What is love?

How four generations of women talk about love

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Abstract

Love is a very important part of our lives. We encounter it in both our social, and cultural sphere. Love is a favoured subject in media. The media constantly reminds us of love, and portrays how one should love and be loved. It makes one wonder what the influence of these media portrayals can be on individuals. The romantic-comedy film genre is especially notorious for its portrayal of an idealized version of love. This is a popular genre among women, and it is not inconceivable that some women may view this idealized portrayal of love as true. Therefore, the aim of this study is to research how women construct love, and how they relate this to popular romantic-comedy films. To answer this the following research question was formed: *How do four generations of women talk about love?* Qualitative methods were used to answer this question. Twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted. The respondents were twelve Dutch women from four different generations. Thematic network analysis was used to analyse the interviews. The women of this study described love either as something that was an intense and passionate feeling or as it was described by the Bible. The respondents argued that their construction of love was *not* influenced by romantic-comedies. Although, the answers given by the women suggested that romantic-comedies could have influenced their definition of love when they were younger, and inexperienced in love. However, the women believed that their social network influenced their construction of love more than romantic-comedies. Specifically, the parents were considered to be the most important source of influence. Overall the accounts of the women were quite similar across generations. However, there were two salient factors that caused differences in the responses of the women. These two factors were religion and the quality of the relationship with the social network of the women. It seems that generational differences did not affect the accounts of the women. The similarities between the accounts of the women can possibly be explained because they share the same *interpretive community*, and therefore can have similar *horizons of expectations*. This study concludes that love is both a social and a cultural concept. People base their construction of love on their own social and cultural experiences. If one is inexperienced in love one can base their conception of love on examples found in both cultural products, and in their social network.

KEYWORDS: *Love, Women, Romantic-Comedies, Meaning-making, Generations*

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Introduction

Love is the most important thing in the world, or, at least that is what we have been told from the moment we were born. There are countless films, TV shows, books, and songs that focus entirely on this notion. One could even argue that love is the backbone of the cultural industry. In the cultural industry love is thus seen as something very important. This view is not entirely shared by the scientific community. Although there are very important theories about love viewed through a psychological lens (Sternberg, 1996, 1986; Sternberg & Grajek, 1984) there has been little research done about love through a more sociological and cultural perspective. These two perspectives refer to studies done about love in relation to popular culture, and meaning-making processes.

This seems strange when we consider the massive amount of cultural products that focus on love. The scientific articles that focus on popular romantic cultural products and the audience are mainly focusing on gender when discussing attractiveness and interpretation. In these studies the researchers often take a feministic point of view regarding the subject. For example, Snitow (1979) has focused on mass market romance, specifically the romantic novels published by Harlequin Enterprises. In this article she argues that these mass-produced paperbacks are not only popular because they are easy to read, but also because these books reflect commonly experienced psychological and social elements in the daily lives of women.

Another example worth mentioning is the research done by Tukachinsky (2008) in which she focuses on how women read the narrative of *Sex and the City*. She discovered an opposition between *romantic* and *unromantic* readers. The former readers saw the show as something that enforced romantic ideology, while the latter readers took a more feministic view and saw it as an enforcement of the patriarchal mechanisms of oppression.

Another scientific field that has focused on love looks at cultural differences and communication. In "Love: American style, Russian style, and Japanese style" Sprecher et al. (1994) looked into the cultural and gender differences between young women and men from three different national cultures and their orientation towards love. Their findings showed differences between how the respondents from the three before mentioned cultures perceived love and its importance. These authors argue that these differences seemed to be connected to participants' cultural backgrounds. Goodwin and Findlay (1997) also researched cultural

differences in relation to love, specifically personal relationships. They found that there were cultural variations in personal relationships based on the difference between individual and collective societies. Cultural differences in romantic writings have also been a topic of research. Lamprinou (2011) has studied the translation habits of Greek writers when they translate English-language romances. Her findings suggest that Greek writers will use different linguistic strategies when translating literature, and thus they will change how emotions were conveyed in the original text.

The last popular avenue of research that looks into love focuses on the social construction of love and relationships. An important researcher in this field is Sternberg. He has written multiple theories about love and what it entails (Beall & Sternberg, 1995; Sternberg, 1996; Sternberg, 1986; Sternberg, Hojjat, & Barnes, 2001; Sternberg & Grajek, 1984). Each new theory of Sternberg builds upon his previous theories. In 1984 he published an article with Grajek that compared three alternative structural models of love. In his following article in 1986 he has built on these models and developed his own theory that he called the *triangular theory of love*. In 1996 he published an article in which he moved beyond this triangular theory of love. He concluded that this theory still was not sufficient enough to explain what love entails. Therefore, he came up with the theory that love can be best explained by viewing it as stories that reflect the social and cultural experiences of an individual. The work done by Sternberg shows that theorizing love is very difficult.

What these abovementioned studies have in common is that they lack a more in-depth approach to the complex concept that is love. These studies can be divided in two groups: (1) literature reviews that focus on previous theories, or (2) research that focuses on mainly a group of young, often female, respondents and draws conclusions from their beliefs and ideas. What thus seems to lack in this field of research is an approach that not only looks at previous research and theories regarding love, but that also focuses on ideas and beliefs that are offered by different generations of respondents. By focusing on how multiple generations of women construct love possible similarities and differences can be discovered in their meaning-making process. During this research process one can hopefully discover what elements influence the meaning-making process of these women.

The abovementioned studies show that both social and cultural elements can possibly influence the meaning-making processes of individuals. In important part of both social and

cultural life is media. Many researchers have looked into the influence of media on meaning-making processes (Bineham, 1988; Hall, 1980; Jauss & Benzinger, 1970; Fiske, 1991). These studies mainly focus on theorizing the influence of media on meaning-making processes. Other studies have built upon these theories and have related it to practical cases (Katz & Liebes, 1984; Leal & Oliven, 1988; Radway, 1983; Ang, 1985). An important mainstream media product that deals with love is the romantic-comedy. Even though romantic-comedies have been imbedded in Western culture for many years little research has been done about it. In this study I want to expand on the research of media and meaning-making processes by focusing specifically on romantic-comedies, and its relation to the construction of love by multiple generations of women.

Love is not only important to research on a scientific level it is also socially relevant. Noller (1996) argues that love is socially constructed, and that it occurs in a social and cultural context. From the moment we are born love is an important part of our lives. It is something we long for, rely on and dream about. Cultural products aimed at young women promote love as something magical:

"Each Disney movie has the same basic pattern, and the same basic audience. Young kids — mostly girls — are constantly conditioned to believe that true love is awaiting them if they become pretty little princesses who will be swept away by the handsome prince and live happily ever after." (Naheed, 2014)

This so-called *princess culture* that seems to prevail in the Western world is fuelled by consumption (Orr, 2009). Big corporations like Disney want to target children as consumers, and have therefore implemented marketing strategies aimed at this group.

Later in life, women will perhaps no longer watch Disney films, but another genre makes its appearance at this stage: the romantic-comedy. These films are characterized by their focus on the importance of marriage and long-term partnership (Grindon, 2012). Often these films show conflict between lovers, and end with a cliché happy ending in which the lovers live happily ever after. This really shows an ideological view of love that is not often present in the world that we live in. In the real world relationships often do not have a happy end, this is illustrated by the general increase of divorce rates around the world (OECD, 2009).

It is thus essential to talk with women about their view of love, so that they can reflect on how they have developed this view. Hopefully they, and other women who will read this research, will discover that their view of love is something that is socially constructed. As the abovementioned theories show, there is no universal truth about what love entails. So you can be the creator of your own love story. It does not always have to include a handsome prince who will sweep the princess away. The aim of this research will thus be to see how women construct love, and how they relate this to popular romantic-comedy films.

To guide my research I will focus on one research question, which will be further supported by two sub questions:

Research question: How do four generations of women talk about love?

Sub question 1: How do they relate their perception of love to popular romantic-comedy films?

Sub question 2: What are the differences and/or similarities between the accounts of the women?

The research question and sub questions have been answered by using qualitative research methods. Twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with women from four different generations. The data was analysed through thematic network analysis, so that the research question and sub questions could be answered.

This thesis has been structured in various chapters that each will describe different aspects of the research. First there will be an overview of relevant theory, and previous research about this subject. This will help imbed the current research into the existing field of theories about love, and meaning-making processes. In the following chapter the method of data collection, and data analysis will be discussed. Next to this certain limitations of the method, and the reliability and validity of the research will be mentioned. The chapter after this will focus on the findings of this research. Finally this thesis will end with a conclusion and discussion of the method, and findings. Further limitations will be discussed, and advice will be given for further research.

1. Theory and previous research

For a research to be relevant it should be embedded in a theoretical framework. In this chapter, I will outline relevant theories for my research. This are theories regarding love, romantic-comedies, and meaning-making processes. I have divided this chapter into three sections. Each of these sections highlights a different area of relevant research. In the first section, I will explain why I define love as something that is both cultural and social. In the second section, I will give a brief overview of the history and conventions of romantic-comedies. In the third section, I will summarize popular theories of media, its content, and audiences.

1.1. Love

1.1.1. A broad definition of love

> "The truth is, love doesn't have a definition. It's a feeling that you, as an individual, can feel. And what you interpret as love might be very different from what someone else does." (Danek, 2014)

As this quote exemplifies love is a difficult thing to define. In this section, I will try to give a broad definition of love for this research project. I will approach love in a sociological way, rather than a biological or psychological one.

When looking at love from a sociological point of view it can be considered to be an inherently cultural concept. Sociologists argue that culture is made up of five components: (1) symbols, (2) language, (3) values, (4) norms, and (5) material culture (Macionis & Plummer, 2012). The first four components are non-material culture, which means that these are intangible concepts that were created by members of a society. The fifth component is, as the word itself mentions, material culture instead of non-material. In other word, these are tangible products that are created by members of society.

I argue that love is a cultural concept, because it adheres to all the five components of culture. In our everyday lives symbols of love are very easy to find. Around Valentine's Day

love is used by advertisers to sell items such as chocolate and flowers. If we text someone we love we often send heart shaped emoticons. These are just two examples of how we are confronted, and use symbols of love. The first example shows the material aspect of love in culture. To show our love to a partner we should buy these symbols of love. What the second example shows is that these symbols of love are also a part of our language. We express our love for someone by using these symbols in our day-to-day conversations. Next to symbols of love, and love being present in our language, it is also subject to values and norms created by societies. As the quote at the beginning of this chapter illustrates individuals can experience love differently. This is due to the values and norms that they have picked up from the society they live in. In individualistic cultures marriage is often based on love, while marriage in collective cultures are often based on other factors (Dion & Dion, 1993).

