APOLOGIA CONTENT ANALYSIS: ROMANTIC COMEDIES

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Capstone Committee

___________________________________

Kevin A. Stein, Ph.D., Chair
Abstract

The purpose of this study is to analyze image repair strategies in an interpersonal context. *Apologia* is the discourse of public apologies such as athletes, politicians, and celebrities. This study applied Benoit’s (2015) image repair *apologia* framework in a content analysis of interpersonal relationships in romantic comedies. In order to do this, the study analyzed the 20 top grossing romantic comedies. *Notting Hill* (Bevan, Curtis, Fellner, & Mitchell, 1999), the 21st on the top grossing romantic comedies was used to pilot the coders’ ability and make small adjustments to the coding. A set of two coders coded all 20 artifacts and discerned the *apologia* strategies used. Romantic comedies were selected because of the conflict needed to perpetuate the movie plot and the need for characters to maintain a certain image. Relationships include misgivings and mistakes that require action. Mortification, the predominant strategy in all 505 coded apologies, could persuade audience members to adapt this strategy in their own lives. Men and women varied in their strategies, but the largest recorded population in the movies was males.
Acknowledgments

My final paper while a student at SUU- the moment is surreal. This project alone has taken over 100 hours of coding, several creative ways of finding the material, and meticulous writing. I have spent more time and energy on this thesis than any other project to date. Not only has it been taxing, but also the most rewarding. I am so glad to have embarked on this journey.

A few shout outs are in store. First off, my family: Nisha, Jeep, TJ, Koda, Mandi, Kiana, Kaitlin, Dallon, Daezia, MahLee, Akaydeh, Kin, Tay, Trex, Kam, Stockton, Mom (Shelley), and Dad (Donald). I never thought in a million years I would be where I am today. This project is the culmination of years of studying, hundreds of papers read, and as always, your love and support. Thank you for the strength you have given me and the faith that I could do this. I am so happy to be with you all forever.

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Southern Utah University, my school, and home. I shipped a package or two to the library because I spent more time there than at home. Thank you for being an incredible institution. I am forever proud to be a T-bird.
“To give anything less than your best is to sacrifice the gift.” Steve Prefontaine
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Content Analysis of Apologia in Romantic Comedies

Apologies have become common occurrences in everyday life. Whether to a loved one, a customer or fellow colleague, apologies run rampant. The apology is developed due to some perceived misgiving. Apologies attempt to repair possible damages, defer blame, or even reduce the severity of the transgression. Saying sorry is not a terrible apology, but there is more than one way to say “I’m sorry.” Interpersonal relationships are vital to life. Understanding how to say sorry is almost as important as saying sorry. How do we determine what to say, do, or think when it comes to apologies?

Other individuals’ experiences can be viewed in mediated messages such as books, film, or television. The effect that media may have on the audience only encourages a further inquiry about apologies. Media can influence perceptions (Gerbner, 1969; Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Lippmann, 1997) about relationships, romance, and the world. Apologies in film are not exempt. Fictional romance is a largely researched arena within communication (Hefner & Wilson, 2013; Bachen & Illouz, 1996; Signorielli, 1991; Johnson, 2007; Holmes, 2007; Johnson & Holmes, 2009). Romantic comedies imitate life and therefore retain permissible situations. Relationships in romantic comedies become a publicly consumed experience, while representing an interpersonal relationship.

Fictional character apologies and romantic partnerships have yet to be combined into a singular study. Apologies range in structure and offer varying strategies. Apologetic strategies attempt to restore a person’s image while maintaining a relationship. To substantiate said claim, Benoit (2015) said “these approaches can be pursued with persuasive messages that create or change the audience’s beliefs or values.” Apologies are used to change how another person perceives the other. Romantic comedy apologies are meant to be interpersonal and contained
within a certain realm of imagination. Unbeknownst to the characters, but known to the writers, the apologies are seen by the public. Paradoxically, the apologies are both public and private. The apologies are witnessed by the public and can determine for themselves whether or not to accept the apology. The image repair strategies within this romantic comedy context offers a unique opportunity to evaluate the specific apology strategies portrayed. Apologia strategies portrayed in this genre could potentially give audience members a blueprint on how to apologize. What apologia strategies are represented in these romantic comedies?

**Literature Review**

Interpersonal relationships are an inescapable part of life. Co-workers, family members, and friendships all contribute to the human experience. A few specific areas have extensive research already conducted: media effects on the audience, apologetic discourse, and the application of image repair.

**Media effects on the audience**

First, media and the audience is dauntingly extensive. Why is media so important? Early on, Walter Lippmann (1997) notes that, “men formed their picture of the world outside from the unchallenged pictures in their heads” (p. 173). Newspapers were a gateway for readers to develop a new picture that geographical location, upbringing and biases limited (Lippmann, 1997). The reality perceived was beyond a personal experience. Consuming media provided a means for a person to gain secondhand experiences. Experiences are shared via media and coalesce into personal image. One particular contribution, mass media, can skew reality and expectations (Lippmann, 1997). Newspapers, television, film, radio, books, and other types of media contribute to this “picture in their heads.” Media influences a person’s world perception.
A large aspect of media includes the viewing population. The larger the population, the bigger demand for the media being viewed, read, etc. Popular culture is “so much a part of the day-to-day lives of all Americans, that the values and beliefs on the surface and hidden beneath these products inevitably have an important impact on us all” (Geist & Nachbar, 1983, p. 2). The culture’s popularity is the foundation for the Southwest Pop Culture/American Culture Association annual conference axiom, “if it isn’t popular it isn’t culture.” The media being consumed and its effects can change attitudes about violence (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Signorelli, Morgan, & Jackson-Beeck, 1979), news reporting (Lee, 2009), or even romantic expectations (Galloway, Engstrom, & Emmers-Sommer, 2015; Hefner & Wilson, 2013). Media’s popularity is associated with money made and overall consumption. Even more specifically, Fiske (2005) said “relevance is the interconnections between a text and the immediate social situations of its readers—it is therefore socially and historically specific and will change as a text moves through the social structure or through history” (p. 216). Popular culture is a connected to the current society and insights can be drawn from this material. If a certain artifact is particularly popular, the content therein could alter and cultivate behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes. But how does media influence its audience members?

