

ERASMUS UNIVERSITY OF ROTTERDAM  
ARTS AND CULTURE STUDIES

# Happily ever after in Cyprus

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A research on the romantic beliefs of young  
Cypriot women.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a qualitative research on the discourses about romantic love of young Cypriot women who are either heavy or non heavy viewers of romantic comedies. Cyprus is an interesting place to undertake such a research about romantic love because despite the fact that its culture is being progressively westernised, it still has great links with traditional values including ideas about romantic love. The research question being addressed is how the discourses of heavy and non-heavy viewers of romantic comedies can be distinguished and typified. In order to answer the research question 14 qualitative interviews were conducted with young Cypriot women. Following a cultivation theory approach the participants were separated into 7 heavy viewers and 7 non-heavy viewers of romantic comedies. A main assumption of this thesis was that heavy viewers hold more idealistic views on romantic love than the non-heavy viewers of romantic comedies. The analysis of the transcribed interviews which was conducted to answer the research question followed a discourse analysis approach. Several concepts of romantic love are being discussed including the distinction between the prosaic notion of love and the idealistic notion of love. Romantic ideals that are being depicted in romantic comedies and are found in the discourses of heavy and non-heavy viewers are also been discussed. Romantic comedies in this thesis are valued as a global product and are being discussed in terms of global and American media culture.

## **Key words:**

Cyprus, Heavy viewers, cultivation theory, romantic love, romantic comedies

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Romantic Love and Cyprus**

Romantic love from a sociological point of view “is a perfect place to study culture” because love has a diverse cultural tradition and is a substantial part of people’s ordinary lives (Swidler, 2001 p.2). The ideas about infidelity and adultery, the sense of obligations those who love, more precisely the morality that pervades romantic relationships may derive from culture. Thus, despite the fact, that love is a personal and private experience, it is at the same time a greatly social and cultural issue.

However in an increasingly globalized world, one can rightfully argue that local cultures and societies today are not only modernised but also complex. Our attitudes and beliefs about romantic love are likely to be influenced by many and different cultural resources such as society, family, media, tradition and popular culture. As a result different ideals and beliefs about romantic love can be traced in different cultures around the world. For instance Swidler (2001) supported that Americans have two different views of love: the “movies love” which is an unrealistic-idealistic notion of love and the realistic-prosaic notion of love.

The society of Cyprus, in geographical terms as well as in terms of values and beliefs about romantic love, relationships and marriage, could be described as an eastern society. According to Panayiotou (2005), the Cypriots give great importance to frequent contact among family members and overvalue social acceptance and approval (Panayiotou 2005). However Cyprus is, since 2004, a member of the European Union and is becoming progressively westernized. Some scholars support that the Cypriot society includes both traditional and modern world characteristics since it had a late westernization a couple of decades ago (Yesilada ,Webster, Peristianis & Anastasiou, 2006; Haztivassilis, 1997), whereas some other scholars have suggested that younger generations in Cyprus are coming closer to American culture in terms of romantic beliefs (Panayiotou, 2005).

One way or the other, the case of Cyprus and the Cypriot people romantic beliefs cannot be studied without taking into account the global culture of today’s world and the influence of mass media. Several researches tried to show that mass media and

especially screen media have the power to influence people's behavior and beliefs (Adoni, 1979; Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Holmes & Johnson, 2009; Mcquail, 1985). Theories have also been developed to prove the effects of media on people, such a theory is the cultivation theory (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002).

Romance is one of viewers' favorite topics in today's media. According to Hall (2005), romantic comedy films have the highest viewing average (Hall, 2005). There are many studies which indicate that media with romantic content may influence the heavy viewer and may cultivate an unrealistic notion of love (Alexander, 1985; Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Rivadeneyra & Lebo, 2008; Segrin & Nabi 2002). So a viewer, who constantly chooses to watch romantic comedies, may develop some ideas about romantic love that are repeatedly depicted in these movies. It has also been argued by several scholars that young women are attracted to the romantic comedy genre more than men and are prone to enjoy this movie genre more since the story of these movies is told from a woman's point of view (Fischhoff, Antonio, & Lewis, 1997; Holmes, 2007).

This study therefore focuses on the culture of love by investigating young peoples' beliefs about romantic love and relationships. More precisely this study focuses on a specific society (Cyprus), on a particular aspect of its culture (love), on a certain age group of its population (young women), and is aiming to examine the way they think and talk about romantic love. Due to the fact that there is some evidence that Cyprus is modern and traditional in a peculiar way, this project more particularly deals with the Cypriot female viewers of American romantic comedies in an attempt to find out the Cypriots ideas on romantic love and to point out, if possible, indications (if any) of the global media culture (influence) on their love beliefs.

Having in mind that our attitudes are likely to be influenced by many and different cultural resources this thesis intends to concentrate on two groups of young women in Cyprus (heavy and non-heavy romantic comedy viewers), through qualitative interviews. Thus the research aims to focus on the way young women in Cyprus think and talk about romantic love by examining the discourses of women who constantly consume global media products, such as romantic comedies as well as the discourses

of women who watch these movies to a lesser extent. By examining these two categories of young women this research attempts to typify and distinguish the way young Cypriot women think and talk about romantic love.

Therefore, the question that can be addressed here is: How can discourses on romantic love, by heavy and non-heavy romantic comedy female viewers in Cyprus, be typified and distinguished?

## **1.2 Love Culture**

People continuously consume “love culture” especially those who want to learn more about love and romantic relationships (Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Swidler, 2001). Some of them might buy self-help books on love, visit therapists and marriage counselors, and certainly read novels and watch movies or soap operas with romantic content (Swidler, 2003; Galician, 2004). Love, according to Illouz (1997), is one of the main mythologies of our time (Illouz, 1997).

Love and its manifestation in movies and especially in romantic comedies provide several unrealistic myths of romantic ideals which hardly respond to reality; myths such as: ‘love conquers all’, ‘love at first sight’, ‘your perfect partner is cosmically predestined’ or ‘the right mate completes you’ (Galician, 20013; Hefner & Wilson 2013; Holmes & Johnson, 2009). “Movies love” is a magical mythic situation that strikes the lovers in the films and makes them overcome all obstacles in order to be together. This view of love however is very distant from the real everyday love that the ordinary people experience. The prosaic love as Swidler (2001) calls it, is a gradually evolving feeling that has nothing to do with the idealistic love of the movies (Swidler, 2001). As it has been mentioned above according to Swidler (2001) two different notions of love exist in the USA: the prosaic-realistic love and the romantic-mythic love of the movies.

Having as a departure point Swidler’s work about Americans’ understanding of love (prosaic and idealistic notion of love), this thesis intends to focus on young women in Cyprus in order to investigate their romantic beliefs and ideas through qualitative interviews. Following also a cultivation theory approach the current study deliberately



tried to find heavy viewers of romantic comedies and non-heavy viewers of these movies in order to distinguish and to typify the respondents beliefs about romantic love, and wherever possible to analyse them through the prism of the distinction prosaic and idealistic view of love. An assumption that can be made here is that heavy viewers may be found closer to an idealistic notion of love whereas the non-heavy viewers may hold a more prosaic-realistic notion of love.

In this sense the aim of this thesis which is to investigate the discourses of women on romantic love, gets an interesting academic relevance as it can be compared with other studies (e.g. Swidler, 2001; Hefner & Wilson 2013) which have a similar focus but took place in different countries and at different periods of time. This research about heavy and non-heavy viewers of romantic comedies in Cyprus can also be part of a broader debate about global media culture and cultural imperialism.

### **1.3 Cypriot Women**

An important aspect of this research is that it is the first time that such research about women's romantic beliefs is undertaken in Cyprus. To the best of my knowledge, there is no similar research exploring Cypriot female viewers' (of romantic comedies) beliefs. In addition, Cyprus constitutes an interesting case with many peculiarities which can only be expected in traditional societies. According to the *Worlds Values Survey* (2006), 91% of Greek-Cypriots believe that God is very important in their lives, the vast majority of Greek-Cypriots have religious weddings and only 15% believe that divorce is always justifiable (Yesilada ,Webster, Peristianis & Anastasiou, 2006). Therefore, one can suggest that the people of Cyprus have great links with tradition.

The traditional view about women in Cyprus was sexist, as it was required of women to be denoted in sexual innocence, obedience and domesticity (Cockburn, 2004; Koutselini & Agathangelou, 2013). Koutselini and Menon support that up until recently (and in many cases even today) Cypriot women have a secondary role in politics, in academia and in other decision making posts (Koutselini 2011; Menon-Eliophotou et al. 2011). In support of this argument, is what the statistical service of Cyprus pointed out in 1994, that only 16 out 555 divorces were demanded by women

(Hatzivassilis, 1997, p. 61). Cypriot women therefore, seem to be not only somewhat marginalised in this late westernised society but in some cases also underestimated.

Thus, one can argue that all these peculiarities of the Cypriot society may influence women even in their private life on such an important matter as romantic love. On the other hand, no one can neglect that Cyprus is participating in a globalized world and its people may share, adopt and adapt themselves to different ideas and views than those set out by Cypriot local culture. Cyprus since 2004 is a member of the European Union and it has been progressively westernised the recent years. A worth noting information is that despite Cyprus' adherence to its traditional values, a great increase in the divorces can be observed since late 1980s in Cyprus (Statistical service of Cyprus [Cystat], 2015). Therefore, one can argue that Cyprus presents a challenging case to study people's discourses (and thus beliefs) about romantic love. Focusing on the women of this society and comparing the discourses of heavy and non-heavy viewers of romantic comedies this research becomes interesting in the sense that it may also illuminate other aspects of this society.

In order to make the topic of the research more clear, in the second chapter there is a thorough presentation of the current situation in Cyprus, the people's traditional views of romantic love and women as well as a theory of love which help us to typify somehow such a broad topic as love. The third chapter constitutes the theoretical framework for the analysis and discuss key concepts of the research such as prosaic and idealistic notion of love, romantic comedies and global media culture. In addition the fourth chapter sketch in a detailed way the way this research was conducted and the methods that they were used. On chapter five there is a presentation and discussion of the findings whereas the discussion continues in the final chapter and a conclusion is drawn.

## **2. Cyprus and Romantic Love**

### **2.1 Cyprus and Westernization**

As mentioned above, Cyprus until very recently could be described as a traditional society with a great number of rural population and traditional beliefs and norms (Yesilada ,Webster, Peristianis & Anastasiou, 2006). Until the 1970s the majority of Cypriot people lived in rural areas of the island and had a long tradition of conventional marriage ideas. The way the couples in Cyprus used to get together was a traditional match arrangement between acquainted families up until recently (Cockburn, 2004). Another notable detail is that in Cyprus despite the law that allows civil marriages since 1923 the vast majority of Greek-Cypriots had religious weddings and almost never got divorced since the Greek Orthodox Church made the divorce a difficult and long procedure (Yesilada ,Webster, Peristianis & Anastasiou, 2006). Bearing in mind the above facts one can argue that Cyprus didn't keep up with the changes that took place in western countries during the beginning and the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century concerning the emancipation of women and the traditional norms and values.

However, Cyprus in the decades of 1980s and 1990s was “participating” in a global western media culture. The everyday life of Cypriots overflowed with all kinds of media culture (television, films, popular music, magazines and advertising) providing thus the Cypriot society with lifestyle images of western culture. Cinemas opened in the cities of the island in the early 80s and multiplied in the coming decades. In late 90s the first multiplex cinema, K-Cineplex opened in Cyprus and within two years other 4 multiplex cinemas opened in the major cities consisting of 28 screens, which project almost exclusively American movies (<http://www.kcineplex.com>). The Cypriot television channels became from one state-channel in the 1980s to nine channels in the 1990s and the “video-clubs” which later became Dvd-stores thrived at the same period, whereas the satellite TV system was established in Cyprus (Cystat, 2015).

Cyprus today is confronted with a shift in its traditional norms and values which is reflected in relationships and in marriages (Panayiotou, 2005). According to the statistical service of Cyprus (Cystat, 2012) the number of divorces has increased from

0.6% in 1980s to 4.9% in 2011. The same service indicates that there is more than 30% chance that a first marriage will end in divorce or separation, an extremely high percentage compared to other western countries. For example in USA where there is a similar high percentage of divorces, the National Centre for Health Statistics, gives only 20% chance that a first marriage will end in divorce (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002). Moreover, a significant proportion of marriages in Cyprus are mixed marriages, for example marriages between Cypriots and persons of foreign citizenship were 21.9% in 2006. An increase can also be observed in the number of the lone parents especially the number of women (Cystat, 2012). It seems that the younger generation in Cyprus not only grew up in a different cultural environment than their parents but also in some cases may behave in a different way.

## **2.2 Cypriot Society and Women**

As it has been mentioned in the previous chapter the society of Cyprus has some peculiarities in respect of relationships and marriage. The Cypriot society keeps up many traditional aspects which blend with modern world ideas, this can be seen not only in relationships and marriage but also in the way the society (especially the older generation) regard women and their role in society. Some important figures that we can get from the statistical service of Cyprus (Cystat, 2012) about women, is that the number of poor and uneducated women is much higher than the number of poor and uneducated men; that a man's average income is still much higher than a woman's income; and that the single-parent families are to a large extent single-mother families. (Cystat, 2012). Of course these data cannot speak for themselves, thus, it is useful to examine them together with some other aspects of the Cypriot society.

There are some scholars who support that the Greek-Cypriot dialect can indicate many elements about the Cypriot culture and Society (Koutselini & Agathangelou, 2013). For Instance in the Cypriot dialect, the word "adropos," which means human being was used (and still is used by the older generation) to signify men only. Another interesting word of the Greek-Cypriot dialect is the word "andogeneka", which means "a strong woman who can speak and act like a man". These words indicate the denial of common characteristics and behaviour between men and women. Finally, it could

also be argued that widely used phrases of the Greek-Cypriot dialect like: “The work of women is at home”, “Stop behaving like a woman” show some of the characteristics the traditional Cypriot society attributes to women in an effort to minimize their role. (Koutselini & Agathangelou, 2013).

According to Menon-Eliophotou et al (2011) the Cypriot society still holds stereotypes about female and sometimes sexist attitudes. Even in academia, both in private and public universities, women are under-represented in research posts and in higher academic ranks (Koutselini 2011; Menon-Eliophotou et al. 2011). What is surprising though is that when male and female academics were called to explain the gender inequalities in academia, they expressed that sensitivity and emotionality are not only weaknesses of an academic but are also typical characteristics of women (Koutselini & Agathangelou, 2013). All of these indicate a society which is not only patriarchal but a society which has a masculine culture well imbued in people’s mind.