When considering the differences in the conception of love across cultures it is important to also take into account other elements that could possibly influence it. An individual is born into a culture, but that is not the only element that plays a role in their conception of love. From the moment one is born one has to undergo a process of socialization. Through the socialization process one learns how function adequately in society. In other words, one learns what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in a various amount of social situations (Maccoby, 1992). This process is mainly guided by the parents, but can also involve different social institutions such as other relatives, friends, and school. Even though there are many socialization agents research has shown that the parents are the most important one (Mabry, Giarrusso & Bengtson, 2007; Maccoby, 1992). Research has also shown that parents, as a socialization agent, can have an impact on the sexual behaviour of their children (Lewis, 1973). Sex is a concept that is related to love, and thus it would not be surprising if parents also can influence how their children construct love.

In this chapter, I have defined love as a cultural concept. In our everyday lives it is easy to come across symbols of love in both material and immaterial culture. Even though culture plays an important role in the conception of love there are also other elements that should be taken into account. Love is also a social concept that can be shaped through various socialization agents. In the following section, I will elaborate more on love as a social concept by summarizing the theories of love by Sternberg.

1.1.2. Reflections on the social construction of love

In the previous section, I mentioned that love is both a cultural as a social concept. It is important to note that there have been other researchers who have tried to theorize love in different ways. Robert Sternberg has extensively researched love as a concept. In 1984, he published an article with Grajek in which they looked at three popular structural models of love. These three models are the (1) Spearmanian model, (2) the Thomsonian model, and (3) the Thurstonian model. The Spearmanian model states that love is characterized by a general undifferentiated factor. The Thomsonian model instead states that love consists of a multitude of underlying bonds. These bonds can co-occur in certain close relationships, and this results in the global feeling that we characterise as love. The Thurstonian model states that love is a small, consistent set of emotions, cognitions and motivations that are all equally present in the feeling that we characterise as love.

In 1986, Sternberg published an article in which he explains his own theory of love, this theory is known as the *triangular theory of love*. His theory builds on the three before mentioned popular structural theories of love. Sternberg (1986) argues that love consists of three components: (1) intimacy, (2) passion, and (3) decision/commitment. There are eight different kinds of love that can be generated by using these three components. This ranges from *nonlove*, which refers to the absence of all three components, to *consummate love*, which is love that is a full combination of all three components.

In 1995, Beall published an article together with Sternberg, in which they looked at the social construction of love. They argue that love is a socially constructed idea that partially relies on external factors. This means that love is not a universal concept that is simultaneously experienced by all people. Different societies and cultures have their own unique understanding of concepts, because of external factors that are present in these societies and cultures. Examples of external factors are the cultural environment, social approval, and one's social network within a culture. Love partially relies on these external factors, and this can explain why love differs across cultures. This view is in line with the earlier mentioned assumption that love is an inherently cultural concept that also can be influenced through socialization.

The universality of love has been heavily discussed among researchers. Some researchers, such as Beall and Sternberg (1995), argue that love is not a universal concept, while

other researchers argue that love, especially *romantic love*, can be universally defined (Gottschall, Nordlund, Temple, & Cohen, 2006; Harris, 1995). According to Gottschall et al. (2006) *romantic love* has a universal definition in literary works throughout history. They mention that *romantic love* can be defines as feeling a (sexual) attraction to one person, with the expectation that this attraction has a lasting duration. Harris (1995) offers a more academic definition of *romantic love* by giving a detailed summary of previous academic definitions. She defined the following seven elements of *romantic love*: (1) desire for union or merger, both physical and emotional, (2) idealization of the beloved, (3) exclusivity (reciprocal), (4) intrusive thinking about the love object, (5) emotional dependency, (6) reordering of motivational hierarchies of life priorities, and (7) powerful empathy and concern for the beloved. It is clear that there are two points of view in the academic world when considering the universality of love.

In 1996, Sternberg published an article in which he builds upon his *triangular theory of love*, and impossibility of a universal conception of love. He argues that his earlier theory was not sufficient enough to exactly explain what love entails. In this article he states that love can be viewed as stories. People base their love story on their own social and cultural experiences. He defines 25 popular love stories, but adds that there are infinite variations of these stories. This theory again confirms the earlier mentioned view of love being a concept that is both constructed culturally and socially.

To conclude, love is a concept that has many definitions in many different situations. Love is an important part of culture, but culture is also a very important part of the conception of love. This research will take both the importance of love in culture, and the importance of culture in the construction of love into account during the research process. How women construct love is thus an interesting aim to take, because the construction can encompass many different aspects of the culture the women are situated in.

It is not only relevant to consider how these women talk about love, it is also important to question how they relate this to different aspects of (popular) culture. As mentioned before, symbols of love are present in material culture. These cultural products portray certain values and norms of love that are present in the culture in which it is produced. For example, romantic films and texts can offer a view of what love is or what it should be. In this we encounter a conundrum that has puzzled researchers throughout the decades. Do we shape a concept through

cultural artefacts or do these artefacts shape how we think about a concept? This question has led to different theories that have specifically focused on media, its content, and audiences. In the following section, I will first give a brief overview of the history of one of the most popular cultural products that portrays love, namely the romantic-comedy. I will also briefly describe the most prominent conventions of the romantic-comedy genre. This chapter will end with a section dedicated to theories about the role that media plays in meaning-making processes.

1.2. Romantic-comedies

1.2.1. A brief history of romantic-comedies

"The hidden challenge of every romantic-comedy lies in getting the audience to believe that these two people absolutely must end up together" (Mernit, 2000, p. 125)

Often romantic-comedies have been dismissed by the media as light-hearted entertainment, but according to Grindon (2012) there is a lot more behind romantic-comedies than most people realize. A genre is not only a tool for classification, labelling, and defining media products, it is also a specific system of expectations that the audience has when looking at media products. Genre provides the audience with a means of recognition and understanding media products (Neale, 2000). At first it seems like genres are set in stone, but Neale (2000) and Grindon (2012) argue that genres can be seen as processes that are marked by differences, variation, and change. As mentioned before, Grindon (2012) argues that genres, such as the romantic-comedy genre, follow cycles of cultural and social development. It is thus interesting to delve into the history of the romantic-comedy to find out its conventions, and how it relates to cultural and social changes.

Most romantic-comedies are subject to the same master plot. A master plot consists of a series of events that occur in a film that establish the conventions of the genre. The master plot of romantic-comedies is well known, and this often leads people to describe romantic-comedies as predictable. People know what to expect of the genre, and thus of the master plot.

The romantic-comedy master plot consists of ten so-called *moves*: (1) unfulfilled desire, (2) the meeting, (3) fun together, (4) obstacles arise, (5) the journey, (6) new conflicts, (7) the choice, (8) crisis, (9) epiphany, and (10) resolution (Grindon, 2012). In short, these moves illustrate a plot in which there are a lot of dramatic ups and downs in love. At the beginning of the film it all goes well between the main characters, but shortly afterwards they start to encounter problems in their courtship. Fortunately, the film traditionally will end with a *happy ending*, in which the characters reunite.

In his popular book *The Hollywood Romantic Comedy* Grindon (2012) divides the romantic-comedy genre into nine cycles or clusters related to specific time periods: (1) 1930-1933: the transition to sound cluster, (2) 1934-1942: the screwball cycle, (3) 1942-1946 the World War II cluster, (4) 1947-1953: the post-war cluster, (5) 1953-1966: the comedies of seduction, (6) 1967-1976: the transition through the counter-culture cluster, (7) 1977-1987: the nervous romance cycle, (8) 1986-1996: the reaffirmation of romance cycle, and (9) the grotesque and ambivalent cycle.

The different cycles or clusters of the romantic-comedy genre are imbedded in the cultural and the social sphere. The genre has transformed throughout history, due to social and cultural changes in society. For example, the current cycle, the grotesque and ambivalent cycle, mainly feature romantic-comedies that highlight the power of sex. Vulgarities, sex, and gross physical jokes are the comic reliefs that fill the plot of these romantic-comedies. In the earlier cycles and clusters sex was also portrayed in romantic-comedies, but it was mainly used as a plot device that could lead to the unity of the main characters.

Sex was not the only differentiating feature of the contemporary romantic-comedies. In the past love was portrayed by romantic-comedies as something that could conquer everything. All the problems that the main characters encountered during their courtship were resolved by their love for each other. In contemporary romantic-comedies uncertainty prevails instead of love. These films started to question the power and saving ability of love. According to Grindon (2012) this scepticism is the reason why many contemporary romantic-comedies make romance impossible. He argues that romantic-comedies have an important social function during the courtship period. When couples watch a romantic-comedy it traditionally would show them that love conquers all, and this lets couples believe in the power of love. This belief, that love conquers all, lets the couple overcome their inhibitions.

To conclude, the history of the romantic-comedy genre is interesting to consider, because it follows cycles of cultural and social development in society. The films of each cluster and/or cycle portray social and cultural developments that occurred during the years the film was produced. It gives a view into specific time frames, and it shows norms and values of love that were prevalent during that time. This study focuses on how four generations of women construct love, and how they relate this construction to romantic-comedies. These women all grew up in different time periods, and thus grew up with different romantic-comedies. It would be

interesting to see if growing up in different time periods can lead to differences in the perception of the women when they consider romantic-comedies. For example, the older generations possibly are more familiar with romantic-comedies from past cycles and/or clusters, while the younger generation is probably only familiar with the previous and current cycle.

Even now the romantic-comedy genre is still evolving and negotiating which conventions make up the body of the genre. In the following section, I will briefly discuss the conventions of the romantic-comedy genre.

1.2.2. Conventions of romantic-comedies

"The genre routinely celebrates it [romantic love] as an immutable, almost mystical force that guides two individuals who are *made for each other* into one another's arms" (Krutnik, 2002, p. 138)

In the previous section, I gave a brief overview of the history of the romantic-comedy genre. Conventions play an important role in identifying films as romantic-comedies. Conventions not only help identify films of a certain genre, they also represent prominent themes that can reveal ideals that are being conveyed by the producers of these films. According to critical scholars certain conventions, such as the *happy ending*, lets people believe that romantic-comedies promote idealistic messages (Hefner & Wilson, 2013). This is especially true for young adolescents, because research has shown that they use media as a source of information when they know little about a subject (Bachen & Illouz, 1996). In this section, I will give an overview of some of the most prominent conventions that can be found in romantic-comedies.