Audience and media have extensive academic research. To explain this relationship between people and media, the effects may fall within two major theories. First, cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1969) suggests that mass media messages foster a setting that “communities cultivate shared and public notions about facts, values and contingencies of human existence” (p. 138). The cultivated picture is shared amongst viewers and can generate a collective attitude or belief. On the other hand, a different explanation includes social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986; Bandura 1994) which proposes “individuals commit to memory behaviors they have
observed to memory to be later used as models on which to base their own behavior” (Johnson & Holmes, 2009, p. 353). Individuals are more likely to adapt these behaviors if the observed behavior was committed by someone perceived to be attractive and if the results provided a positive outcome (Bandura, 1994). Social cognitive theory suggests an active part in viewer consumption, whereas cultivation theory is a passive outlook— one to be acted and the other to be acted upon. Mass media can potentially influence viewers not only directly, but also indirectly.

People use experiences, firsthand or secondhand, to understand the world around them. Learned behaviors are effectively transferred by direct interaction or observed (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). Research supports that exposure to screen media can teach youth different aspects of their world (Dill & Thill, 2007; Hurtz & Durin, 2004). If media consumption can teach youth about family values, work ethic, or stereotypes, the same can safely be deduced about other topics, such as romantic relationships. For example, Haferkamp (1999) and Holmes (2007) found that regardless of infrequent open communication about feelings, intentions and desires, individuals believed the partner should be able to decipher intuitively what the other person was feeling by what they observed. Understanding without communication is a perpetuated ideal in these romantic relationship imitations. Johnson & Holmes (2009) sampled 40 romantic comedy movies and discovered four incongruent messages about relationship formation, maintenance, and termination: 1) deeper feelings developed much quicker in the early stages of relationships; 2) emotional infidelity was permissible; 3) significant importance was placed on the partner; and 4) early emotions in relationships should exist throughout the entirety of the relationship.

Past research has explained the process of how media affects the consumer; whether actively (e.g. Bandura, 1986, 1994) or passively (e.g. Gerbner, 1969). Idealized love and sexual
relations can have an adverse effect on individuals that consume said such unrealistic relationships (Baran, 1976; Holmes, 2007; Signorelli, 1991; Shapiro & Kroeger, 1991). Sex, relationship formation, and other aspects of the relationship render audience members potentially misinformed. Once misconceptions are formed, viewers can feel as if they are missing out on what should be while stuck with reality (Galloway, Engstrom, & Emmers-Sommer, 2015). The perceived love ideals can leave the viewer yearning for low conflict, high satisfaction, and the unattainable mate. Johnson (2007) qualitatively found several myths about relationships in 13 popular wedding films, such as “love at first sight”. Movies influence perception about love and leave unrealistic expectations in their wake.

Genre specific findings may give insight to how films impact personal perceptions. For example, adolescents supplement lack of social knowledge with media (Bachen & Illouz, 1996). The sampled youth cited romantic comedies when describing how a relationship should be (Bachen & Illouz, 1996). Further, Bachen & Illouz (1996) conducted interviews with youth and discovered 90% said they “often” or “sometimes” encountered love like in the movies. Observed experiences fill in the empty spaces, even though characters are fictional. For this study, the sample was taken from film and not television due to the fact that “relationships on television, which often take several seasons to fully develop the characters, movies are viewed in a single sitting” (Hefner & Wilson, 2013, p.152) and provide a rich vein for analysis. The romantic relationship progression “runs its course” in a few hours. Romantic comedies, therefore, include compacted information in the allotted time.

The focus thus far has been solely appropriated to these interpersonal relationships, but never upon specific aspects of the relationship. Apologetic communication has yet to be explored in romantic comedies. Several factors contribute to relationships and their maintenance (Knapp
& Vangelisti, 2009) and individuals who describe conflict or examine relationships will mention apology as a natural component of those contexts, but nobody has focused on the discourse of apology as something worthy of examination. The way characters apologize require further inquiry due to the effect that media has on the audience, creation of unrealistic ideals of love, and how the audience adapts behaviors by what they see work.

Apologetic discourse

Interpersonal relationships are complex. Several factors can influence how people think, feel, and behave. A constant flux exists in interpersonal relationships: forming stages, maintaining stages, and terminating stages (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). Each stage of the relationship can be incrementally examined or the entirety of the whole lifespan can be analyzed. Knapp & Vangelisti admit that why people do what they do is part psychological, and how they communicate within these stages is just as imperative. An important facet to consider in interpersonal relationships is the concept of impression management theory, also referred to as identity management theory (IMT). IMT seeks to explain how “persons go about trying to project a positive self-image” (Gass & Seiter, 2011, p. 85). Basically, people control how they conduct themselves in order to portray themselves as a certain type of person. Typically, credibility is established by reinforcing the image a person cultivates (Gass & Seiter, 2011). To establish a positive image, people are required to engage in what Erving Goffman called facework (1967). Facework is negotiating a person’s standing in others’ eyes (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Ting-Toomey, 1994; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). People interact with others and even perform certain acts to maintain a positive face with others. Credibility is vital in apologies if the apology is to be believed.
Often, when an individual is perceived to have, accused of, or has committed a wrongdoing, he or she will participate in discourse that attempts to restore damage to their reputation (Brown & Levinson, 1978). Brown and Levinson (1987) delved into the appropriate responses to attacks on character, which they later revised. The core politeness theory is, “that some acts are intrinsically threatening to face and thus require ‘softening’” (1987). The reaction to loss of face requires the accused to reduce the threat and provide an appropriate a response that repairs the damage. Politeness theory does not clearly define the concept of threat to face and does not give direction as to the appropriate response (Arundale, 1999). Other theories specifically explain the process a person repairs their image and contribute largely to apology research.

Ware and Linkugel (1973) explored apologies, or in their words, “apologia, the speech of self-defense.” Ware and Linkugel both found apologies as a specific genre of rhetorical criticism but was a premature concept. Apologetic discourse in the beginning was argued to be, “a distinct form of public address, a family of speeches with sufficient elements in common so as to warrant legitimately generic status” (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p. 273). The public apology was not deemed a different form of discourse until political offenses became recurrent and required a specific approach to the situation. There is essentially a two-part accusation process: target is alleged to have committed an act and the transgression is characterized as reprehensible (Benoit & Drew, 1997).

