

Teaching Relationship Concepts Using Media Clips

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ABSTRACT. The benefits of using film clips in Marriage and Family Relations classes are numerous. They can be used to teach new concepts, initiate discussion, and assist students in developing “perspective taking,” an important component in feminist pedagogy and in developing critical thinking skills. Suggestions for classroom utilization are included, as well as methods for gathering film clips and information about copyright issues. The appendix includes numerous examples of family related themes, movies in which the clips can be found, descriptions of the scenes and the approximate length of each clip.

From the broadcast of Saturday morning cartoons and *Sesame Street*, to the purchased disks of *Professor Einstein* and the various Disney creations, children at a very young age are entertained and educated through the visual arenas of television, film, VHS and DVDs. These forms of media follow children into adolescence and young adulthood and continue to be a major source of entertainment and education throughout their lives (Steyer, 2002). In addition to the myriad hours of entertainment at home, a friend’s residence or in the theater, the visual realm of entertainment media provides educators with an easily available pedagogical tool. Perhaps the abundance of visual stimuli is the reason that college students have become more visual in their learning (Hosley, Gregg, Weng & Montemayor, 1998). Educators in various disciplines, such as education (Diez, Pleban, & Wood, 2005), history (Sprau, 2001), counselor education (Higgins & Dermer, 2001), and religion (Marshall, 2003) are capitalizing on this visual learning style by incorporating the use of film in their teaching repertoire (Marshall, 2003). In the family studies discipline, articles related to teaching pedagogy and the use of film highlight such areas as family systems (Hudock, Gallagher, and Warden, 2001), stepfamilies (Leon and Angst, 2005), social class (Seery, Cobb, Harpel, and Herzog, 2002), and poverty (Roberts, 2003). There appears to be great potential in using film to help teach a variety of marriage and family relationship concepts in an educational setting.

The purpose of the current article is to expound upon past efforts to promote the use of film pedagogically by describing (a) the benefits of using film clips in the classroom to teach marriage and family relationship concepts, (b) examples of clips that have been used in Marriage and Family Relations classes to demonstrate marriage and family relationship concepts, and (c) legal aspects of using copyrighted movie clips in an educational setting.

Pedagogical Benefits of Using Film Clips in the Classroom

As a teaching tool, popular films offer advantages that many educational films cannot. According to Bluestone (2000), popular films are better at integrating the multiple complexities of the “real world” than educational films which often provide isolated and idiosyncratic examples. For example, an educational film may focus on proper couple communication

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techniques without discussing the numerous situations or stressor events that influence the manner in which couple converse. Leon and Angst (2005) found that using film in the classroom created a shared language and increased class discussion. Marshall (2003) discovered that viewing films in a communal context, such as a classroom, opens up student dialogue and makes risk-taking more likely. In addition, students might be more willing to vicariously discuss personal family experiences through characters or situations from a popular film than they might otherwise. For example, a student may be willing to describe emotionally abusing patterns of communication that transpired between a parent and child in a film, but be unwilling to discuss similar occurrences in her family. Likewise, a student may question the concept of generational transmission of divorce in a media clip, while wondering about the same in her own family experiences.

According to Seery et al. (2002), films can be used as a teaching tool in three ways: an entire film can be used during class times or as an out of classroom assignment; particular scenes of 10-30 minutes can be shown during class time; or brief snips, which demonstrate a specific concept, can be incorporated into a classroom presentation. While the benefits of using film to enhance classroom education are relevant to the three methods described by Seery et al., this article focuses primarily on the use of brief film clips from popular movies. Many pedagogical advantages exist for using them. For example, a short clip, lasting from two to five minutes, can punctuate a specific principle or concept because of its narrow focus and brevity. Irrelevant tangents of an entire film will not be available to distract students from the instructor's pedagogical intent for showing the clip. They can be used within a single class period and not be broken up over the course of multiple 50 minute class periods. Short clips can stimulate the learning atmosphere by breaking up long lectures, or as a classroom change of pace at various times throughout the semester. Also, clips easily can be replayed, making it possible to clarify or promote further discussion.

