragmatic love correlated positively with the desire for a traditional wedding, even though they are more associated with eros love – passionate, romantic (2010). In observing the media's promotion of weddings primarily to women, it is important we ask to what extent the media creates desires rather than illustrates pre-existing, common fantasies for women. Nevertheless, both men and women are constantly subjected to the media's interpretation of how each role should be carried out in a relationship. And so, continues the gendered stereotypes.

C. Fairytale Romance

In addition to stereotyping, the media also depicts romantic love in a very hyperbolic way. Couples' interactions are portrayed as extremely passionate and glamorous. Johnson and Holmes note that in romantic movies, relationships evolve to a deep level very quickly without much explanation as to why (2009). This leads to unrealistic expectations of meaningful relationships in a small amount of time. (Galloway et al. 2015) call it the "Wonderful World" view of love: people who watch romance movies expect their relationships to unfold in the same way as on the screen. Both Johnson and Holmes (2009) and Galloway et al. (2015) suspect that the Wonderful World effect will lead to frustration and disappointment when those expectations do not come to fruition. Eggermont (2004) notes that adolescents may be especially susceptible to being misled because they do not have many experiences of their own to compare with. Research findings showed similar results for college students who watched romantic films as also having more idealistic beliefs about relationships (Galloway et al. 2015). Mass media influences people directly and indirectly, in short-term ways and long-term ways, whether they are conscious of it or not (Potter 2011).

Depictions of romantic love are found throughout all forms of media. These representations oftentimes reinforce gender stereotypes and create standards that no relationship can measure up to. Although there is some research on this topic, there is still a lot to be explored. It has not yet been determined whether people expect the romance they see in the media because of cultivation theory or social cognitive theory. Also, the majority of studies analyzing romance in the media are quantitative. There would be a lot of value in taking a qualitative

approach. The research has also been limited to younger demographics (teens and college students). Studying older populations would be of interest, in particular, to compare what they see in the media to what they have actually experienced. It would also be beneficial to research different ethnicities' perceptions of romantic love based on the media. Many people long for the romantic relationships that they see on TV. By learning more about the differences between what is depicted and what actually occurs, people may discover that genuine love is a lot deeper and a lot more desirable than what they expected.

Data and Methods

For this research, I use content analysis to explore how romantic love is depicted in Jared The Galleria of Jewelry commercials. Content analysis

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provides the opportunity for an examination of how romance is portrayed, what the romantic interactions consist of, and what other information is being transmitted that contributes to what is involved in romantic love. Quantitative approaches examine the frequency of specific interactions or the number of people with particular opinions about what romantic love is. This method is also valuable because it utilizes data that exists outside of the research. Therefore, the information being presented remains consistent between the actual purpose that the data was created for and the purpose of studying it. Using content analysis will add to the body of research on media representations of romance by offering a qualitative perspective, which some studies lack.

Jewelry commercials are well known for showing scenes of love and affection between two people. I chose to study Jared's commercials because it is one of the more prominent jewelry stores and airs its commercials fairly regularly. For that reason, many people recognize the name and there is a stronger likelihood that they have seen one of the commercials. Jared's sells a variety of jewelry, including but not limited to engagement rings, chocolate diamond

necklaces, and charm bracelets. This is significant because it demonstrates that the store is not limited to only engagement rings and people who are preparing for marriage, but jewelry for all occasions and all people. Because jewelry is so often associated with romantic gestures, these commercials are prime examples of what the media presents as love between significant others.

I am accessing the commercials on YouTube and a website called iSpot.tv. The Jared's YouTube channel has commercials from 2016-2017. iSpot.tv has commercials from as far back as 2012. The commercials are about 30 seconds each, with a shortened version of the same commercial lasting around 15 seconds. However, sometimes the depiction of romance only receives a small portion of that time. The narrative of the couple becomes a lot more meaningful due to the short allotment of time centered on it. By critically analyzing these scenes, I will gain a better understanding of what these jewelry commercials convey as romantic love.

As I watched the commercials, I took notes of what actions and interactions occurred between the actors, as well as the dialogue. I also observed the settings of the interactions and the appearance of the actors (i.e. physical characteristics and attire). After reviewing these observations, I was able to separate my findings into descriptive codes. The descriptive codes created a general overview of what was being depicted. These codes led to the development of key concepts that occurred consistently throughout the commercials. The concepts evolved into categories that became the basis for the final analytical codes. Three themes emerged out of the analytical codes that exemplify what romantic love should look like, according to Jared The Galleria of Jewelry.