The introduction of specific image repair strategies transformed the way apologies are studied throughout academia. Though rich and rewarding, the varied approaches limited the ability of scholars to compare results with one another. The typology needed to be uniform in order to have transferable results. The strategy classification differs immensely between some
scholars, such as Sykes and Matza (1957) delinquency theory that had five potential categories to Schonback’s (1990) estimated 150 possibilities. Benoit (2015) provides a fourteen strategy Image Repair Theory that can be used in defense rhetoric. The theory was derived from several sources (e.g. Burke, 1970; Scott & Lyman, 1968; Ware & Linkugel, 1973) and others. Benoit's Apologia framework identified options rather than prescribing solutions.

The predecessor to image repair, image restoration theory was potentially constrained in some instances. Burns and Bruner (2000) address several areas that cause possible misinterpretations with Benoit’s (1995) theory: specifically image and restoration. Viewers of the apology could misinterpret image in two ways. The first indicates an oversimplification of the agent’s image. Texaco’s image repair after racist allegation and later irrefutable proof of guilt, Brinson and Benoit’s (1999) analysis of Texaco’s image is not fully represented. A dichotomy unfolded to adequately solidify the company’s perceived “image.” Image complexity cannot be suitably ascertained using image restoration theory (Burns & Bruner, 2000). Secondly, “a reader might assume that image restoration must be approached from the point of view of the corporation” (Burns & Bruner, 2000, p. 29). As stated, the strategies being used are seen from the apologizing agent instead of the agent receiving the apology. The apology success is therefore skewed because the strategies are defined by the apologizer and not the recipient. Benoit (2000) points out that he has always acknowledged multiple audiences are involved in the apology. Burns and Bruner’s stated their goal was to generate an audience-oriented point of view. For Burns and Bruner, Benoit’s definitions were too simple- an academic’s hubris thinking a theory needs to be complex in order to be useful.

In response, Benoit (2000) addressed these concerns about Image Restoration Theory. A determining factor of image restoration has always included the audience’s point of view. He
observed, “The key point here, of course, is not whether in fact the actor caused the damage, but whether the relevant audience believes the actor to be the source of the reprehensible act” (p.72). He reiterates his definition of image as, “the perception of a person (or group, or organization) held by the audience, shaped by the words and actions of the person, as well as by the discourse and behavior of other relevant actors” (Benoit, 1997, p. 251). Benoit adamantly points out that image is in what the audience perceives and not merely what the agent apologizing claims.

Another caveat Burns and Bruner (2000) discussed about image restoration theory was the process’s oversimplification. The situation becomes a stimulus-response event. The offended party or person attacks the offender and the offender responds in a way that completely restores his or her image. The simplicity does not necessarily generate deficiency. A small concession, Benoit (2000) changed "image restoration"(Benoit 1995) to "image repair" (Benoit 2015), because restoration was misleading of the strategy. Restoration might infer that the image was restored to its former position. The apologizer could potentially settle for a repaired state, yet retain a damaged position. Image repair has been scrutinized, but also defended. The theory has potential for growth in certain arenas.

**Application of image repair**

_Apologia_ research is rich with varying subjects of analysis. Public apology is a consistent phenomenon. Whether it is Texaco executives racial remarks (Brinson & Benoit, 1999) or Mel Gibson’s drunken tirade (Stein, 2010), all lead to tactics of image repair. Notable figures and companies consistently make mistakes and certain strategies are utilized to reclaim or repair lost face. Benoit (2015) and Coombs (1995) have contributed the most developed framework for _apologia_. Benoit’s (2015) image repair strategies identified fourteen possible strategies. The
rhetorical analysis critically evaluates apologetic discourse in the public sphere. Apologia research is not lacking in breadth or depth.

Previous research has analyzed the success of certain apologia strategies (Benoit & Drew, 1997; Blaney, Benoit, & Brazeal, 2002). Richard Nixon's discourse during the Watergate scandal (Benoit, 1982; Harrell, Ware, & Linkugel, 1975; Katula, 1975) is an example of rhetorical strategies being analyzed within Nixon’s apology. Furthering the research of public apologia is Stein’s (2008) antapologia, which originated as a response to apologia strategies. The apology and the response have both been studied. All research thus far lacks representation in the interpersonal realm. Apologetic discourse transcends public spheres and could leave ripples within private systems.

Thus far, apologia research is solely aimed toward real life (non-fictional) characters. The apologies studied includes celebrity (Furgerson & Benoit, 2013; Stein 2010), corporations (Brinson & Benoit, 1999), political figures (Benoit, 1982; Harrell, Ware, & Linkugel, 1975; Katula, 1975), nation-states (Stein 2008) and sports professionals (Stein, Barton, & Turman, 2013; Husselbee & Stein, 2011). Specifically, romantic comedies uniquely qualify for analysis. Though these real life apologies may be similarly scripted, the non-fictional apologies differ from fictional film portrayals. Film sequences are created to mimic life and create an attachment with the viewer. The films demonstrate an entire relationship within a few hours (Hefner & Wilson, 2013). The apology was created in the film to represent an interpersonal relationship image repair. Interpersonal apologies in romantic comedies are publicly available and readily consumed.

The following questions were asked to give the analysis direction. A content analysis is used to determine what strategies are being shown. Benoit's (2015) rhetorical framework is used
as the foundation for the content analysis in order to determine the specific frequencies in which each strategy emerges.

RQ1: What are the dominant image repair strategies used in romantic comedy interpersonal relationships?

RQ2: Which strategies are used most by males?

RQ3: Which strategies are used most by females?

Methods

Several things need to be discussed to begin this study: a specified sample, description of the theoretical framework used, and the coders’ part to find apologia discourse.

Sample

The focus is apologies and image repair strategies within romantic comedies. To analyze these strategies, a sample was drawn from the all-time top 20 grossing movies (Romantic Comedy, n.d.) in the romantic comedy genre. The list was derived from www.boxofficemojo.com that reports earnings of movies. A movie’s gross income can be an indicator that the media was distributed over a wide demographic. The populace is the contributing factor to the movie’s success and income. The top movies were selected for this specific reason. Box Office Mojo simplifies the process by reporting all time gross income of movies and even breaking it down into genres if needs be (Romantic Comedy, n.d.). The sample once again supports the axiom, "if it is not popular, it is not culture."