Along with the indications that Cyprus is a society with a rigid attachment to the traditional aspects of its culture there are some scholars who suggest that a change is taking place in Cyprus, especially in the romantic relationships of the Cypriot couples. For instance, Panayiotou and Cox-Boyd (2002) found great differences between Cypriot married couples and North American couples and they suggested that these differences was due to the fact that the Cypriots’ cultural standards of emotional expression are different from those of the North Americans. Interestingly, Panayiotou (2005) found that Cypriot dating couples, (younger than the married couples), showed many similarities to the North American couples as to their accommodation styles and their relationship quality. In other words recent generations in Cyprus are much closer to North American couples than the generation of their parents in respect of personal gratification and relationship quality (Panayiotou, 2005). Taking into account these two studies about married couples (Panayiotou & Cox-Boyd, 2002) and dating couples in Cyprus (Panayiotou, 2005), one can argue that younger generation in Cyprus think and behave differently than the older generation in terms of romantic love. Panayiotou (2005) suggests that the reason why the younger generation in Cyprus is much closer to North American couples, is because this generation has “globalized” attitudes toward love and marriage and follows the western standards of personal satisfaction (Panayiotou, 2005).

Therefore, there is much evidence that the Cypriot society and culture are changing. There is also evidence that the new generation in Cyprus tends to rely on Western conceptions which have romance and passion as the basis of marriage. If we accept that these findings somehow reflect a socio-cultural change between two successive generations in Cyprus, then it is also of great interest the fact that divorces have increased in the last 30 years. A question that can be raised here is how much this change has to do with external factors, such as the American media culture. For this reason I'm trying to see how the female Cypriot heavy viewers of romantic comedies think and talk about love and then compare that with how the non-heavy viewers of the same movies think and talk about love. By doing this, with the hypothesis that the comparison will end up in some obvious differences between heavy viewers and non-heavy viewers, I believe that eventually I will be able to present some kind of influence on the heavy viewers.

### **2.3 Theory of Love**

Romantic love is not only a central theme of movies, of literature and other forms of art but it has occupied scholars and theorists to a great extent from many and different disciplines. Sociologists, philosophers and psychologists constantly tried to analyze and comprehend the nature of love and how and what people think about it. Romantic love belongs to the sociologically awkward sphere of private life which means that it is a totally personal matter but at the same time it is directly related to culture.

There are many theories about love which categorise and typify different aspects of love. However for this research the triangular theory of love of Sternberg (1986), seems the most informative to better understand the objective of this thesis.

According to this theory, love has three components: intimacy, passion and decision/commitment. If these three components are present then the couple may be able to experience an ideal relationship. However, an ideal relationship of love depends on the combination of the three components whereas the kind of love one experiences depends on the strength of these three components. Sternberg illustrates love as a triangle which has each component of love on each of its three sides. These three components together in an ideal relationship of love form an equilateral triangle

which represents the ideal shape of a relationship. If one of the three sides of the triangle is bigger or smaller than the other two then the triangle becomes a scalene triangle or an isosceles triangle. Similarly, when one of the components of love (intimacy, passion or decision/commitment) is bigger or smaller than the other two then the relationship loses its balance (Sternberg 1986).

In the triangular theory of love, Sternberg suggested that there are eight different kinds of love which are generated by the combination of the three components of love. These eight kinds of love are: (a) non love (the absence of any of the three components), (b) liking (only intimacy), (c) infatuated love (only passion), (d) empty love (only decision/commitment), (e) romantic love (intimacy + passion), (f) companionate love (intimacy + decision/commitment), (g) fatuous love (passion + decision/commitment), and (h) consummate love (all three components).

All these different kinds of love can help us to understand and illustrate what kind of love we may encounter in people's romantic relationships. For instance, using this theory one can argue that the traditional way of getting married in Cyprus, produced many "empty love" type of relationships. Due to the fact that in the Cypriot Society marriages were arranged and to some extent are still arranged between acquainted families, the partners start with the decision/commitment to love each other, or to try to love each other. According to Sternberg (1986) this can be described as "Empty Love" because this kind of love originates only from the decision/commitment component and has nothing to do with the intimacy and passion components of love. On the other hand, other kinds of love may illuminate different aspects of people's relationships. For instance Sternberg describes infatuated love as "love at first sight". Infatuated love comes from an intense experience of passionate and psychological arousal. The infatuated lover may experience "somatic symptoms such as increased heartbeat or even palpitations of the heart" (Sternberg, 1986, p. 124). Similarly, fatuous love which results from the components passion and decision/commitment is the kind of love we usually associate with the movies. This is the kind of love that where it is applied the lovers meet one day, they get engaged two weeks later, and marry the following month. These two kinds of love (infatuated love and fatuous love) seem to have many similarities with some romantic ideals that are depicted in romantic comedies such "love conquers all", "idealization of the other", "love at first

sight” and “predestined partner” (Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Winn,2007). Thus, it can be argued that these two kinds of love are the “movies love”, which is often depicted by romantic comedies.

Since the objective of this thesis is to compare and distinguish what Cypriot women viewers (heavy and non-heavy) of romantic comedies think about love and romance, one can assume that heavy viewers of these movies may hold views that are closer to infatuated love or fatuous love. Thus, a comparison between the discourses on romantic love by heavy and non-heavy viewers not only can occur in terms of romantic ideals that are depicted in these movies but also it may be informed by the triangular theory of love.



### **3. Theoretical Framework**

#### **3.1 Why Culture Matters**

Culture in many cases guides people in the choices they have to make through life and helps them to internalize skills, styles and habits. In other words culture offers images and ideas that form a view of the world (Swidler, 1986). Of course, people differ as to how much culture and which cultural resources they use in their lives. For instance some people may draw on cultural precepts, others on personal experiences, some others psychological theories and others even on media culture.

According to Swidler (1986) enduring values are not always the determining factors in forming individual behaviour, because if this was the case then people should be expected to follow traditional values in any situation they found themselves. As she argues, people seem to abandon easily traditional values in new circumstances. For example, immigrants from remote cultures when arriving in western countries seek wealth and prestige, whereas in their homelands the same individuals may have sought to preserve traditional values that are related with family honor and family continuity (Swidler, 1986).

People are more attached to their set of skills and capacities with which they try to obtain their objectives than to certain values they may carry with them (Swidler, 2001). Individuals use culture as a tool kit or a repertoire in order to create strategies that fit their needs and are compatible with the circumstances they are in. Culture affects individuals' actions by forming their habits and skills which together form a strategy of action. For Swidler (1986) a strategy of action is a pattern according to which people organize action over time. The strategy of action is not a rational plan but is a general subconscious way of organizing action in order to achieve many different life targets (Swidler, 1986, p.277).

Strategies of action depend on culture not in the sense that there is a cultural ethos (or cultural system) that people follow but in the sense that they depend on culture through habits, moods, sensibilities, and views of the world that people pursue. Strategies of action are also directly related with society, because individuals depend on the society for cultural resources but also because the strategies of action they

create make sense only within a social world. Following this understanding of culture Swidler (2001), argues that individuals draw on multiple, often competing cultural traditions in order to interpret their own understanding of love. For instance, Swidler supports that Americans hold two views of romantic love: the prosaic-realistic view of love and the movies-idealistic view of love and she argues that these two notions of love are used by people for their understanding of love in very different contexts.

### **3.1.1 Prosaic and Idealistic Notion of Love**

The idealistic notion of love or movies love is found to a great extent not only in romantic movies but also in many aspects of western culture. Romantic ideals such as: “soul mate”, love conquers all”, or “love at first sight” can be found in courtly tradition, in bourgeois preconceptions and even in ancient Greek myths. For instance, the idea of a predestined partner is fathered on Plato in *The Symposium*, more than two thousand years ago (Galician, 2004). According to this ideal, there is one and only true love for each person and it is an individual’s destiny to find that soul mate. Another romantic ideal that is somehow an extension of the “predestined partner” is the “perfect partner” which perpetuate the idea that your perfect mate will fill all your needs and make your dreams come true (Galician, 2004, 2007). In addition, the ideal of love at first sight goes a step further and suggest that this perfect mate should be recognized instantaneously (Swidler, 2001). Finally, the ideal “love conquers all” is one of the main aspects of an idealistic-movies love. This ideal suggests that as long as partners love each other, then having different values and interests, as well as facing financial and social difficulties, do not present a real problem.

An opposing view of the idealistic love is what Swidler (2001) suggested the prosaic-realistic notion of love. According to Swidler (2001) this prosaic view of love has four characteristics: first, it takes time and has no doubts. It is often ambivalent and may occur accidentally, but it is not the result of a dramatic choice. Second “One true love” does not exist. One person can love several other persons in many different ways. Third, love which leads to marriage should depend on harmony and on practical characteristics rather than on irrational feelings contrary to social conventions. A couple is more likely to be happy if it has fewer difficulties to overcome. Finally,

there is no guarantee that love will last forever. Love and marriage need hard work, compromise and a good mood for change (Swidler, 2001, p. 114). Interestingly the prosaic notion of love seems to be closer to the traditional view of love and marriage in Cyprus than the idealistic notion of love. The fact that Cypriot married couples had to stay together and struggle for their marriages, due to rigid traditional values of their society, seem that it helped them to develop a prosaic realism towards love and relationships.

Following the argument of Swidler (2001), that there are two kinds of love, the prosaic and the idealistic love, one can argue that an individual may hold one of these notions of love. However, as mentioned earlier Swidler (2001) found that both notions of love (prosaic and idealistic) can be found in the same individual (Swidler, 2001). In order to explain this finding Swidler examines the nature of marriage, and she argues that marriage as an institution and a relationship can provide a married couple with this duality of thought (prosaic and mythic notion of love). For example, when people think about their choice of getting married or remaining married tend to mobilize the mythic notion of love, but when they think about their everyday relationship people use the prosaic realistic view of love.

### **3.1.2 Relationship beliefs**

When people enter relationships they already have in mind beliefs about what relationships should be like, what characteristics make them worth-while and what rules relational partners should follow. These expectations and beliefs about relationships and love, whether they are realistic or idealistic, they are called romantic beliefs. An important reason to look into these romantic beliefs is that romantic beliefs may determine our future intimate relationships (Knee 1998; Sprecher & Metts 1999). For instance, a belief in destiny may lead an individual to believe that partners are either meant to be together or not, while a belief in growth may lead another individual to believe that relationships need to be developed and cultivated with a lot of effort (Knee, 1998).

Romantic beliefs are related with emotions of love, liking, and passion (Sprecher & Metts 1999) but they are also highly associated with ideas that come from our culture's love mythologies such as the love stories of Romeo and Juliet, Lancelot and Guinevere or Tristan and Isolde (Swidler 2001). Of course in the modern world these love stories are just a preliminary aspect of our world's love stories. Many researchers have supported that love remains one of the most depicted topic in media today. (Galician, 2004, 2007; Johnson & Holmes 2009). Having a look at the entire media spectrum (television, movies, newspapers, books, music and the internet) one can easily see that this is true about media and romantic love. It has also been argued that media may affect somehow the audience, by helping people either to construct their own love stories or even to form their romantic beliefs (Galician, 2004; Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Holmes & Johnson, 2009; Sternberg 1995)

According to Sternberg (1995), individuals like authors construct their own stories about love and they also explain their actions and motivations based on those stories (Sternberg, 1995). The themes and the plot of these stories are formed by people themselves from various sources such as their personality traits, their experiences, emotions, motives and cognitions. Sternberg also observes that the stories people create are always within a context of their culture, because people have to create stories that are socio-culturally acceptable. Therefore our stories of love can be very much affected by our culture mores and values. However, our stories about love can be also affected by our interaction with parents, siblings and friends as well as by stories we heard from fairy tales, novels and movies (such as Romeo and Juliet). Consequently, one can justifiably argue that our "stories" about love and romantic beliefs can be affected by media culture as well.

Moreover it has been argued that romantic movies especially romantic comedies due to the fact that they depict romantic beliefs they may enhance and reinforce some viewers' romantic beliefs. For this reason many researchers have studied these movies content and tried to indicate how and to what extent these movies could "cultivate" romantic beliefs to their viewers. (Galicia, 2007; Hefner & Wilson 2013; Holmes & Johnson, 2009). Before I attempt to explore these studies, I will try to see on what theories these studies rely. One of these theories is cultivation theory which is going to be discussed in the next section.

### 3.2 Cultivation Theory

Cultivation theory suggests that people's attitudes and beliefs about society can be influenced by television and media in the long term. The more television people watch the more likely they are to be influenced by the world depicted on television to the extent that they view real world as similar to the world presented by television (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002). According to cultivation theory viewers who spend many hours watching television inevitably internalize some ideas and principles that are recurrently presented on this medium. Cultivation of certain information such as facts, values, assumptions, images and beliefs occurs within the "black box" of the individual who is exposed to that kind of information (Morgan & Shanahan, 1999, p.177).

Television, according to Shanahan and Morgan (1999), take advantage of representational realism in the form of story-telling and persuade the viewers that the events which are taking place in the television dramas could happen in reality. In other words the viewers most of the times can easily imagine themselves being in the place of the central character of a movie or a television series. In this way the viewers are continuously presented by 'facts' and impressions about life and the world from television, as a result they can accept these facts and impressions that exist in the same way in the real world (Shanahan & Morgan 1999).

Despite the fact that cultivation theory has been established in the 1970s as a way of assessing the contribution of television messages to viewers' conceptions, there is still much criticism of the cultivation theory as many other factors can exert an influence on people's attitudes besides heavy exposure to television. It has also been supported that cultivation theory is very simplistic since it is not explained in the whole theory how the effects may occur (Hirsch, 1981). Criticism against cultivation theory has also been backed up by the fact that a cognitive model which proves the function of the theory has not yet been developed in the research.

However, there have been some scholars who supported cultivation theory and advanced the theory with their studies. For instance, Shrum argues that the heavy viewers of television are more likely to have the television images in their minds and, thus, are more likely to access these images in order to answer questions that require

them to express their beliefs and ideas about a topic. In other words, when heavy viewers of romantic comedies are asked about their romantic beliefs, they may reflect romantic ideals that they have continuously watched in these movies (Shrum, 1997). Thus, when a heavy viewer of romantic comedies is called to answer questions about love and romance, she most probably will draw from the images she has in her mind from these movies.