In addition to their logistical benefits, film clips provide a unique method to enhance active learning and the development of critical thinking skills by providing visual examples of specific concepts (Marshall, 2003). According to Bluestone (2002), teaching a concept by using film clips can be done in two ways: by defining the concept prior to showing a clip and assigning students to look for the concept while viewing the clip, followed by classroom discussion; or alternately, showing a clip, asking students to discuss what was being addressed in the clip, after which the instructor defines and names the concept. By using the first method, for example, when teaching the concept of "androgyny," the instructor would first define the word, then shows a relevant film clip, and afterwards ask students to describe examples of "androgyny" demonstrated in the clip. Using the second method, without defining or mentioning the term, the instructor would show a clip that demonstrates "androgyny," ask students to describe behaviors demonstrated by the actors in the clip, what students thought the behaviors demonstrated, and finally, the instructor would introduce the term "androgyny" to the behaviors the students described. Either technique allows for the concept to be discussed in-depth, and as Bluestone suggests, ". . . when a concept is elaborated on it is remembered more fully" (Bluestone, 2002, p. 2). We have found it particularly helpful in some instances to provide specific questions or directives before we show a clip to the students to focus their attention a certain way (especially when clips last several minutes). Providing students with questions prior to watching a clip allows them to focus on specifics and can help prepare them for a more informed and thoughtful discussion of the clip and the concepts to which it pertained. For example, in a clip from *The Story of Us* we may ask students to look for negative ways the husband and wife communicate

with each other, or to find examples that demonstrate the children's awareness of tension in their parents' marriage. A clip can also be paused at a certain point and intermittent discussion can occur as a way to emphasize a segment of the clip through such immediate attention. Students can then be guided to focus a certain way on a subsequent segment of the clip to maximize the pedagogical potential of the clip.

A second manner in which clips can aid the development of critical thinking skills is the ease at which they can be used to encourage "*perspective taking*." Since establishing and maintaining healthy family interactions is a key ingredient in most family courses, it is especially important to recognize differing points of view each family member may have. When discussing parental discipline, for example, an instructor might show a clip in which a mother is spanking her six year old son. As a teaching option, the instructor could assign a portion of the class to take the parental perspective while the remainder of the class is assigned to take the child's perspective. After showing the clip, the instructor might ask members of each group to describe feelings they believe the parent or child might have experienced during and after the spanking. If "being frightened" is a feeling the students ascribe to the child, the instructor might ask class members to brainstorm other ways of disciplining that would not create fear in a child. The instructor might also ask students' opinions on what the short and long term consequences of spanking a child might be.

A clip from *The Prince of Tides* can be used to develop "perspective taking" related to gender and power issues. In this particular clip, the family is sitting around the table eating a meal, when the husband complains about the food, derides his wife's abilities, and orders her to make something better while he waits at the table. Two children follow their mother into the kitchen and smilingly approve as she stirs a can of dog food into the skillet dinner that she had previously prepared. Either before or at the conclusion of the clip, the teacher could assign half of the class to discuss the scene from the wife's perspective, the other half from the husband's perspective, and the entire class from the children's perspectives. Questions might be: "who held the power in the family?" "what methods did the wife use to cope with her husband's abusive behavior" and why did she use the particular methods?" how did the father view his role in family interactions?" "how did the children view their father?" and "how did the children view their mother?" This clip, also, provides an excellent example of passive-aggressive communication.

"Perspective taking" is also a major component of feminist pedagogy. A goal of feminist educators is to change family studies curricula to reflect the diversity of family experience and to assist students in recognizing multiple truths and ways of knowing (Boss, 2004; De Reus, 2003). According to feminist pedagogy, "perspective taking" allows students to move away from their own family experience and separate them from possible "internalized racist, homophobic, sexist and classist ideologies, among others, that limit their beliefs about individuals and families (Allen & Farnsworth, 1993, p. 351). A clip from *Antwone Fisher*, for example, can illustrate how race, social class, and family of origin interact to influence one's perceptions about family relationships and the definition of "family." A scene from *The Big Fat Greek Wedding* can be used to demonstrate unique issues a couple from two different cultures may experience when they plan to wed.

Another particularly relevant clip for such a purpose is from *Mr. and Mrs. Loving*, the story of the Virginia interracial couple who took their fight against miscegenation to the U. S. Supreme Court and won. It can be used when discussing racist ideologies and the influence of

historical time period on family life. Before watching the *Mr. and Mrs. Loving clip*, a portion of the class could be assigned to take the perspective of Mr. Loving, a white man who was jailed because he married an African-American woman. Following the showing of the clip, they could be asked to discuss how they, as Mr. Loving, felt and how the law assisted in creating those feelings. They might also be asked why they thought a miscegenation law was created. Others students might be asked to take the perspective of Mrs. Loving and describe how they think she may have felt as a woman, and as an African-American. Others could be asked to take the perspective of the sheriff who arrested Mr. and Mrs. Loving. They might be asked to discuss the sheriff's attitude about miscegenation and from where they think it was derived. By using the "perspective taking" technique, and discussing each of the three characters in the clip, students can be probed to discuss racist ideologies, as well as how living at a particular time in history influences interpersonal relationships.