While content analysis is a useful method of research, it still has its limitations. One limitation of this unobtrusive method is that I do not have the ability to ask why the commercials were recorded the way they were. Content analysis is also up to the interpretation of the researcher, which means that the interpretation of viewers is not taken into account, and thus the data cannot be assumed to accurately reflect the views of society as a whole. There are also limitations to this study specifically. I am only analyzing the commercials of Jared The Galleria of Jewelry. Other jewelry stores may be portraying romantic love in a different way than

Jared's. By focusing on one store, I cannot make the most complete and inclusive analysis. There were also no other methods utilized to help support the interpretations of the data. However, in spite of these limitations, the following content analysis still provided compelling findings on how romantic love is depicted in Jared The Galleria of Jewelry commercials.

Data Analysis

By applying a critical lens to advertisements between 2012-17, we gain a better understanding of how this jewelry company presents romantic love. After completing the analysis, three themes manifested: romantic love is traditional and habitually done; romantic love is carried through relationships within the same social group (ie. race, socioeconomic level, etc.); and romantic love plays out as a hegemonic narrative, where the ruling class influences society so the views of the affluent are accepted as the cultural norm.

A. Stereotypical, Heteronormative, and Apparel

In every commercial but one, the man bought the woman jewelry. This perpetuates gender roles that put the man as the only caretaker and provider. Jared's does have men's jewelry: cufflinks, money clips, watches, bracelets, and necklaces (Jared The Galleria of Jewelry 2017). Moreover, commercials lack women buying gifts for their partners. These depictions perpetuate common stereotypes where the man is supposed to buy gifts for the woman. The implication is it's not as romantic if the female makes the gesture. The one time a woman purchased her own jewelry, she went home to show it off to her husband. This could be interpreted to mean she got the jewelry more for how he liked the way it looked on her than for herself. Also, any time there was a proposal in a commercial, the man asked the woman. This solidifies another gender stereotypical expectation. By recording the commercials in this way, Jared's portrays romantic love to dependent on commonly accepted behaviors as opposed to understandings of love and romance that challenge gender roles.

The romantic love in the commercials was strictly heteronormative. Every couple was man and woman. There was never once a scene with a man or woman buying jewelry for someone of the same

sex romantically or even platonically. This not-so-subtly conveys the message that romantic love should not occur between two members of the same sex. Such a conservative view of love reinforces beliefs that homosexuality is wrong and strengthens the feelings of shame that others experience for their homosexuality.

Lastly, the romantic love appeared very traditional, even in the attire of the actors. In these narratives, the women wore dresses that were either knee-length or right above the knee. The colors were always the ones perceived to be most feminine: pinks and purples. If there was a print, it was floral. In one commercial, a woman was walking into a room full of women, all dressed in a floral-print, knee-length dress. The men's clothes usually consisted of slacks, a button-down shirt, and a sports coat. The only other variation for men was khakis and a sweater over a plaid shirt. This communicates that romance looks a specific way, and if your romantic love does not fit into this box, you are doing it wrong.

B. Race, Class, and Reflection

Out of all the commercials I analyzed, there were not any couples that were obviously different races. The white women were in a relationship with white men. The two black women in all the commercials were in a relationship with black men. There was one commercial that was especially indicative of this characteristic. A woman asked three different women where they got their jewelry. The woman being asked the question would point across the room, smile at her husband, and say the famous slogan, "He went to Jared." Because of the common pattern of couples in all the Jared commercials prior, the race of the husband was predictable. It has been fifty years since the Loving v. Virginia Supreme court case ruled that laws prohibiting interracial marriage were unconstitutional. Though there is still a stigma attached, interracial relationships are much more common than they once were. Choosing to portray romantic relationships only between people of the same race discourages people from seeking intimate relationships with someone of a different race. It generates the assumption that there are more differences than commonalities between people of different skin colors.

The commercials also coupled people of the same social class. This was made most apparent by

their clothes. No one couple had different types of clothing that would indicate different socioeconomic statuses. They were also presented as being of higher social status. This, again, was made obvious by their attire: elegant dresses and button-down shirts with suit jackets. Most of all the women already had on a necklace, bracelet, and earrings whenever her significant other presented her with a new piece of jewelry. The couples lived in big, spacious homes – one woman’s closet was not just a walk-in, but a walk around closet – and went on fancy restaurant dates. All these factors create a sense of wealth and convey that romantic love should occur within one’s own socioeconomic group. Although the Cinderella stories promote the idea that relationships between people of different social statuses are possible, the Jared commercials convey they are not exactly practical.

Not only were the couples of the same race and social class, but they even looked similar to one another. They often shared the same skin, hair, and eye color. When I began specifically looking for these similarities, one couple even looked like they were brother and sister. They had the same skin complexion, dark brown hair, hazel eyes, and identical smiles. The attire was very much alike in regard to colors and textures. It was as though the goal in pairing the two people together was so that they reflected one another. This again reiterates the notion that romantic love is best found within the boundaries of one’s own group.