The most well known convention of romantic-comedies is the *happy ending*. It makes the films very predictable, but that also makes it very comforting. The couple can encounter many problems, but eventually they will end up together. It strengthens this believe that love can conquer all. Researchers, such as Grindon (2012) and Richardson (2012), have concluded that this convention does not show struggles that couples can endure during the rest of their relationship, and this has created a widespread belief among the audiences that having a relationship and loving someone will be easy as soon as you jumped a few hurdles. Richardson (2012) also links the *happy ending* convention to the increasing divorce rate of the past years. He argues that romantic-comedy films portray marriage in a wrong way, and this leads people to believe that marriage should be effortless.

Another convention often portrayed in romantic-comedies is the *soul mate* or *the one* convention. This convention focuses on the idea that there is only one perfect love for the character of the film (Hefner & Wilson, 2013). This convention is actually a very old myth that even was mentioned in the writings of Plato and Aristotle (Franiuk, Shain, Bieritz, & Murray, 2012; Hefner & Wilson, 2013). It is also in line with the Western ideology of monogamy. Believing in having a *soul mate* is also an important theory in the field of relationship theories.

The *Love at first sight* convention occurs the moment the main characters meet each other. Immediately after they meet they know they are in love (Hefner & Wilson, 2013). The *love at first sight* convention is not found as often as the *happy ending* and the *soul mate* or *the one* convention in romantic-comedies. According to Hefner and Wilson (2013) this can be explained by the fact that this convention focuses on the beginning of the relationship of the couple, and this can thus not always apply to the plotlines of romantic-comedies, because they can feature relationships in very different stages.

The previous two sections highlighted that romantic-comedies are not just light-hearted entertainment. The genre follows social and cultural changes in society. The films of each different cycle and/or cluster convey the values and norms of love of that time period. Next to these values and norms of society the romantic-comedies also portray conventions of the genre. These conventions represent prominent themes that can reveal ideals that are being conveyed by the producers of these films. According to the abovementioned researchers these conventions can influence the meaning-making process of individuals. Many researchers have looked into the influence of media on the audience. In the next section, I will discuss several media theories that focus on the role played by the media in the meaning-making process.

1.3. The role played by media and meaning-making processes

The classic hypodermic model has been a popular theory during the beginning of mass communication research. This model entails that media have one message, and audiences are directly influenced by this message that is being put forth (Bineham, 1988). It portrays the audience as a susceptible group that has no power of its own. In later eras researchers began to criticise this one-sided view of the audience.

In this later period reception theory became popular among researchers. They began to consider that media had multiple messages, which are actively encoded by the audience. Stuart Hall exemplified this in his encoding and decoding model for cultural texts. Creators of cultural products encoded a meaning into the product, which then can be decoded by the audience. He limits the decoding of texts by audiences to four readings: (1) dominant-hegemonic, (2) oppositional, (3) negotiated, and (4) aberrant (Hall, 1980, pp. 101-103).

Other researchers agreed with Hall's view of multiple meanings in texts, and this was exemplified in research that focuses on active audiences. An important researcher behind these theories is Fiske (1991). He takes a similar stance as Hall, but he places more emphasis on the active role of the audience instead of the creators of cultural products when creating meaning. He argues that the audience are autonomous when creating meaning, and thus do not rely on the meaning given by the creator of the product.

Two other researchers that elaborated on the active audience theory were Jauss and Benzinger (1970). They argued that the meaning that individuals create is being influenced by their background. They called this the *horizon of expectations*. This background includes their demographic profile (nation of origin, gender, age, race, sexuality, etc.), their social networks, and personal idiosyncrasies (Alexander, 2003, p. 191).

The horizon of expectations is often linked to *interpretive communities* (Radway, 1991). People who are part of the same *interpretive community* share similar *horizons of expectations*, and thus share similar assumptions about concepts, which can lead to the construction of similar meanings. These two abovementioned theories are in line with the earlier mentioned view that love is both socially and culturally constructed. Thus, one can argue that the concept of love is dependent on the *horizon of expectations* of a person.

Other researchers have built on the research done by Radway, and have also looked at interpretive communities. Famous examples are the researches done by Katz and Liebes (1984), and Ang (1985) about the popular American soap opera *Dallas*, and the research by Leal and Oliven (1988) about, *Summer Sun*, a popular Brazilian soap opera. These researchers all focused on different aspects of interpretive communities. Katz and Liebes (1984) looked into the cultural differences in the viewing experiences of *Dallas* fans. Ang (1985) also looked at fans of *Dallas*, but instead focused on the interpretative stance the Dutch community took towards the show. Finally Leal and Oliven (1988) looked into the differences in narrative interpretations of both the working-class and the upper-class in Brazil. They all concluded that people from different interpretive communities interpret the same cultural product in different ways, because of the different horizons of expectations that they have.

When considering these theories of reception it is very important to also include the study by Bachen and Illouz (1996) about the cultural models of young people, and how that relates to media. They studied how young people talk about love, and romance. In their research they concluded that young people's view of love and romance can be influenced by media. It is very interesting to note that they noticed that the view of these young people on love, and romance changed with their age. The older respondents added personal, and parental experiences to their view of love and romance. So although media does play a role in the meaning-making processes of young people, eventually real life experiences will mediate how much media will influence their views.

In this section, I have tried to define the position of this research in the field of reception theory. Earlier in this study, I have argued that love is both socially and culturally constructed. This is in line with the view that the *horizon of expectations* of an individual can influence how that person constructs love. However, I also argued that the construction of love by an individual can also be influenced by the conventions of romantic-comedies. This view strongly resembles the encoding and decoding model by Hall (1980). Thus, this research can be positioned in the field of reception theory that accounts for both an active audience, and the reflexive power of media content.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the research design of this study. This research design includes both a description of the data collection and the data analysis.

2. Research design

2.1. Data collection

Love is a very personal concept, and therefore very difficult to grasp. It is intertwined in human behaviour and their lives. For this reason, it is best to adopt a qualitative approach to research this topic. Qualitative research relies on the assumption that people give meaning to their surroundings. They will use these meanings as a basis for their actions in life. Qualitative research thus focuses on trying to understand how people act based on these meaning-making processes ('t Hart, Boeije, & Hox, 2009). Qualitative methods are further used to describe dynamic, multi-dimensional, and often complex phenomena. This method not only helps researchers describe complex phenomena, it can also give further insights into the context surrounding those phenomena (Sofaer, 1999).

For this research, I have conducted twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews. The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Eleven of these interviews were conducted face to face at the home of the respondent. By interviewing them at a familiar place the respondents can feel more comfortable to talk about love, which is often seen as a very personal subject. One interview was conducted online through Skype, because the respondent preferred to use Skype instead of a face-to-face interview. This could be seen as a possible limitation, but research has shown that if both audio and video are enabled and work accordingly during a Skype interview it is almost similar to a face-to-face interview (Sullivan, 2012). It can be seen as very similar, because the expressions and other visual clues that are given by the interviewee can still be picked up by the interviewer.

The structure of in-depth semi-structured interviews can not only be used to test concepts and theories that were derived from the theory, but it also leaves room for respondents to elaborate on topics that they find important (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This has given the respondents the chance to explain how they construct meaning, and how they perceive and experience reality. The theoretical framework of this study was used as a basis to form the interview questions. I have drawn on relevant literature to construct sensitizing concepts and I have translated this into interview questions. When preparing the interviews and conducting

them, I have relied on the 25 interview strategies as described by Hermanowicz (2002). He has meticulously described how to conduct a successful interview. By using these strategies the reliability of the interviews was further enhanced. The interviews were conducted in Dutch, and the interview questions that were used are included in appendix A.

The research sample consists of women from four different generations. Previous research has shown that there is a relation between gender and the conception of love (Dion & Dion, 1993a, 1993b, 1996; Heiss, 1991; Sprecher et al., 1994; Sprecher & Sedikides, 1993). The main conclusion of these studies is that there is a difference between men and women and how they perceive and construct love. Interestingly a later research done by Fehr and Broughton (2001) argues that the views of love by men and women are not that different as previous scholars have shown. Contrarily to these studies which all looked into the differences between the two genders, in this research, I have specifically focused on women to offer a more in-depth view of the conceptions of love shared by the participants of one gender.

Not a lot of research has looked at love across different generations. Most studies related to love have focused on young men and women and their views (Heiss, 1991; Sprecher et al., 1994; Tukachinsky, 2008). A study by Neto (2001) is one of the few studies that has focused on love across three generations of women. He found that there were significant differences between how these three generations of women view love. This shows that looking at different generations can herald different and thus interesting results. It is also interesting to look at different generations, because they have all experienced different events during their childhood. Therefore I have decided to look into generational differences between the female respondents, so that I could find out if they shared similar conceptions of love. I have defined a generation sociologically rather than biologically. For this I have used the definition by McCrindle and Wolfinger (2009). According to them a generation is an identifiable group of people that share birth years, age, location, and significant life events at critical development stages.

I have used four of the generations that McCrindle and Wolfinger (2009) described as a criterion for my sample, namely the *Baby Boomers* (born between 1946 and 1964), *Generation X* (born between 1965 and 1979), *Generation Y* (born between 1980 and 1994), and *Generation Z* (born between 1995 and 2009). I have interviewed three women per generation. So, in total my sample consists of twelve women. Table 1 below gives an overview of the respondents. In appendix B a more detailed overview can be found of the respondents.