Romantic comedy, or also known in a derogatory fashion “Chick Flicks,” is a genre based upon two factors. The first factor is a romantic partnership. The relationship can be starting or intensifying to qualify. Though some other genres have this element in the storyline, romantic comedies maintain a focus on the actual relationship between the two main characters
of heterosexual orientation. Within this genre element, conflict between the two characters is inevitable and inescapable. The narrative is conflict driven, as with most storytelling, but the focus, once again, is upon the relationships fruition or deterioration.

The romantic comedy genre list does not overlap with other genres. An aspect of romantic comedies is the use of humor in improbable situations but functions as an agent to reduce the intense feelings present. Romantic comedies vary from the other categorical genres: action, adventure, animation, comedy, sports, documentary, drama, family, horror, fantasy, and science-fiction. Romance and humor couple together like the main characters of that genre. Even within the romantic genre lies sub-genres: crime, fantasy, drama, and comedy. The humor is what distinguishes it from the similar romantic drama. Once again, the purpose is to evaluate fictional characters in realistic positions and to analyze their actions. Romantic fantasy or even crime romantic comedies (e.g. *The Mexican* (Ball, Ryder, Tyrer, Wyman, & Verbinski, 2001), *One for the Money* (Heigl, Heigl, Lamal, Reid, Toll & Robinson, 2012), and *Intolerable Cruelty* (Daniel, Jacks, & Coen, 2003) deviate from the central romantic comedy foci.

**Theoretical Framework**

Romantic comedy apologies are lacking in academic research. The interpersonal communication in that setting requires a specific methodological tool, a content analysis. A content analysis is the quantification of qualitative items that leads to inferences about the content (Salkind, 2010). The ongoing relationship between content analysis and communication research is deeply rooted within media studies (Berelson, 1952; Salkind, 2010; Krippendorf, 2004). The process facilitates consistency and plausible duplication of the measurement. Coders systematically evaluate selected text (e.g. advertisements, film, television shows, newspapers, pictures) and assign a value to the phenomenon (Salkind, 2010). Two or more coders designate
and count discovered content within the text. The objective is to observe the content and discern what is beneath the surface; the reason behind, implications, and specific aspects of the content is up to the researcher to interpret. Several content analyses have been conducted concerning romantic film content (Pardun, 2002; Tanner, Haddock, Zimmerman, & Lund, 2003) and only two studies used a strict romantic comedy genre sample (Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Hefner & Wilson, 2013). Though several inquiries have been made, not a single study focused upon apologies.

A content analysis can be used to form a new theory inductively, or can be coupled with an existing framework. Apologia is the theoretical framework used to determine different image repair strategies utilized. Apologia, as stated previously, is inclusive of various image repair strategies, but each strategy is unique and cannot be another strategy. The results can be either-or but never both, or in other words mutually exclusive and Benoit & Drew (1997) have used such a classification. Benoit's image restoration strategies (2015) are categorized thematically into five separate groups. Denial, which is declaring the accusation of wrongdoing as untrue. Evading responsibility for the event is used by the agents to distance themselves from the wrongdoing. Reducing offensiveness of the event is the attempt to lessen the potential damage to image. Corrective action seeks to fully make amends to the wronged. The last category, mortification, has one strategy, where the accused individual takes responsibility for the event and expresses sorrow for the act. These broader categories break down into specific strategies.

\textit{Denial} has two strategies. Simple denial is when the accused denies that he/she committed the wrongdoing, (“I didn’t do it!”). The other strategy is shifting blame. The accused claims some other person/entity is responsible. The agent denies responsibility and redirects the accusation elsewhere.
Evading responsibility contains four separate strategies. Provocation is when the accused claims he/she was provoked into acting. Defeasibility is when the accused blames external causes, such as a lack of knowledge or control. Defeasibility is different from shifting blame in the sense that one is denying that he or she had anything to do with the transgression, while the former merely evade the responsibility. The person using defeasibility attributes the accused as some sort of participation in the event. Accident, the accused says he/she didn’t mean to do it. Good Intentions is the last strategy for evading responsibility. The accused argues that he/she intended to do well. The consequences were unfortunate but the aim was to have a positive effect.

Reducing the offensiveness of the event has a set of mutually exclusive categories that begins with bolstering. The accused offsets the harmful act by praising him/herself for other things unrelated to the harmful act. The image they have created previously should reduce the harm of the act and attempt to use it to counteract the offense. Minimization is where the accused attempts to lessen the significance of the harm by claiming it was not that bad. The act was a minor transgression and not as terrible. Differentiation is where the accused attempts to distinguish his/her bad act from similar, but worse harms.

The difference between the last two strategies is the comparison. Minimization is claiming something was not as bad as it seemed, while differentiation strives to compare the event to possible worse events. An example would be “Stealing is not as bad as you think” while a differentiation strategy would take the same event and say, “I stole something, so what? It is not like I killed a man”.

Continuing with reduction of offensiveness, transcendence is when the accused attempts to put his/her harmful act into a more positive context, which is distinct from defeasibility.
Transcendence is about making the act into something positive. The accused is changing/reducing the potential perspective of the event. With attack accuser, the accused verbally retaliates against his/her accuser. Compensation is when the accused offers a payoff to the accuser, which does not often correct the damage- emphasis on ‘does not often correct the damage’. The last caveat is what separates this category from the next category/strategy.

**Corrective Action** has only one strategy and that is when the accused works to fix the damage he/she caused. Typically, this strategy is on the positive end of the spectrum of image repair strategies. When an event occurs, the accused does his or her best to amend the situation.

**Mortification** is the last possible yet the most genuine strategy. The accused takes responsibility for the harmful act and expresses sorrow. Including mortification, all of the strategies have mutually exclusive application to which the coders can assign the appropriate value to the situation. Romantic comedies and image repair combine together in search of three research questions.

