

Romantic Comedy Genre

A Film Student

ENG 225: Introduction to Film

Professor Director

Circa 600 B.C.E.

Purpose: Use this modeled example of the Week 2 Written Assignment to explore the elements that make this an exemplary submission. Hover over the number or scroll to the end of the text to read about what the student has done well in this assignment.

Romantic Comedy Genre

Genre theory is a way to help one study films, and to classify films into different groups so that viewers have an idea of what they will be watching before they even watch it. Genre is like a glossary for movies. All films fall under at least one genre and most can be more narrowly categorized into subgenres. For example, the romantic comedy genre can also overlap with subgenres like the screwball comedy, teen comedy, or gross-out comedy (Goodykoontz & Jacobs, 2014, table 4.1). This paper will focus on the romantic comedy genre, specifically the screwball comedy, *Knocked Up*, to help movie viewers gain a better perspective on the elements of this film, the specific conventions of this genre, as well as the how this film expands the boundaries of romantic comedies.

In her study of the romantic comedy genre, Katherina Glitre (2006) suggests that, “genre expectations are based on convention—our mutual understanding that certain things happen in certain ways in certain kinds of texts. Thus, one of our expectations when watching a romantic comedy is that the film will end with the union of a couple,” (p. 10). This rings true for the movie *Knocked Up*, which stars Seth Rogen as the obnoxious male protagonist, Ben, and Katherine Heigl as Alison, the uptight, yet put-together female protagonist. Ben is a slob who smokes marijuana and finds nude scenes in movies indexes them on a website he runs with his friends. Alison is a beautiful television producer who has her life together and is looking to move up in her career. When Ben and Alison meet at a nightclub, they end up intoxicated, and spend the night together. After that night, Alison finds out she is pregnant and she informs Ben. They both test out a relationship, but decide they are too different, so they split up. Ben ends up getting his life together and Alison realizes she misses him and cannot raise their baby on her own. In the end, they come back together before their baby is born. This movie incorporates elements

of romance, including raunchy sex scenes, and comedic commentary and funny banter throughout the film. A hallmark of the romantic comedy genre is pairing two characters who are complete opposites. *Knocked Up* brings together two people whose lifestyles are at odds, are joined by the repercussions of their one libidinous night, fall in love, go through a conflict that leads to a break up, and then eventually they get back together, all while infused with “comedic obstacles,” (Goodykoontz B., & Jacobs, 2014, Ch. 4, para. 1). In this way, the film portrays this genre’s main goal to have a happily ever after ending, whether the protagonists end up together or not, which they do, while maintaining the light hearted, comedic tone of the film.

Knocked Up joins the conventions of romantic and screwball comedy in its setting, lighting, and theme. Set in the present day, in easily relatable circumstances, viewers are able to connect with the characters. The light in which we see the characters helps us to relate to their experiences. For example, high key lighting is used throughout the movie to keep in tune with the lighthearted and funny plot. In the scene where Alison is having breakfast with Ben and her sister’s family, the lighting is bright to show the happy and overwhelming emotions of the characters as they process the fact that they are going to have a baby. It also helps set the mood for the funny commentary between the children and adults. Another convention is the theme, which helps to classify this in the romantic comedy genre. The theme is “what the movie is about,” (Goodykoontz & Jacobs, 2014, Ch. 3.3, para. 2). The theme of *Knocked Up* is how two opposite people meet under unusual circumstance, come together, overcome obstacles, and, eventually, fall in love despite their differences. This is the most common recurring theme throughout all romantic comedies, which helps set expectations of the genre.

In earlier years, romantic comedies often portrayed the good looking, wealthy gentleman pursuing the immature heiress (*Roman Holiday*) or the prostitute with a heart of gold (*Pretty*

Woman) and did not resort to showing any sex scenes to heighten their romance. Judd Apatow, who wrote and directed *Knocked Up*, has changed the character dynamic as well as added in explicit sex scenes that, as David Denby (2007), points out, has broken the “classic patterns of romantic comedy” (para. 6). Alison is the ambitious, career woman, who has it all together, while Ben is the lazy, comical, “schlubby guy” who gets the girl, by getting his life together and being there for Alison and the baby. (Goodykoontz, & Jacob, 2014. Ch. 4.4, para. 9). The character roles have been reversed from earlier romantic comedy films. It’s important to note how Judd Apatow has expanded the screwball comedy subgenre, which incorporates a strong female character, playful battles, banter between the sexes, and adding in the bromance (Goodykoontz B., & Jacobs, 2014, Ch.4.2, para. 26). The bromance, which is two buddies who are very close, is shown when Ben takes a trip to Vegas with Alison’s brother in law to bond over drugs and alcohol all while discussing their lady troubles. Judd added in the bromance and drug scenes to help grow with the tastes of the new generation of viewers. This as well as sex scenes, has stretched the limits of this genre. It give the viewers a way to relate their own real life moments to the characters in the movie as well as the consequences that can come from the choices that they make.

In conclusion, genres are used to help people pick certain elements that they like, such as comedy and romance, to watch in a movie. Judd Apatow’s movie, *Knocked Up* (2007), shows the classic romantic comedy through his use of lighting and theme. He also stretched the boundaries of this genre to help keep not only romantic comedies alive, but attract male and female audiences alike through different explicit scenes, the bromance, as well as changing the lead protagonists’ roles. Knocked Up has taken romance to a whole new level and kept a humorous tone throughout the entire movie to help portray the screwball comedy that it is.

References

Denby, David.(2007, July 23). A Fine Romance. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/07/23/a-fine-romance>

Glitré, K. (2006). Hollywood Romantic Comedy : States of the Union, 1934-1965. Manchester, GBR: Manchester University Press. Retrieved from <http://www.ebrary.com>

Goodykoontz, B., & Jacobs, C. P. (2014). *Film: From watching to seeing* (2nd ed.) [Electronic version]. Retrieved from <https://content.ashford.edu/>

1. In this paragraph, the author clearly states the objective of the romantic comedy genre, identifies its conventions, and describes how this film meets that objective by using those conventions.
2. Here, the author could better describe the conventions of the screwball comedy and how the film joins those conventions with the conventions of the romantic comedy.
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5. This is an excellent use of an outside source to support the argument that Knocked Up breaks the mold of the genre.
6. This is a strong insight into the changing tastes of audiences and how effective films anticipate, often presciently, the stories audiences want to see.