Cultivation research so far has used different techniques to assess cultivation, but what is essential in cultivation theory is the comparison of people who spend much time watching television and people who spend less time watching television. Thus, a cultivation research focuses on the differences of heavy and light viewers indicating in this way that television may contribute to viewers' conception of social reality (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). By interviewing heavy and non heavy viewers, this research follows a cultivation theory approach and tries to indicate any differences in the participants' beliefs. An assumption that can be made at this point and in accordance with cultivation theory (for the current research) is that heavy viewers of romantic comedies may hold beliefs about romantic love similar to the romantic ideals that are constantly depicted by romantic comedies.

The fact, that the focus of this research is the viewers of romantic comedies, makes romantic comedies and what they depict of great importance for the thesis. Thus, an attempt will be made in the next section to explore what the existing research on romantic comedies has so far indicated.

### **3.2.1 Romantic Comedies**

Many scholars studied romantic love and media, but there aren't many studies that focused exclusively on romantic comedies. For instance, Galician (2007) edited a distinctive volume on how sex, love and romance are represented in the media. The scholars who participated in this volume, tried to find indications of the existence of Galician's 12 myths of sex romance and love that are being presented in the media (Galician, 2007). Some of the Galician's myths are: "Your perfect partner is cosmically predestined", "Love at first sight exists", "Your true soul mate knows

what you're thinking or feeling”, “The right mate completes you—filling your needs and making your dreams come true”, “if your partner is truly meant for you, sex is easy and wonderful”, “all you need is love, so it doesn’t matter if you and your lover have very different values” (Galician, 2007, pp. 2-3). According to Galician all these myths are constantly being depicted across the whole media spectrum (Galician, 2007).

However, Galician’s (2007) volume had also studies that dealt only with romantic comedies and the romantic myths that are being presented in these films. One of these studies is the study of Johnson (2007) who tried to indicate consistent myths in romantic comedies. Particularly, Johnson(2007) focused on 13 popular wedding films (romantic comedies) and tried to find evidence that the 12 myths about love and romance, that Galician (2004) created and suggested that they exist in all media, are also present in these movies. Johnson (2007) found that all of the Galician’s myths are greatly depicted in the dialogues and the stories of the films he examined (Johnson, 2007).

Similarly, Winn (2007), supported that there is a pervasive "carpe diem/seize the day" theme within Hollywood romantic comedies. According to her research, these movies have five “seize the day” themes such as the: ‘turning points’, ‘sudden transformation’, ‘overcoming oneself’, ‘overcoming the odds’ and ‘sacrifice’ (Winn, 2007, p.217). Two of these themes though “Overcoming the odds” and “Sacrifice” are of a special interest because they are in accordance with previous research (Galician, 2004; Johnson, 2007). The “overcoming the odds” theme in which a couple triumphs over the ‘odds’, seems to perpetuate Galician’s myth “All you really need is love, so it doesn’t matter if you and your partner have very different values” (Galician, 2004, p.55). According to Winn (2007) the “overcoming the odds” theme in romantic comedies is usually depicted as overcoming cultural differences or interpersonal differences (Winn 2007, p. 221). Finally, “sacrifice” according to Winn (2007) is another frequent theme that exists in these movies which deals with saving a relationship by sacrificing oneself. In this theme the partner who sacrifices himself/herself does this willingly and seems to be happy in doing so “in the face of the triumph of romance” (Winn, 2007, p.223). Winn also concludes that romantic

comedies leave out relational difficulties and mainly focus on the honeymoon dating phase which is usually the early stages of a relationship.

Both studies (Johnson, 2007; Winn, 2007) clearly suggest that heavy viewers of these movies may cultivate idealistic love beliefs and develop “movies” expectations of romantic relationships. Despite the fact that the studies of Winn (2007) and Johnson (2007) are very informative, they are descriptive analyses which lack the element of a quantitative research approach. Thus, some scholars tried to fill that gap by undertaking content analysis of a great number of these movies.

Most specifically, Johnson and Holmes (2009) undertook a content analysis of 40 top grossing romantic comedy films. In their analysis they examined not only verbal messages but also non verbal and they coded in total 100 romantic behaviours of the movies’ characters. Worth to be noted is that in their open coding categories, their largest category was kissing with 326 incidents in 40 films and the second-largest category was compliments with 154 incidents of which 123 incidents were expressed by male characters. They also found that male characters were the ones in these movies who were taking initiatives and making the “greater effort”(Johnson & Holmes, 2009, p.360). Another interesting finding of the study of Johnson and Holmes (2009), is that expressing affection is one of the most persistent acts in these movies. Affection was the largest axial category comprising 25% of their sample. However, married couples in these movies were rarely depicted to express affection or to be passionate to one another, and when they were shown to express affection, this was limited to simple gestures such as “brief kisses or standing with an arm around one other” (Johnson & Holmes 2009, p.362).

What is apparent from the existing studies on romantic comedies is that these films depict the “getting married” phase in a very exciting and unrealistic way (Johnson, 2007), whereas the “being married” phase is depicted as a difficult and harsh phase from where affection and romance have evaporated. In addition to these studies is the research of Hefner and Wilson (2013), who not only studied the content of these movies but they also tried to find an association between the romantic beliefs of the viewers and the romantic ideals depicted by these movies.



Hefner and Wilson (2013), also have focused on the romantic ideals that are continuously depicted in romantic comedies and tried to examine whether these movies have an overarching theme. In their analysis of 50 romantic comedies, they have coded several types of expressions of love and romance. Interestingly the ideal “one and only” constitutes 40% of these codes. One fourth of the coded expressions had to do with the ideal “love conquers all”, whereas almost one third of these expressions had to do with the ideals of “love at first sight” and “idealization of the partner”. Finally, despite the figures they found that the overarching theme in the vast majority of romantic comedies was the ideal “love conquers all”. They were also able to find an association between romantic comedy viewing and endorsement of romantic beliefs, especially the belief: “the idealization of the other”. In addition and to their surprise Hefner and Wilson (2013) were able to prove that only “the idealization of the partner” was positively related to repeated viewing of these movies (Hefner & Wilson 2013).

All these studies, consistent with Cultivation theory, have suggested that romantic comedies can somehow influence the heavy viewer of these movies. Heavy viewers of romantic comedies are likely to develop romantic beliefs or at least have expectations about the romantic relationships as they are represented in these movies. According to the same studies, the most common romantic ideals that are portrayed in romantic comedies are: “Love conquers all”, “idealization of partner”, “soul mate/one and only” and in some cases “love at first sight” (Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Johnson & Holmes 2009). All the ideals that are depicted in these movies constitute in a way the potential ideal relationship of the viewers. For this reason the interviews of this study tried to elicit beliefs and ideas of the participants on the following four themes “Love conquers all”, “idealization of partner”, “soul mate/one and only”, “love at first sight”.

### **3.2.2 Women and Romantic Comedies**

The focus of this research is on women which are heavy and non-heavy viewers of romantic comedies for various reasons. Since the very beginning of the cinema, romantic movies attracted the audience’s attention and particularly the young audience’s attention (Edman, 1940). It has also been argued that young viewers are

often trying to acquire information about love from television and movies (Bachen & Illouz, 1996). Romantic movies and to be more precise romantic comedies are a very popular and successful genre. They had ten billion dollars in gross revenue between 1995 and 2010 (Nash, 2015). According to Hall and his study (2005), about the types of media people choose to watch, Romance comedy films have the highest viewing average (Hall, 2005).

Despite the fact that there has not been a clear “purification” of genres in movies as there has been in music or in literature (Bauman, 2001), romantic comedies appear to be a much purified genre compared to other movie genres. Romantic comedies seem to have similar setting, similar topic and the same emotional mood. Furthermore romantic comedies follow a clear structure in order to unwind their plot. As Rubinfeld (2001) supported the typical romantic comedy has a particular formula: (a) a meeting between a hero and a heroine, (b) many obstacles that prevent the characters from recognizing, declaring and legitimizing their mutual love, (c) the triumph over the obstacles, and (d) happy ending with a wedding. (Rubinfeld, 2001).

Romantic comedies are informally called “chick-flicks”, indicating that they don’t only attract adolescents but also women, after all in these movies the woman is the clear lead protagonist (Fischhoff et al, 1997). According to Fischhoff et al. (1997) and their study, male and females have clear differences in movie preferences. Women are attracted to romance-movies (“women films”) more than men do and are prone to enjoy this movie genre more since the story of these movies is told from a woman’s point of view (Fischhoff et al, 1997). In another study, Holmes (2007) found a significant association between female viewers and preference for romance media. He was also able to indicate that female viewers of romance media come to believe that mind reading is expected in a relationship (Holmes, 2007).

One may argue why research needs to focus on romantic comedies per se, and neglect somehow the other romance content media such as soap operas and reality programmes on television. There are many reasons which suggest that romantic comedies deserve a closer look. In romantic comedies, unlike other romantic content media, the main storyline of the movie is the love story of the couple and not any other storyline which may have a love story as a subplot of the whole story.

Moreover, romantic comedies unlike other romance content media, provide stories that show a romantic relationship from the beginning to the end in only 90 minutes that the movie lasts. Comparing romantic comedies with soap operas where the characters and the love story develop gradually, it can be argued that the movies may have a bigger impact on the viewer since in one single sitting the movie's plot, meanings and overarching messages are revealed. This seems to be in accordance with cultivation theory because the viewer who continuously watches these movies is being intensely exposed to media messages that exclusively deal with romantic and love themes.

### **3.3 Global media**

An important cultural product such as romantic comedies which can reach viewers all around the globe certainly implicates the debate about global media and their influence. The concept of the powerful media and their ability to promote ideas and cultural products all over the world is not new at all, on the contrary it has been analyzed by many scholars and it has even foster many and different views about globalization. Already in the 1960s McLuhan argued that with the development of electronic media, human history will enter in a new phase where the people of the world will live in a 'global village' (McLuhan, 1962). The notion of global village might seem dated today but the debate for the globalized world is very much apropos.

The phenomenon of globalization has been discussed and analysed by several scholars, thus trying to define such a disputed topic is not an easy task. However, a general definition that can be attributed to such a phenomenon can be as follows: globalization is the diffusion of commodities, ideas, values and people by which the individuals' everyday experience may be influenced and as a result a standardization of cultural expression may occur (Durham & Kellner 2001; Hall, 1997; McLuhan, 1964; Pietersen, 1994, Tomlinson, 1991).

Ideas and theories about globalization are divided between scholars that are pro-globalization and try to defend this phenomenon's positive aspects and scholars who have a negative view on globalization. The negative view of globalization sees the

phenomenon as another form of domination and control by the wealthier countries, over the undeveloped ones. Scholars who support this view argue about a cultural imperialism which can be harmful as it can produce a cultural homogenization (Durham & Kellner 2001). As Tomlinson (1991) suggests cultural imperialism is applied when the values, practices and meanings of a strong foreign culture are imposed upon a native culture (Crane 2013; Lee, 2008; Tomlinson, 1991).

The cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1997) identifies two major characteristics of global media culture: first, a homogenization of a cultural representation and second, the functioning of the West as a centre of this homogenization where this global mass culture is produced and from where it is distributed throughout the world (Hall, 1997). Supporters of media imperialism argue that media that originate from the same source and are alike in content can develop similar preferences and likings to different audiences. As a result media taste and media consumption around the world can become more homogeneous (Fu, 2006).

Some other theorists though argue that despite the fact that global media cultural products have overflowed the world today, this does not suggest that a severe cultural homogenization is taking place; on the contrary these theorists see it as a global hybridization of cultures. One of them is Pieterse (1994) who also supports that a better term for the phenomenon of globalization in today's world is hybridization since global media culture blends with local cultures and creates a new hybrid culture in different places of the world. Hybridization can bring together "exotic and familiar, villagers and townspeople, performers and observers" (Pieterse, 1994, as cited in Durham & Kellner 2001 p. 668) and blend them together. The same applies to different cultures, nations and ethnicities which mix together, share and adopt elements from one another (Pieterse, 1994). This line of argument supports that different societies react to the same audiovisual products heterogeneously depending on their cultures' peculiarities, such as social norms, taste preferences, and aesthetic judgments

### 3.3.1 American Media Culture

This debate about global media and globalization, most of the time aims at the media hegemony of the USA. A country which is one of the main producers and distributors of media cultural “goods” that reach the most remote areas of the world. Although other countries film industries are increasing their film productions (Crane, 2013), it is well acknowledged that American film industry dominates global media culture and in a way constitutes a menace to the film industries of other countries.

USA is considered a super producer in film industry since it produces and exports a great number of movies, much bigger than any other nation (Crane, 2013). For instance USA from 1970 to 1997 increased the exports of films into other countries, while all the other countries experience a sharp exports fall (Fu, 2006). In support of this, is the research of Fu and Govindaraju (2010) who studied the box office revenues in 35 countries between 2002-2007 and found that even countries which have cultural differences with the United States, were consuming American movies to a greater extent the recent years. These findings also suggest that audience’s taste in these countries may have become more homogeneous and closer to the Hollywood films (Fu & Govindaraju, 2010).

There are various reasons for the dominance of the American film industry such as the talent and the means that are concentrated in Hollywood or the cultural policy of USA’s government in order to promote American films (Scott , 2010). However there is one reason which is very important and it is related to the current research. The American films are built on universal themes of action, sex, and fantasy which rely more on images and visual depictions than on dialogue. Lee describes the Hollywood films as “non-American” and certainly “less cultural specific” (Lee, 2008, p. 121). American film industry in its attempt to attract viewers from the global film market, developed a new type of films where the American cultural elements have been eradicated. These films are called transnational since they have themes that are broad, unspecific and can address audiences from other cultures.

Thus it is well acknowledged that the American film industry dominates global media culture. Therefore, many countries are taking different kind of measures in order to “protect” their film industries. Measures like putting restrictions to foreign competitors such as tariffs and quotas or subsidizing the domestic film industry. Even UNESCO recognises the exceptional value of cultural expression, including films. This is one of the main reasons that in the 2005 Convention created policies to safeguard different forms of cultural expression. A convention that USA not only refused to sign but also tried to annihilate it by signing bilateral trade agreements with different countries, in order to promote American films (Crane, 2013).

