

**An Anthology of Love And:  
An Honors College Thesis Film Capstone Report**

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**Curiosity:**

*Right now, there's sorrow, pain; don't kill it, and with it, the joy you've felt.*

*Call Me By Your Name (2018)*

**The Focus of Work**

Heartbreak hurts— in unexplainable ways. My senior thesis Capstone, titled *an anthology of love and*, is a film poem of loosely connected vignettes that interrogate what relationships are composed of, specifically those that are falling apart. Approaching it in short form storytelling, it breaks down into a myriad of awkward, funny, terrifying, and heartbreaking moments that highlight the human-ness of wanting love.

This film really centers around the idea of the “and” in the title— *an anthology of love and...* heartbreak, and pain, and endings, and beauty, and awkwardness, and humor, and fear, and suffering. It is the ultimate human experience. An abstract concept of pain, it encompasses something so universal and yet so isolating.

**The Raison D'Être**

As with all of my work, the nature of this film is autobiographical. I found myself drawn to my family and friends who had multitudes of stories about their own heartbreaks, both retrospectively funny and others extremely scary. In gathering many stories, I started to understand the universality of this experience and that no single story can ever encompass the abstract pain of a heartbreak. There is pain in knowing someone and losing someone, as each person is unique and each loss is its own version of grief. There is no general way to define it for each individual. This naturally led me to the concept of an anthology – a series of vignettes, loosely connected, but standalone in nature.

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Humor, and absurdity, are particularly useful tools for the exploration of the human experience of healing. Things become funny until they become tragic or tragic until they become funny. Humor eases the viewer into difficult territory. Some loss is handled with humor, and some humor is necessary to understand that love was never present. That's part of the beauty of love: sometimes it exists and sometimes it does not. It is something we have control over and ultimately have no control over whatsoever. (How much can the director control within the frame and how much chaos can we create?) With these ideas and tools in hand (vignettes, control, physical exposition, humor, and heartbreak), I began crafting and shaping a film around different stories and different characters, different hearts to break and be broken.

Every vignette is a true story and the final vignettes included in the film are as follows:

- A woman, crying, sits in a library next to a man who is more concerned about "continuing to have sex" than anything else.*
- A man gets broken up with by his girlfriend and her side lover, who simply closes a garage door on his pleading calls.*
- On a ski lift, a man tells his partner that he does not love them anymore, even though they drove to the mountain together.*
- On New Year's Eve, a man breaks up with his girlfriend over the phone.*
- Two women lay in bed cuddling, one slowly un-tangles from the other. No words are exchanged.*
- A woman eats alone, feeling the absence of the person who should be eating with her.*
- One person in a car begins recklessly driving as they are afraid of breaking up with their partner in the passenger seat.*
- One woman enraged that her girlfriend is trying to break up with her, threatens and attempts suicide.*
- A man and woman scream at each other over the lack of sex and intimacy in the relationship; it ends violently.*

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In my film and my directing approach, there was no good or bad character. This film was a way for me to reflect on my own role in relationships, both good and bad, while also understanding that we have all been broken up with as well as been the breaker of hearts. Each holds its own power, its own pain, and its own contribution to the end of a relationship. I found that, as a director, I was humanizing both sides. In that kind of presentation of the characters, there is a presentation of truth and a complexity to it. This is what allows these moments and stories to be so universal. There is a subjective truth to film, especially experimental film. There is a poetic logic that allows scenes to be interconnected in ways that work similarly to memories. Film is not constrained to a stage or a time or a place. That's the beauty in the specificity of this medium. It's what allows it to be so intimate and revealing.

### **Knowledge:**

*Thus, along with the romantic era notion that someone can “tug at our heartstrings,” there is the postmodern reality that the same person can “rip our hearts out.”*

*The Science of Happily Ever After ( Tashiro, pg. 76)*

### **Research**

Love is, literally, like a drug (Fisher et. al, 2016; Frascella et al., 2010, p. 295). The scientific research comparing the biological effects of love to that of substance and behavioral addiction suggests that love can become an addiction (Fisher et. al, 2016; Griffin-Shelley, 1991; Mellody et al., 1992). And, in turn, heartbreak is similar to drug recovery (Fisher et. al, 2016; Field, 2017; Field, 2011). There is evidence that from the early stages of romantic involvement and relationships involving love, lovers show many symptoms of behavioral addictions including “euphoria, craving, emotional and physical dependence, withdrawal and relapse” (American

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Psychiatric Association, 2013; Fisher et. al, 2016). My film works in similar ways. The unending vignettes and constant flashes of happy lovers during fight sequences embeds the film with this idea of craving and withdrawal. The repeated use of characters in different vignettes throughout my film touches on the similarity to relapse. It becomes a cyclical pattern of “on again off again” relationships that so clearly mimic the patterns of drug addiction.

Current day brain scans have supported these findings in how romantic love engages dopamine-rich regions of the brain – essentially the brain’s reward system – which are similar regions activated during drug and behavioral addiction (Aron et al., 2005; Fisher et. al, 2016; Xu et al., 2011). It is believed that love developed as a survival mechanism (Fisher et. al, 2016). It encourages reproduction and pair-bonding which increases the likelihood of species survival (Fisher et. al, 2016; Fletcher et al., 2015). The evolutionary intensity of pair-bonding was necessary, but, in an age where survival is not the reason we love, it has become society’s heroin addiction.

