

FINAL PAPER PROMPT: MOVIE AND COURSE CONNECTIONS. WATCH A MOVIE AND MAKE 5 CONNECTIONS TO COURSE MATERIAL (FOLLOW FINAL PAPER LOGISTICS FROM WEEK 11 POWERPOINT.) SHOULD BE BETWEEN 4-5 PAGES.

Christmas Through a Lens: “Love Hard”’s Sociological Take on the Happiest Time of the Year

Netflix’s “Love Hard” explores multiple themes discussed in our class this year. The film follows the life of an LA-based writer who chronicles her unsuccessful dating life weekly. On a whim, she travels to Lake Placid, NY to surprise her online boyfriend for Christmas, where she learns she’d been catfished. Starring Nina Dobrev and Jimmy O. Yang, this film is about finding love when (and where) you least expect it. The following sociological themes are presented in the film: time poverty (as it relates to capitalism), vertical relationships, sexual harassment, gender norms and personal growth/healing. I chose this film to emphasize the fact that even a holiday romcom can implicitly manifest sociological problems we struggle with in reality through a “humorous” storyline—we simply have to be an active audience to recognize the signs.

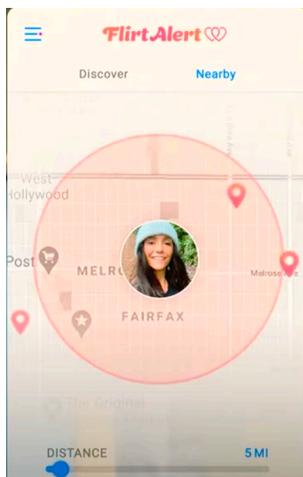


Photo Courtesy/ YouTube
Vidcloud Movie Clips
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QPHyzqablLY&t=25s>

The first scene I want to discuss relates to time poverty. With long work hours, household chores and a social life to uphold, there just isn’t enough time in the week to accommodate everything. This is exactly why protagonist Natalie Bauer set the radius on her dating app to 5 miles, limiting her chances of finding true love to only West Hollywood. “Gas is so expensive¹,” Bauer complained to her coworker. It would cost her \$40 one way to get to Glendale. This is probably her pay for a few hours of work. One date costs \$80 round trip, not including the dinner bill if they decide to go Dutch and possibly buy ice cream after. If this goes well, then she will go on a few more dates with the guy and the cost will keep accumulating. The more time she spends with a potential boyfriend, the more money she will spend and the more broke she will be. In other words, she will need to work more to make more money and thus have less time to spend with a guy even though she was working in order to be able to spend more time with him in the first place. This is a prime example of **time poverty** as a result of capitalism. The system

forces us to work in order to sustain ourselves, however it drains all of our time and energy so we have nothing left for non-work activities. Bauer had reduced her dating radius, strategically, not

¹ about 2 minutes into the film

only to save money but also to cut down on commuting time so she does not waste precious minutes in a car alone. This has allowed her to go on a number of (unsuccessful) dates while still working full-time as a writer. It is convenient that her job is to write a disaster dating column based on her bad dates, but it is still work for her after all, and very time-consuming. Each date consists of the getting-ready part, the actual date part and the winding-down-change-clothes-take-off-makeup part. This is in addition to her office hours, meaning her work and personal life overlap significantly and even when she is on a date (which is supposed to be fun) she is thinking of work and how she can write about it. Mentally, she has no free time at hand since every date is an article for and a means to earn money at the media company. She is completely embedded in the capitalistic, time-consuming system.