In this challenging media landscape, it is apparent that small countries, like Cyprus, are at the mercy of the markets and the great producers and distributors. Fu (2006) has indicated that small and not very developed markets import only from specific film industries unlike wealthier countries that import from various film origins (Fu, 2006). Cyprus, seems to be such a case as it has cinemas which show exclusively American movies. Since 2001 when the first multiplex cinema of Cyprus officially opened with a focus on American films, the smaller independent Cinemas of the country which showed non-American movies gradually closed. Today, Cyprus constitutes of 6 multiplex cinemas and 28 movie screens which project exclusively US productions (Cystat, 2015). Thus, in this study Cyprus presents the opportunity to test important theories about cultural imperialism, hybridization and American media domination around the world.

### **3.4 Research Question and Sub Questions**

As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis love is directly related to culture and society. Thus, having to study what people think about romantic love you need to take into consideration their cultural background and their societal reality. Of course, the fact that in today’s world, the global media culture has become very powerful and can influence people around the world should be also taken into account. Thus this thesis tries to examine love and somehow indications for media influence through the prism of people’s ideas and beliefs about love.

More particularly, focusing on women, of such a specific location like Cyprus, who are viewers (heavy or non-heavy viewers) of such a specific global product such as romantic comedies, it is as if one is examining the ideas of love that may derive from global and local culture of love. Therefore having the discourses of two groups of interviewees (heavy and non heavy viewers) to compare and typify makes the whole thesis a debate about love, romantic ideals, global media culture, cultivation theory, heavy viewers and non-heavy viewers of screen media.

The objective of the thesis becomes even more challenging if you think that in Cyprus a traditional notion of love which affects mostly Cypriot women is well embedded in Cypriots' minds (Hatzivassilis, 1997). Global media products, on the other hand (and in this case romantic comedies), seem to have the ability to cultivate romantic ideals and beliefs to a heavy viewer (especially to women) wherever they are (Galician, 2007; Hefner & Wilson, 2013). Thus, focusing on heavy and non-heavy viewers of romantic comedies and having qualitative interviews with them, gives this research the opportunity to analyse the ways in which media messages are internalized. For this reason the distinction of Swidler (prosaic and idealistic notion of love) is drawn here to help the analysis and the interpretation of the discourses of the participants in such a broad topic as love.

This leads us to the questions that this thesis is trying to answer: Are there any differences in the way heavy and non-heavy female viewers of romantic comedies think and talk about love? Are there similarities between the discourses on romantic love of these two groups? Which group seems to endorse romantic ideals and which group seems to hold a realistic notion of love? All these questions lead to the research question of this thesis which is: How can discourses on romantic love, by heavy and non-heavy romantic comedy female viewers in Cyprus, be typified and distinguished?

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Qualitative Interview**

In order to answer the research question of this thesis, I chose to follow qualitative research approach for several reasons. Due to the fact that the thesis deals with the unlimited/inexhaustible theme of love, where peoples' beliefs are likely to be various, ambiguous and inconsistent, qualitative research interviews seem to be the most appropriate method for this thesis. As Swidler supports people have multiple approaches to different situations in their love life and they mobilize different meanings to organize different lines of action (Swidler, 2001). Thus, having to face such a challenge, the qualitative interviews appear to be the method with which I can explore the respondents' point of view and investigate their arguments for their behaviour on such a personal matter as love.

Qualitative interviews give me the opportunity to meet and talk with the participants in person and as a result to receive an in-depth idea of the interviewees' beliefs about romantic love by examining the way they think and talk about this topic. As Holstein and Gubrium (1995) support it is a good method for investigating questions of 'why' and 'how'. Thus, the qualitative interviews will give me the opportunity not only to study what people say, but also how they say it (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995).

Moreover, having to answer a research question which aims to investigate the discourses of Cypriot women (heavy and non-heavy romantic comedy viewers) about romantic love, the qualitative approach with interviews appears to be the only way to address fully the researched topic. As Folkestad (2008) supports qualitative interviews allow the respondents to reflect and reason on a variety of subjects in a profound way and provide an insight to the research question (Folkestad, 2008).

### **4.2 Discourse analysis**

The method of analysing the interviews for the current research is discourse analysis. When one transcribes interviews (as it happens here), one has the opportunity to undertake a discourse analysis on what has been said and how. The reason why discourse analysis is used is because it allows the researcher to approach his/her data



in an in depth and well structured way while doing qualitative research. In discourse analysis the main aim is how people use language to construct their accounts of the social world. In other words, discourse analysis is concerned with the way language is used to present different aspects of reality. Thus, discourse analysts can also be selective in relation to the data and he/she can extract parts of the discourse that provide the richest source of information (Tonkiss, 2004).

Furthermore, in discourse analysis, all the data have to be treated as potential indicators of concepts and for this reason all the collected data need to be analysed well without any preconceived analytic scheme or standardized ideas and codes. Thus, the discourse analysis in this research, which deals with the very broad topic of love, provides a method that may dig out any unexpected view of the participants and will code and categorise it, if it actually emerges from the interviews and if it is compatible with the research objective (Tonkiss, 2004). What is meant by coding in discourse analysis is the process of giving conceptual labels to different segments of data in order to bring up themes and patterns.

An important aspect of discourse analysis is that the initial codes should be numerous and specific so that the researcher could later combine them in larger categories, and those categories into themes that inform the theoretical concepts of his/her research. Therefore, discourse analysis constitutes a well structured method that can illuminate in the best possible way the data of this research and it may lead to interesting and unexpected findings.

### **4.3 Procedure**

In order to answer the research question 14 qualitative interviews were conducted (7 heavy viewers and 7 non-heavy viewers of romantic comedies). The qualitative interviews were conducted in Cyprus between the 25th of March and the 9th of April. The interviews took place in cafes or at the interviewees' houses on a specific time during the day which was arranged in advance by the phone. The participants did not know much about the design of the research apart that it had to do with movies and their romantic beliefs. Before the interview I made it clear to the interviewees that there is not right or wrong answer in issues like love and romance, in order to make

my respondents feel confident. However, due to the fact that sometimes sensitive issues emerged about romantic love and relationships (e.g. ex-boyfriend, dramatic break up), I felt that I had to create a climate of trust and understanding.

Although I had a questionnaire to follow I did not always stick to it in a rigid way. For example, when the interviewees were single I was focusing more on the questions that dealt with love and relationships in general, whereas when the participants were in a relationship I was trying to elicit as much information as possible about their behaviour in their relationships. Most of my questions were formed to make the respondents choose and then justify their choice among different love stories, images and examples. The follow up questions aimed to make the interviewees justify themselves, their actions and their choices about romantic relationships, beliefs and expectations. Thus, follow up question like “What do you mean?” or “In what way?” I believe prompt the interviewees to elaborate on their romantic views and ideas.

The interview questions deal with issues of love which could foster discussions about prosaic or idealistic notion of love. During the interviews, special emphasis was given on the romantic ideals that are represented in romantic comedies: “love at first sight” “Love conquers all”, “idealization of partner” and “soul mate/one and only” (Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Johnson & Holmes 2009; Johnson, 2007; Winn, 2007). However, I didn’t name any of the romantic ideals that can be found or are being suggested by these movies in order to let the interviewees express freely their views about romantic love in their own words. In this way I could investigate how things were said and what terms the interviewee used in order to describe her notion of romantic love. A romantic ideal was named by me only after the interviewee herself described that ideal. Interestingly I found that despite the fact that some interviewees described the ideals, they didn’t agree that what they described was the romantic ideal I pointed out.

In order to make the interviewees express themselves and describe their romantic beliefs, some of the interview’s questions were trying to elicit romantic stories that the participants themselves had experienced. For this reasons questions like: “how did you get together with your boyfriend?” or “Can you tell me a very romantic moment you have experienced recently?” made the participants narrate a story or describe an incident. Also questions about their parents acquaintance or a story that they consider

as the ultimate romantic story, made the interviewee not only tell a story but also take a stance on this story and elaborate on why she considered it romantic. These kinds of questions were chosen for two reasons. First, it is the nature of the research such, that it is important to know the participants' romantic experiences as well as what stories they consider romantic. Second, it is also a way to assess whether these stories join hands with the romantic comedies stories of relational scripts, as Winn (2007) and Rubinfeld (2001) described them. In addition vignettes were used when the participants weren't very talkative. The vignettes were about difficult decisions faced by lovers in their relationships (for the vignettes see the appendix). In this way I was able to ask the interviewees about difficult dilemmas and not only make them express their views about love but also urged them to reveal their rationale.

#### **4.3.1 Sample**

As mentioned above the units of analysis were 14 young women (25-33 years old), who grew up in Cyprus and live there today (with the exception of two master students who live in Rotterdam for the academic year 2014-15). All the participants were Greek-Cypriot, and the spoken language of the interviews was Greek-Cypriot dialect. From the 14 participants only one was married with children, while two of them were newlywed, five of them were in a relationship and six of them were single. Pseudonyms were used for interviewees only in one occasion where the particular interviewee wanted to keep her anonymity.

In order to find and select the participants I used snowball method, so an interviewee or an acquaintance/friend led me to the next heavy or non-heavy viewer who was willing to participate in the research. The snowball method allowed me to reach easily heavy and non-heavy viewers participants. With heavy viewers particularly, the method of snowball sample was very helpful because often heavy viewers have friends who are also heavy viewers of romantic comedies. Surprisingly there were many individuals who wanted to participate in the research and I even had the opportunity to choose which of ones to interview.

Despite the limitation of the snowball method that the selection of the interviewees may come from the same network, I believe that my sample tackled this challenge.

Due to the fact that I was aware of this limitation of the snowball sample and I had many individuals who wanted to participate, I deliberately tried to select interviewees who were not in the same network of friends and they were also coming from different cities of Cyprus. Thus, I ended up with a sample of 14 female respondents who were coming from the four main cities of Cyprus: Nicosia, Limassol, Larnaca and Paphos, as well as from villages of different regions.

The sample consists of 7 heavy viewers of romantic comedies and 7 non-heavy viewers of romantic comedies. Although the “orthodox” cultivation way to assess media exposure is to ask the respondents how much time they spend watching television, many other types of measurement have been proposed (Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). For instance studies which were focusing on movies, introduced a list of movies where they asked the participants to tick the movies they had watched (Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Holmes 2009). This technique to measure the amount of romantic comedies viewing of the participants was used in this study.

Thus, in order to examine if the participant was actually a heavy viewer of these movies, she was given at the beginning of the interview a list of 40 romantic comedies to tick the movies she had watched (for the list see the appendix). For this thesis, heavy viewer was considered the participant who had watched more than 30 out of 40 movies on the list. Something else that was also taken into account was the admission of the participant that she was a heavy viewer as well as how many times a participant has watched the same movie. The list of 40 romantic comedies was made of the 30 top-grossing romantic comedies which were retrieved by the [mojobox.com](http://mojobox.com) and 10 additional romantic comedies (no matter their revenues) that have been projected in the Cypriot cinemas and television (K-Cineplex, 2015; Press and Information Office of Cyprus Government [PIO] 2015). Information about the 10 additional films were acquired from the cinemas K-Cineplex (Andri Constantinou, General Manager of K-Cineplex, personal communication, March 26, 2015) regarding the movies they have shown since 2001 and from the Press information centre of Cyprus (PIO, March 27, 2015), where I retrieved from its database which romantic comedies have been shown to the Cypriot Television. This extended list, comparing to other studies’ lists of

movies (e.g. Hefner & Wilson 2013), was an attempt to measure the participant's exposure to romantic comedies as accurately as possible.

According to this list the interviewees were classified for this research as heavy or non-heavy viewers of romantic comedies. More specifically the heavy viewers were Polina (teacher, 29 years old), Naya (air hostess, 28 years old), Annita (artist, 30 years old), Varvara (air hostess, 31 years old), Marianna (graphic designer, 31 years old), Maria (student, 25 years old), Vivian (manager, 30 years old). The non-heavy viewers were Fivi (student, 25 years old), Anastasia (Bank employee, 32 years old), Ksanthi (secretary, 30 years old), Barbara (unemployed, 30 years old), Rona (artist, 27 years old), Klelia (unemployed, 25 years old), Angie (bank employee, 33 years old).

#### **4.3.2 Analysis**

The interviews were recorded and their duration was between 30 minutes to 1 hour and 15 minutes. After completing an interview I transcribed it in a Microsoft word document. I also transcribed in a word document the list of the romantic comedies where each participant had to tick the movies she watched. All the interview transcripts were printed out and read thoroughly many times. Follow

Applying a discourse analysis approach, while I was reading the transcripts I looked for patterns of contrast in the discourses between the two different groups (heavy and non-heavy viewers). Following the distinction of Swidler (2001), that there are two kinds of love, the prosaic and the idealistic love, the analysis tried to indicate whether the participants hold an idealistic or prosaic notion of love. At the same time I looked for any indications of consistency of the discourses between interviewees of the same group but also between interviewees of the two different groups (heavy and non-heavy viewers). In this way, I was able to isolate parts of the discourses that were of primary interest for the research, such as ideas about marriage, definitions of love and romance as well as romantic stories that the participants narrated. I also looked for any repetition of key words or phrases that could indicate what the participant actually thinks about romantic love. At this stage I worked closely with the data and I coded all the transcripts one by one.

The coding was done by writing codes in the margin of transcripts and by using memos where needed. Despite the fact that the interviews tried to elicit ideas and views of the participants on certain romantic ideals (love at first sight, love conquers all, ideal partner, predestined partner), the analysis of the transcripts didn't follow strictly these concepts. After completing the coding of every transcript, I was writing the codes of each transcript in a word document where I collected all the codes from all the transcripts. The word document where I collected the codes, was divided in two lists: heavy and non-heavy viewers. Together with the codes I was also writing the name of the participant as well as the locations of the code in the transcript so I would be able to find them later during the analysis.

All the codes together were 132, which later were put into bigger categories such as: marriage, sacrifice, obstacles, attraction, understanding and acceptance. These categories were linked to romantic ideals and concepts at the results' chapter were linked to romantic ideals and concepts. For instance, the categories of obstacles and sacrifice were linked to the ideal love conquers all, whereas categories such as communication and understanding were linked to the idealization of partner. In addition, parts of transcripts that seemed important for the objective of the research (such descriptions of romance or beliefs and ideas of the interviewees) were extracted from the transcript and translated in order to be analyzed and compared with other interviewees' answers. Some of these extracts can be found in the next chapter where they also are linked to existing theory.