What is even less understood than love, is how a society so focused on love can be so bad at maintaining it. Two-thirds of marriages in the US end in divorce and there are many more marriages that involve separation or chronically unhappy married couples (Tashiro, 2014). Thus, only around 1/10 of marriages are ‘happily ever afters’ (Tashiro, 2014). Many of the relationships in my film are blatantly unhealthy and cycles of abuse. The viewer is left to wonder how and why these partners got together in the first place. Yet, the inevitability of the relationships ending reflects the current realities of western society. It shines an important light on one thing: love ends.

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### **In Dialogue with Other Art**

The reality is that this topic is not often covered in the specific style that I've chosen. There are endless lists of films about love and heartbreak (*Call me by your name* (Italian-American feature), *In the Mood for Love* (Chinese feature), *Fleishman is in trouble* (American series), *Marriage Story* (American feature), *Pride and Prejudice* (British feature)). But none of these approach it in the same style that I do— focusing on short-form vignettes. My biggest inspiration for this style was actually *Songs from the Second Floor* from *The Living Trilogy* by Roy Andersson, a Swedish filmmaker. This series of films is composed of vignettes about depression, life, and being human. But these do not tackle the topic of love and heartbreak that so fascinates me. Heartbreak connects with short(er) form storytelling in films such as: *Easy* (episodic series about sex/life/love); *Love, actually* (4 stories intertwined in a feature about finding love); *Modern Love* (episodic vignettes about love in the modern day). While all of these are good examples and comparisons, none approach the topic in the tragedy form that I so admire. There is no happy ending in my film. In this world, people get broken up with and that's it. People are stuck in unhealthy relationships and there is no "right" answer for it. What's unique in this case is how I am isolating tiny slivers, moments of the end, and seeing what can be learned and felt just by having that moment juxtaposed with other endings. In truth, my film lies somewhere between a film and an art installation. It is an experience to be viewed, to be felt but not to walk away with any answer. Sometimes, life doesn't work out the way we anticipated.

### **A Modern Presentation of an Old Concept**

To talk about love in 2023 is to acknowledge technology, to acknowledge the pandemic, and its effects on connection, socialization, and distance (physical and emotional). Even just in the last 30 years, technology has impacted how we love and how we break up. Love letters are

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now “good morning” texts. Mixtapes for loved ones are Spotify playlists curated for crushes. “Going steady” has been replaced with “hook-up culture.” In a world, where at the first sign of discontent, partners can go on an app and look for something ‘better’, breakups can feel sudden. People can feel replaceable, relationships dispensable, more than ever before. Communication has changed from texting to calling, zooming to in-person. An endless number of social media apps exist for communication and yet “ghosting” is a notorious way to avoid a breakup. Shared trauma, isolation, and quarantine bubbles accelerated the intensity of a relationship at younger ages. The way technology and the pandemic have impacted relationships and my experience of love is unique in and of itself. I directed and filmed through this instinctual lens. Vignettes end suddenly; characters feel pressured into “friends with benefits” because of underlying dispensability; codependency is an issue from quarantine bubbles. To be clear, my film is not a film *about* covid or technology by any means. It is simply affected by it. It has soaked in the effects of this generation without infantilizing or exoticizing it.

### **Purpose:**

*And love isn't something that weak people do. Being a romantic takes a hell of a lot of hope. I think what they mean is: when you find somebody that you love ... it feels like hope.*

*Fleabag (S2, Ep6)*

### **Intended Impact of the Film**

We must not underestimate the impact and value of art. Film has perhaps a more visceral way of understanding people, exploring ideas, and wrapping it in emotion. It is an art form that people have access to and that which can actually influence them. Film and art are ways to probe and understand the human experience, constituting a sort of research that can also represent

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visually, sonically, and emotionally an idea that may ring true with people's experiences. Data can support my film, but cannot influence people in the same way. When the world shut down, people were scared or depressed, they turned to art. Humans turned to movies and films as empathetic creatures looking for connection or just a way to pass the time. The beauty of creating film, and especially this capstone, is it did so much for me as a filmmaker—for me as a human who was hurting. But in creating this art, in separating this experience from myself, this film can now live and do so much for others. It is a way to create connections with people across the globe. It is a way to help people feel, to empathize. Love is a universal feeling, and heartbreak even more so. There is beauty and power in a medium that is capable of communicating such abstract ideas to such a wide audience. There is a real impact with film. They create an anchor for those who need one. They create hope.

I have become stronger as a director, as a professional, and as a filmmaker. I trust that I can have an impact on this world. Filmmaking has a way of teaching the maker as well as the viewer. It has a way of giving hope and healing to the maker as well as the viewer. Film is a medium where story meets art. In processing my experiences through art, others can filter and reflect on theirs. What I aim to achieve, even through my love of tragedy, is hope. I want people to empathize and hope for a better future even amidst their darkest heartbreak.



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