The second scene I would like to analyze is between Bauer and her boss and the power-over dynamic that is inherent in their vertical relationship. Bauer's boss takes advantage of Bauer's situation and has threatened to fire her multiple times, saying that her disaster dates are the only thing saving her job. "A disaster for you is a hit for me²," her boss said. "You should be thankful because it is why you have a job³." This is an example of a vertical relationship in the workplace: employer and employee. Bauer's boss, Lee, has power over Bauer and unless she wants to be unemployed, she will continue to write the content that Lee wants published. This type of **vertical relationship** is authority over financial well-being; it is also a workplace hierarchy since Bauer reports to Lee. Bauer tried to stand up for herself and announce that she wanted to write a feel-good article with a happy ending, rather than a disappointing dating article, but was immediately shutdown by Lee. He knows the type of content he wants and will not budge until he gets it; he has the power to enforce that in the office. Even when Bauer is in Lake Placid, NY for Christmas, Lee continues to text her for an update on her disaster date. He needs an article from her and knows she is in no position to refuse the assignment. She does eventually end up writing an article, but not before she admits she has fallen in love. Her boss, in the interest of getting an update on the story from Bauer, goes so far as to show up to Bauer's fake engagement party. She was ignoring his texts so he made a physical appearance in hopes of learning about her impromptu journey and the status of his article. Toward the end of the film, Lee helps Bauer realize why she remained in Lake Placid even after being catfished— she fell in love with Josh (the guy who catfished her.) Yet, in his heartfelt conversation with her, he still manages to mention that he is her boss and expects an article soon because he can fire her. Despite giving true friendly advice, the nature of their relationship as boss and employee does not change.

The third scene I will explore is when Bauer criticizes a Christmas song for its encouragement of sexual harassment. An essential component to a Christmas romcom is the music. "Baby it's cold outside," created in the 1940s, has been a "classic" Christmas song, but does not come without controversy. Bauer claims that the song has "been putting the hip in

² about 3 minutes into the film

³ About 11 minutes into the film

Rohypnol since 1944⁴.” Rohypnol is more commonly known as the date rape drug, a sedative slipped in victim’s drinks. In this scene, Bauer is stating that the Christmas classic is not as innocent as it seems; it represents **sexual harassment**. It is a dialogue between two people—a person who wants to leave and another who is trying to make that person stay even though they do not want to. The song, and Santa himself, makes Bauer uncomfortable; she still loves Christmas, but does not agree with the creepy surveillance Santa conducts (watching everyone to see if they are naughty or nice) and with songs like “Baby it’s cold outside” that engage predatory tactics toward a reluctant victim. An example of an uncomfortable situation in the song is when the woman sings “I ought to say, no, no, no, sir” and the man replies “Mind if I move in closer?” The answer is no, but clearly that message is not explicit enough for the man, who



Photo Courtesy/ YouTube jerster
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3exSprXZnPE>

insists on making moves despite the woman’s hesitation. About halfway in the film, Bauer and Josh Lin sing this song when caroling⁵, but with a twist. Lin knows how uncomfortable Bauer is with the context of the song, so he changes the lyrics to reflect consent, partner respect and a healthy relationship. Bauer sings “I really can’t stay” and Lin replies “No problem, there’s the door” instead of “But baby it’s cold outside.” The original lyrics make it seem like the cold is an excuse to keep someone from staying against their will. Lin really makes an effort to

“change [the] lyrics so the song doesn’t sound so, uh, rape-y⁶.” In this new version of the song, Lin offers to call Bauer an Uber so she can get home safely; to lend Bauer his phone to call her worried mother; and to get Bauer to leave, completely opposite than the original song’s goal. Part of a healthy relationship is respecting the other person’s decisions and this new version of the song reflects that. The original was written in a time when women did not have the same societal rights and image we have now; they were chaste homemakers who couldn’t refuse their husbands’ requests for sex or anything else. The societal and historical context of the 1940s is different than today’s, but that should not mean we continue to idolize a song that does not fit in today’s context.

The fourth topic I would like to talk about is the emergence of Josh Lin’s true identity from previous suppression by societal gender norms. Alongside being a romantic Christmas film, “Love Hard” explores self-growth and reflection by breaking away from **gender norms** using

⁴ About 16 minutes into the film

⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8O7_KpnJd08

⁶ about 52 minutes into the film

Lin's character development. He is the odd one of his family; the least favorite son who always disappoints his father no matter what. Lin has hobbies and interests of his own, but at the sake of not seeming manly enough, he hides his true self. His brother is the ideal "man" and the ideal son, which Lin fears he will never be. Even when he made his profile on the dating app, he assumed he had to look a certain way to get girls to like him: the "ideal" man portrayed in media being the tall, handsome man with abs and a chiseled jawline who also happens to be rich. In short, Lin is not himself. He tries to be someone else to fit in, when he would rather be himself and follow his dreams. He is interested in making candles, something the death of this grandfather inspired him to do: forever save his grandfather's memory as a scent. However, candles are marketed as a woman's accessory—no candle has ever targeted a male audience. Lin wants to change that and target the untapped market: males, by creating and selling manly scents. Jiffy Lube and Freshly Cut Grass are two scents he concocts in his basement. When Bauer first finds the candles in the basement, he lies and says they are his grandmother's. He is scared to reveal a supposed "feminine" side to himself—he thinks Bauer will tease him for doing something typically considered feminine in society. He tries to defend himself by saying "guys can do things besides hunt and pay for everything⁷." Because of society's gender norms, Lin is