**Coding**

Drawing upon Benoit’s (2015) model of *apologia*, the process involved: (1) coders time stamping instances in the film when face was being threatened; (2) recording the person's gender; and (3) coding the apology within one of the fourteen strategies. To ascertain possible coding difficulties and other issues with the intended study, a pilot study was conducted with the 21st top grossing movie on the list, *Notting Hill* (Romantic Comedy, n.d.). *Apologia* strategies used in the interpersonal settings were identified and recorded by a set of two coders. The coders separately watched each movie and followed the aforementioned steps. A minor problem arose concerning which strategies were to be coded. This was amended by only coding the initial apology. Drawing upon Brown and Levinson, the focus was “discourse attempts to restore face,
image, or reputation after suspected wrong-doing” (Benoit & Drew, 2009, p.153). Some act of “wrong-doing” had to be addressed. A wrongful act had to be perceived as being committed. The agent responding to the accused reprehensible act was the only coded strategy concerning that act. All apologies that were between two characters and solely for their own image repair and not in place of another agent were recorded. Recording only monumental or apex apologies left important strategies that were portrayed through the entirety of the film.

Though *apologia* strategies may have caused some conflict, focus was only upon the initial strategy of image repair between the agents. Interpersonal communication is messy in regards to the fact that each character in the film plays off of the other. To reduce this dissonance, the focus was on the initial strategy being used. The scope of this study is not to measure the effectiveness of image repair strategies, but inferences can be made about the strategies’ possible effects. Strategies used in response to the initial image repair strategy delves into *antapologia* (Stein, 2008; Husselbee & Stein, 2012) and is not the focus of this study.

Though the use of multiple strategies are possible, the principal strategy was recorded. Sub-strategies can contribute to the image repair, but to minimize incongruity and maintain the focus of this study, the prevalent strategy was recorded. A series of strategies used in succession due to the first strategy as a stimulus were not considered. A third party determined the chosen code for the frequencies when conflicting values were coded.

**Results**

Out of the 20 romantic comedies sampled, 505 different instances of image repair strategies were used in initial, *apologia* discourse. Coder inter-rater reliability was determined using Cohen’s Kappa (Cohen 1960; McHugh 2012) because of the nominal scales used to determine the qualitative values of the apologies. The agreement was moderately reliable (Cohen
The agreement’s $k$ value was .76. Frequencies were measured to determine the highest used strategies and by which gender. The image repair strategies used by males totaled 314 instances. The remaining 191 strategies were coded female strategies.

Table 1

_Apologia Frequencies in Romantic Comedies_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Apologia</em> Strategy</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of Sample</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Simple Denial</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>34 (10.8%)</td>
<td>20 (10.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shifting Blame</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>27 (8.6%)</td>
<td>8 (4.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provocation</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5 (1.6%)</td>
<td>11 (5.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defeasibility</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>31 (9.9%)</td>
<td>26 (13.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accident</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>9 (2.9%)</td>
<td>3 (1.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Intentions</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>12 (3.8%)</td>
<td>6 (3.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolstering</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>10 (3.2%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimization</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>22 (7.0%)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>12 (3.8%)</td>
<td>9 (4.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcendence</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>17 (5.4%)</td>
<td>11 (5.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attack the Accuser</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>44 (14.0%)</td>
<td>23 (12.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>5 (1.6%)</td>
<td>2 (1.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corrective Action</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>18 (5.7%)</td>
<td>5 (2.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mortification</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>68 (21.7%)</td>
<td>41 (21.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Note._ Percentages of male and female counts were derived from his/her respective gender.

**Mortification**

Research question one asked about dominant image repair strategies used in romantic comedy interpersonal relationships. The specific strategies had surprising results. The data
suggests that the tactic used the most in the romantic comedy interpersonal relationships was mortification. Both males and females were depicted as using this strategy. Research question two and three inquired about the male/female strategies. The occurrences were significantly portrayed by both genders. To illustrate, here are a few examples of mortification in the sampled films:

In *The Proposal* (Bullock, Kurtzman, McLaglen, Orci, & Fletcher, 2009), Andrews’s father says, “The point is, I owe you an apology.” Andrew responds “Accepted.” The apology was derived from Andrew’s father’s actions the day before and how he treated his boss/fiancé (Margaret). Once again in *The Proposal*, mortification was exemplified with Margaret’s climactic apology, “I’m sorry. I have a confession…Turns out it is not easy to ruin someone’s life once you find out how wonderful they are. You have a beautiful family. Don’t let this come between you. This is my fault.” She takes upon herself the responsibility of blackmailing Andrew. She apologizes to both his family and specifically Andrew.

To further illustrate mortification in romantic comedies, Pat (main male character) in *Silver Linings Playbook* (Cooper et. al, 2012) says “I’m sorry! I’m sorry! I’m sorry!” after he commits a wrongful act. He accidently hits his mother in a glancing blow and he apologizes with tears. He does so with conviction and at the time, takes responsibility for his action. Later in the film, Tiffany (the main female character) exclaims, “I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” Pat responds with his own, “I’m sorry.” Tiffany “I took it too far” after an altercation between the two. Tiffany committed a reprehensible act and felt sorrow for what had happened. She expresses genuine remorse and accepts responsibility for her actions. In one of the final scenes, Pat writes a letter to Tiffany and asks her to read the letter. Before she can read it all, Pat finishes it saying out loud, “Thank you. I love you. I knew it the minute I met you. I’m sorry.” The relationship progresses
and his image is repaired. The original grievance was the letter. The letter was thought to be for Pat’s ex-wife and Tiffany was furious he wanted her to read it.

In another film, *Mr. Deeds* (Caracciolo, Sandler, & Brill, 2002), mortification was once again illustrated with a phone call between Deeds and Bennett, “I’m so happy you called. I’m wicked sorry about last night.” Deeds takes responsibility and showcases remorse. The night before Deeds gets a bit reckless with the bad boy of tennis and also throws up on Bennett’s skirt. Deeds appears to be genuinely sorry. Towards the end of the movie, Deeds is hurt about Bennett deceiving him. Bennett has fallen into a frozen lake and the conversation escalates as Deeds asks “You gonna get mugged in there, too?” Deeds is worried he is being deceived again and Bennett’s image is tarnished. Bennett apologizes for what has happened while the lake, “I’m so sorry. I really love you.” Deeds is still skeptical as he exclaims, “B-b-bullshit!” Whether successful or not, mortification was the most represented *apologia* discourse used in these romantic comedies.