An application of "perspective taking" that we have utilized in teaching a marriage course is having students look for the "relationship perspective" while watching a movie clip. This technique is helpful when teaching marital communication. For example, from *The Story of Us*, students could be assigned to take each spouse's perspective in a scene in which the spouses are distracted by their own surrounding while attempting to have a discussion over the phone. After viewing the clip, the instructor could ask the students to describe the issue each spouse is having with the other's communication style. Students may recognize that neither spouse is listening to the other.

"Reevaluating a situation," (Marshall, 2003) is closely related to "perspective taking," and is a third pedagogical arena in which film clips can assist students in developing critical thinking skills. While similar to "perspective taking," "reevaluating a situation" requires students to address such questions as, "How might a character in the video have acted differently?" "Why might the character have acted as she did?" or "In what way might a person have acted differently if he were living in a middle income family instead of living in poverty?"

A clip from *Jerry McGuire* can serve as a good example for "reevaluating a situation." In one particular scene, a newlywed couple is in bed watching a video of their wedding, and begin a serious conversation about their relationship. At the moment the conversation begins, the mother's young son from a previous relationship comes into the bedroom disrupts the conversation and asks to watch the wedding video with the couple. The husband uses the child's request to avoid the awkward conversation with his wife. By "reevaluating a situation," the instructor might ask students, "how might the wife have handled the situation differently?" or "why do you suppose the husband responded they way he did?"

Marshall (2003) believes that practically any video clip from a popular film that engages students can be used, providing the educator has a particular pedagogical tool in mind. Educators should also consider the maturity and sensibilities of their audience, in that some clips may include offensive language and images that unnecessarily create an uncomfortable and closed atmosphere that undermines learning. On the other hand, some content may be intentionally provocative to evoke powerful reactions that can enhance learning. If these issues arise, educators should be thoughtful in finding a helpful balance.

Student Learning Outcomes

Empirical and anecdotal evidence exists for the use of film clips in teaching about marriage and family relationships. Imig (1981) compared learning outcomes and discovered that students who were shown film clips in class and tested using films clips scored higher on exams than those who were taught the traditional method and were tested in the traditional manner.

Likewise, Smith, (2001) found that students learned family theories better when film clips were implemented to provide various examples.

Anecdotally, through course evaluations students have informed us that they value the use of film clips. Examples of student comments include the following:

“I also liked how you incorporated video clips to put things into perspective and made them more realistic.”

“I loved how he incorporated movie clips and fun activities to help us better understand the course content.”

“I really loved the fact that Dr. [name] used videos so much as an example to support the material.”

“I also liked that we watched videos to get a better idea of what we were learning.”

Other instructors have reported that students enjoyed film-based assignments and demonstrated a high quality of work when completing them (Kirsh, 1998; Tipton and Tiemann, 1993). Smith (2001) found that students learned family theories better when using film clips and indicated they enjoyed the use of movie clips.

Methods for Clip Selection

We recognize that the process of selecting film clips is tedious and time consuming. VHS media has been replaced by DVD technology, which is more likely to be copyright protected. It might be necessary, therefore, for the instructor to bring the entire DVD to class in order to use the clip. VHS, however, continue to be available and very inexpensive. At the time of this writing, many VHS films were available at on-line stores for \$0.01. As far as finding relevant films, our experience has demonstrated that students are helpful in suggesting films with an overall marriage or family theme, but they have difficulty in recommending or evaluating scenes for a specific concept. We have developed the following methods for finding appropriate clips:

- Look for a film with a narrow family or relationship theme and determine what concepts are illustrated. The movie title is often helpful in making this type of selection, for example, *The Story of Us* or *When a Man Loves a Woman*.
- Have a specific concept in mind and choose a film that is likely to demonstrate the theme, such as *Parenthood* or *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*.
- Assume serendipity - Since studying individual and family relationships include a myriad of concepts, it is likely that a concept will be illustrated in many popular films that do not have family or relationships as their primary focus. A further benefit of using popular film clips is that classroom concepts can be found while interacting with family or friends in an informal movie-watching setting -- outside the teaching environment. For example, in their article Sheperis and Sheperis (2002) describe how they use scenes from *The Matrix*, a science-fiction film in which computers rule the world, to teach family systems theory.

Educational Usage of Copyrighted Materials

The film industry exists to make a profit and given that popular media is typically copyright protected and many legal considerations are involved in showing movie clips to students. Contained in section 107 of the Copyright Act of 1976 are copyright exemptions for certain

usages of copyrighted materials, such as in teaching. These exemptions are referred to as “fair use” exemptions. Determining what falls within fair use is not particularly precise, but the copyright act provides four general guidelines in making such a determination: (a) the purpose and character of use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes; (b) the nature of the copyrighted work; (c) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and (d) the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work.

