

Post-Feminist Romantic Comedies: An Analysis of Gender Roles and Relationships

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ABSTRACT

This research paper provides a comprehensive overview of the analysis of post-feminist romantic comedies, focusing on plot structures, subplots, gender roles, and character traits. In exploring this genre, the study investigates the implications and hidden messages embedded in the narratives of five representative movies from the post-feminist time period. The paper begins by defining the post-feminist era and its relevance to contemporary cinema.

Drawing from a diverse selection of films, the analysis delves into the various ways in which these movies challenge, reinforce, or subvert traditional gender norms. These themes include the ideas and messages related to power dynamics in relationships, gender roles, and romanticization of certain romantic comedy settings. Overall, it underscores the importance of critically analyzing popular media as a means of understanding and dissecting the messages that shape contemporary perceptions of romance and gender roles.

Keywords: romantic comedies, gender studies, post-feminism, sociology

1. INTRODUCTION

Romantic comedies hold a special place as a genre that both entertains and reflects the evolving cultural norms and attitudes towards love, relationships, and gender roles. Romantic comedies can act as cultural artifacts to reflect and shape societal beliefs about relationships and gender roles. These films may often follow a limited number of classic narrative arcs, yet they still provide a canvas for examining the evolution

of gender roles and the ways in which society grapples with issues such as empowerment, agency, and identity.

This paper will specifically delve into an exploration of post-feminist romantic comedies, dissecting the core themes, messages, and implications of this movie genre subtext on gender dynamics and relationships. These films are not mere sources of entertainment but can also serve as cultural benchmarks that influence and reflect our perceptions of modern-day sociological beliefs. Additionally, this investigation allows us to critically examine post-feminism itself—how it intersects with feminism, how it challenges or reinforces societal norms, and how it impacts our understanding of gender and empowerment. Moreover, as viewers and consumers of media, understanding the messages conveyed by post-feminist romantic comedies empowers us to engage critically with the broader cultural conversation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to best understand the sociological subtext of romantic comedies, it is essential to examine the research completed on the genre of movies. The literature review will begin by delving into an exploration of the history of romantic comedies and then more specifically those of the post-feminist era, the time frame of movies which will subsequently be examined in the paper. It will then segue into a comprehensive overview of the way in which scholars have analyzed these movies through plots, subplots, gender roles, and characteristics of both primary and secondary characters.

2.1 Background History of Romantic Comedies

In the 1920s, the United States experienced a cultural revolution, especially regarding the roles and perception of women. For instance, the “flapper” culture emerged where young women challenged traditional gender norms through the adoption of more liberal behavior and fashion choices. Women actively pursued independence, embraced new opportunities,

and resisted the conventional expectations of femininity (Acharya, 2019). For instance, many flappers sought economic independence by working outside the home, uncommon for women in previous generations. They also took jobs in offices, factories, as well as a variety of other urban settings. This signified not only a desire for financial autonomy but also the rejection of the idea that a woman was to only belong exclusively in domesticity. Flappers would be more socially active and visible in public spaces, such as dance clubs, speakeasies, or sporting events where they asserted their right to participate in activities, previously considered those only for men (Park, 2014)

However, the Wall Street crash occurred in 1929 and fear cast a shadow over the era of sexual liberation and the struggle for gender equality. In 1932, Franklin D. Roosevelt came into office where 15 million people were impacted by unemployment and the national income was reduced by 50%. At the time, FDR was often described as a “fairytale prince ... [who] lacked the capacity even to imagine that things might end up badly.” In essence, a fairytale serves as a narrative in which we find solace that despite negativity, goodness will ultimately prevail. The president's embodiment of this fairytale resonated with the nation's widespread longing for reassurance and the fairy tale elements became increasingly evident in romantic comedy movies of the time (Potter, 2002).