**Attacking the Accuser**

The second most utilized image repair strategy was attacking the accuser. Attacking the accuser is when the accused verbally retaliates against his/her accuser (Benoit 2015). Several examples are given to showcase this strategy in romantic comedies. In *Knocked up* (Goldberg, Rogen, Apatow, 2007), Alison (the lead female character) exclaims, “Well, don’t! Okay?! You can’t take anything seriously! You didn’t even read the baby books.” To the accusation, Ben (the lead male) retaliates by attacking Alison and her grievance, “I didn’t read the baby books! What’s gonna happen? How did anyone ever give birth without a baby book?! That’s right, the ancient Egyptians f*#$ing engraved “*what to expect when you’re expecting*” on the pyramid walls! I forgot about that! Who gives a flying f#$ about the baby books!?” Seth Rogan’s
character retaliates against Alison to reduce the responsibility concerning the act. He does admit he did not read the baby books but adamantly attacks his accuser. Though some may see it as minimization, he is attacking Alison with her accusation. The overlying strategy is to showcase how ridiculous Alison is for having a problem with Ben not reading the books. He uses the accusation to attack Alison. The context of the argument supports the this example as attacking the accuser.

Another example would be in The Proposal (Bullock et. al, 2009), when Bob was fired. He is told several reasons why he is fired. He retaliates against Margaret, his boss and lead female character, “You poisonous bitch! You can’t fire me!” He leaves the accusation by the wayside and directly insults and attacks Margaret. Another use of attacking the accuser in The Proposal (Bullock et. al, 2009) is when Margret says, “Okay. Time out. This bickering bickerson needs to stop. People have to believe that we are in love so…” Andrew responds, “That’s no problem, I can do the doting fiancé. It’s easy but for you it’s going to require you to stop snacking on children while they dream.” He uses a humorous yet demeaning attack to reduce his responsibility concerning the act.

Hitch (Mordaunt, Tadross, & Tennant, 2005) also has an example of attacking the accuser when Sara Melas has a problem with Hitch and he begins, “I don’t do interviews. But if you’d like to get back to the evening, I’d be happy to sit and talk” she responds, “Great idea. You start.” She wants him to speak up about his perceived horrible acts and he responds “Well, maybe if you weren’t snarling.” Sara accuses Hitch of terrible things but he responds by using her attitude about the situation against her. The accuser is attacked and further escalates comedic and interpersonal conflict.
Finally, to illustrate attacking the accuser in romantic comedies, *Silver Linings Playbook’s* (Cooper et. al, 2012) Pat begins by saying “What the f*$# are you doing? Your husband’s dead!” Tiffany inquires “Where’s your wife?” Pat yells, “You’re crazy!” Tiffany escalates the situation by saying, “I’m not the one who just got out of that hospital in Baltimore.” She is referring to the mental institution Pat had to stay at after he attacked his wife’s adulterous partner. He finally yells, “Well I’m not the one who is a big slut.” The longevity of the quote was given to give context to the situation. Attacking the accuser as an image reparation strategy often is responded to in kind.

**Defeasibility**

The third most portrayed image repair strategy was defeasibility. Defeasibility was not only the third highest strategy overall, it was also the second-most used strategy used by female characters. Defeasibility as a strategy is when the accused blames external causes such as lack of knowledge or control (Benoit 2015). To illustrate defeasibility in romantic comedies, here are a few examples:

In *Knocked Up* (Golberg et. al, 2007), Alison addresses Ben, “Just because I’m pregnant, I’m not some ruined woman and all romance goes out the door.” Ben responds, “I’m sorry. I like you a lot that’s all this is.” He is diffusing his responsibility and assigning it to his feelings. The feelings he has is the driving force and is out of control. If he did not have those feelings, he would have been able to control his behavior. Ben is treating his feelings as an external power.

*Something’s Gotta Give* (Block & Meyers, 2003) has Erica asking, “You came here to see me?” Harry responds, “I’m aware it was a bold move, but, one of those impulses that just grabs you, but so far we’re okay.” Harry is not in control of his actions and attributes it to an uncontrollable force. The reason these examples are not transcendence is that their positive act is
not put into a positive light. The actors are blaming something out of their control. The feelings may be perceived as possibly positive reasons but that is not the purpose behind their *apologia*.

Another example of defeasibility in romantic comedies is in *Knocked Up* (Goldberg et. al, 2007) when a bouncer apologizes to the lead female and her best friend

“I know, you’re right. I’m so sorry. I f*#$ing hate this job. I don’t want to be the one to pass judgment and decide who gets in. This shit makes me sick to my stomach. I get the runs from the stress. It’s not because you’re not hot. I would love to tap that ass. I would tear that ass up. I can’t let you in because you’re old as f*#*… for this club, not, you know, for the earth.”

The bouncer blames his actions on his job. His job is the reason he has to pass judgment on others. By “hating” his job, he reduces his responsibility to why he rejected them from the club.

In *Silver Linings Playbook* (Cooper et. al, 2012), Tiffany does something that puts Pat into a bad situation with a crowd and a police officer. Tiffany tries to repair her image with the police officer by saying, “I’m f#*$ed up, what can I tell you? I’m sorry.” Tiffany places responsibility on her character’s previous image. She is not in control of herself and cannot be held accountable for her action.

Another example of female defeasibility would be Alexa in *50 First Dates* (Ewing, Lupi, Roach, & Segal, 2004), when she is confronted by Henry, “What’s up with the “tramp: and the “beeches” talk? Are you drunk or something?” Alexa responds, “I apologize for nasty talk. I am grouchy due to lack of recent physical intimacy (Russian-ish accent).” Once again, the behavior was out of the character’s control. The behavior was attributed to something they could not necessarily control.
Discussion

Different apologia strategies in these films concluded in some surprising results. The first tactic used the most in the films' interpersonal relationships was mortification. Showing sorrow and claiming responsibility was ideal in most situations. Though effectiveness with the audience was not measured in this study, qualitatively it can be postulated what effects may occur. Drew and Benoit (1997) mentioned that mortification has a higher positive effect when used. Because mortification is shown extensively, the audience could adapt the strategy in their own discourse. The relationship’s progression in the film supports a romantic comedy genre. Ideally, a person takes responsibility if a transgression has been committed.