Table 1: Overview of the respondents of this study

Generation	Name or pseudonym	Year of birth	Amount of siblings	Amount of children	Amount of relationships
Generation Baby Boom	Molly	1955	2 (brother & sister)	3 (sons & daughter)	4/5
	Truus	1958	5 (brothers & sister)	2 (daughters)	3
	Hella	1962	1 (sister)	2 (sons)	3
Generation X	Nancy	1965	1 (brother)	2 (daughters)	1
	Sandra	1967	6 (brothers & sisters)	2 (son & daughter)	1
	Almira	1969	1 (brother)	2 (sons)	1
Generation Y	Evelien	1987	2 (sisters)	-	1
	Meg	1988	2 (sister & brother)	-	3
	Rieke	1993	3 (sisters & brother)	-	4
Generation Z	Julia	1995	3 (brother & sisters)	-	1
	Rosa	1999	2 (sisters)	-	-
	Ingeborg	2000	3 (sisters & brother)	-	-

This sample is not large enough to generalize the findings for a whole generation. In the research conducted by Neto (2001) the sample contained 144 respondents. This is a much larger sample, but this can be explained by his usage of quantitative methods instead of qualitative methods. He used a survey, which is a method that can reach a lot of people in a short time. The downside of this method is that even though it can show possible recurring themes and patterns across generations, it cannot show how they are constructed (Boeije et al., 2009). Using interviews means that the respondents can elaborate on how they construct these themes and patterns, and this can result in a more developed meaning-making frame in which love is being viewed by the respondents. The sample size of my research is thus too small to be generalizable, but the research method did not intend to provide generalizable findings. Rather, the emphasis of this qualitative research was to realise an in-depth understanding of how a small sample of Dutch women think, and reflect on what they think. These findings can possibly be the stepping-stones for further research about the meaning-making processes of women, and the effect of media on this process. In the next chapter, findings will give well-rounded view of the construction of love by the four generations of women. It will also show how these women perceive the role played by romantic-comedy films in this construction.

I have drawn my sample by using snowball sampling. This method of sampling is a great tool for research with sensitive and personal subjects, because it works per referral (Boeije et al., 2009). For some people love can be a very difficult subject to talk about. For example, a broken heart is not easily healed. The biggest limitation of snowball sampling is that you will tend to only find respondents of the same social class or group, because it works per referral. To ensure that the sample was not limited to one group specifically certain social and cultural characteristics were taken into account during the sampling process. In every generation at least one person was religious and the respondents also had different education levels and diverse backgrounds. It is important to note that all respondents were heterosexual, so this can potentially influence the results. Having a different sexual preference can potentially lead to different results. Also only one respondent had divorced parents, and two other respondents have lost a parent early in life. I have selected respondents who have different experiences both in their social and cultural life in order to get a glimpse into a wide range of testimonies. This helped form a well-rounded view of the construction of love by the four generations of women.

Reliability is a contested concept in qualitative research. It is more often associated with quantitative research. Stenbacka (2001) even argues that reliability in qualitative research is a misleading or irrelevant concept. Lincoln and Guba (1985) do not agree with Stenbacka, instead they argue that qualitative research should strive for *dependability* (p.300), which is very similar to reliability in quantitative research. According to Shenton (2004) dependability can be achieved by carefully and meticulously reporting the research process. By doing so a future researcher can repeat the method, and hopefully get similar results. A meticulous description of the research process also allows the reader to determine the dependability of the research. To enhance to dependability of a research one should describe both the data gathering and analysing process, and should also offer an evaluation of these processes. I have strived to achieve this in this chapter, and also the following.

Silverman (2011) has described several criteria to ensure the validity of research. Validity can be improved by using a comparative method in which the researcher will look for another comparable research, so that he/she can compare their results. In this field of research there are very few studies that focus on both the construction of love by several generations of women and how these women relate their construction of love to popular romantic-comedies. Fortunately, research has been done about these two subjects separately. I have looked at the results of these researches and have compared these findings to mine. This has greatly improved the validity of this research.

When doing research, one should be aware of his/her own subjectivity. During the entire research process your own subjectivity is active (Peshkin, 1988). Therefore, it is important to note that of course I also have my own perceptions about love. During my research, I have tried to remain objective towards the subject, and my respondents. By having done this I can ensure a more objective, and valid research.

2.2. Data analysis

Through thematic network analysis I have coded and analysed my findings. The purpose of thematic analyses is to find significant themes at different levels within a text (Attridge-Stirling, 2001). Because it focuses on different levels this is a great method to look into complex phenomena, such as meaning-making processes. Researchers who use qualitative methods often encounter problems when they have to describe the process through which they organized, and structured the themes they found in the data. Attridge-Stirling (2001) offers thematic networks as a tool that can help organize themes that have been found. This will ensure a structured and methodical systemization of analysis.

Thematic network analysis relies on systematically breaking up a text in three different themes: (1) basic themes, (2) organizing themes, and (3) the global theme. Basic themes are simple statements that characterize the data. They are very basic, and can thus say little about the whole text. If basic themes are based on a similar principle they can be grouped together. This in turn forms an organizing theme. These themes show a broader view of the themes that are in the text. Thus it is more substantial and significant than the separate basic themes. The basic and organizing themes can be summarized by a global theme. This theme reveals what the text as a whole is about in relation to the analysis. It is important to note that there can be more than one global theme, but there can never be more global themes than the amount of basic and organizing themes. The amount of global themes depends on the complexity of the texts in regard to the analysis (Attridge-Stirling, 2001).

The process of thematic network analysis is very similar to qualitative thematic analysis in general. For example, breaking up a text according to three levels of codes or themes is often used in qualitative content analysis. In qualitative content analysis they refer to open, axial, and selective coding instead of basic, organizing, and global themes. The main difference between thematic network analysis and other kinds of qualitative thematic analysis is that it is very visual. Thematic network analysis makes use of *coding trees*, which helps create a visual representation of the relations between the basic, organizing, and global themes. A blank example of a coding tree is included in appendix C. I haven chosen this specific method because I am a visually inclined person. This method made it easier for me to come up with organizing and global themes out of the basic themes.

When the data was gathered through the interviews the coding process began. First the interviews were transcribed in Dutch. These transcriptions were translated to English, and the initial basic themes were written down in a coding scheme. In this coding scheme I could systematically write down the basic themes of each interview question separately. Each generation was coded in a separate file to ensure that the coding process could be conducted systematically. It also made it easier to find similarities and differences between generations. An example of a page of this coding scheme can be found in appendix D. After the coding schemes were completed I again considered the basic themes, and I grouped similar basic themes together in the abovementioned thematic network analysis coding trees. Each coding tree focused on a specific interview question. An example of a coding tree that I made can be found in appendix E. When the basic themes were all accounted for in the coding tree I tried to look for commonalities between them. These commonalities formed the organizing themes. After I formed the organizing themes I tried to summarize them in a global theme or themes. These global themes were used to answer the research, and sub questions of this research.

In total there were 355 basic codes written down in the coding trees. These basic codes formed 76 organizing themes. After summarizing the organizing themes I could form 25 global themes. These themes were gathered in 24 coding trees. In the next chapter I will elaborate on the most salient global themes of this research.

During the coding process another limitation was discovered. The interviews were conducted in Dutch, because the respondents and the researcher were all Dutch. There were both advantages and disadvantages for interviewing the respondents in Dutch. The biggest advantage for interviewing in Dutch is that it made it easier for the respondents to articulate what they meant, because they could answer the questions in their native language. This is especially true for the older generations, because they had little to no education in English when they grew up. So this meant that the respondents could exactly tell what they wanted to tell about love, and this supported the credibility of the results. The biggest disadvantage of this was that during the coding process the answers of the respondents had to be translated from Dutch to English. Research that has focused on the translation of texts has shown that texts are written in a cultural context, which means that if it is translated to another language, it will often lose the context in which it was written, which in turn can affect the meaning of what was being conveyed (Davies, 2003; Lion, 2005). For example, some Dutch expressions and words cannot be translated to

English, because these expressions and words do not exist in the English language. After deliberation it was decided that the advantage of interviewing in Dutch exceeded the disadvantage of the possible context loss due to translation. The aim of this research is to see how women construct love, and how they relate this to popular romantic-comedy films, this can only truly be researched if the respondents can articulate how they construct love. During the translation of the transcriptions I have taken into account the Dutch context, and I have tried to approach the exact meaning as close as possible in English.

3. Findings

In the following chapter I will discuss the findings of this research. I will describe the most salient themes found in the data and support them with quotes made by the respondents. In the data certain ideas of the respondents were recurrent. The respondents thought that romantic-comedies did not influence how they constructed their definition of love. Instead, participants' testimonies suggest that romantic-comedies could have possibly influenced their definition of love when they were younger, and thus inexperienced in love. However, the respondents believed that their social network influenced more the construction of their definition of love. Specifically, the parents were seen as the most important source of influence. Overall the accounts of the women were quite similar across generations. Two salient factors that caused differences in responses could be identified, namely religion, and the quality of the relationship with the social network of the respondent. It seems that generational differences did not affect the accounts of the women.

This chapter has been divided in three parts. Firstly, I will briefly discuss the diverse definitions of love that were given by the respondents. Secondly, I will answer the first sub question of this research by describing how romantic-comedies, and social networks have influenced the construction of love by the respondents. Lastly, I will end with answering the second sub question of this research, by giving a description of the similarities and differences that could be found among the generations.

In total, twelve women of four different generations were interviewed for this research. There were three women per generation. As mentioned before the sample was quite diverse, because during the sampling process several characteristics such as religion, social background and education level were taken into account. It is still important to note that although this sample seems to be quite divers it cannot represent the whole female population of the four generations. Even though the sample is not generalizable, the results of this study are still relevant. By using thematic network analysis to analyse the data an in-depth understanding can be realised of how these women think, and reflect on what they think. These findings can be the stepping-stones for further research about the meaning-making processes of women, and the effect of media on this process.

3.1. Definitions of love: Passion, equality or adoration

At the beginning of the interview the respondents were asked to give a definition of love. Their answers were very diverse. It ranged from linking love to the description given by the Bible to describing love as a *warm feeling*. Some of the respondents made a clear distinction between *romantic love* and *love in general*. Through this distinction, *romantic love* was often linked to romantic gestures, sexual attraction, intimacy, feelings of warmth, and it was considered to be more intense than *love in general*:

> "Yeah, that [love between partner and friends] is of course different (…) Because sex is a clear difference, that makes you become more intimate with someone. That intimacy, exposing yourself."
> Evelien, generation Y, 1987

In this definition of Evelien, we can see that these women find it very important to connect intimacy and passion to love. This is very much in line with the contemporary view of love and marriage in the West. While in the past love and especially marriage, was supported by financial security, now passion and romance have the upper hand (Turner, 2007). This was also supported by some respondents, who specifically mentioned sex as a part of the definition of love. Others did not specifically mention it, but they did allude to it:

> "[Love in the broadest sense of the word] I think it's less about wanting to share everything together, and if for example you look at friendships then attraction, sexual attraction is less important."
> Rosa, Generation Z, 1999

During the coding process two other different points of view could easily be identified among the respondents regarding love. Most of the respondents mentioned or referred to love as being something that was specifically between two people. They referred to love as being equality between two people in a relationship. It revolved around a connection between two people, who both exert the same amount of effort. Love between two people was seen as something that could complement and reinforce both parties involved.