According to Fritz Dolak, manager of the University Copyright Office at Ball State University (personal communication, December 11, 2007), if an instructor has a legal copy of a VHD or DVD, he or she can show clips from the movie or the entire film in a face-to-face classroom setting provided the instructor has specific instructional objectives for the film’s use. A legal copy consists of movies rented or purchased from a video or retail store, such as Blockbusters or Target, or borrowed from a library or friend. Dolak cautions, however, that it is against copyright law to place the clips on-line, including Blackboard or any other electronic classroom tool used outside the classroom. Likewise, if an instructor arranges to show a film to a wider audience, even if no admission fee is charged, he or she must rent the film from an appropriate company arranged through the university’s library or other appropriate university office. Because many gray areas exist in the “fair use” exemptions, we recommend that educators desiring to use film clips as a pedagogical classroom tool consult with their school or university’s designated copyright personnel. Technically, only a court can determine whether or not a particular usage of copyrighted materials falls within the fair use guidelines.

Another area in which educators using the visual media as a teaching tool may experience copyright regulations is with “off-air” recordings. “Off-air” under these guidelines primarily refers to televised programs recorded by telecommunications or multimedia university personnel at the request of a classroom instructor. Recordings by university personnel of such television programs as *Nova*, *Oprah Winfrey*, and *Dr. Phil*, fall under the “off-air” category. University copyright officers should utilize and classroom educators should be aware of the Kastenmeier Guidelines for Off-Air Taping for Educational Purposes (Dolak, personal communication, December 2, 2007). These guidelines incorporate the following information:

1. The Guidelines were developed to apply only to off-air recording by non-profit educational institutions.
2. A broadcast program (including cable programs) may be recorded off-air and retained by a non-profit educational institutional for a period not to exceed the first forty-five (45) consecutive calendar days after the date of recording.
3. Off-air recording may be used once by individual teachers in the course of relevant teaching activities, and repeated once only, when instructional reinforcement is necessary in classrooms and similar places devoted to instruction within a single building, cluster, or campus, as well as the homes of students receiving formalized home instruction, during the first ten (10) consecutive in the forty-five (45) calendar day retention period. “School days” are school session days—not counting weekends, holidays, vacations, examination periods, or other scheduled interruptions—within the forty-five (45) calendar day retention period.
4. Off-air recordings may be made only at the request of and used by individual teachers, and may not be regularly recorded in anticipation of requests. No broadcast program may be recorded off-air more than once at the request of the same teacher, regardless of the number of times the program may be broadcast.

5. A limited number of copies may be reproduced from each off-air recording to meet the legitimate needs of teachers under these guidelines. Each additional copy shall be subject to all provisions governing the original recording.
6. After the first ten (10) consecutive school days, off-air recordings may be used up to the end of the forty-five (45) calendar day retention period only for teacher evaluation purposes, i.e. to determine whether or not to include the broadcast program in the teaching curriculum, and may not be used in the recording institution for student exhibition or any other non-evaluation purpose without authorization.
7. Off-air recordings need not be used in their entirety, but the recorded programs may not be altered from the original content. Off-air recordings may not be physically or electronically combined or merged to constitute teaching anthologies or compilations.
8. All copies of off-air recordings must include copyright notice on the broadcast program as recorded.
9. Educational institutions are expected to establish appropriate control procedures to maintain the integrity of these guidelines (*Congressional Record*, October 1984 (retrieved from <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/Kastenmeier.html>)).

We encourage educators to refer to their institutional copyright compliance officer for further guidance.

Conclusion

Film clips can be a valuable pedagogical asset to enhance teaching in the marriage and family field. They are a valuable tool in teaching new concepts, “perspective taking”, diversity, and the effect of historical time period on family life. Instructors can provide clips of movies students have most likely viewed in their informal, relaxed, similar-aged personal relationships and utilize the clips to be a fun, yet resourceful, educational technique with which students can identify. Copyright laws apply to the film clip and instructors should determine their university’s interpretation of the regulations before using or reusing clips in the classroom. As a resource for educators (and to model what we had described in this article), we have included a few examples of film clips that we have used in the classroom (see Appendix).

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Appendix

Topic: Marital Adjustment

Movie: *Barefoot in the Park* (also focuses on Communication/Listening)

Scene: Newlywed couple arguing after an evening out about wife's mother being on a blind date; argument turns into fight about their differing personalities; wife starts talking about getting a divorce.