## **5. Results**

### **5.1 Heavy and Non-heavy Viewers**

The distinction between heavy and non-heavy viewers in terms of their discourses on romantic love was sometimes easy to be distinguished but some other times it was not clear to which group a participant belonged. Interestingly the majority of heavy and non-heavy viewers were able to discuss love and romance in depth and they could also elaborate on some interesting ideas and insights.

The findings of this research seem to be in accordance with the initial assumption that the heavy viewers may be found closer to an idealistic-movies notion of love while the non-heavy viewers may be found to hold a realistic-prosaic notion of love. There are also indications in the discourses of these two groups, (heavy and non-heavy viewers) that idealistic and prosaic views of love could be found in the same participant. In other words, both heavy viewers and non-heavy viewers seemed to hold prosaic and movies view of love separately and simultaneously. In general what can be said for these two groups (heavy and non-heavy viewers) is that they have many similarities concerning their love and romance ideas but they have also some distinct differences in some specific themes.

A particular difference of these two groups which was evident from the very beginning of the empirical analysis was that the heavy viewers of romantic comedies in this sample were much more talkative than the non-heavy viewers. It seemed as if they had ready answers for some questions and also they were willing to justify their responses describing what they read, heard or experienced. It seemed that the majority of the heavy viewers troubled themselves with similar dilemmas and questions much before the interview. Even the less talkative and shy heavy viewers were able to explain their thoughts with an example or a metaphor. On the other hand the non-heavy viewers were rather negative and reluctant to answer my questions. It was like they reacted as if they had not encountered such dilemmas before or they had not had any trouble with such issues. It was obvious that they had difficulties answering my questions. In support of that I quote some of the non heavy viewers' comments: "What kind of questions are these?" (Ksanthi, non-heavy viewers) or "I don't know... I need time to think for these, you should have sent me the questionnaire to think

about the answers” (Angie, non-heavy viewer). To be more specific the 7 heavy viewers’ interviews together lasted almost 8 hours whereas the duration of the non-heavy viewers’ interviews was only 5 hours. To sketch it better the heavy viewers all together had 63 pages of transcript whereas the non-heavy viewers had 50 pages of transcript.

### **5.1.1 Participants’ differences in their Discourses**

Despite the fact that the differences which have been found between heavy and non heavy viewers were not many, they become very notable when one takes into account the fact that the heavy viewers’ romantic beliefs that were different from non-heavy viewers, are continuously depicted in romantic comedies. Particularly the participants of this study were found to differ in their discourses on romantic love in three different topics: predestined partner, marriage and sacrifice.

The heavy viewers, were found to believe in a predestined partner who as they stated, wasn’t only their own choice but he was also the choice of fate. Some of them clearly said that they believed in fortune and they considered that often the things which happened in their love life were meant to happen. Interestingly, while heavy viewers of romantic comedies believed in destiny, the majority of non-heavy viewers believed in “growth” of romantic relationships. In other words, non-heavy viewers believed that couples need to try hard in order to develop a successful relationship.

Another remarkable difference is that non-heavy viewers were in favour of marriage whereas heavy viewers believed that marriage wasn’t important for the romance of their relationship. In addition, non-heavy viewers not only were in favour of marriage but the majority of them seemed to believe that marriage should be taken into account when the couples want to proceed to the “next level” in their relationships.

A category that emerged from the analysis of the transcripts and it was found only in the interviews of heavy viewers, was the theme of sacrifice. According to Winn (2007) this theme which emphasizes the idea of saving a relationship by sacrificing oneself, is a very common theme in romantic comedies. Some of the heavy viewers of this research seemed to greatly endorse this belief and were ready to sacrifice



themselves for their beloved one but at the same time they expected their partner to sacrifice part of his personality in order to satisfy them. Moreover, only two heavy viewers seemed to strongly believe in the ideal of love at first sight. Finally, although both heavy and non-heavy viewers seemed to agree that acceptance and understanding are very important in a romantic relationship, only heavy viewers were in a position to explain in detail what they meant by acceptance and understanding and to support their opinion with examples, metaphors and stories.

### **5.1.2 Participants Similarities in their Discourses**

An initial assumption of this thesis was that heavy viewers of romantic comedies would hold ideas and beliefs about romantic love closer to the romantic ideals depicted by these movies; and as a result a clear distinction between heavy and non-heavy viewers of romantic comedies would take place in the analysis of the transcripts. However, heavy and non-heavy viewers of romantic comedies in Cyprus often came up with the same ideas about romantic love.

A common belief of the participants was the ideal that love conquers all. Both heavy and non-heavy viewers seemed to strongly believe in the power of love to overcome all obstacles. Interestingly, for both groups, obstacles in a couple's romantic relationship had a double role: to test the love the partners have for each other and consequently to strengthen their relationship. This was very much apparent in the love stories and the romantic incidents the interviewees narrated during the interviews. It is also worth to note that the majority of the respondents of both groups when they were called to narrate a love story or a romantic incident, they referred mostly to old couples.

Another interesting similarity in the beliefs of the two groups was their notion of an ideal partner. Heavy and non-heavy viewers seemed to have unrealistic beliefs about an ideal partner: a caring partner who would try to do everything for them, whom they could trust, on whom they could lean and with whom they could share everything. Both groups also believed that the expression of affection from the part of their partner is also very important. Finally, acceptance and understanding were not only

important for both groups but they were also expected in a relationship. The participants of this research seemed to consider that lovers have to be able to accept each other's flaws, to express their feeling to one another, to listen and discuss issues that might be annoying to one of them.

Despite the fact that the idealistic notion of love was prevalent in both groups' discourses, having a closer look to the transcripts, it can also be argued that some of the participants hold the prosaic notion of love. For instance, some of the participants were found to strongly believe in the growth of relationships and were also prepared to take initiatives, work hard and compromise in order to keep their partner. Moreover, some of the respondents who came to believe in the ideal of sacrificing oneself for the sake of their relationship, they also stated that they believe that acts of sacrifice should be taken by themselves as well. In addition, believing in the sacrifice of oneself for the sake of a relationship can be seen as a prosaic-realistic notion of love because when a woman expects from her partner and also from herself to sacrifice parts of his/her personality (as some respondents were found to believe in this research) this is compatible with what Swidler (2001) describes as prosaic notion of love.

## **5.2 Interpreting Discourses**

The following sections will present and discuss the similarities and the differences between heavy and non heavy viewers' discourses as well as their idealist or/and prosaic-realistic notions of love. Extracts will be used in order to illustrate better the answer of the research question. The findings are also linked with what existing research suggested about romantic love and romantic comedies.

### **5.2.1 Marriage**

Marriage was one of the main themes on which heavy and non-heavy viewers hold different views. At first glance heavy viewers were found to hold views about marriage that weren't in accordance with what some studies on romantic comedies

have indicated, whereas non-heavy viewers seemed to be in favour of marriage as romantic comedies seem to suggest. For instance, the majority of non heavy viewers were in favour of marriage and they came to believe that marriage is necessary for a couple in order to go forward with their relationship. On the other hand the majority of heavy viewers believed that marriage is not only undesirable but also can cause friction in a couple's relationship.

Romantic comedies perpetuate the myth that because "two people love each other, they can get married and everything will work itself out" (Johnson, 2007, p. 312). Despite the fact that in many of these movies the couples seem to have conflicting values, this discrepancy doesn't seem to cause any real problem or bother the couple in any way. There are many real life issues that are absent from these movies or are overcome in a very easy way (Johnson, 2007). In addition the majority of these movies end with a "happy end" and with the wedding of the two main characters or at least a 'promise' for a wedding (Rubinfeld, 2001).

Thus, taking all these into consideration one can assume that heavy viewers of romantic comedies may hold positive views about marriage. However, this was not the case with the interviewees in this research. Particularly with the question should couples get married, the majority of the heavy viewers, answered that they didn't consider marriage important for their relationship, whereas the majority of non-heavy viewers seemed to consider marriage as a necessary "next step" for their relationship.

Most heavy viewers seemed to agree that marriage takes place mainly for other reasons than purely romantic love. For instance Annita (heavy viewer) said: "I believe that marriage secures the couple in social and in financial terms but it has nothing to do with love and romance." The other heavy viewers seemed to share Annita's views about marriage. Varvara, another heavy viewer, explains her thought about marriage as follows: "I believe marriage is made just for social reasons... It is not a marriage that will make you keep your relationship or evolve it.. or anyway get old with him." While Naya (heavy viewer) ascertains: "marriage doesn't help to have a successful relationship, rather the opposite happens as I understood". In the above answers it is obvious that the heavy viewers believe that marriage not only is not in

accordance with their views of romance but marriage can somehow damage a couple's romantic relationship.

On the other hand the majority of non-heavy viewers seemed to believe that marriage is not only needed in a couple but it also helps them to evolve their relationship.

Barbara (non-heavy viewer), who had recently a wedding proposal, put it very romantically: "when you are about to marry you feel that the other is there for you, and he wants you as you are, for a lifetime". Anastasia on the other hand, (married with children) gave a firm answer saying that: "When a couple is about to have babies then you have to get married. It is not true what they say that marriage damages romantic love." Finally, Ksanthi (non-heavy viewer) explained why she believed that couples should get married in a very neat way:

"Because I believe that those who want to be together and continue with their relationship have to get married... things have to be done in the right order... or the order we learnt at least... the couple needs to get married, so that they can continue on a next level; so they will have obligations... I think it is inappropriate to stay with the other as a flatmate and having also a baby... I think it's wrong."

It is obvious that non-heavy viewers believe that marriage needs to be taken into consideration if the couple wants to continue being together. On the other hand heavy viewers of romantic comedies, despite the fact that existing research suggests that heavy viewers of these movies may be in favour of marriage, seemed to think that marriage is not really the next step to a successful relationship. Hence one can argue that there is an inconsistency between what research suggests about heavy viewers of romantic comedies and what is found here about marriage.

An explanation for this inconsistency may come from the content analysis of romantic comedies of Johnson and Holmes (2009). Johnson and Holmes (2009) have argued that in romantic comedies married couples are portrayed as unaffectionate with each other. Despite the fact, that in their analysis of 40 romantic comedies they found that affection was the largest axial category comprising 25% of their sample, the married couples in these movies weren't expressing affection. Married couples most of the

time were represented as unhappy and when there was a discussion about marriage in these movies, a negative view towards marriage was expressed. According to Johnson and Holmes the depiction of marriage in these movies is likely to put across to the viewers of these movies that marriage is deprived of romance (Johnson & Holmes, 2009).

### **5.2.2 Predestined Partner**

*“The longing for a destiny is nowhere stronger than in our romantic life”*. - Alain de Botton, in *Essays in Love* (1993)

As Alain de Botton puts it romantic love seems to be well associated in peoples' mind with fate. This idea, that there is a destiny in our romantic lives where a “one and only/soul mate” is out there, is also very old. As mentioned above, some scholars trace this idea in ancient Greece, more than 2 millenniums ago (Galician, 2004). According to this ideal, there is one and only true love for each person. This myth that: your missing half is somewhere out there and waiting for you to be reunited, it is well embedded in romance content media such as romantic comedies (Galician, 2004; Winn, 2007; Holmes, 2007). It seems that a great number of people believe that they will meet sometime during their life a person who will complete them emotionally and otherwise.

In the sample of this research the theme predestined partner (or one and only/soul mate) was found to be one of the most distinct differences between the discourses of heavy and non heavy viewers. The heavy viewers of this sample seemed to be the ones who came to believe in a predestined partner. From the six interviewees who talked about the destined partner, five were heavy viewers of romantic comedies and only one was non-heavy viewer of these films. All the 6 interviewees, who extensively talked about a predestined partner, mentioned in different parts of the interview: “I believe in fate”, “I believe in fortune”, “it was meant to be”, “It didn't feel like trying but it came natural”, “It's something that you cannot control” or “someone is out there waiting for you”. From their comments on follow-up questions all six interviewees suggested that their lover wasn't only their own choice but he was

also the choice of fate. A typical example of this strong belief on the predestined partner ideal is Vivian (heavy viewer) who said:

**Interviewer:** Why do you think we fall in love with one person rather than another?

**Vivian:** there is something that attracts us to him

**Interviewer:** Which is?

**Vivian:** I believe in a kind of attraction that exists but we are not aware of it... I believe in fortune and I believe that somewhere there is a person for us... That's why I believe that due to the fact that my parents divorced, Theodosios (her boyfriend) was a gift from fate for me.

Vivian here clearly shows that she believes in an attraction that exists (which apparently she felt) but which people are not aware of. She calls it fortune but she also suggests that it is a drive or a feeling that leads us to the one and only partner. However, Vivian also implies that there might be a subconscious aspect of this "unknown attraction" since she mentioned her parents, without clarifying what she means but poetically describes the match with her boyfriend as a "gift from fate".

With another respondent a similar belief about predestined lovers seems to be implied:

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me a very romantic moment you have experienced?

**Barbara:** I was in Thessaloniki and I was walking across a central square when I saw an old lady who used to be my professor at the university. She was with her husband and they walked arm in arm and she was holding a flower.

**Interviewer:** What was romantic about that moment?

**Barbara:** From their expression, their attitude and the way they walked I felt that these two individuals were born to be together and die together. By looking at them I realized in a strange way what they had been going through, what they were going through and what they would be going through in the future.

Barbara here captured the essence of the one and only/ soul mate ideal. Two people that are not only destined to be together but they "were born to be together and die

together”. Despite the fact that Barbara is a non heavy viewer of romantic comedies, it seems that she endorsed Galician’s myths “your perfect partner is cosmically predestined, so nothing/nobody can ultimately separate you” and “The right mate ‘completes you’ — filling your needs and making your dreams come true” which are well embedded in these interviewees’ romantic ideas (Galician, 2007, p. 3).

Similarly Naya seems to believe in a predestined partner:

**Interviewer:** Why do you think that this is so romantic?

**Naya:** Because it was like... there were signs everywhere, it was a very strange coincidence. It was the person that I needed most in my life; he was the man I prayed to meet. But the moment he came into my life I didn’t realize it and I didn’t let him “come into life”.. . I let him after a while, and for this reason I also think that I destroyed the timing...

The interviewee is admitting here that due to the fact that she wasn’t vigilant enough she didn’t take into account the signs and she almost spoiled what was meant to be. This observation seems to agree with what Winn (2007) describes as “seizing the moment” theme which is pervasive in romantic comedies. Winn argues that in romantic comedies the characters are shown to take initiatives and do gestures that bring them together (Winn, 2007). “Seizing the day” theme suggests that such moments may be easily overcome merely by choosing the "right" dramatic gesture at the “right” moment. In the above extract Naya seems to believe in the “seizing the day” theme and for this reason she considers that she spoiled the timing because she didn’t seize the moment the right time.