"If two people love each other, but I also think they can complement each other. Yes, I also think they want to do things for each other, and that they are equal in a relationship."
Ingeborg, Generation Z, 2000

In these abovementioned descriptions of love we can recognize the *triangular theory of love* by Sternberg (1986). He argued that love consists of three components: (1) intimacy, (2) passion, and (3) decision/commitment. In the views of the abovementioned respondents we can see that these three components are integrated in their definition of love.

Several other respondents viewed love in a different way. Although they also agreed that love was between two people, they did not focus on equality between those two people, but rather on the adoration of the person that was being loved. These respondents almost placed the person they loved on a pedestal. For them, loving someone entailed doing everything for one person, and also putting yourself aside for one person:

"Love is committing your life to someone else. Love is actually giving yourself to someone else."
Hella, generation Baby boom, 1962

"Loving someone, caring for… Yes, I also think it's putting someone first, before yourself."
Julia, Generation Z, 1995

The respondents that expressed this adoration in love all had one factor in common: they were religious. According to Gomez and Fisher (2003) adoration, and worship are a part of believing in God or a transcendental reality. This can possibly imply that religion has played a part in the construction of love for these women.

Although the respondents did not share the same definition of love, they did see eye to eye in one aspect. All these respondents connected love almost always to one other person. In this focus on love being between two people we can recognize the Western ideology of monogamy. Research has shown that the Western ideology of monogamy has existed since the Roman Empire (Macdonald, 1990). This seems to indicate that cultural norms, like monogamy, play a part in the process of forming a definition of love.

Another aspect that almost all respondents agreed upon was that a universal definition of love could not exist. In participants' views this was not possible for two reasons: (1) love is a

very difficult concept to describe, and (2) people want and/or need different things in love. According to the respondents wanting and/or needing different things in love is connected to social, and cultural factors. People's needs and wants are different due to experiences in love, their upbringing, and the environment they are raised in.

> "Because love can really be influenced by your experiences. By how you love someone, by who loves you, how you have been loved by your parents. Love is very fragile, and if it gets damaged it will also be different. I think a universal definition is not possible, because there are too many things that can influence it."
>
> Rieke, Generation Y, 1993

The respondents also confirmed that they themselves were influence by both social, and cultural factors. This echoes the assumption that was made in the theoretical framework about the influence of social, and cultural factors on the construction of love. Even though the respondents agreed that it is impossible for a universal concept of love to exist, they did mention almost all aspects of the academic universal definition of *romantic love*, as summarized and defined by Gottschall, Nordlund, Temple, and Cohen (2006), and Harris (1995). As mentioned before, Gottschall et al. (2006) defined *romantic love* as feeling a (sexual) attraction to one person, with the expectation that this attraction has a lasting duration. Harris (1995) defined the following seven elements of *romantic love*: (1) desire for union or merger, both physical and emotional, (2) idealization of the beloved, (3) exclusivity (reciprocal), (4) intrusive thinking about the love object, (5) emotional dependency, (6) reordering of motivational hierarchies of life priorities, and (7) powerful empathy and concern for the beloved.

3.2. The influence of romantic-comedies and social networks

This chapter will focus on answering the first sub question, which is: *How do four generations of women relate their perception of love to popular romantic-comedy films?*

All the respondents admitted that they have watched romantic-comedies. Especially the younger generations mentioned that they watched a fair amount of romantic-comedies during their life. The older generations now watch romantic-comedies from time to time, but when they were younger they used to watch it less often.

"Look in my youth we watched less TV than now. There was also less TV. When I was around 5 or 6 you had something for children on Wednesday from 16:00 till 18:00, and that was it. Nowadays there are of course zillions of channels that air 24/7."
Sandra, Generation X, 1967

As the abovementioned quote illustrates in the past there were fewer media channels, so the respondents from the older generations did not have the opportunity to watch as much romantic-comedies as the younger generations. Another factor that also influenced how much respondents watched romantic-comedies in their youth was religion.

"Yeah in the past, there was *'t Schaep met de 5 pooten*, for my parents that was a complete drama. That was, because there was cursing, oh man, man. And low-cut and tight dresses. That was all too horrible, too horrible to describe, and that's why we couldn't see it."
Truus, Generation Baby boom, 1968

Religious respondents and some respondents that have been raised religiously told that they could not watch romantic-comedies because their parents had forbidden it. The participants explained that their parents thought these films did not represent love and relationships in a good way, and that the attire and the behaviour or actions of the actors was improper. So, although some respondents did not watch a lot of romantic-comedies when they were younger, they all watch them now.

When asked why they like to watch romantic-comedies the respondents were quite unanimous. They liked romantic-comedies because of the *happy ending*, and other plot devices

that are common for these films, such as the humorous situations, and complications that arise between the lovers. Not only did they mention the conventions of romantic-comedies as described by Grindon (2012), one respondent even managed to describe the master plot of romantic-comedies.

"[When talking about liking romantic-comedies] Well the complications, the humour, the airiness, just it being fun, because there are a lot of funny situations. […] It gives you a food feeling when two people find each other, and that you know that it will be okay in the end. […] It's just like gum […] you have something to chew for a while, but eventually it's not food, but it's just entertainment."
Hella, Generation Baby Boom, 1962

Another aspect that influences the likeability of romantic-comedies for the respondents was also mentioned by Hella in the previous quote, namely it is easy to watch. Her chewing gum metaphor perfectly explains how the respondents view romantic-comedies. For them, it is a form of entertainment that does not require much thought because, as a viewer, you already know that it will have a *happy ending*. Participants watched romantic-comedies mainly to relax and to escape into a fantasy world. This is very much in line with both the findings of Radway (1983) when she asked women why they read romantic novels, and of Snitow (1979) in her study about the success of Harlequin novels among women.

Interestingly, the predictability of the plots of romantic-comedies was also mentioned by respondents as a reason to dislike these kinds of films. The respondents did not like romantic-comedies that tried too hard to be funny, that had bad actors that acted to dramatic, and/or were too predictable. If this happened they could not relate to, or recognize situations that occurred in these films. This was also tied to the characters of the films. The romantic-comedies that the respondents liked featured characters that they could at least identify with through personality traits, or them being in certain situations. They often identified more with the female characters. The perceived relationship between the identification with the film situations and characters, and its likeability is in line with the findings by Cohen (2001). He argued that identification can lead to increased enjoyment, involvement, and intense emotional responses. Identification can also lead to the audience being less critical towards the messages the texts are trying to portray. Cohen (2001) further argues that identification through media can possibly have persuasive and imitative effects on audiences.

During the coding process, I discovered that, on some level, the respondents did identify with the films and characters, but these films did not seem to have persuasive and/or imitative effects on them. I asked the respondents about two popular conventions of romantic-comedies, namely the *love at first sight*, and *soul mate* or *the one* convention. I wanted to know if they believed in these conventions, and also if they thought romantic-comedies had influenced their views on this. Some respondents believed in *love at first* sight due to them having experienced it themselves, or having heard from other people that had experienced it. However, most respondents rather believed in *attraction at first sight*, because they argued that love has to have time to grow:

"[When talking about love at first sight] I don't believe that it will be aright from the start, and that everything will be okay. I think love has to grow. So you can look at someone, and be attracted to that person. You do need to have that look to move on. You have to date to see if you feel something. It's more than: Hey, you're good looking."
Meg, Generation Y, 1988

As this quote exemplifies most of the respondents reject the *love at first sight* convention as portrayed by romantic-comedies. It was interesting to see that the other prominent convention, the *soul mate* or *the one* convention, was not that easily rejected by the respondents. This difference between the two conventions can possibly be explained by the behaviour of the parents of the respondents. Some of the parents of the respondents tended to refer to the *soul mate* convention when they talked about relationships with the respondents. Possibly due to these conversations with their parents the convention has been normalized for the respondents.

So, most of the respondents did believe that there is a *soul mate* for everybody, but they did add that this does not necessarily has to be romantic, but can also be a good friend. The respondents who did not believe in the *soul mate* convention attributed it to the notion that some people do not want to find a *soul mate*, or are not suitable for one.

"[When talking about not believing in soul mates] Because I think that some people are better off alone […]. I just think some people are not suitable for relationships. Just don't fit in the relationship life. And then it's not necessarily a soul mate in a romantic sense. So for example it can also be a

good friend or something like that. Maybe that is possible, but I don't believe that there is one true love for everybody, no."
Rosa, Generation Z, 1999

The quote by Rosa in a way illustrates the negotiation meaning-making process that she goes through when explaining to me why she does not believe in the *soul mate* convention. At first, she states that some people are just not meant to have a relationship, and thus a *soul mate.* However, she follows up with a statement that recants her earlier remark. Maybe having a *soul mate* is possible if it is only a friend. She then ends with the statement that she still does not believe in having one true love. In this negotiation process, she accepts certain parts of the *soul mate* convention, but at the same time she rejects other parts. This in line with the earlier mentioned encoding and decoding theory by Hall (1980). This process of negotiation also became apparent when I asked the respondents if they thought romantic-comedies has influenced how they view these two conventions.

Most of the respondents mentioned that romantic-comedies did not influence their view on it, because they knew that they are just films, and are thus fake. This emphasis on romantic-comedies being fictions can be traced back to their upbringing. Some respondents were told by their parents that romantic-comedies did not portray reality. The older generations also tell this to their children. So, from an early age they are reminded that they should not believe in the portrayal of love by romantic-comedies. Even though the respondents mentioned that romantic-comedies did not influence their definition of love, they also admitted that romantic-comedies can possibly influence younger people since they have not really experienced love:

"[When talking about love in romantic-comedies] Well I think in the past I used to hope it was like that. That you would fall in love, and that you would then be in love forever. Then you would not have to work hard, but it would all be great. Yes, that is something that you recant when you get a relationship. […] That's the portrait romantic-comedies paint. That you just can lie back, and the loving feelings will do the rest. […] So I think that it has influenced me, but there comes a moment that you recant that thought when you face reality."
Rieke, Generation Y, 1993

What Rieke mentions in her quote is that love is portrayed as something that is easy. This view also comes forward when the respondents talked about their definition of love being portrayed in romantic-comedies. According to most respondents romantic-comedies rather portray *romance* than love. This is because they think that these films often focus on the early stages of love when it has not had the chance to develop fully. This view explains why the respondents perceive love as being portrayed as something easy in romantic-comedies. This is in line with the views of Grindon (2012) and Richardson (2012), who both argued that romantic-comedy conventions, especially the *happy ending*, lets people believe that love is easy.