scared to be his true self though; he wants to be seen for who he is and not judged through society's biased and divided lens. Bauer helps him come to terms with his identity, which gives him the confidence to confront his father about his true career aspirations.

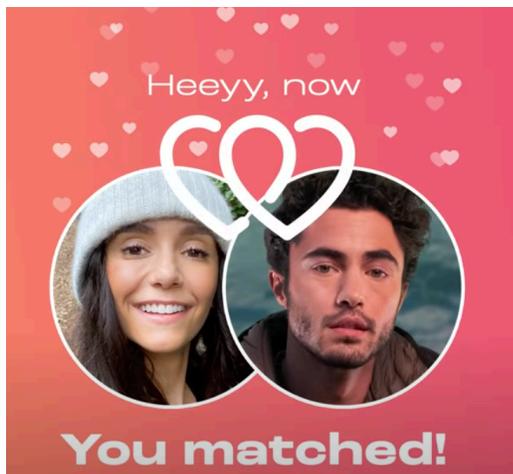


Photo Courtesy/ YouTube Netflix
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3boMRfx6cJE>

Lastly, I will discuss Lin's journey of **self-healing and personal growth** to embrace his passion for candle making and accept himself. This relates to the class lecture on healing, specifically the lesson of "treating yourself as your own best friend and unconditional self-compassion." It was lesson 7 of the 12 lessons we discussed on strength, healing and transformation. You need to be your own best friend first before turning to others. That means loving yourself, accepting yourself and being confident in yourself. Lin was none of these before he met Bauer.

He never stood up for himself against his brother and did not believe he could find someone who resonates with his values. This is why he barely got any matches on his dating profile and he felt obligated to use a friend's photo and bio to attract more dating matches. When this worked (because he matched with Natalie) it must have reinforced in him that he was not good enough to begin with. After seeing Lin's original profile pictures, Bauer realized that he was trying too hard to be someone he was not. If only he could "believe in himself⁸," the fact that he is a good person

⁷ about 40 minutes into the film

⁸ about 1 hour 8 minutes into the film

would reflect in his pictures on their own. He needed to trust himself first before he could expect other people to see that passion and goodness in his eyes. In class we discussed how one needs to console themselves as they would a best friend. One cannot be too harsh on themselves when they would forgive a friend who makes the same mistake; self-love is just as important as loving someone else. Realizing this, gave Lin confidence in his abilities and in facing his father with his business career. It was during that confrontation that Lin's father revealed how proud he was of his son for pursuing his dream and being independent. Lin was so consumed in the idea that he was not good enough, he never realized how his father felt about him. Lin's (short) journey of growth and healing complemented his romantic adventures with Bauer and demonstrated that internal healing does not have to happen alone. One can be surrounded by loved ones while learning to love themselves and others.

A wide range of topics from class appear in Netflix's original holiday romcom, "Love Hard." As an active audience member, one can distinctly pick out the sociological concepts that are woven throughout the script, reflecting our own lives today. Time poverty is an issue everyone suffers from; however, in reality, it can have more severe consequences such as sleep deprivation and depression. Sexual harassment in media further develops the rape culture in our country, but ties a pretty red ribbon on it around Christmas time and sings about it in a happy, cheery tune. Gender norms prevent us from being our true selves, for fear of retaliation by society's designated surveillance police who keep deviators in check. While the film includes all these issues, it also takes the time to discuss how one can heal, through the evolution of Josh Lin's character arc. A romcom can be more than a simple feel-good film to watch curled up in a blanket drinking hot chocolate. It can be a way to watch our own lives from afar and reflect on what we want to change and move on from.