Director Frank Capra's "It Happened One Night" film in 1934 marked the beginning of the romantic comedy genre. It also is often recognized as the pioneer of screwball comedy. During this time period, when the idea that happiness depended on heterosexual love culminating in marriage was so widespread, screwball comedy emerged as a type of romance movie as a response to the tension created by these rigid marital norms. They offered a more

lighthearted depiction of the desires and interactions between the sexes. Oftentimes, the humor in these movies stemmed from misunderstandings between sexes or manipulation of the opposite gender to achieve certain objectives (Acharya, 2019). Over the decades, the romantic comedy genre has undergone various transformations and adaptations. In the 1950s, the movies shifted more towards sex comedies. In the 1970s, they became heavily influenced by feminist ideals in addition to the Hollywood renaissance. Notably, since the 1990s, starting with the release of "When Harry Met Sally" in 1989, the genre experienced a significant resurgence and has consistently performed well at the box office (Potter, 2002).

Post-Feminist Romantic Comedies

Postfeminism can be described as a concept that acknowledges and uses feminism not to further equality but to rather suggest that equality has already been achieved (McRobbie, 2004). Under postfeminism,

gender equality is noted as “fait accompli” and no longer necessary to be emphasized (Angyal, 2014). It does

acknowledge certain achievements of feminism, such as promoting the educational and professional opportunities for women and emphasizing their freedom to choose their roles in work, family, and parenting (Angyal, 2014). However, some scholars see it as a means to redefine women's rights and equality through a lens of liberal individualism that centers on lifestyle choices and personal consumer gratification (Angyal, 2014). They understand its attempts to incorporate and normalize aspects of feminism but, at the end of the day, it is also seen to commodify feminism by portraying women as empowered consumers. Thus, while postfeminism may seem to support gender equality on the surface, it can also be seen to undermine the image of feminism and, often veiled in irony, support the resurgence of traditional sexism or anti-feminism.

The other perspective of postfeminism is as a renegotiation of antifeminist and feminist ideals, exploring new possibilities for women rather than undoing feminism (Gerhard, 2005). It is considered as a continuation and complication of feminist ideals instead of a threat to it (Robinson,

2011). The “post” of the term can be implied to characterize the ongoing transformation and change, challenging certain assumptions made by second-wave feminism, such as universalism and biases (Brooks, 1997).

The Hollywood romantic comedies released from 2005-2011 are categorized in the postfeminist cycle. In these films, the traditional romantic elements seen in the 1980s and 1990s have been replaced by a focus on recreational sex, the presentation of bodies, and discussions about women's sexual subjectivity and femininity in contemporary society (Bowler, 2013). It has been observed that even with this change in genre, these romantic comedies continue to display a distinct level of sexual conservatism and a unique tension surrounding female sexual freedom, empowerment, and femininity. What is intriguing is that male lead characters appear to be more comfortable with their own sexuality when compared to their female counterparts. So, even though these films explore themes of casual sex, women's desires, and progressive attitudes, they ultimately celebrate the return to beliefs in 'soulmates,' long-lasting relationships, and committed behaviors that were once rejected during the era of 'nervous romances.' (Bowler, 2013) These ideals were seen as a timely solution to the radical feminism of the previous century and the declining patriarchal institutions of the late 20th century.

2.2 Elements of a Romantic Comedy

Romantic comedies are often summarized as stories where "boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl back," as illustrated in Jeffers McDonald's book titled "Boy Meets Girl Meets Genre" (McDonald, 2007). However, in reality, romantic comedies frequently deviate from this simple formula. The classification of romantic comedies is a difficult task as Henderson points out, most Hollywood films contain elements of romance and comedy, making the genre's boundaries difficult to establish (Hatch).

In every romantic comedy, subplots are present, and not all films within this genre strictly follow the aforementioned conventional "boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl" storyline. Scholars like Glitre and Rubinfeld have made efforts to categorize the various variations of romantic

comedy plots into four (Angyal, 2014).