What I found remarkable from the participants who believe in destiny is not that they cannot understand or they don’t know that there are many reasons that lead us to be with one person rather than another but it is that they choose to see it from a romantic point of view. A good example for that is when Annita a heavy viewer of these films suggested that the subconscious plays a big role in our choices but for her, she insisted that it is the romantic feeling and fate that mostly determine her choices.

**Interviewer:** Why do you think we fall in love with one person rather than another?

**Annita:** Well... needs... issues...

**Interviewer:** Don't you feel that you are a bit cynical right now?

**Annita:** No this is why we fall in love.

**Interviewer:** So there is nothing romantic in this?

**Annita:** Yet, it is romantic... for example a girl's father is crippled and she falls in love with a cripple person, isn't that romantic? Isn't it romantic that her father chose somehow his son-in-law before his daughter was born? It is something that has been determined before you were born and you find it out when you become 25-30 years old.

One can argue that the way Annita discuss the reason we fall in love with one person rather than another suggest that she may have a natural inclination to romantic ideals. Alain de Botton in *Essays for love* discussed the ideal of the fated mate and he intelligently concludes that people most of the times confuse the destiny to love, with the destiny to love a given person (Alain de Botton, 1993). The heavy viewers of this sample who discussed about a predestined partner seem to believe in the destiny to love a given person. An ideal that indicates the heavy viewers' idealistic notion of love at least about this particular matter: predestined partner.

### **5.2.2.1 Growth of a relationship**

On the other hand, apart from Barbara who seemed to believe in the existence of a predestined partner, the vast majority of non-heavy viewers didn't seem to believe that their partner was predestined. When they were called to answer questions like: "why do we fall in love with one person rather than another?" a few typical answers were "it is inexplicable" or simply "it is chemistry" without any further explanation. They also seem to endorse greatly a belief in growth rather than in destiny. More specifically, Angie, (non-heavy viewer), said: "I realised that in a relationship you have to take initiatives and go forward if not it takes back..."

Similarly, Fivi (non-heavy viewer) in a discussion about a vignette where the woman in the story has a dilemma between a trustworthy and caring guy and an irresistible but unstable guy, she said: "



**Fivi:** She must choose the trustworthy one and she will make him loveable and whatever she wants

**Interviewer:** Is what she feels for the trustworthy one real love?

**Fivi:** It might not be... but I honestly believe that she can make him loveable. She can love him in the course of their relationship; she can even fall in love with him.

Interestingly Fivi here seems to strongly believe in a kind of love that reminds us a lot of the “empty love”. According to Sternberg (1986), “empty love” relies only on a decision to love someone and be committed to love him even if you don’t feel any passion for that person. Sternberg (1986) argues that “empty love” is the kind of love which can be found in traditional societies where relatives and friends arrange marriages between young people (Sternberg, 1986, p.124). In these marriages, commitment to love each other plays the predominant role. The fact that Fivi, a non heavy viewer, grew up in the country-side of Cyprus suggests somehow why she holds some of the Cypriot traditional ideas towards love and marriage.

Believing in growth of a relationship and holding traditional ideas about love, one can suggest that these non-heavy viewers also hold a prosaic view of love. The way the non heavy viewers describe what they believe is needed to make a relationship work seems to agree with Swidler’s (2001) prosaic notion of love. According to this view of love there is no ‘one true love’, couples are likely to be happier if they have fewer obstacles to overcome, and love requires continuing hard work and compromise. All these characteristics seem to be consistent in the non-heavy viewers’ answers: “You can love him in the course of your relationship” or “You need to take initiatives and go forward if not it takes back...”

### **5.2.3 Love Conquers All**

A common idea about romantic love is that it has the power to overcome any obstacle. “Love conquers all” is a theme which suggests that different values or interests, as well as financial and social difficulties are not an issue before love. No matter what the obstacles are, love will find the way somehow. According to Hefner and Wilson

(2013) a prominent feature of this theme is that partners believe that the issues in their relationship will be solved as long as love is present, even if they don't work through the issues (Hefner & Wilson, 2013). The theme of "Love conquers all" can be found in many romance novels as well as romantic movies (Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Lee, 2008). For instance Hefner and Wilson (2013) in their analysis of more than 50 romantic comedies, found that "Love conquers all" was the most recurrent overarching theme in these movies.

"Love conquers all" in this sample involves two main categories: old couples and obstacles. These two categories sometimes overlap and some other times one completes the other. From these two categories the most prominent was "old couples" which at first emerged as a code at different points in the transcripts of heavy and non-heavy viewers. This was a very numerous code that constitutes by itself a category. Obstacles were mentioned by participants in order to show how love can prevail in different circumstance and in order to explain why they consider overcoming obstacles romantic.

### **5.2.3.1 Old couples**

Both heavy viewers and non-heavy viewers referred to old couples as a romantic moment or story they have experienced recently or heard. More specifically the interviewees' answers were about elderly couples who use to walk together holding hands, or having linked arms. The reason why many respondents may find it very romantic can be summarized in an interviewee remark: "it is difficult for those who see these old couples to believe that they are still in love... I remember that we used to say that most probably one of them couldn't walk on his/her own that's why they walk arm-in-arm"(Rona, non-heavy viewer).The expression of romance and affection in old couples can make someone justifiably argue that "love conquers all". Another interviewee Anastasia(non heavy viewer) seemed to agree with this argument and she expresses the view that neither time nor illness can stop true love.

**Interviewer:** Can you tell me a very romantic moment you have experienced recently?

**Anastasia:** I was visiting a relative at the hospital and next to him on a bed in the ward was an old lady. Her husband who was very old as well... was standing next to her, trying to kiss her but because he couldn't bend as he was old and the old lady couldn't sit on the bed because of the operation she had... both were struggling to kiss but they couldn't... and the old lady gave her hand to her husband and said, 'it's ok, if you kiss me here is ok'.

**Interviewer:** And what makes this romantic?

**Anastasia:** Because after all these years they are together, it seems that they somehow are still in love since they want to kiss.

It is obvious here that Anastasia considers romantic the fact that they are old and still behaving like a couple in love who wants to kiss and be together physically. In her words "After all these years" is implied that after having faced difficulties and troubles of all kinds this couple managed to be together and "in love". The same view is expressed in a more explicit way in another part of the same interview where Anastasia is asked to tell a romantic story and she narrates the love story of her grandparents.

**Interviewer:** Do you know another romantic story, to tell?

**Anastasia:** Yes, my grandma and grandpa... The parents of my grandma arranged a marriage for my grandma but she didn't want to marry the guy her parents wanted her to marry, she was in love with my grandpa.... so the day of the official arrangement of the marriage, my grandpa went secretly and took her from her parents' house and married her... they had a beautiful life together... and when my grandma died, at the funeral just before they buried her, my grandpa whispered to her ear something and then they buried her.

**Interviewer:** And why do you think this is romantic?

**Anastasia:** Because even after death he was in love with her... I don't know... because he also maybe whispered to her "I'm coming, wait for me"... I don't know...

The non-heavy viewer respondent here once again shows that she believes strongly that love can overcome all obstacles, even death. The old couple in this case apart from any other relationship barrier, it has also to face the ultimate physical separation which is death. Death seems here to be the ultimate obstacle to test the love of the couple. An obstacle that instead of splitting them up, brings them closer to each other. Obstacles were another category that emerged in the transcripts. Interviewees often referred to obstacles as barriers which the true love has to overcome in order to prevail. For some respondents obstacles in relationships were an indication of real romance in a relationship. This concept of obstacles is going to be further analysed in the next section.

### **5.2.3.2 Love stories and obstacles**

The interviews, as it has been mentioned in the previous chapter, had a narrative approach in the sense that I was trying to elicit romantic stories from the participants. Thus, the interviewees were telling different romantic stories they encountered in their lives. After narrating the story that they considered to be a romantic story I used to ask them why they thought that this particular story was romantic. In their attempt to explain why something was romantic the interviewees came up with interesting answers. For instance, Marianna (heavy viewer), when she was explaining why she considers the story of a couple she knows romantic she said: I suppose, because they had to face all these difficult situations and overcome all the barriers in order to be together... and in spite of all that, you can see that they are still in love as they used to be ten years ago”. Another respondent Varvara, (heavy viewer) explaining why she considers her parents’ story a love story she said:

“the fact that they had strict parents and my mom was trying to find a way to convince them... and then although she convinced them, my father had to go to Greece so they had to send letters to each other.. all of these I think make the story romantic”.

What is interesting in these answers was that the majority of them (heavy and non-heavy viewers) referred to the fact that the couple in their story faced obstacles and

finally against all odds overcame them. The respond of Annita (heavy viewer) in the same question, about her parents' love story who met in Moscow while they were studying, delineates neatly all the interviewees' answers about obstacles.

**Interviewer:** What is romantic about this particular story?

**Annita:** I think it is very romantic because there was lack of communication in terms of language, since they couldn't speak the same language. They both speak a bit of Russian but neither of them could speak the language of the other, but it seems that what they felt was so intense that made them to cling to each other. And even when they finished their studies they faced many difficulties, it was a time when they didn't have phones or skype... nothing... they just talked once a month in the public phone booth... until they decided that they wanted to be together for the rest of their life...

As it can be observed from the interviewees' answers, obstacles in relationships were there to test somehow the lovers' will and determination to be together. This observation seems to consent with the perception of love in the courtly tradition. According to Hopkins (1994) the barriers in courtly love, were believed to make the love for each other more intensive (Hopkins, 1994, p. 55-59). Obstacles in these cases were various, such as: parents or society disapproval, distance relationship, separation or different cultural background.

The way the interviewees (heavy and non-heavy viewers) narrate the romantic stories, indicates that obstacles in these stories were the focal point of the whole story. This observation reminds us what Rubinfeld has supported regarding the stories in romantics comedies. According to Rubinfeld (2001) the typical romantic comedy has a particular formula: (a) a meeting between two potential lovers, (b) many obstacles in their way, (c) the triumph over the obstacles and (d) finally a happy end (Rubinfeld, 2001). It is obvious that two attributes of this formula: the obstacles and the triumph over the obstacles, are central in the stories the interviewees of this sample have told. One can argue that both heavy and non heavy viewers ideas about old couples and obstacles are a little rose-coloured, since no-one refers to the idea that love and relationships need hard work, compromise and a good mood for change from both partners in order to achieve a successful relationship which lasts several years. Driven

perhaps by a traditional view were the couples somehow didn't have any other choice apart from being together, the respondents seem to talk in an idealistic way about them and their relationship showing that they hold an idealistic-movies love.

What is remarkable in this “story-telling” question is that all 14 interviewees apart from two (non-heavy viewers) narrated at least one romantic story and one romantic incident. According to Sternberg (1986) individuals develop their own love stories of what they believe a proper romantic relationship is. These love stories may be derived from watching other individuals in relationships, or from reading fiction or even from watching television and movies. Sternberg also suggested that people form over time their own stories of “what love is or should be” (Sternberg, 1986, 1995). In this research sample, 12 out of 14 respondents seemed to have constructed their love stories (or adopted the stories that suit them) and they were ready to argue why they considered these stories romantic.

#### **5.2.4 The ideal partner**

Galician (2007) argued that in mass media the myth that is well depicted is that of: “the right mate ‘completes you’, filling all your needs and making your dreams come true” (Galician, 2007, p.3). This argument has also been supported by many studies on romantic comedies dealing with the same issue (Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Holmes & Johnson 2009; Winn, 2007). According to Holmes and Johnson (2009) the male character in romantic comedies is depicted in a very unrealistic way. From the analysis of 40 romantic comedies they found that the male character constantly takes initiatives in the relationship and does several romantic gestures such as: giving presents, doing favours and expressing affection (Holmes & Johnson, 2009) . The belief of the “idealization of the partner” and in this case of the male-partner it seems to be well associated with the high exposure in romantic comedies.

However in this sample not only the majority of heavy viewers but also the majority of non-heavy viewers seemed to hold views of idealistic ideas about a desirable perfect partner. The theme of the “ideal partner” in this analysis involved three categories: supportive partner, sacrifice, acceptance and understanding. In all three categories the interviewees described a partner who should fulfil an idealistic list of

needs. To be more precise for the participants (heavy and non-heavy viewers) it was equally important for their partner to be their greatest lover, their best friend, their emotional companion and their intellectual equal.

#### **5.2.4.1 Supportive Partner**

Supportive partner was a category that emerged from many codes like understanding, caring partner, acceptance and affection. The majority of the interviewees seemed to agree what a caring-supportive partner is. Adjectives like “kind”, “supportive”, “clever”, “handsome”, “humorous”, “loyal”, “helpful” and “stable” were used by both heavy and non-heavy viewers. However some respondents seemed to know exactly what they expected from their partner and what they would never accept. For instance, Anastasia (non-heavy viewer), clearly stated: “I want to know that he cares about me, he worries about me... from the moment I understand that he does not care then I’m off”. This respondent insists that she has to be in her partner’s mind and that her partner must worry about her. Although she was clear in her view that she must be a priority in her partner’s concerns she didn’t explain what she meant by “worrying”.

On the other hand Naya (heavy viewer) explained: “A caring partner has to make for you something to eat because you may finish your job late... to remain calm if you are frustrated... It doesn’t have to do with helping me with the housework but it has to do with offering to do certain things which show that he cares.” Similarly Ksanthi (non-heavy viewer) while she was talking about a caring partner, she explained: “Well ... it means that when you feel down he has to hug and kiss you.. to ask you what’s wrong... not to overlook the fact that you are down. Of course he also has to say everyday ‘I love you’ and ask you how was your day at work”. The expression of love and affection in this interviewee’s answer is not only an expectation from the interviewee but also a kind of an obligation from the part of her companion.

In another occasion Vivian (heavy viewer), while she was describing a caring partner she said: “He solves your problems without having to ask him. Basically we all have our issues and when your partner is there for you, ready to solve your problems without having to ask, then he is your God.” Despite the obvious exaggeration in

Vivian's words, it seems that she endorses the belief that "your right mate completes you, filling all your needs and making your dreams come true" (Galician, 2007, p.3). Of course, it is fair to say that this heavy viewer by using the word God, clearly understands that such a person who can be there for you and solve your problems before you ask is an unrealistic expectation.