It seems that although the respondents regularly watch romantic-comedies, they do not really think that they get influenced by them. However, when considering their responses about the definition of love and romantic-comedy conventions, participants appeared to engage in a negotiating meaning-making process. It seems that in this ideology of love that is being presented by romantic-comedies, the respondents select which view they want to accept, and which they want to reject. In a way, they also confirm this themselves by admitting that romantic-comedies can possibly influence individuals who are younger. As mentioned before, young adolescents do tend to use media as a source of information when they know little about a subject (Bachen & Illouz, 1996). Throughout life you will gain more experiences in love, but it will still be impossible to know everything about love. So, it is still possible that the respondents, even for a small part, depend on the ideology of romantic-comedies to construct their current definition of love.

During the coding process, other elements were also identified as possibly influencing the construction of love by the respondents. As briefly mentioned before the respondents were told by their parents that the portrayal of love by romantic-comedies was not realistic. The older generations also tell this to their children. This view of romantic-comedies is not the only thing that is being conveyed from one generation to the next. According to the respondents the greatest influencers on their construction of love are their parents. This is to be expected, considering that research has shown that one's parents are the most important socialization agent in one's life (Mabry, Giarrusso & Bengtson, 2007). The respondents mentioned that their parents were an example or a role model that gave them a stable foundation of how to love someone:

"[When talking about the influence of her parents on her definition of love] Yes, something that I can learn from. So they [parents] are an example, but not a role model. I wouldn't do it exactly the same as them."

Rosa, Generation Z, 1999

In this quote by Rosa, we can again recognize this process of negotiated meaning-making. She sees her parents as an example, but she will not use everything they tell or show her about love for her own construction of it. The respondents also viewed their siblings and friends in the same light. When they talked about their siblings and friends, they especially mentioned that they compare the relation status of their friends to their own situation. Participants explained that they looked at their situation to see if that was how a relationship or love should or should not be. Again, this is an example of this process of negotiated meaning-making.

"[When talking about the influence of her friends on her definition of love] That is something that influences your definition. Yes, and that you sometimes look at someone and you don't see that vibe. Sometimes I think, well I do not see that they are in love or that they share things. (…) I will look at them and think I want this, or more of this, or something like that. Or some do not have great sex, so yeah I don't think that would be an ideal partner."

Evelien, Generation Y, 1987

Although the respondents did mention that they had less of an influence on their construction of love than parents. The respondents attributed this to the length of knowing the person, and his/her age. Siblings, and friends were more seen as peers, and were thus perceived as having approximately the same experience in love as the respondents. For this reason, participants rather relied on the knowledge of their parents, because they were older, and thus more experienced in love.

To conclude this part, the responses of the participants showed that they do engage in negotiated meaning-making behaviour when constructing their definition of love. The respondents admitted that romantic-comedies have possibly influenced their view of love when they were still younger, and thus had little experience in love. They did not consider romantic-comedies to portray their definitions of love, and thus they rejected certain conventions and ideologies that are being portrayed in them. However, because respondents do engage in this

negotiated meaning-making process they still seem to partially accept other conventions and ideologies of romantic-comedies. During the coding process, it also became clear that other factors seemed to influence the construction of love by the respondents. The respondents mentioned that their social network, so their parents, siblings, and friends, had a greater influence on their definition of love than romantic-comedies. They saw their social network as an example, or as a role model when constructing their definition of love, but again, they mentioned that they only partially accepted how their social network constructed love.

Thus, overall the construction of love by the respondents can almost be described as the construction of a patchwork. The respondents appeared to construct their definition of love by selecting views and ideologies about love that they like or can identify with. This construction process by the respondents is very similar to the encoding decoding model of Hall (1980). The actions of the respondents underline the active audience theory. The construction process of the respondents included elements from romantic-comedies, but also from specific individuals within the participants' social network. In addition, the respondents mentioned that age and experiences also matter. When you are younger, it is possible to identify or to like the ideologies of romantic-comedies more than when you get older and have experienced love in other ways. Essentially, participants seemed to argue that it is possible to decide for oneself what is important when constructing one's definition of love. This view on the matter has beautifully been summarized by one respondent:

"Well, I think that every person is a product of everything all together."
Hella, Generation Baby boom, 1962

3.3. Differences and similarities between the respondents

This chapter will focus on answering the second sub question, which is: *What are the differences and/or similarities between the accounts of the women?*

Both differences and similarities could be found in the accounts of the respondents. When I first started working on this research I expected that the generational differences would be the most salient but I discovered that this was not entirely true. Other factors, such as religion, and the quality of the relationship with the respondents' social networks, seemed to influence how respondents answered.

Religion was the most salient factor that made respondents give similar answers. In all the generations, at least one respondent was religious, and often other respondents had been raised religiously but decided later in life to stop believing. During the coding process I identified religion as a recurring element in the accounts of the respondents. As mentioned before religion seemed to play an important role in the way religious respondents formed their definition of love:

 "Because I think that that [being love by God] is the ultimate form of love. (...) I think that you can only love someone in a perfect way if you know Jesus. And that, uh, has a lot of influence on how I define love."
Julia, Generation Z, 1995

How the religious respondents viewed love was very different from the non-religious respondents. While the former ones constructed their definition of love based on the religious values and norms taught to them by their parents, the latter ones constructed their views according to other values and norms taught to them by their non-religious social network.

Religion also seemed to influence other aspects of love for the religious respondents. It mediated how love was discussed with their social network, specifically how it was almost not discussed with their parents. While the parents of the non-religious respondents tended to talk about the practicalities of love, such as relationships and sex, the parents of the religious respondents instead talked about love in the biblical sense of the word, and discussed love in a more philosophical than practical way.

"I was raised in a strict Christian family, so they mainly said: "don't start a relationship. Keep away from boys, and you can't have sex before you marry." (…) So they did not really talk about romantic love. That was sort of a taboo. (…) Ideally you would have a relationship with only one person, and that would also be the person you would marry."
Rieke, Generation Y, 1993

As the quote by Rieke illustrates, practicalities of love, such as sex, were seen as a taboo subject. This was also reflected in the way the parents of theses religious respondents viewed romantic-comedies. As mentioned before, respondents that were raised religiously were forbidden to watch romantic-comedies. Participants explained that this was mainly because these films portrayed very different values and norms of love than those of their religion. These values and norms of love seemed deeply ingrained in the religious respondents as they often brought them up in their answers.

The importance of their religious values for instance came forward when participants talked about the kind of romantic-comedies they liked or disliked. While there was quite a consensus among the respondents about why they liked romantic-comedies, there was a distinct difference when they discussed why they did not like certain romantic-comedies. The non-religious respondents mainly disliked romantic-comedies that tried too hard to be funny and that had bad actors that acted to dramatic, while the religious respondents disliked romantic-comedies that wrongly represented love. This mainly included films that focused too much on sex, adultery, and lust. These previous mentioned characteristics are very much in line with the description of contemporary romantic-comedies by Grindon (2012). So, it would seem that the religious values and norms of the respondents are less compatible with the portrayal of love by contemporary romantic-comedies.

"[When talking about romantic-comedies that she dislikes] Yeah, I think those films where it only revolves around lust. (…) In which they only care about getting with as much people as possible. I don't like that kind of films. (…) So I think that it's important that love is portrayed in an honest way."
Julia, Generation Z, 1995

This quote again shows that religious values and norms about love have influenced how these respondents view love, and romantic-comedies. Being raised religiously by their parents, and still being religious later in life seemed to affect the way these participants perceive love because of the norms and values along which they express their views. In this we can recognize that a social and/or cultural factor, such as religion, can possibly influence how the respondents construct their definition love.

Another social factor that possibly influenced how the respondents constructed their definition of love was the quality of the relationship that they had with their social network. Several respondents had a troubled parent-child relationship, and this influenced how they thought about the role played by their parent(s) on their perception of love. The respondents who did not have a troubled relationship with their parents believed that their parents were an example or a role model of how to love. These respondents constructed their definition of love according to values and norms that their parents have shown and/or taught them. The respondents that had a troubled parent-child relationship thought that their parent or parents showed them how not to love someone or had a very different view of (romantic) love, and that they would definitely love in a very different way than how their parents did:

> "My upbringing maybe did have an influence… Yeah, it has influenced how I think about love. One side of my family showed me how you should do it [love], and the other side showed me how not to do it [love]."
> Meg, Generation Y, 1988

A troubled relationship between the parents also seemed to possibly influence how one respondent constructed her definition of love. This respondent was the only one with divorced parents and she admitted that the divorce had influenced her view on love. Due to the divorce of her parents she no longer believes in the existence of only one true love:

> "But for example because of that [the divorce] I think differently about there being one true love. For example I don't believe in it. (…) Yes, and that you can also see that you will not necessarily stay with the same person you whole life. For example other parents do stay together their whole life for the sake of their children. I think differently about that, yes, I think that if it goes wrong that it will still be okay. And it's not a disaster or something like that."

Rosa, Generation Z, 1999

Rosa was very conscious about the fact that relationships can end. In her statement we can recognize the findings by Kulka and Weingarten (1979), who argued that when parents divorce it can have an effect on their children. Their findings pointed out that children that were 16 years of age or younger when their parents divorced are more likely to divorce themselves later in life, than children who grew up in intact families. This notion is very interesting when comparing it to a statement made by one of the religious respondents. This other respondent, Rieke, made a very contrasting statement. Namely, she explained that her parents taught her that one should only start a relationship with the idea that it will last forever or for a long time:

> "[When talking about how she view relationships] Friends of Koen [boyfriend], those who are not Christians, would say: It would be fine if I will be together with someone for four years, but I know that we will break up after a couple of years, and I know that that can happen, but that doesn't matter. I would instead say: No, you begin a relationship knowing you will stay together. That should be your starting point, but that is something that I learned from my upbringing."
> Rieke, Generation Y, 1993

When looking at these two contrasting statements, it is evident that these respondents derive their ideas about love from the way they were raised and the types of values and norms conveyed to them by their parents. These findings again seem to confirm the findings by Mabry, Giarrusso and Bengtson (2007) and Maccoby (1992) that the parents of the respondents are an important socialization agent that can possibly influence how the respondents construct their definition of love.