C. Young, Beautiful, and Extravagant

Although they are no longer the princes and princesses of our youth, romance is still reserved for the young and beautiful. Of all the commercials I analyzed, there was not a single one that showed a couple that looked to be past their twenties. Every single person appeared to be in the mid-to-late twenties. Even in the commercials where there was a proposal, the actors were on the younger end of the adult spectrum. It teaches people to make falling in love at a young age a priority and that if you don’t find someone while you’re young, you may never find anyone. This gives the impression that after a person passes a certain threshold of age, romance no longer plays a role in the relationship.

Another characteristic that reinforces the hegemonic narrative is the physical appearance of the actors. They all met the American standard of

beauty: light complexion and European features—long, skinny nose and light eyes. Overall, the men had an average physique, being around 5’11” and not overweight, though there was one man that was noticeably muscular. However, all the women were slim and skinny. Their attire always flaunted this particularity, whereas the men’s clothing made it harder to gauge their body shape. The two black women that were featured in two different commercials, out of all the commercials I viewed, did actually have their natural hair. A majority of the actors, however, had blonde hair and blue eyes. All the actors had perfectly straight and white teeth, and the women always had their hair and makeup done. This insinuates that romantic love occurs more often between and among “beautiful” people. This becomes an issue when people don’t see themselves as attractive. If they believe that beautiful people get to experience romantic relationships and they don’t think they’re beautiful, they might begin to self-loathe or change the way they look in an unhealthy manner to meet the standard of beauty. Either way, they become dissatisfied and unhappy with themselves.

Finally, romantic love is depicted as extravagant and over the top. The settings of the commercials added a dramatic flair to the interactions between the couples. For example, one couple passionately embraced on the beach. In another, a man proposed to his girlfriend on an airplane. She said yes, he dipped her into a kiss, and everyone on the plane started clapping. There were fewer scenarios where couples were experiencing everyday life. This preserves the hegemonic narrative that romance requires these types of exaggerated, grand gestures. By doing so, it creates unrealistic expectations and puts pressure on partners to live up to those expectations. As a result, both individuals are set up for disappointment if their partner does not have the means or desire to meet those expectations. In addition, the commercials also make more ordinary signs of affection, such as staying home together and watching movies, or cooking, seem subpar when compared to the extraordinary scenarios. It makes the little moments of romantic interactions seem less worthy of appreciation.

Conclusion

The purpose of this content analysis was to determine how romantic love is depicted in Jared The

Galleria of Jewelry commercials. The results uncovered three main themes: romantic love was portrayed as traditional, through endogamous relationships, and in the hegemonic narrative.

The commercials displayed a very traditional presentation of romantic love. The roles of the genders were based on stereotypical expectations, relationships were confined to heterosexual couples, and even the attire of the actors was restricted to old-fashioned styles. Romance was also characterized to occur specifically within the borders of one's own social group. This was demonstrated through the lack of interracial couples, couples of varying socioeconomic statuses and physical characters. Lastly, the commercials were filmed through the hegemonic narrative of romantic love. Actors were young and beautiful and the romance between them was very embellished.

There are negative consequences that come with each of these depictions. People who do not fit into these categories may think they are at a disadvantage or are less worthy of romantic love. All three of the themes in the Jared commercials share a common thread: uniformity. They suggest that romantic love looks one particular way. But as diverse as the human race is, so is romantic love.

This study found similar results to those of previous research. It found that images of romantic love in the media perpetuate gender stereotypes and create unrealistic expectations of romance. However, this analysis also revealed the underlying message of conformity in jewelry commercials. Jared's commercials depict romantic love in a specific fashion. The effect is that people expect, desire, or change their version of romantic love to reflect what is portrayed. This is where the debate of cultivation theory versus social cognitive theory comes in.

One of the strengths of this study was the data that existed prior to the analysis. Therefore, it was not compromised by the fact that it was being studied, the information did not change between one purpose and the other. Another strength was that the method was unobtrusive, so the data was very accessible, and I could review it as many times as necessary to give the most in-depth critiques. One more strength was that the analysis had the capacity to go in any direction that the data led, rather than be restricted to predetermined, dichotomous answers. A weakness of this study was that only one jewelry

store's commercials were analyzed so it may not be representative of all jewelry stores.

There should be more research to establish whether cultivation theory or social cognitive theory engenders these expectations of romantic love. It would also be beneficial to have studies that focused on each theme that emerged from this study (tradition, endogamy, and hegemony) and their role in romance portrayed in the media. No matter which direction or where it is focused, there still needs to be a lot more exploration analyzing depictions of love in the media and their implications on society

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