Approximate length: 7:50

Movie: *Forget Paris*

Scene: Newlywed couple move to husband's home; wife changes jobs and is dissatisfied; husband eventually changes jobs for her and is dissatisfied; both are challenged by each others' wants and habits.

Approximate length: 10:00

Topic: Love and Commitment

Movie: *Castaway*

Scene: After he was stranded on an island and assumed dead, he reunites with former—now married—lover. He picks up his car at her home and begins to drive away on a dark, rainy evening. She has to battle between her feelings of love and commitment and decides to stay with her family.

Approximate length: 4:15

Movie: *Story of Us*

Scene: Husband and wife planning to tell children of their decision to divorce; wife realizes that their relationship is worth saving; suggests eating at "Chou-Funs" instead of going home to break the news as originally planned. Wife describes all the good in the marriage that is worth saving.

Approximate length: 3:15

Topic: Communication

Movie: *Story of Us*

Scene: Husband calls wife while she is in the middle of a laundry crisis; he wants to bond over their memories of their old apartment as he watches it be torn down.

Approximate length: 1:25

Movie: *Jerry McGuire*

Scene: After watching their recent wedding video, couple beginning to discuss their feelings about it when small child asks if he can sit and watch TV with them; both having difficulty expressing themselves; husband uses child as a way to avoid the conversation.

Approximate length: 1:20

Topic: Family Systems (family roles and rules in the system)

Movie: *E.T.*

Scene: Discussing over dinner Eliot's claims of seeing a weird creature; each family member displays their functions in the family; shows some family rules.

Approximate length: 2:30

Movie: *Mr. Mom*

Scene: Family rules and routines breaking down and leading to chaos (father distracted by soap operas and neglecting the children); after having a dream, the father creates new routines and rules and the family system stabilizes.

Approximate length: 9:00

Topic: Family of Origin influences on Adults

Movie: *Story of Us*

Scene: Couple sitting in bed, reflecting back upon a funny moment during couples counseling; their conversation becomes more negative as their parents symbolically sit next to them and fill their minds with messages from their families of origin.

Approximate length: 2:10

Movie: *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*

Scene: Shows two distinct types of families from which the engaged individuals come (one large, loud, family, dancing in the diner; one quite, reserved family sharing a drink together); foreshadows how differing backgrounds come together in a single marriage.

Approximate length: 2:05

Movie: *When a Man Loves a Woman*

Scene: The wife's parents show up to watch the children while the wife and husband go on vacation. The wife's mother subtly but sharply puts her daughter down. Since the wife is an alcoholic, her mother may be part of the problems related to the alcoholism.

Approximate length: 1:35

Topic: Gender and the family

Movie: *Mr. Mom*

Scene: Mother's first day of work after father loses job; he feels threatened when the mother's boss shows up in a limousine; father tries to compensate with hyper-masculine behavior.

Approximate length: 3:10

Movie: *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*

Scene: Parents argue about their daughter's wishes to go to college; the father is supposed to give his approval yet the mother knows how to manipulate him to get her way; illustrates different means of power and authority in the family.

Approximate length: 2:10

Topic: Family Challenges/Crises

Movie: *Forget Paris*

Scene: Couple deals with infertility; tries multiple treatments unsuccessfully; puts strain on relationship.

Approximate length: 8:45

Movie: *Prince of Tides* (also focuses on passive-aggressive Communication)

Scene: While adult son cooks dinner, he remembers an incident when he was young and his family was eating dinner together; father was verbally abusive to wife and children; mother displays passive-aggressive communication by serving him dog food.

Approximate length: 2:15

Movie: *Mr. and Mrs. Loving*

Scene: Mixed-race couple deals with miscegenation, bigotry, and racial hatred.; newlywed couple in bed are arrested by a sheriff and his deputies.

Approximate length: 4:15

Topic: Parenting

Movie: *The Great Santini*

Scene: An alcoholic father in the military demonstrated his authoritarian style at work and at home; he has a competitive moment with his son while playing basketball that leads to father's demeaning treatment of his son; mother tries to help their son understand his father's authoritarian style.

Approximate length: 8:50

Movie: *Spanglish*

Scene: Father helping self-conscious teen daughter study; mother concerned about daughter's weight and manipulates her by buying her smaller clothes; daughter is crushed, father is angry at wife; illustrated issues of dealing with children's physical development, communicating with insecure adolescents, and problems between parents.

Approximate length: 4:25

Movie: *Parenthood* (also use for Communication/Listening)

Scene: Mother and father discussing different perspectives on parenting; father not listening and seems overly focused on child at expense of the marriage.

Approximate length: 1:50