It may seem that generational differences were not present in the answers of the respondents, but that is not entirely true. There was a notable difference between the oldest generation and the other generations. The Baby boom generation talked less or did not talk at all with their parents about love, and specifically the practicalities of it. This can possibly be explained by the generational differences between the respondents, and their parents. Nowadays, sex and sexuality are subjects that are often openly discussed in the Netherlands, and one can easily encounter it via various media channels. In the past, sex was something that happened behind closed doors, and it was thus seen as something very private.

It is interesting to note that although the respondents from the oldest generation did not report discussing love with their parents as much as the younger respondents, they still seemed to construct their definition of love in a very similar way. This is also true for their views on romantic-comedies. This can possibly be explained by the before mentioned theory of the *horizon of expectations* by Jauss and Benzinger (1970), and the theory of *interpretive communities* by Radway (1991). Jauss and Benzinger (1970) argued that the meaning that individuals create is being influenced by their background. According to Radway (1991), people who are part of the same *interpretive communities* share similar *horizons of expectations*, and thus share similar assumptions about concepts. It can be argued that the respondents all belong to the same broad cultural *interpretive community* that can be called the Dutch culture. All the respondents have been raised in the Netherlands, and thus have grown up in a Dutch society that has specific values and norms. That the respondents are a part of this broad cultural *interpretive community* can possibly explain the similar construction of meaning by the respondents.

When considering the views and opinions of all the respondents about the influence of romantic-comedies on their definition of love there seems to be a general consensus. The respondents did not believe that romantic-comedies have influenced their definition of love. They only believed that it could have possibly influenced them when they were younger, and still inexperienced in love. This would suggest that how the respondents viewed love was not related to their perception of romantic-comedies.

4. Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this study was to see how women constructed love, and how they relate this to popular romantic-comedy films. To make this aim more concrete one research question and two sub questions were constructed. In this study I have tried to answer the following research question: *How do four generations of women talk about love?* This research question was supported by two sub questions: (1) *How do they relate their perception of love to romantic-comedy films?*, and (2) *what are the differences and/or similarities between the accounts of the women?*

Qualitative research methods were used to answer the questions of this research. I conducted interviews with twelve women from four different generations. Several characteristics, such as religion, were taking into account when selecting the respondents. Thematic network analysis was used to analyse the data.

The women of this research tended to describe love either as something that was an intense and passionate feeling or as it was described by the Bible. In the definitions of the women several theories of love by Sternberg could be recognized. His *triangular theory of love* (Sternberg, 1986) could be recognized in the respondents' description of love as an intense and passionate feeling. The respondents also agreed with Sternberg that a universal definition of love was not possible to create, because love is connected to social and cultural factors that can differ between people. Ironically, when the respondents talked about their definition of love they actually mentioned several aspects of the academic universal definition of love as described by Gottschall et al. (2006), and Harris (1995).

When talking about love and romantic-comedies the respondents argued that these films did not influence the construction of their definition of love. They argued that they had this realisation that romantic-comedies are just films, and thus fake. Although, the answers given by the respondents suggested that romantic-comedies could have influenced their definition of love when they were younger, and inexperienced in love. This is in line with the findings of Bachen and Illouz (1996), who also argued that young adolescents tend to use media as a source of information if they have little knowledge of a subject. The respondents believed that instead of romantic-comedies their social network had more influence on the construction of their definition of love. They specifically mentioned that their parents were the most important

influencers on their construction of love. This is in line with the findings of Mabry, Giarrusso and Bengston (2007), and Maccoby (1992), who argued that parents are the most important socialization agent in one's life.

During the testimonies of the respondents it was noticeable that they were going through a negotiated meaning-making process when answering questions. In this process we can recognize the encoding decoding model of Hall (1980). The respondents appeared to construct their definition of love by selecting certain views and ideologies of love that they liked or could identify with. In this construction process they included views and ideologies of their social network, but also some elements from romantic-comedies. Thus, the respondents can be seen as an active audience who engage in a negotiated meaning-making process when constructing their definition of love.

Certain differences and similarities between the accounts of the respondents could be found. These differences and similarities could be linked to social factors. Religion was the most salient factor that made respondents give similar answers. The respondents who were religious gave similar answers when discussing the construction of their definition of love, when discussing love with their social network, and when discussing romantic-comedies. In their testimonies the religious respondents heavily relied on religious values and norms about love that were taught to them by their parents.

Another social factor that lead to a similarity in answers was the quality of relationship that the respondents had with their social network. Having a troubled parent-child relationship influenced how the respondents thought about the role played by their parent(s) on their perception of love. They contributed less influence to their parent(s), and did not consider them to be an example or a role model. A troubled relationship between the parents also seemed to influence how one respondent constructed her definition of love. She no longer believes in the existence of only one true love, and she is very conscious about the fact that a relationship can end. She attributes these two views to the divorce of her parents. This is in line with the findings of Kulka and Weingarten (1979), who argue that when a child is 16 years or younger when their parents divorce they are more likely to divorce themselves later in life.

There were little generational differences to be found in the testimonies of the respondents. All the generations gave similar accounts when talking about the construction of their definition of love, and the role that romantic-comedies played in their construction. This

can possibly be explained by the *horizon of expectations* theory (Jauss & Benzinger, 1970), and the *interpretive communities* theory (Radway, 1991). Being a part of the same *interpretive community* can lead to similar *horizons of expectations*, and thus similar assumptions of concepts. It can be argued that the respondents all belong to the Dutch cultural community. The respondents have all been raised in the Netherlands, and this can possibly explain the similar construction of meaning by the respondents.

To conclude, the abovementioned results indicate that love is indeed both a cultural as a social concept. This view is also supported by Sternberg (1996), who argues that people base their love story on their own social and cultural experiences. Thus, it is possible that when one is inexperienced in love one can create a personal love story based on examples found in both cultural products, and in one's social network.

Although this research heralded interesting results some limitations were present. As mentioned before, this study features a sample of just twelve Dutch women from four different generations. Therefore, the sample of this study is not generalizable. It cannot represent the construction of love by the whole female population of the four generations.

Another limitation of this research is the language. The interviews with the respondents were conducted in Dutch. For the analysis of the interviews the answers were translated to English. In this translation process certain elements of the construction of love by the respondents can be lost. Certain Dutch words and phrases cannot be translated to English, because these words and phrases do not exist in the English language.

Subjectivity by the researcher is another possible limitation of this research. The driving force behind this research was my own belief that romantic-comedies and other romantic media had influenced my perception of love. I believed that the respondents were also be influence by these romantic media products. Due to this assumption I expected certain answers from the respondents that would confirm the influence of romantic-comedies on the construction of love of these women. During the interviews I was very surprised to notice that I did not necessarily get the answers that I expected. This made me encounter, and confront my own subjectivity of this subject. Due to this realization of my subjectivity I could deal with it accordingly for the rest of the research.

The goal of this study is to add to the scientific field of media and meaning-making processes by focusing on multiple generations of women, and romantic-comedies. This study

heralded interesting results that can be used further in this scientific field. Future research should focus on the construction of love by women from different countries. It would be interesting to see if these women share the same concept of love as the women in my sample. Further research can also look into the construction of love by multiple generations of men, so one can compare the findings to this study to investigate similarities and differences. Another avenue of future research can be to create a large-scale quantitative study about the construction of love by multiple generations of women and men. This quantitative follow-up study can use the findings of this study to create measurable quantitative concepts.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview form in Dutch

Hartelijk dank voor het meedoen aan mijn onderzoek. Ik ben nu master student aan de Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam. Ik doe de master Media, Culture & Society. Mijn master focust op media en wat voor invloed dat potentieel kan hebben op de maatschappij. Om mijn master af te sluiten moet ik een onderzoek doen en dat presenteren in de vorm van een scriptie. Ik doe onderzoek naar liefde. Specifiek gaat het over hoe meerdere generaties vrouwen praten over liefde en hoe zij dit relateren aan romantische-komedies.

De vragen zullen dus voornamelijk gaan over hoe u/jij liefde ziet. Het is heel belangrijk om te realiseren dat er geen fout of goed antwoord bestaat bij dit onderwerp. De vragen kunnen best persoonlijk worden. Dus als u/jij geen antwoord wil(t) geven op de vraag dan kun(t) u/je dat aangeven. Alle informatie rondom het interview zal discreet behandeld worden. Zoals ook op het consentformulier aangegeven is kan ik uw/jouw naam vervangen door een pseudoniem. Heeft u/jij daar behoefte aan?

Het interview zal tussen de 45 en 60 minuten duren. Heeft u er bezwaar tegen als ik het opneem via mijn iPad? Heeft u nog vragen of opmerkingen voordat we beginnen?

Introductievraag

1. Hoe zou u liefde definiëren?
   a. In de breedste zin van het woord.
   b. Romantische liefde.

Persoonlijke informatie

1. In welk jaar bent u geboren?
2. Waar bent u opgegroeid?
   a. In een stedelijke omgeving of op het platteland?
3. Wat is u hoogst genoten opleiding?
4. Heeft u broers of zussen?

5. Zijn uw ouders gescheiden of zijn ze nog steeds bij elkaar?

    a. Als ze zijn gescheiden, wanneer zijn ze uit elkaar gegaan?

6. Bent u gelovig?

    a. Zo ja, welk geloof hangt u aan?

        i. Bent u opgevoed volgens dit geloof?

    b. Denkt u dat uw geloof invloed heeft gehad over hoe u denkt over liefde?

        i. Waarom wel/niet?

7. Wat is uw seksuele oriëntatie? / Voel je je aangetrokken tot jongens of meisjes?

8. Hoeveel relaties hebt u gehad?

    a. Hoe zijn de relaties beëindigt? / Waarom heeft u het uitgemaakt?

9. Praat u met uw ouders over liefde?

    a. Waarom wel/niet?

    b. Waar hebben jullie het dan over?

    c. Praten jullie dan ook over romantische-komedies?

        i. Waar hebben jullie het dan over?

10. Denkt u dat uw opvoeding invloed heeft gehad op uw definitie van liefde?

    a. Waarom wel/niet?

    b. Op wat voor manier?

    c. Welke rol hebben uw ouders hierin gespeeld?

11. Praat u met uw broers of zussen over liefde?

    a. Waarom wel/niet?

    b. Op wat voor manier?

    c. Praten jullie dan ook over romantische-komedies?

        i. Waar hebben jullie het dan over?