Previous research warns about similar idealistic relationship perceptions (Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Galloway, Engstrom & Emmers-Sommer, 2015; Hefner & Wilson, 2013). Romantic comedy mortification is likely to give the audience a blueprint on how to apologize. The viewer is seeing this particular strategy the most. The audience could expect their significant other to take responsibility. Waiting for the other to apologize could decrease a viewer’s own participation in apologizing. Further research is required. The consistent mortification salience could persuade viewers to either use mortification or expect it from others. To adopt the strategy, individuals need to see that this strategy used by a likeable/attractive character and see a positive outcome (Bandura, 1994). True mortification requires the agent to show remorse for their actions and take full responsibility but the use of mortification could be harmful.

Regardless of the situation, an unrealistic expectation is portrayed. The accused needs to take responsibility and show remorse. To repair image, the proper response is mortification even if the act is not actually committed. A viewer could see this as the proper course of action regardless of internal dissonance. Internal dissonance can occur when the accused just accepts
the responsibility and showcases remorse but did not actually commit the act (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). Potentially, self-sacrificing situations will save face and progress the relationship, but dishonesty about the act could further complicate the situation. If the significant other discovers the dishonesty, done even to save face, more problems will develop. This argument is derived from saving face and also trying to stay true to self. As humans, individuals want others to see a certain image of themselves (Gass & Seiter, 2011). Utilizing the Johari Window model (Luft & Ingham, 1955), individuals will want to control what others know about themselves. The two, known to self and known to others, can be cohesive and beneficial. The opposite is also true. The side that no one sees could be a direct contradiction to what people see. Turmoil could ensue if mortification is to be used even though the accused did not commit the wrong.

Why do people want mortification? Intimacy in relationships has a need for honesty and responsibility so that trust can develop. In personal relationships, the trust that is created can be shattered easily and painstakingly long to repair (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). Mortification is therefore even more essential in giving viewers a blue print on how to truly say sorry. Public apologies are directed towards a population while interpersonal apologies include a much smaller audience. Individuals want sorrow and accountability for actions because intimate relationships do have a strong element of trust. To nurture trust, taking responsibility would benefit the continuation of the friendship and/or romance.

The two highest portrayed tactics are rather dichotomous. While mortification requires the individual to take responsibility for his or her own actions, attack the accuser reduces the responsibility by challenging the opposing agent. Several factors contribute to the use of this strategy in the sample. Romantic comedy is about relationships. The comedy brings a human
element that softens the romantic implications such as romantic dramas. Both reasons contribute to the necessity of attacking the accuser for artistic reasons. Conflict drives the story and is actually healthy for relationships (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009) when resolved.

Referencing the *Hitch* (Mordaunt et. al, 2005) example in attacking the accuser, Hitch confronts Sara Melas about her behavior. The intended romantic evening turns into insults and salad flinging fun. Emotionally charged as it may be, the attacks on the accuser were comical and dispelled the potentially deep emotions. Attacking the accuser is done in a comical representation for the audience, but not necessarily in the interpersonal relationship.

Based on media consumption, the audience could see attacking the accuser as permissible, especially done in a joking manner. The relationship context varies between individuals, but throughout the majority of the sampled films, attacking the accuser was used to further conflict and create comedy. Attacking the accuser in interpersonal situations should be used with caution. Romantic comedies represent elements of real life, but not necessarily the same consequences. Temporarily, the agent could save face but knowing whether or not it sticks is beyond this study. Estimating that attacking the accuser does not maintain the reparation, another strategy could be implemented to further image repair.

The audience could also perceive attacking the accuser as ineffective. Attacking the accuser was a strategy used in the beginning to mid portions of the film. The relationship was premature and the image repair strategies adapted as the movie progressed. Seeing how romantic comedies do use humor, it is not surprising that attacking the accuser is the second most represented strategy. The portrayal was humorous, but the complications in the actual situation could deter audience adaptation.
Research question two inquired male strategy use. Mortification, as mentioned, was the frequent choice for image repair. In the male coded strategies, it was also the first choice. An important aspect to remember is that the attacked individual does not even have to commit the wrong, as long as it is perceived to have happened (Benoit 2000). The audience, or in this case the romantic interest, would often perceive the other as committing a wrong. In order to maintain the relationship and image, claiming responsibility seemed to be the optimal choice. Romantic comedies generally requires the male to claim responsibility. The power may seem up to the women to accept or reject the apology, but this could educate audience members that males need to step up to the plate.

Attacking the accuser was the second most used strategy for males. Several concerns arise with males using attacking the accuser so frequently: males are generally seen as aggressive, attacks on the accuser are portrayed in film as humorous, and the attacks appear to be necessary. The first issue will be discussed later on, while the humoristic approach was already covered. An example of the strategy being necessary, several times in The Proposal (Bullock, Kurtzman, McLaglen, Orci, Fletcher, 2009), Andrew attacks his accuser, Margaret. Margaret uses her position as Andrew’s boss to extort him to become her fiancé so does not get deported. Because he is doing her a huge favor, he can use attacking his accuser to repair his image. The result is that the audience could perceive his character as justified for using this strategy. The audience could adapt this in their own image repair strategies if they feel justified and hope to maintain a certain face. The problem with this strategy is that that people may see themselves in the best positive light while viewing others in a negative context for the same situation. Individual bias creates skewed reality of who is right and wrong. Though efforts to save face seem justified, the image repair strategy could lead to opposite outcomes.
Concerning research question three, females also used mortification the most. The second most used strategy was defeasibility. Though mortification was the default repair strategy, the second strategy introduces some possible complications.

Defeasibility by females was used within these particular films. The accused evades the responsibility by claiming it was some external cause such as lack of knowledge or control (Benoit, 2015). Defeasibility potentially implicates that female characters are agents to be acted upon and not to act. The female character is not in control of the things she does and can perpetuate an unrealistic notion that women are not in control of their actions. The implication is purely misogynistic. Though the audience is typically female (Johnson & Holmes, 2009), patriarchal ideals could present genders as specified roles to be played and certain strategies to adopt.

Defeasibility may change slightly from Benoit’s (2015) definition that the accused blames external causes such as lack of knowledge or control. Though emotions and love are intuitively intrinsic, the characters treated it as if it was an eternal force driving them. The blame is not to bolster their reputation but to reduce their actions consequences by lack of control.