The first amongst these four is the "Cinderella" plot which involves a drastic transformation of the heroine. These are often found in teen romantic comedies however, surprisingly, this plot remains rare. The next is the "odd couple" plot which combines internal and external conflicts (Angyal, 2014). These typically touch on issues of social conformity, especially regarding class or racial differences. Another is the "comedy of remarriage," focusing on the reunion of a couple (Angyal, 2014). However, the most common subplot, according to Glitre, is the "battle of the sexes" plot, where the hero and heroine initially compete or dislike each other but eventually move toward compromise and reconciliation, often through role reversals. This subplot is seen even in the characters of Western written storytelling such as Kate and Petruchio in 'Taming of the Shrew' and with Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy in 'Pride and Prejudice' (Angyal, 2014).

Rubinfeld also identifies four distinct subplots within Hollywood romantic comedies, albeit with slightly different boundaries. These include the pursuit, broken-hearted redemption subplot, cold-hearted redemption, and foil subplot (Angyal, 2014). The pursuit subplot involves a hero's persistent pursuit of a heroine, overcoming resistance to win her (Angyal, 2014). The broken-hearted redemption subplot features a lonely hero healed by one heroine. Conversely, the cold-hearted redemption subplot revolves around an emotionally blocked off hero learning to love, often through the heroine (Angyal, 2014). Despite the occasional variations, these subplots follow predictable and consistent patterns, providing comfort and familiarity to Western audiences (Angyal, 2014). These subplots aim to bring the central couple together romantically by the end of the film, as outlined by Rubinfeld's definition, which requires a "successful conclusion," typically involving marriage or a relationship leading to marriage (Angyal, 2014).

This requirement for a romantic union at the conclusion of a film is an integral part of Rubinfeld's generic definition for romantic comedies. Rubinfeld's definition doesn't leave room for narratives that don't culminate in a "happy" ending, where the central couple is united in either marriage or a relationship that is likely to

lead to marriage (Angyal, 2014). Notably, scholars such as MacDowell have delved into the variations that exist within the concept of a "happy ending" in Hollywood cinema. They've raised questions about who truly finds happiness in such endings – the characters, the audience, or both. Moreover, feminist film scholars like Byars and Landy have engaged in discussions about interpretations of the happy ending, particularly in melodrama and other genres traditionally associated with femininity (Angyal, 2014).

In contrast, Jeffers McDonald's definition allows for some flexibility, noting that romantic comedies "almost always" involve a "successful conclusion." This flexibility implies that there can be exceptions, such as the film "My Best Friend's Wedding". However, as Ingraham points out, even though "My Best Friend's Wedding" doesn't conclude "happily" for the female protagonist, it still reinforces the significance of heterosexual marriage, monogamy, and traditional gender roles (Angyal, 2014). In essence, the film conveys the message that despite finding a professional and ambitious career woman appealing, the love interest ultimately chooses a woman who adheres to traditional femininity and prioritizes his needs over her own.

Nonetheless, Rubinfeld's definition doesn't accommodate films like "The Break-Up" and "Crazy, Stupid, Love", which don't conform to the typical "happy ending" criteria. While these movies undoubtedly fall into the romantic comedy genre, they deviate from the expected conclusions. Such films, however, are rare exceptions in the broader context of Hollywood romantic comedies, which, with few deviations like the nervous romance cycle of the 1970s, consistently feature the central couple being united by the end.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study aims to analyze and compare the gender-related themes and hidden messages within the post-feminist romantic comedy genre by examining five popular films: "Friends with Benefits," "The Proposal," "27 Dresses," "Sweet Home Alabama," and "How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days." These films were chosen based on their box office success, release within the same post-

feminist time frame, and the presence of differing romantic comedy tropes (Box Office Mojo).

The selection process involved reviewing box office performance and critical acclaim for rom coms released within the chosen post-feminist time frame (2000-2015). The selected films were watched in their entirety as a means to accurately identify gender-related themes, tropes, and hidden messages within their narratives. There was particular attention and detail given in order to best comprehend the portrayal of female and male characters, their roles, relationships, and character arcs.