Some interviewees while trying to describe the ideal partner came up with the concept of friendship as an aspect of the ideal partner. According to them a proper companion needs also to be a really good friend as well. In other words the interviewees expected to do with their partners the same things that they usually do with their friends and vice versa, they also expected their partner to do with them the same things that he usually does with their friends. Rona (non heavy viewer) for instance said: "Your partner shouldn't make a distinction between you and his friends. I mean that he should behave to you as if you were one of his good friends". Rona clearly shows here that she does not want to feel excluded from any aspect of her partner's social life. In a similar way Marianna (heavy viewer) said:

**Marianna:** I wouldn't like to see my partner do things without telling me, even if it concerns his job

**Interviewer:** Even if it concerns his job?

**Marianna:** Yes, because I think, if we agreed to share everything he shouldn't have any problem to talk to me about his work... because if he doesn't tell me then I would think that there is a reason for this.... maybe another woman...

It is obvious from the above extract that the women of this sample want to feel that they can share everything with their partner and that he does the same with them. To go one step further they also expect to have a good level of communication with their partner. This is well expressed by Ksanthi (non-heavy viewer) in the following extract:

**Interviewer:** Do you mean that your views about relationships change since you met Andreas (her husband)?

**Ksanthi:** Yes... because with Andreas, we are friends besides being lovers...we are each other's company.



**Interviewer:** Don't you think that all couples should be like that?

**Ksanthi:** What shall I tell you... I know many couples whose relationship relies mainly on sex and others who don't have a real communication between them... I believe that for a relationship to work, you have to be most of all good friends with your partner, he must be your company... The person you want to be together every day.

As Ksanthi expects that her husband should be her good friend with whom she can sincerely communicate, many other interviewees were expecting the same from their partners. Both heavy and non-heavy viewers believed that the communication between two lovers is very important. For instance Barbara (non-heavy viewer) said: "you need to spend time with one another, you need to see each other, to talk to each other, to listen and to discuss". Similarly Annita (heavy viewer) explicates: "For me is very important to be able to communicate my inner world/inner feelings to the other person and the other should be able to understand". Communication between lovers seemed to be of great importance for most of the interviewees.

#### **5.2.4.2 Acceptance and understanding**

Another category that emerged during the analysis and has to do with the ideal partner is the issue of acceptance and understanding between the lovers. Again both heavy and non-heavy viewers mentioned that acceptance and understanding are not only important but are also expected in a relationship. Interestingly though only the heavy viewers explicitly described what they meant by acceptance and understanding. A good example is the extract below from Marianna, a heavy viewer:

**Interviewer:** What does it mean for you a caring partner?

**Marianna:** To understand me, to respect me, to respect my needs... ok I will also have to compromise as well.

**Interviewer:** What do you mean by understanding?

**Marianna:** To understand each other, let's say be able to understand and accept some of the things he likes even if I don't like them and he, on the other

hand, has to understand and accept my flaws... something like a good friend who accepts you as you are.

Similarly Varvara (heavy viewer) seems to agree that her partner has to be willing to accept her flaws: "...he must know your flaws and accept them because only then it means that he really accepts you as you are." On the other hand, Vivian (heavy viewer) believes that she also has to accept the flaws of her partner: "Both need to accept each other, for example the fact that my boyfriend is gabby; but I like the fact that he is gabby... of course he might get on my nerves sometimes but I have to pass on that...". One can argue that the way these heavy viewers expressed themselves on this matter shows that they are realistic in their expectations of the other in a relationship. They may expect to be accepted as they are by their partners but they also seem ready to compromise and accept the flaws of their partners.

Once more heavy and non heavy viewers seem to share similar views on this specific matter but as it has been mentioned above, the heavy viewers were much more talkative than the non-heavy viewers. Moreover the heavy viewers seemed to be in a better position to elaborate on questions that had to do with their ideal partner and their expectations. This observation agrees with what Shrum (1997), a cultivation theorist, supported about heavy viewers of television. Shrum argued that heavy viewers of television may have ready-made answers in some topics, due to the fact that they have the television images in their minds and thus to answer a question about a topic are more likely to retrieve their ideas and beliefs from these images (Shrum 1997). For instance, in the current research heavy viewers of romantic comedies have proven to be much more prepared to talk and argue on romantic love beliefs.

#### **5.2.4.3 Sacrifice**

Winn (2007) has argued that sacrifice of oneself for his/her lover is a common topic in romantic comedies. Winn calls this sacrifice the 'Little Mermaid motif', when one partner leaves his/her world for the world of the partner's. This sacrifice is the same sacrifice that Little Mermaid did in the Disney tale where she left her home in the sea to

live with the prince. Although real-world relationships require compromise on the part of both partners, romantic comedies usually depict one of the partners sacrificing himself/herself to be with the other (Winn, 2007, p.222-223)

The idea of sacrifice was found in only three participants who mentioned clearly that they expect from their partner to be ready to give as much as he can. Despite the fact that this category emerged in only three interviews, it is of great interest because only the heavy viewers had this requirement of “sacrifice” from the part of their partner.

Polina for example said:

“...he must be willing to do things that are not in accordance with his personality but are things that you will like see him doing them... for instance I know that Nathanael (her husband) got bored in family dinners, however he is coming with me at my family’s dinners and this I believe shows that he wants to see me happy”.

Here Polina of course she does not expect from her partner a dramatic act of sacrifice but still she expects that her husband needs to do some gestures that show that he is interested even if these gestures are somehow conflicting with his personality.

Similarly, Maria (heavy viewer) believes: “when you are down he should do everything so that he will make you feel better, even if he is not well, he has to try to change your mood”. On the other hand Varvara (heavy viewer) stated “I believe that when you only think the other first and then yourself, is true love. When you trying to make the other happy, when you trying to satisfy the other...”

It seems though that for some respondents sacrifice wasn’t only from the part of their partner but also from their part. Varvara who in the above extract suggested that she would like to see her partner to have her as his priority, in another part of the interview she states that she believes that she wants to be able to sacrifice herself as well.

**Interviewer:** Do you think that your ideas of love have changed since you first started dating?

**Varvara:** Yes they've changed because I believe that at my 17, I used to appreciate other things on a man... I may got matured and look for other things in a man.

**Interviewer:** Why do you consider that this was a change in your ideas of love?

**Varvara:** I think at 17 I wouldn't give without taking back, I wouldn't sacrifice myself for the other, but now I feel that I can do it, I can give without taking in return... It satisfies me somehow.

Interestingly here Varvara (heavy viewer) admits that in younger age she wouldn't accept the idea that she could give without taking in return but now at an older age, mature enough, she believes that she can even sacrifice herself for true love and not just expecting from her partner. Interestingly, Varvara appears very willing to sacrifice herself in order to satisfy him but also she seems to believe that sacrifice has to be taken from the part of both partners for the sake of their relationship. Sacrifice in the sense of compromise and change, as well as in the sense of hard work to restrain "strange" aspects of one's personality seems also to agree with Swidler's (2001) notion of prosaic love (Swidler, 2001).

The prosaic notion of love that Varvara (heavy viewer) holds here is well blended with the idealistic view of love that she was also found to hold. The observation that this respondent seems to hold both prosaic and idealistic notion of love, is compatible with Swidler's idea that people use both views of love when they are called to think for different occasions. However an important difference that needs to be taken into account is that Swidler explained this duality of thought (prosaic and idealistic notion of love) by arguing that marriage cultivates the use of both prosaic and idealistic notion of love.

Varvara (heavy viewer) here was found to hold both (idealistic and prosaic) notions of love despite the fact that she never got married. The reason for this duality of thought in the case of Varvara (heavy viewer) may come from the fact that the prosaic notion of love reminds a lot the family-traditional values that were dominant until recently in Cyprus. Thus, a woman that grew up in Cyprus despite the fact that she might have other cultural influences than the Cypriot culture she is also likely to have

obtained aspects of the Cypriot traditional culture which are in favour of prosaic notion of love.

### **5.2.5 Love at first sight**

Individuals who endorse the ideal of “love at first sight” are people who believe that a romantic relationship can start after the first meeting of two people and it can flourish very quickly (Sprecher & Metts, 1989). Sternberg (1986), in his triangular theory of love, classifies “love at first sight” as the infatuated love. According to this classification love at first sight emanates only from the passion component and has nothing to do with the decision/commitment and the intimacy components of love. Holmes and Johnson (2009) in their analysis of 40 romantic comedies, they coded many incidents that perpetuate the theme love at first sight (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). Interestingly, the way “love at first sight” is portrayed in films is often confused with lust and attraction (Hutchins, 2007).

Despite the fact that it has been suggested that love at first sight is one of the main themes in romantic comedies (Johnson & Holmes, 2009), the majority of the interviewees (heavy and non-heavy viewers) not only stated that they don’t believe in “love at first sight” but they also didn’t have much to say about it. For instance, Anastasia (non-heavy viewer) when she was asked if she believes that what she felt was love at first sight, she answered in a cynical way without giving it much thought: “Since it ended up the way it ended up (marriage and children), I imagine that it was love at first sight”. Also, Varvara (heavy viewer) stated “it never happened to me” whereas Ksanthi (non-heavy-viewer) said: “I paid no attention at the first time I saw him.. ok I’ve noticed him but nothing more...”

However, there were some respondents who seemed to really endorse the romantic ideal of “love at first sight”. These interviewees also gave some interesting answers which show that not only they consider that they have experienced love at first sight but also they have an opinion about it. Vivian (heavy viewer) admits during the

interview that she believes in love at first sight as she has experienced it, she give a description of how she felt:

“It was something very intense and was much more visual... something that makes you feel happy when you see the other... you feel a little something... not that I never felt like this before but at that time it was something very sudden... It wasn't this gradual process when you fall in love with someone's personality, but you fall in love with someone's image.”

Another heavy viewer respondent not only expressed that she believed in love at first sight but she also stated that she experienced love at first sight in a different way:

**Interviewer:** Do you believe that all these things that you are describing were love at first sight?

**Annita:** It was love at first line.

**Interviewer:** What do you mean?

**Annita:** From the moment he talked to me on facebook I felt something beautiful and unique for him.

On this occasion Annita (who met her boyfriend online) perceived the whole concept of love at first sight in an even more idealistic way. It seems that for Annita, only the first contact (not even in person) was needed and it was enough to make her fall in love with her boyfriend. One can argue that Annita being a heavy viewer of these movies may have endorsed somehow the belief of love at first sight.

On the other hand, another heavy viewer (Polina) seems to hold a different view than Annita. Although, Polina describes love at first sight and says that she has experienced it, (as it is being depicted in romantic comedies), she didn't consider that what she felt was love at first sight.

**Interviewer:** Was it a special moment?

**Polina:** Yes it was... I remember I was observing the way he was moving, the way he was behaving with the others, and I found it by all means attractive

**Interviewer:** Did you feel anything before you talked to him?

**Polina:** My heart was beating quickly and I didn't know what to do... to go and talk to him, to wait for him to come... it was really a weird feeling.

**Interviewer:** Would you say that what you felt was love at first sight?

**Polina:** No, it was rather a strong attraction... it was lust.

To my surprise Polina (heavy viewer) not only disagreed with the term “love at first sight” but she also named it correctly, according to Hutchins (2007). Despite the fact that Polina was found a heavy viewer of romantic comedies she didn't seem to share the romantic belief of love at first sight, a belief that is perpetuated by these movies.

Despite the fact that research suggested that heavy viewers of romantic comedies may hold a belief in love at first sight, this did not seem to be true apart from two interviewees. The fact that the majority of the respondents believe that love at first sight does not exist it's an element that suggests somehow their realistic approach of love at least in the very beginning of their relationship.

#### **5.2.5.1 Eye Contact**

Believing or not in the ideal “love at first sight”, some of the interviewees seemed to find the gazing in their romantic relationships important. As Johnson and Holmes (2009) found, the vast majority of romantic comedies frequently depict behaviours such as gazing and smiling between lovers. Klelia (non-heavy viewer) recounting when she was in love at a younger age she said: “It was a need to see the other from a distance, to see if he was going to smile, if he was going to change his expression, if he was going to look at you...”. Similarly Fivi (non-heavy viewer) when she was also talking about her platonic loves at a much younger age, she stated: “You don't expect something from him, you just want to see him, you go to school, you see him, you are satisfied and you leave, there is nothing more.” Despite the fact that these two non-heavy viewers described as a need to see the other, it is important to note that they both were talking about feelings they had at a much younger age.

Moreover, in an interview with a heavy viewer of these movies, an interesting argument came up on the significance of gazing in romantic love. Naya (heavy viewer) explained in an explicit way why she believes eye contact is very significant. Particularly she said:

**Interviewer:** Which is the ultimate romantic story you remember best, (either you have heard or read/watched)?

**Naya:** Romeo and Juliet... or not... I remember I saw recently a well known performer... Abramović... For instance, at her performance at MoMA, where the visitors were sitting opposite to her, without talking but only staring at her, it was for me a very romantic moment. Because they were two strangers totally distant between them and they were sharing a very truthful moment communicating with their eyes

**Interviewer:** And why do you consider this romantic?

**Naya:** I believe that eye contact is very important because you still can “talk” with your eyes without talking and in the case of Abramović without even moving. As far as I remember to say that I wanted to be able to see my partner in the eyes and “talk” to him without talking.

Influenced by the romantic comedies or not, this interviewee points out something very important, that eye contact is maybe the first and foremost incident that potential lovers may experience. Nevertheless, the way they will interpret this first incident depends only on them and their preconceptions about love. One can also argue that the way an individual expresses his/her understanding on love indicates how romantic that person is.



## **6. Conclusion**

As it has been argued in the previous chapter heavy viewers and non-heavy viewers of romantic comedies seemed to hold idealistic ideas about love and romance.

Particularly, both groups came to believe in the romantic ideal “love conquers all” as well as the “idealization of partner”. Both groups also believed that understanding and acceptance are very important for their relationships and both groups considered romantic when a couple had to face obstacles through their lives but at the end they remain together. Finally, a common belief to both heavy and non heavy viewers was also that one’s partner should be caring and supportive as well as loving and affectionate.