An interesting finding is that strategies analyzed in this study were found to be used largely by males. If a female audience is in fact the intended population of consumption, a few implications exist about males engaged in image repair strategies more frequently than women.

It is an unrealistic ideal to say that men are almost always at fault in romantic conflicts. Whether caught in perceived or actual wrongdoing, the message here is that men must take responsibility if they wish the relationship to progress. This notion is coupled with a few apologies within *50 First Dates* (Ewing, Lupi, Roach, & Segal, 2004). Henry’s potential partner has amnesia and repeatedly has to win her over, day after day. He is continuously apologizing
using mortification. Because men are more often perceived to be at fault; consequently, men have to engage in image repair strategies more frequently.

This conclusion also bolsters the notion that women are a thing to be acted upon. Men are trying to repair image and continue the relationship. Females are portrayed as the wronged and potentially not taking as many risks as their male counterparts. Less risk with actions requires less image repair if the actions are reprehensible.

Attacking the accuser was used by both males and females, but the strategy plays second fiddle to male mortification. Males were depicted with aggressive image repair strategies in regards to women’s defeasibility or lack of control. Gender roles are reinforced by the apologies represented. Potentially, males will depict this as preferred behavior or women could view this as a common course of action that is left under the ambiguous umbrella, “that’s what men do”. The contradictory message for the supposed intended audience is rather paradoxical.

**Conclusion**

The top grossing list does not determine the total number of views. The amount of viewings could be vastly different from the amount of money made. Once a movie has been purchased, viewers could watch the same movie repeatedly. Considering Netflix and other online streaming services, the most popularly viewed romantic comedies could generate a varying list of top movies. Future research could include furthering the sampling list and comparing top grossing movies with top viewed movies and determine whether there is a relationship. A larger sample would also better further study of this subject. Though it would be beneficial, “every study must have bounds or it cannot be completed” (Benoit, 2000, p. 42). Enough movies were sampled to generate interesting results.
In addition to a larger sample size, the field remains untouched in the effects these image repair uses have on the audience. A content analysis' purpose is not to determine such effects, but analyze the content within the artifacts. Will people that watch romantic comedies be quicker to use mortification when faced some sort of grievance in their interpersonal relationships? The question is beyond the scope of this study and necessitates further inquiry.

The overall product delves into the intricacies of fictional interpersonal apologies. A research typology that has not been applied to either interpersonal communication or popular culture studies, generated interesting insights. Does art mimic life or does life mimic art? The popular apology was accepting responsibility and showing sorrow. Mortification is a powerful strategy to repairing an image if it is sincere (Benoit & Drew, 1997). Because media effects influence real world perspectives (Lippmann, 1997), the most frequent image restoration strategies could teach people the proper (or improper) way to apologize (Gerbner, 1969; Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1994).

Films portray a private relationship compared to most apology strategies that are used in public spheres. The intimacy of the situation can give viewers the necessary tools to find absolution for their misdeeds. Public officials’ public apologies do not have a direct effect on day to day relationships. Films depict private relationships and the content can be easily adapted into a viewers’ own personal life. Films are better equipped in providing a framework for people to apologize than public apologies by celebrities, country states, and athletes.

Popular artifacts and academic work married together proffer a new arena of application. The application is readily available and perpetuates the importance of pop culture inquiry. The function of academia is to understand, question, and hopefully benefit. The learned behavior
impacts a person’s day-to-day interactions. A person could be one movie away from figuring out how to say sorry.
References


Ball, C., Ryder, A., Tyrer, W., Wyman, J. H. (Producers), & Verbinski, G. (Director). *The Mexican* [Motion Picture]. United States: Dream Works


*The proposal* [Motion picture]. United States: Touchstone.


Goldberg, E., Rogen, S. (Producers), & Apatow, J. (Director). *Knocked up* [Motion Picture]. United States: Universal Studios


http://www.jstor.org/stable/2089195


Appendix A

Sampling List

Table A

*Top 20 Grossing Romantic Comedies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Movie</th>
<th>Gross Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>My Big Fat Greek Wedding</em></td>
<td>$241,438,208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>What Women Want</em></td>
<td>$182,811,707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Hitch</em></td>
<td>$179,495,555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>Pretty Woman</em></td>
<td>$178,406,268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>There's Something About Mary</em></td>
<td>$176,484,651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td><em>The Proposal</em></td>
<td>$163,958,031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td><em>Sex and the City</em></td>
<td>$152,257,509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td><em>Runaway Bride</em></td>
<td>$152,257,509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td><em>Knocked Up</em></td>
<td>$148,768,917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td><em>As Good as it Gets</em></td>
<td>$148,478,011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td><em>Bringing down the house</em></td>
<td>$132,716,677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td><em>Silver Linings playbook</em></td>
<td>$132,092,958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td><em>Coming to America</em></td>
<td>$128,152,301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td><em>Sweet home Alabama</em></td>
<td>$127,226,418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td><em>My Best Friend's Wedding</em></td>
<td>$127,120,029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td><em>Sleepless in Seattle</em></td>
<td>$126,680,884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td><em>Mr. Deeds</em></td>
<td>$126,293,452</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td><em>Something's Gotta Give</em></td>
<td>$124,728,738</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td><em>50 First Dates</em></td>
<td>$120,908,074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td><em>The Breakup</em></td>
<td>$118,703,275</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td><em>Notting Hill</em></td>
<td>$116,089,678</td>
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*This movie was used in the pilot study and not counted towards the overall content analysis.*
Appendix B

Frequency results in the content analysis

Table B

*Frequencies of Apologia Strategies*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Apologia Strategy</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>% of Sample</th>
<th>Male (%)</th>
<th>Female (%)</th>
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<td>Simple Denial</td>
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<td>34 (10.8%)</td>
<td>20 (10.5%)</td>
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<td>Shifting Blame</td>
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<td>6.9</td>
<td>27 (8.6%)</td>
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<td>Provocation</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5 (1.6%)</td>
<td>11 (5.8%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Defeasibility</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>31 (9.9%)</td>
<td>26 (13.6%)</td>
</tr>
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<td>Accident</td>
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<td>2.4</td>
<td>9 (2.9%)</td>
<td>3 (1.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>505</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>