Gender-related themes and hidden messages were identified within each film. Themes such as career and romance, traditional gender roles, and challenges to post-feminist ideals were considered. After analyzing each film individually, a comparative analysis was conducted to identify commonalities and differences among the selected films. This allowed for the discovery of overarching post-feminist themes present across multiple films. The fact that all the chosen films were produced in Hollywood, USA, was important to understanding how these films reflect and contribute to the larger American cultural dialogue on gender and relationships.

Some limitations of this methodology include the fact that, while the chosen films offer valuable insights into post-feminist rom coms, the paper's findings may not represent the entire spectrum of rom coms from this era. Furthermore, film analysis inherently involves a degree of subjectivity, and interpretations may vary among viewers. However, there were efforts made to provide a comprehensive and balanced analysis.

This methodology outlines the systematic approach utilized to analyze and compare gender-related themes and hidden messages with this selection of post-feminist rom coms. The chosen films were carefully selected to ensure relevance and the analysis was conducted with a critical examination and comparative analysis to identify overarching themes in this genre.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 Theme: Women and careers

One running theme that evidently ran through some of these films was that women would

initially be portrayed with their careers as their driving force, however throughout the film and at the end of the films, they would discover love to replace this force and their jobs would be placed on the back burner.

For instance, in "Sweet Home Alabama," the female protagonist Melanie Carmichael, starts the film as a successful fashion designer in New York City. Her career is her primary focus, yet as the story progresses, Melanie returns to her small hometown in Alabama, where she reconnects with her past and her first love, Jake. Throughout the movie, she starts to prioritize her genuine emotions for Jake over her career aspirations. By the end, she chooses love over her career, leading to a heartwarming conclusion with her rekindled relationship with Jake (Tennant, 2002).

In addition, in "How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days", the female lead Andie Anderson writes for a women's magazine who is resolute to prove her point about her thoughts of romantic men-women relationships. Hence, the movie starts with her determined to write an article on how women can lose a guy in 10 days. As the movie progresses, she meets Ben, the male protagonist who is also trying to make a woman fall in love with him within the same time frame. As they both engage in their respective challenges, they develop genuine feelings for each other and Andie gradually shifts her previously career-focused approach instead towards dating (Petrie, 2003).

Again, in "The Proposal", the female protagonist Margaret is portrayed as a highly successful professional who is solely focused on her high-status career. She's known for her tough and demanding attitude in the workplace and the workers around her understand that her personal life has taken a back seat to her job. But, once again, as the film progresses, Margaret undergoes a transformation where her motivations switch from using the male lead Andrew to keep her job and avoid deportation into forming a relationship with him (Fletcher, 2009).

On the surface level, the message seems somewhat feminist in that women can be seen having these jobs and women can have these careers. At the beginning of these films, the female protagonists' ambition and career-driven driven mentality strongly emphasized. They are

depicted as strong, independent women who are successful in their professional lives, enforcing that feminist ideal. This initial characterization highlights their determination and capabilities. But as noted above with all of these films, the women's paths continuously cross with male characters who challenge their career-oriented outlook. Love slowly enters the picture and as this happens, the women find themselves falling more and more into this emotion and the male lead, while simultaneously depicted as detaching further and further away from her ambition.

The hidden message of this theme thus lies in the traditional gender roles that these films perpetuate. There is a suggestion that women should ultimately prioritize love and relationships over their careers. By never continuously referring back to their career aspirations, there is a communication to the viewers that a woman's true fulfillment comes, not from her career achievements, but rather completely from romantic love and companionship. This aligns with conventional gender norms where women are held to the expectation that they should constantly prioritize family and relationships.

