

Romantic Comedy

“Snakes and snails and puppy dog
tails...Sugar and spice and
everything nice...”

--- Rudyard Kipling

Questions to explore within the film genre of Romantic Comedy...

- What are some predictable character roles for this genre?
- Where are some familiar settings for these films?
- What problems are characteristic in these films?
- What value assumptions support the story line?
- In what ways does this genre help define cultural values [in the United States]?

As we explore and examine the romantic comedy genre....

- Think about the following....
 - These films are often viewed as light, up-beat, and comforting.
 - However, do the messages about relationships that are inherent in this genre potentially cause disappointment and emotional distress for those people for whom the fairy is most unlikely to occur (for any number of reasons)?

Primary character roles

- Male who is unavailable - emotionally detached, already involved, heart-broken & longing for another [woman], psychologically challenged, etc.
- Woman who longs for a fulfilling relationship - successful but lonely, kind but quirky, single mom, young ingénue, rich yet life lacks adventure, etc.

Supporting character roles

- Lifelong friend and confidant (one or both primary characters may have someone like this).
- Unexpected friend and confidant (this relationship develops during the course of the film and adds substance to the story line)
- Sage or wise elder - typically a parent, grandparent, older sibling, neighbor, etc.
- Peripheral characters - children and extended family, friends & spouses, etc.

Familiar settings...

- Large urban metropolis
- Small town USA
- United States or Europe
- Generally not rural unless characters are at a summer home, wealthy, or “transplants” (Sense & sensibility).

Typical problems or issues...

- Apparent inability to commit to a long-term relationship.
- Previously failed or tragic end to a relationship prevents one from taking a risk with another.
- Issues of social class or status as a road block.
- Existence of a relationship with another person [who is clearly wrong for the character in question].
- Single parent and child[ren].
- Age, looks, personality disorder.

Supporting value assumptions...

- Love with another person will make you happy and lasts forever.
- True love is transformational
- True love resolves, cancels out, or provides all that is needed to overcome all other life issues and social class boundaries.
- Being in love will make your life complete.

More supporting value assumptions...

- Love is always possible and will happen if you are open to it.
- We are inherently incomplete without a partner.
- Upon finding love, our problems dissolve

Cultural values defined...

- Traditional love relationships are what we all really want [and need].
- People who are not in a primary relationship all really wish they were.
- Having or being a family IS the next step...

More cultural values defined...

- Men will [or must] take care of women [and children].
- Attractive, nice women will fall in love unattractive and sometimes not-so-nice men (but not the other way around).
- Most of us live or want to live in a middle or upper middle-class world.

When Harry Met Sally

- The clip we will be viewing is a romantic comedy classic.
- This scene reinforces the value that love is transformational and completes one's life and sense of self.
- It also is a standard in romantic comedies in that the hero or heroine almost always makes a mad dash to retrieve a seemingly lost love and is successful.

The End