Despite the fact that heavy viewers and non-heavy viewers seemed to have many similarities in their romantic beliefs, there were some distinct differences in their beliefs about romantic love. Particularly, heavy viewers differ in their discourses on romantic love in four different topics from the non-heavy viewers. For instance, the heavy viewers of these movies came to believe that marriage was affecting in a negative way romantic love, they also came to believe in the ideal of predestined partner, love at first sight as well as the ideal of sacrificing oneself for the other. Interestingly, these romantic ideals are greatly depicted in romantic comedies. Another non negligible difference between heavy and non-heavy viewers was that the former group was much more expressive in any part of the interview than the non-heavy viewers’ group. Thus, heavy viewers can be described as the group which holds more idealistic views, as the initial assumption of this thesis suggested.

Both groups several times expressed idealistic views and seemed to hold an idealistic notion of love, yet many respondents also seemed to hold a prosaic notion of love. Despite the fact that there were indications that some of them had idealistic and prosaic notions of love only one interviewee (heavy viewer) was actually found to hold simultaneously prosaic and idealistic notion of love.

### **6.1 Reflection to Theory**

The main assumption of this research (which found to be valid), was that heavy viewers may hold more idealistic beliefs than the non-heavy viewers of romantic

comedies. Thus, in order to find out if this assumption was valid and in order to typify and distinguish the participants' discourses on romantic love, several concepts and theories were used.

Although the focus of the research was the romantic beliefs of the respondents that can also be found in the romantic comedies, the triangular theory of love (Sternberg, 1986) was helpful to the categorization of the interviewees' ideas of love during the analysis. Heavy viewers for instance were found to hold beliefs that can be characterized as infatuated love or fatuous love (or even romantic love) which are the kinds of love that have passion either as their only component or as one of their two components. Thus, one can rightfully argue that the heavy viewers consider the passion component in their romantic beliefs and decision as very important comparing to the non-heavy viewers. For example, non-heavy viewers were found to be closer to "empty love" or compassionate love which are characterised by the absence of the passion component.

One theoretical aspect that was discussed in this thesis was Swidler's (2001) distinction of love (prosaic and idealistic notion of love). According to Swidler (2001) individuals may draw from different and often competing cultural sources in order to interpret their understanding of love. It is apparent that the participants of this research (heavy and non-heavy viewers), draw from many and various cultural sources in order to interpret their own understanding of love. Both heavy and non heavy viewers of romantic comedies vary in their romantic beliefs and sometimes seem to be closer to a prosaic notion of love and other times to an idealistic notion of love.

The cultivation approach that the thesis followed could find support in the differences between heavy and non heavy viewers' concerning their romantic beliefs. Despite the fact that heavy viewers were found to differ in their romantic beliefs from the non-heavy viewers in only four different topics (predestined partner, marriage, sacrifice and love at first sight), this finding becomes very important if we take into account that these themes are greatly depicted in romantic comedies. Another distinctive difference between these two groups was that heavy viewers were more prepared to give quick answers and they were also able to elaborate on their answers and give

reason for their romantic beliefs and choices. This observation seems to be in accordance with what Shrum (1997) suggested about heavy viewers and their readily accessible answers about issues that they constantly watch on television. Taking into consideration the above findings, one can suggest that cultivation seems to occur in the heavy viewers' beliefs about romantic love. However, this study cannot come to the conclusion that heavy viewers of romantic comedies hold certain romantic beliefs only because they are highly exposed to these movies. One can rightfully argue that the heavy viewers not only have other influences but they may be drawn to this certain genre because they somehow have a natural inclination to romantic ideals.

Nevertheless, whether we accept that a heavy viewer cultivates romantic ideals that are continuously depicted in romantic comedies or not, the fact that these viewers are constantly watching these movies may at the very least reinforce their pre-existing romantic beliefs. Thus, romantic comedies, as a global product, which can reach audiences around the world, can promote specific romantic ideals. In this respect romantic comedies which are originated from the same source and are alike in content can develop similar preferences and likings to different audiences even in the most remote places (Fu 2006). Thus, linking love to media with romance content in a place like Cyprus, it is important to understand that perceptions of love evolve and change through time, and as a result peoples' traditional love beliefs merge with novel ideas that come from various sources.

## **6.2 Reflection to Methodology**

This research used qualitative interviews as a method to collect its data, and the discourse analysis as a method to analyse these interviews, in the form of transcripts. Both methods seemed to be very informative and useful in the current research as they provided the suitable tools to carry forward the collection and the analysis of the data in the most compatible way for the objective of the research.

Having as a focus the participants' discourses and as a result their beliefs on romantic love, an approach was needed that would encourage the participants to talk and discuss as much as possible about romantic love, an approach that would also elicit

nuance accounts from the interviewees. For this reason qualitative interviews were used as they were considered the right method to collect the data of this research. The questions that were asked were aiming to make the interviewees to elaborate on their romantic views from different perspectives. For instance, there were questions which were inviting the respondents to narrate a love story or a romantic incident or even to visualize themselves in an imaginative future. This approach helped to bring out interesting arguments about romantic love as well as appealing love stories.

On the other hand having many transcripts to analyse, in such a way where all the data have to be treated as potential indicators of concepts about love and romance, discourse analysis has proved to be the most appropriate choice. Undertaking a discourse analysis, it was possible to shed light on aspects that were also the focus of this research but weren't the main themes of the romantic comedies. For instance, themes like sacrifice and disfavour of marriage which have been found in the discourses/transcripts of heavy viewers, were only detected by coding and labelling different parts of the transcripts and then they were put together into categories which afterwards constituted the themes that were analysed in the chapter of the results.

Finally, due to the fact that this research design was such, a strategy was also needed to assess media exposure (to romantic comedies) of the participants in order to separate heavy and non-heavy viewers of romantic comedies. In this study, since the focus of romantic comedies, a list of 40 romantic comedies was used so that the participants will tick the movies they had watched. This extensive list of 40 films has proved to be a good way of distinguishing heavy from non-heavy viewers of romantic comedies.

### **6.3 Further Research**

Despite the fact, that heavy viewers had distinct differences in some romantic beliefs with the non-heavy viewers, was not enough to show a clear correlation between high exposure to romantic comedies and the romantic ideals of heavy viewers. As it has been mentioned above, several reasons could have influence the heavy viewers to hold these romantic beliefs such as society, family and other media. It can also be suggested that individuals with such beliefs are drawn to romantic comedies because

they have a natural inclination to romantic ideals. Therefore, a research that will study the heavy viewers' character and personality and their preference of romance media content, seems challenging for psychology and media studies.

Another possibility for future research is to focus on people's ideas and beliefs about marriage in Cyprus. According to this thesis despite the long rigid tradition on ideas about marriage (arranged marriages, religious weddings) there are some indications that Cypriot people are gradually changing in the way they value marriage as an institution. Thus, a future research that will examine longitudinally the changes that occurring from a traditional mentality to a more westernized way of thinking and the reasons for these changes seems very interesting.

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Mojo box office - <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/>

Press and Information Office of Cyprus Government (PIO) -

[http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/pio/pio.nsf/index\\_en/index\\_en?opendocument](http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/pio/pio.nsf/index_en/index_en?opendocument)

## APPENDIX

### Interviews' topic list

There are 5 concepts that the interviews are dealing with: **a) the ideal partner**, **b) the ideal relationship (that leads to marriage)**, **c) one and only/soul mate**, **d) love conquers all**, **e) love at first sight**

### Explain in brief the study's aim

Explain to the interviewee that it is a study which tries to elicit what young Cypriot women actually believe about love and romantic relationships. (Make it clear that is not a right or wrong answer but only the interviewee's answer).

- Discuss for a short while about the movies they interviewee likes and give her the list to complete.

### Information about the interviewee:

<u>General information of the interviewee:</u>	<u>Interviewee's romantic relationship:</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Age, Education, Residential History, Occupation of the interviewee</li><li>• Religion (Try to identify how religious is the interviewee and her family, i.e fasting, taking communion)</li><li>• Priorities in her life? (i.e. Career, family, children, broader goals)</li><li>• Parents' background: Father's Occupation and Education, Mother's occupation and Education.</li><li>• Parents romantic relationship (How can you describe your parents' romantic relationship during your childhood?)</li><li>• How did your parents get together? Was it a romantic story?</li></ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Are you in a relationship? (For how long)</li><li>2. Did you know your bf before you got together? (for how long?)</li><li>3. How did you get together? (Is there a romantic story behind it?)</li><li>4. Do you believe that you experience true love with your bf?</li><li>5. Do you consider that you are in love with him?</li><li>6. How often do you think of your bf in a day? (give percentage)</li><li>7. Will you die for him?</li></ol>

### **Love beliefs (in general)**

1. In general, how would you say that media portray love? Accurately? Rarely? Falsely? Idealized or realistic?
2. What if any, are the stories you have heard or read that you remember best?
3. Do you consider yourself a romantic person?
4. What is "to love" for you?  
(Follow-up questions)
  - a. How many times do you think that you were in love?
  - b. Have you ever been rejected by somebody whom you really loved?  
(Can you describe your emotions at the time of this rejection and refer to some specific moments?)
  - c. Have you ever dumped somebody who really loved you? (Can you describe your emotions at the time and refer to any specific moments?)
  - d. When was the first time you ever thought you were in love?
  - e. How did it feel like? (What made you think it was love?)

### **The concepts:**

#### ***a) The ideal partner***

1. Can you describe a perfect date?
2. What qualities a woman tries to find in a man?
  - a. What are the three main things that you really appreciate in a man's behaviour?(What flatters a woman?)
  - b. What idealized qualities does your partner have? Does he know that he has these qualities? (Would you die for him?)
3. Do you think that your ideas of love have changed since you first started dating him? How so?
4. What does it mean for you a caring partner?

#### ***b) The ideal relationship (that leads to marriage)***

1. If you could make a wish to the Genie where would you put your future self?
  - a. With whom? What place? (countryside or city, apartment or house, with pets or not, with kids or not)

2. Can you tell me a very romantic moment you have experienced recently? /  
What was the most romantic moment you have had?
  - a. What was romantic about that moment?

### **Marriage**

What is your opinion about marriage? (should couples get married?)

- a. Can you imagine yourself being married without children?
- b. Can you imagine yourself, an elderly person with grand children without having been married?

### **c) *One and only/soul mate***

- a. Why do you think we fall in love with one person rather than another?
- b. Do you think that you can understand what kind of person is someone from the first date? (first five dates?) and why?
- c. What do you think can make you realize that your relationship will not be successful?

### **d) *Love conquers all***

- a. What is your opinion of a betrayal in a relationship?
- b. What would you forgive or not forgive and why?
- c. What would you do if you were in love with a man of a different religion or ethnic community and your family did not approve of this relationship?

### **Vignette 1**

Jim and Diana have been dating for a long time and are planning to get married. One summer when they were apart Jim had an affair with another woman, but never told Diana about it. When Diana learns of this she breaks off the relationship. Jim says that since he had broken off the affair he did not feel the need to mention it to Diana.

- a. Who is right? Why?

- b. Do you think Diana's reaction to the affair is an indication that she really does not love Jim?
- c. Does Diana have a right to be jealous? To feel betrayed?
- d. What if Jim had told her about the affair? Would that make it all right?

### **Vignette 2**

A woman has been involved with two different men. One is kind, trustworthy, and caring. She sees him as her "best friend." The other is exciting and irresistible. She finds herself falling in love with him even though she realizes he is not right for her—he is not dependable and stable. She has tried to get over him, but she cannot. Both men are in love with her and want to marry her.

- a. Whom should she marry? Why?
- b. Is what she feels for the second man really love? What is love?

### **e) *Love at first sight***

1. Do you remember the very first time you saw the man that you felt in love with?
  - a. What was he wearing?
  - b. Was it a special moment?
  - c. Did you feel anything before you talked to him?
2. Do you believe at love at first site?

After the interview:

- Did you feel I covered everything that was important to you, or are there things that you would have liked to talk about more?
- Before this interview, have you thought about most of the issues we talked about?
- Did you find it difficult to answer my questions?

### **List of Romantic Comedies**

DIRECTIONS: For the list below, please indicate how often you have seen each film. Circle “never” if you’ve never seen the movie, “once” if you’ve seen the movie once, “many times” if you have watched the film more than once.

1. *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* →                      Never                      Once                      Many times

2. *What Women Want* →                      Never                      Once                      Many times

3. *Hitch* →                      Never                      Once                      Many times

4. *Pretty Woman* →                      Never                      Once                      Many times

5. *There is something about Mary* →                      Never                      Once                      Many times

6. *The Proposal* →                      Never                      Once                      Many times

7. *Sex and the City* →                      Never                      Once                      Many times

8. *Runaway Bride* →                      Never                      Once                      Many times

9. *Knocked Up* →                      Never                      Once                      Many times

10. *As Good as it gets* →                      Never                      Once                      Many times

11. *Bringing down the House* →                      Never                      Once                      Many times

12. *Silver Linings Playbook* →                      Never                      Once                      Many times

13. *Coming to America* →                      Never                      Once                      Many times

14. *Sweet Home Alabama* →                      Never                      Once                      Many times

15. *My Best Friend’s wedding* →                      Never                      Once                      Many times

16. *Sleepless in Seattle* →                      Never                      Once                      Many times



<i>17. Mr Deeds →</i>	Never	Once	Many times
<i>18. Something's gotta give →</i>	Never	Once	Many times
<i>19. 50 first Dates →</i>	Never	Once	Many times
<i>20. The Break-up →</i>	Never	Once	Many times
<i>21. Notting Hill →</i>	Never	Once	Many times
<i>22. You've got mail →</i>	Never	Once	Many times
<i>23. It's complicated →</i>	Never	Once	Many times
<i>24. Valentine's Day →</i>	Never	Once	Many times
<i>25. How to Lose a Guy in ten days →</i>	Never	Once	Many times
<i>26. Just go with it →</i>	Never	Once	Many times
<i>27. Shakespear in Love →</i>	Never	Once	Many times
<i>28. Norbit →</i>	Never	Once	Many times
<i>29. Arthur →</i>	Never	Once	Many times
<i>30. Sex and the city 2 →</i>	Never	Once	Many times
<i>31. Along Came Polly →</i>	Never	Once	Many times
<i>32. Love actually →</i>	Never	Once	Many times
<i>33. Serendipity</i>	Never	Once	Many times
<i>34. Kate and Leopold</i>	Never	Once	Many times

35. *Bridget Jones: The edge of reason*            Never            Once            Many times

36. *500 hundred days of summer*            Never            Once            Many times

37. *The Holiday*            Never            Once            Many times

38. *No strings attached*            Never            Once            Many times

39. *The wedding date*            Never            Once            Many times

40. *How to lose a guy in 10 days*            Never            Once            Many times