Furthermore, this slightly also touches on the notion of sacrifice. These women are often portrayed as having to compromise their career aspirations for the sake of love. Hence, this signifies that women are expected to be able to take these drastic changes in their professional lives when they enter into romantic relationships. While both sacrifice and compromise are natural aspects of any relationship, these films often depict a disproportionate burden on the female characters by never highlighting the changes that men have had to make to their lifestyle. Writer and professor of cinematic studies Chrisitne Gledhill similarly argues that postfeminist romantic comedies frequently undermine their own feminist ideals by depicting women as ultimately reliant on men for their sense of fulfillment and happiness, also citing the movie "How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days" (Scharaga, 2017).

4.2 Theme: Men with more agency

Building upon the theme that these films project a somewhat superficial form of feminism, where women are placed in high-powered roles merely as a façade rather than fully developing them as accomplished and influential professionals. Conversely, male characters are

often portrayed as genuinely enjoying their chosen careers although not as glamorous or stereotypically impressive, demonstrating a greater degree of personal agency and control over their life choices without any external influences. In "The Proposal," Andrew serves as Margaret's assistant. But the film consistently nods at his long-term aspiration to become an editor, a dream he cherishes throughout the story (Fletcher, 2009).

In "Sweet Home Alabama", Melanie is the female lead who is a high-powered professional in the fashion industry. However, the film does not delve into her career nor showcase her accomplishments within her field. On the other hand, Jake, the male character Melanie ultimately forms a relationship at the end of the film, is a glassblower in a small town in Alabama. He's by no means of more economic status than Melanie but the film does reflect him as content and fulfilled in his work, adding depth to his character (Tennant, 2002).

Furthermore, in "27 Dresses", while the female protagonist Jane does not hold a necessarily high-status profession, her job is seen more as a dead-end with no specific end-goal that she is wishing for. The male character Kevin is tasked with writing wedding announcements for the newspaper, a job that doesn't particularly fulfill him. However, what sets Kevin apart is his unwavering commitment to this role, driven by his career-oriented dreams to become a respected journalist for the newspaper in the future (Fletcher, 2008).

By differentiating men's and women's jobs in terms of how they are represented as ones they genuinely enjoy and can exercise agency and control over their careers, this dichotomy surprisingly challenges traditional masculinity but rather reinforces traditional roles and expectations for women. Men were often associated with high-powered, prestigious jobs. Instead these films suggest an evolving idea of masculinity where men can find satisfaction aligned with personal passions, challenging the norm that men must conform to traditional career roles in order to be considered successful. In fact, their journey in embracing a number of different activities to reach their utmost professional goal

is highly regarded. On the flipside, for women, professional satisfaction is not seen as anywhere equal to romantic fulfillment in holding weight on their happiness. They are, as aforementioned, expected to make a choice while these films enforce the notion that men can "have it all" by excelling in both career and love.

This theme can reflect women's self-esteem and confidence in a negative light. It insinuates that women should have to give up their own power and autonomy in order to be in a relationship. Women are finding themselves in romantic relationships where they may feel contractually bound to please their partner, while men tend to seek a balance between a gratifying career that aligns with their personal interests and the companionship of a woman they desire. Thus, these films may actually be promoting unrealistic romantic relationships. Men are characterized as being perfect and desirable, and women as flawed and needy. In real life, this dynamic can present challenges for women seeking and sustaining healthy relationships, especially when considering the practical importance of careers and income which romantic comedies often do not address comprehensively.

4.3 Theme: The "perfect" guy and the "wrong" guy

In romantic comedies, the theme of women selecting the "wrong" guy over the "perfect" guy is one that is recurring. The "perfect" guy is typically depicted as physically attractive and charismatic with a successful career or as a high-achiever in his field. He frequently engages in romantic gestures, such as surprise dates, thoughtful gifts, or heartfelt declarations of love. These actions reinforce his "perfect" status. Conversely, the "wrong" guy is one with multiple flaws that make him less appealing. This could range from character flaws such as arrogance or selfishness or misaligned values that clash with those of the female lead which creates conflict and serves as a barrier to their relationship.