12. Denkt u dat uw broers of zussen invloed hebben gehad op uw definitie van liefde?

    a. Waarom wel/niet?

    b. Op wat voor manier?

13. Praat u met uw kinderen over liefde?

    a. Waarom wel/niet?

    b. Waar hebben jullie het dan over?

        i. Praten jullie ook over romantische-komedies?

1. Waar hebben jullie het dan over?

14. Denkt u dat uw kinderen invloed hebben gehad op uw definitie van liefde?

    a. Waarom wel/niet?

    b. Op wat voor manier?

15. Praat u met uw vrienden over liefde?

    a. Waarom wel/niet?

    b. Waar hebben jullie het dan over?

        i. Praten jullie ook over romantische-komedies?

            1. Waar hebben jullie het dan over?

16. Denkt u dat uw vrienden invloed hebben gehad op uw definitie van liefde?

    a. Waarom wel/niet?

    b. Op wat voor manier?

17. (Als er verschillen zitten tussen de invloed) Waarom hebben ouders, broers/zussen en vrienden een andere invloed op uw definitie van liefde?

Liefde en romantische komedies

1. Kijkt u veel romantische-komedies?

    a. Waarom vindt u romantische-komedies leuk?

2. Wat voor romantische-komedies vindt u leuk?

3. Wat is uw favoriete romantische-komedie?

    a. Waarom is het uw favoriete film?

    b. Aan het begin van het interview definieerde u liefde als …, denkt u dat liefde ook zo wordt gerepresenteerd in deze film?

        i. Kunt u voorbeelden geven hiervan?

    b. Hoe zou u de karakters beschrijven van de film?

        i. Identificeert u zich met deze karakters?

            1. Waarom wel/niet?

            2. Op wat voor manier identificeert u zich?

4. Zijn er romantische-komedies die u niet leuk vindt?

    a. Kunt u een voorbeeld noemen?

    b. Waarom vindt u deze films niet leuk?

5. Gelooft u in liefde op het eerste gezicht?

    a. Waarom wel/niet?

6. Gelooft u dat er voor iedereen een soulmate bestaat?

    a. Waarom wel/niet?

7. Terugkomend op de laatste twee vragen, denkt u dat romantische-komedies uw kijk hierop hebben beïnvloed?

    a. Zo ja, op wat voor manier?

    b. Kunt u voorbeelden noemen van films die u hebben beïnvloed?

    c. Zo nee, waarom niet? Denkt u dat iets anders hier invloed op heeft gehad?

Afrondende vraag

1. Denkt u dat er een algemene definitie bestaat over liefde?
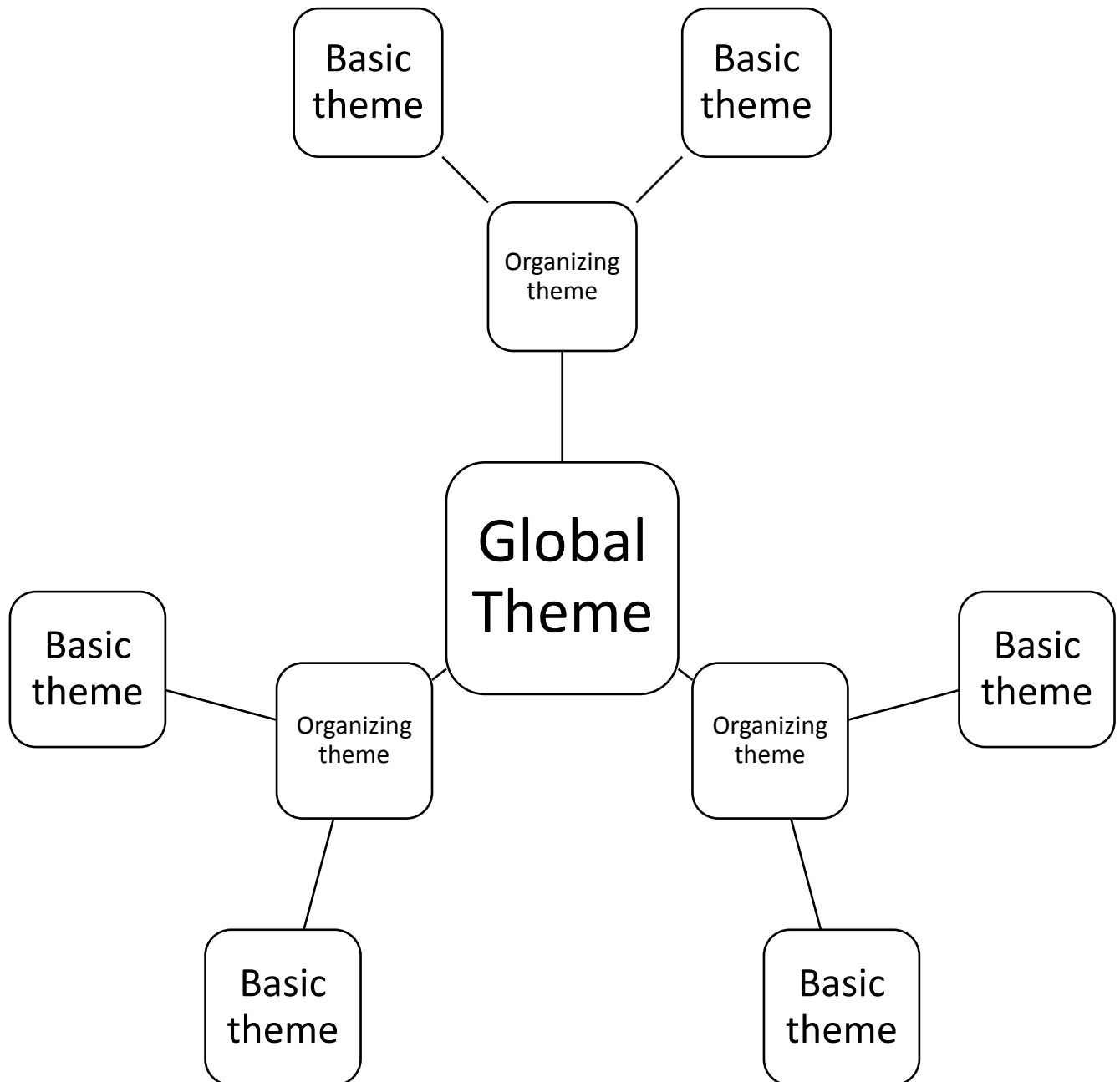
    a. Of is het voor iedereen anders?

Sluiting

Nogmaals hartelijk dank voor het deelnemen aan mijn onderzoek. Heeft u nog vragen of opmerkingen die u/je kwijt wilt? Als u/jij interesse heeft/hebt in de resultaten dan kan ik dat naar u/je sturen via de email. Voor u tijdsbesef is het handig om te weten dat ik 22 juni mijn final deadline heb staan.

Appendix B: Overview of the respondents

Name or pseudonym	Gender	Year of birth	Place of birth	Place of residence	Level of education	Occupation
Molly	Female	1955	Hillegersberg	Zevenkamp	Domestic science school	Housewife
Truus	Female	1958	Zuid-Limburg	Delft	Higher professional education	Accountancy
Hella	Female	1962	Singapore/ Geldrop	Gouderak	Higher professional education	Secretary
Nancy	Female	1965	Amsterdam/ Lelystad	Dronten	Intermediate vocational education	Secretary
Sandra	Female	1967	Alkmaar	Delft	Intermediate vocational education	Volunteer/ housewife
Almira	Female	1969	Rotterdam	Papenveer	Higher professional education	Freelancer (consultancy)
Evelien	Female	1987	Tilburg	Amsterdam	Higher professional education	Designer
Meg	Female	1988	Deventer	Amsterdam	Graduate level	Lawyer
Rieke	Female	1993	Bennekom	Rotterdam	Higher professional education	Student
Julia	Female	1995	Middelburg	Rotterdam	Graduate level	Student
Rosa	Female	1999	Maarssen	Maarssen	High school	Student
Ingeborg	Female	2000	Bunnik	Bunnik	High school	Student

Appendix C: Thematic network analysis coding tree

Basic theme

Basic theme

Organizing theme

Global Theme

Basic theme

Organizing theme

Organizing theme

Basic theme

Basic theme

Basic theme

Appendix D: Example of initial coding scheme

The picture below shows one page of the initial coding scheme that was used to extract the first basic codes from the transcriptions. This specific page is from the Baby boom generation coding scheme. In the first column, the question that is being coded is written down. The second, third, and fourth column each represent the answers of one respondent.

Coding scheme – Generation Baby boom

29. What kind of rom-com liked	- Sound of Music & Annie - Cheekiness in the films, kid antics - You've Got Mail	- No preference really - Likes British films	- Notting Hill - 27 Dresses - The Holiday - Films in which 2 people are linked to each other, while they don't like each other, but end up together - Nice actors/actresses - English humor - Pride & Prejudice
30. Favorite rom-com	Sound of Music	Bridget Jones	27 Dresses
31. Why favorite rom-com	- Funny - Monkey tricks - Happy end - "Cherry on top is that it's also a true story"	- Funny, because was very direct - She tries to fix things, but makes it worse and worse	- Main character, personality she has, weird/willful
32. Love def. presented in fav. rom-com	Yes - Both in love	No - Too romantic, glazed representation of love, they always get each other in the end - Doesn't show emotion that you need to love	No - Rom-com's have nothing to do with real love - Rom-com's are about romance
33. Examples of love def. in fav. rom-com	- She gives the children a lot of love - She gives him a different view on reality, he doesn't want to face reality - Give & take both during film - Marry for better or for worse	- Not unconditional - Maybe happens more at the end, but she had to fight very hard for that	- Not realistic - Always the same: suddenly more interested in each other, get drunk & it's fun, than a misunderstanding happens & eventually it works out - More a nice

Carol Noordam - 371891

Appendix E: Example of filled out thematic network analysis coding tree

Equals in relationship

Bond/connection with someone

Share life together

Effort from both parties

Two people who find each other

Complement & reinforce

Love is equality between two people

Give & take

Transceding power/force to do eveything for 1 person

Love is intense, and between two people equally or for one person is adoration

Attraction

Putting someone first

Passion

Loving someone

Love is doing everything for someone

Intense feelings/romance

Sex

Wanting the best for someone

Intense

Putting yourself aside for the other

Give your life/commit your life to someone else

Intimacy

Care for someone

Element of suprise

Warm feeling

Energized feeling