In the film "Friends with Benefits", the two lead characters Jamie and Dylan have recently experienced breakups in their romantic relationships and decide to engage in a friends with benefits situation. They establish an agreement: "No emotions, just sex. Whatever occurs, we remain friends." Hence, Dylan embodies the "wrong" guy archetype by initially approaching the

relationship with the female lead as casual and noncommittally. Dylan and Jamie also have a misalignment in their values where Jamie dreams of finding “the one” or her “Prince Charming” whereas Dylan is seen being more skeptical about the possibility of a genuine romantic relationship. Parker is the male character Jamie meets at one point throughout the film. He is a children’s oncologist, which aligns with the idea of a successful, wealthy, and intelligent man (Gluck, 2011).

In “27 Dresses”, Jane has an unrequited crush on her workplace boss George. He is the “perfect” man for Jane as she finds him charming and funny, always knowing how to make Jane laugh. In fact, Jane at the end of the film even admits the only reason she continued to stay at her job was due to her feelings for George. Later on in the film, Jane meets Kevin. Kevin holds skepticism about love and his willingness to challenge Jane’s idealized views on weddings create tension and conflict in their relationship. He is seen as disrupting Jane’s carefully constructed world of romanticism. In addition, when he first discovers Jane’s secret of being a bridesmaid 27 times, he uses this information for a story without considering how it might affect her. Thus, he embodies the “wrong” guy persona (Fletcher, 2008).

At the end of both these two romantic comedies, Jamie and Jane both end up with the respective “wrong” guy from the movies. Firstly, Jamie is dumped by Parker with his reasoning being “I’m not your Prince Charming” (Gluck, 2011). Similar to the other criticism of post-feminism rather being a form of “fake feminism”, Jamie finds herself unable to resist the allure of romantic comedies and fairy tales. Her attempts to assertive and self-reliant persona through her efforts to maintain a façade of indifference and to separate physical intimacy from emotional connection, often referred to as “phallic girlhood,” cannot mask or erase her innate femininity. Dylan’s struggle to grow closer to Jamie throughout the movie stems from his perception of her being “damaged,” a belief Jamie overhears in a conversation (Gluck, 2011). Instead of finding someone who appreciates her unique values and experiences, Jamie ultimately accepts Dylan’s grand romantic gesture at the movie’s end when he realizes how much he misses having her around (Gluck, 2011).

The film does introduce a feminist element by permitting the characters to engage in a “friends with benefits” arrangement before committing to a long-term, monogamous romantic relationship. This narrative choice may initially deflect feminist criticism, as it challenges traditional romantic norms.

However, Jamie and Dylan’s deliberate decision to ultimately embrace the traditional “happy ending” serves as a reminder that, despite its unconventional beginnings, the film eventually conforms to the traditional rom-com genre conventions and reinforces the rigidity of gender hierarchies. Even within a more modern narrative, it becomes evident that challenging these conventions remains a complex and multifaceted endeavor.

In regards to the film “27 Dresses”, Jane ends with Kevin in spite of the fact that Kevin writes an article about Jane, revealing the embarrassing truth that she has been a bridesmaid 27 times, and his editor publishes it on the front page of the Commitments section of the newspaper (Fletcher, 2008). The message behind this theme of selecting the “wrong guy” is that there is an undermining of women’s standards. By not selecting her “perfect” choice, it can

suggest that women should tolerate or accept the negative qualities of the “wrong” choice in the name of love. This can lead to a normalization of unhealthy relationship dynamics. This theme additionally can inadvertently reinforce societal pressure on women to be in a relationship at any cost. It implies that being single is somehow inferior or less desirable than being in a partnership, even if it means compromising one’s own standards or values. This, in fact, perpetuates gender imbalances in relationships by implying that women should be more accommodating or forgiving in their partner choices than men. There is a reinforcement of traditional gender roles that place the burden of relationship satisfaction on women, while men are less expected to compromise their standards.

4.4 Theme: The urban-rural divide

This theme typically involves characters who are “big time city people” or urban residents, often depicted as career-focused, fast-paced. They are then placed in a rural or small-town setting, where they undergo growth and discovery of a true

romantic relationship.

This theme is evidently seen in the film “The Proposal” where Margaret is a successful editor with a high-powered job in New York City. However, there is a turn of events when Margaret, who is originally from Canada, faces deportation due to her visa issues. To avoid this, she concocts a scheme to fake a marriage with her assistant, Andrew Paxton, to make him her fiancé and secure her residency in the United States. Hence, as part of the deception, Margaret and Andrew travel to a remote and picturesque town in Alaska – a significant shift from the fast-paced city life (Fletcher, 2009).

In “Sweet Home Alabama”, the film starts out with Melanie Carmichael as a designer in New York City. However, there are multiple character and relationship dynamic shifts when she moves back to her small town in Alabama (Tennant 2002).

Again, similarly in “27 Dresses”, Jane and Kevin’s relationship starts taking a more serious turn when they take a road trip for a wedding-related errand in a rural town called Rhineland in New York (Fletcher, 2008).

What this demonstrates is the larger idea of the American imagination of a very romanticized imagination of rural life. The hidden message of this ties into broader cultural and sociological concepts. For instance, in the romanticized rural life portrayed in the previously mentioned films, women are often shown in domestic roles, such as homemakers or caretakers, while men are often engaged in traditional “manly” activities like farming, carpentry, or small business ownership. These roles can reinforce traditional gender norms, suggesting that women's happiness is tied to domesticity and men's fulfillment is tied to providing.

This rural setting often presents an idealized version of femininity as well, where women are portrayed as nurturing, and family-oriented. This can reinforce the notion that a woman's primary role is to create a warm and inviting home, prioritize family life, and support her partner's ambitions. On the other hand, men are presented as strong and dependable – the protectors and providers for their families. While these qualities are not positive nor negative, they are perpetuating certain stereotypes of traditional

masculinity, suggesting that men should be the dominant and stoic figures in relationships. In addition, this setting is often associated with simplicity and contentment, contrasting it with the complexity and stress of urban life. While this can be appealing, it may imply that women should seek fulfillment in simpler, more traditional roles, rather than pursuing ambitious careers or personal goals.

And while this was not an idea heavily explored upon, it can be suggested that the romanticized rural life in rom coms typically centers around heterosexual relationships. Not only does this reinforce the traditional opposite-sex partnerships, but it also limits diversity in films whether that be with gender, race, culture, etc. It also often marginalizes or ignores other forms of romantic or family arrangements, contributing to heteronormativity.

5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the investigation into post-feminist romantic comedies spanning the years 2000 to 2015 has led to the identification of four pivotal themes: women and careers, men with more agency, the “perfect” and “wrong” guy, and the urban-rural divide. These themes, aligned with post-feminist ideals, appear to champion a façade of feminism—a portrayal that suggests women's independence and their supposed lack of need for further representation.

However, beneath this surface level idea of empowerment through these movies lies a paradoxical undercurrent that confines women to traditional gender roles and at times, even encourages evolving notions of masculinity in a progressive light.

It is essential to note that this analysis is fit within a specific timeframe, and Hollywood's cinematic landscape, for this specific genre and overall, has evolved since then. Nevertheless, our examination of post-feminist romantic comedies during this era highlights a nuanced and oftentimes contradictory narrative. These films, while attempting to showcase women's agency, often fall short of contributing positively to feminist goals such as shattering glass ceilings and advocating for equal rights. Instead, they frequently perpetuate stereotypes and engage in the complexities of empowerment and constraint. Hence, the

portrayal of gender dynamics in romantic comedies continues to remain a dynamic discourse.

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